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THE
GOOD AND EVIL IN ORTHODOXY.

By CHARLES K. WHIPPLE.

From 'THE INDEX.'

THE form of religion commonly called "Orthodox" has one very great merit; namely, its energetic hostility to "sin;" its persistency in maintaining the doctrine set forth by a Scripture writer, that sin is "exceeding sinful." Orthodoxy often misjudges in its estimate of what *is* sin; often departs, both by allowance and prohibition, from the Scriptural view of what acts are sinful; sometimes stigmatises, as wicked things perfectly authorised by its "infallible and sufficient

rule," the Bible; and sometimes enjoins as indispensable duties, acts in nowise enjoined by that rule. But, nevertheless, it does this great service to its generation, of holding up sin as always dangerous, always unjustifiable, always to be resisted and avoided.

The danger and evil of Orthodoxy lie chiefly on the other side. Its specially dangerous and evil influence comes from its doctrine concerning "righteousness." With the best intentions towards God and man, it utterly misrepresents both in the attempt to describe the relation of each to this quality, "righteousness."

For themselves, the professors of Orthodoxy, utterly disclaim righteousness. Though many of them are plainly seen to be honest and worthy people, doing the very things that men ought to do, and seeming to be actuated by good motives, playing well their parts as husbands, fathers, friends, tradesmen, citizens, philanthropists, they persistently call their best actions filthy rags, and declare their hearts to be corrupt and depraved. I barely mention this in passing, having intended to speak mainly of their misrepresentation of the righteousness of God.

Claiming for God in the gross, as everybody else does, absolute perfection of character, and also specifically claiming for Him justice, mercy, wisdom, goodness, love, pity, true friendliness, and fatherly feeling towards all his human creatures, and unchangeableness in the exercise of all these perfections, the professors of Orthodoxy make in detail such representations of every one of these as to neutralise or even to reverse them. Although they never intend to speak of the Deity but in terms of praise and honour, the details of their account of his relation to the human race in its origin and destiny are so framed as to attribute to justice things plainly unjust, to mercy a course decidedly unmerciful, to wisdom obvious defects of plan and failures in execution, to goodness deliberate allowance of an ultimate triumph of evil, to love characteristics not only

unlovely but repulsive, to pity the extreme of relentlessness, to fatherhood, as shown in the Divine Being, a serene and unmoved contemplation of the permanent misery and ruin of vast numbers of his children.

No doubt, many orthodox people are utterly unconscious that their system makes such representations as these. I will therefore note down some instances, beginning with the attribute called justice.

Orthodoxy adopts Paul's representation (Rom. ix. 21) that from a mass of unconscious clay God does make and may rightfully make "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction," knowing that a destiny of conscious suffering throughout eternity awaits them. And it also adopts Paul's horrible conclusion (v. 20) that the human sufferers thus doomed before their birth have no right of remonstrance. Its professors thus (let us hope, unconsciously) attribute to God something positively unjust, an act and a purpose essentially evil.

Orthodoxy also attributes to God another act of enormous injustice; namely, making the salvation of men depend upon their "belief" in a certain doctrine, quite irrespective of the *evidence* for or against that doctrine; or, to come nearer to the case in hand, quite irrespective of the absence of evidence for it, and an accumulation of the strongest reasons against it.

We must believe, on peril of damnation, Orthodoxy tells us, that Jesus of Nazareth is Christ, the Messiah of Old Testament prophecy and Jewish expectation. Our welfare throughout eternity must depend on our acceptance of this theory, although whoever reads the two Testaments may see that, in fact, Jesus fulfilled neither the prophecy nor the expectation. The prophecy announced a Messiah, descended from David, who should be "the Lord's anointed" as David was, who should rule as king in the land of Palestine with full acceptance of the Hebrew people, as David did, and who should continue to rule in that land for ever, making that nation supreme, overthrowing its oppressors, and bringing all

other nations into permanent subjection to it. The Jews expected precisely the thing thus predicted, and rejected Jesus because he did *not* fulfil it. He never either ruled the Jews, nor was accepted by them in any manner, either literally or spiritually. He was not even a son of David unless he was the son of Joseph; a supposition which, however probable, Orthodoxy vehemently rejects. He was the teacher of a doctrine far better than Judaism; but he was not, in any sense, the predicted and expected "King of the Jews."

Yet, assuming him to be "Christ," Orthodoxy further requires that he be acknowledged as "Lord" by all who live, have lived, or are to live in this world.

It might suffice to say, in reply to this demand, that we need and desire only one Lord, our Creator and Preserver, the Father of all mankind; and that, belonging already to God, we cannot honestly "give ourselves to Jesus," as the propagandists of Orthodoxy require that we should do. But there is also another reason. Sundry errors of doctrine and judgment into which Jesus fell, if we may trust the evangelists, his biographers, make it plain that his statements should not be taken as authoritative. His predictions, no doubt, expressed his genuine opinion of what was to take place, but events have shown the erroneous character of sundry of them. He assumed, if the evangelists have given us his words, that the end of the world, and a final judgment for ever separating the righteous from the wicked, would occur within the lifetime of the generation to whom he preached. Some of his precepts can be accounted for and justified only on the supposition of such speedy ending of this world, and its business and pleasure. But these predicted wonders did not occur, and nearly nineteen hundred years have passed since their failure was made manifest. And, though many nations during that period have called themselves Christian, assuming to adopt the religion taught by Jesus, not one of them has pretended to practice his precepts of non-resistance, of unlimited and

indiscriminate giving and lending, of refusal to lay up treasures on earth, of neglect of provision for food and clothing, and of abstinence from oaths and from public prayer, &c., &c. The people who most loudly claim to be followers of Jesus do not follow him in all respects, nor is it well that they should do so. His doctrine of everlasting misery for a considerable proportion of mankind (if the biographers represent him rightly upon that point) has unfortunately met with very wide acceptance. That dogma alone, if he taught it, should suffice to prevent our taking his teaching as authoritative.

Since then, the particular beliefs demanded by Orthodoxy not only fail of evidence, but are counterpoised and overbalanced by opposing reasons, we may conclude them to be not only unessential to our future welfare, but destitute of all basis of truth or justice. Belief must follow evidence, and to require it without or against evidence is unjust. Let us pass to the next item.

Orthodoxy attributes to God a character and an attitude of loving kindness to men in this world, quite irrespective of their state of penitence or impenitence for the sinfulness common to all. He loves all men, even the worst in act and the worst in purpose (the upholders of Orthodoxy say), until their bodies die. After that time (they say) he will not only cease to love and begin to hate a certain portion of them, but he has arranged that from that time onward *for ever*, neither repentance nor reformation shall be of the least avail to improve their condition.

Orthodoxy, theoretically claiming God as the perfection of goodness and excellence, demands equally belief in Satan, the enemy of man and the embodiment of all evil. Yet, after the death of the body, it represents God as holding, to that large proportion of mankind which it calls "the impenitent," not only the same relation of implacable spite and vengefulness which Satan holds, but union with Satan in the work of tormenting them for ever. Orthodoxy frowns upon those people

who, in careless talk, say that this or that was done "like the devil;" but its own deliberate representation of God's future relation to millions of men and women paints him as precisely "like the devil" in spirit and in action; it affirms that he will laugh at the calamity of a portion of his human creatures, and mock when their fear cometh.

Orthodoxy claims God to be the perfection of wisdom, and joins Isaiah in saying:—

"Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel? and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?"

But, unfortunately for the consistency of Orthodoxy, two other passages of the book which it calls "The Word of God," give "MOSES" as their infallibly inspired answer to all the specifications of the above inquiry. If that collection of early Hebrew and Christian literature be really "God's Word," observe what was divinely dictated to the writers of Exodus and Numbers, as follows:—

"And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; now, therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt, with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth. Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven,

and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever.

“And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.”—Ex. xxxii., 9-14.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they. And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them), and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land; for they have heard that thou, Lord, art among this people, that thou, Lord, art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them by daytime in a pillar of cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now, if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now.

“And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word.”—Numb. xiv. 11-20.

According to these passages, MOSES was the counsellor of the Lord, teaching him in the path of judgment, showing to him the way of understanding, and even availing, by prudent counsel, to change the determination which he had formed and expressed.

Orthodoxy requires that these two narratives shall be received as "the Word of God," equally with those opposite declarations in the same volume which impute to God perfect wisdom.

Orthodoxy attributes to God pity, mercy, goodness, and love, each perfect in quality, and each unchangeable. Yet, regardless of the absolute self-contradiction therein expressed, it specifies a time (the death-hour of the "impenitent sinner") when, to him or her, God will at once and for ever cease from the exercise of these kind affections, and take on, in their stead, the extreme of implacable vengeance throughout eternity. Towards these condemned ones God, according to the Orthodox creed, will then feel and act, and will for ever continue to feel and act, just as that same creed represents Satan as feeling and wishing to act now.

It must be remembered, moreover, that the expression "impenitent sinner," in the dialect of Orthodoxy, means not only specially corrupt men and women, practised and hardened evil-doers, but all who have not "believed" and accepted the chief theological dogmas of that system. With its advocates, "mere morality" is a term of reprobation, differing in degree only, not in kind, from theft and drunkenness. With that system, exemplary life in man or woman, loveliness of character, the exercise of the sweetest human affections, a life devoted to perfect fulfilment of the duties of spouse, parent, friend, citizen, philanthropist, as far as human eye can distinguish, avail nothing to secure acceptance with God. Without the special "belief," these go for nothing, in his view, as Orthodoxy interprets him; *with* the special belief, Divine acceptance is sure, even to a life utterly destitute of these best traits of humanity. Belief, in the very act of death, saves the ruffian who suffers strangulation once, after meriting it a hundred times; "mere morality," or what Jesus and James specified as the main requisition which God makes of men, will neither save nor help. On the contrary, he or she

who has *only* led a noble life, pure within, and helpful to the family, the neighbour and the community, if without this special belief, must not only be rejected and condemned by the judge, but must be classed thenceforth for ever to associate with the vilest and most corrupt of human beings!

Let us look at a few of the details of this classification.

Forty-seven years ago, a young man of Massachusetts, with only the average of worldly advantages, awoke to recognition of the fact that a poor and despised minority of his nation were suffering the most cruel oppression at the hands of the majority, and that this oppression had become so fortified and systematised by accompliceship of the functionaries of law and religion with its perpetrators, that both State and Church combined actively to uphold it. This system of oppression was so dominant and triumphant that even to speak against it was to incur odium from the officers of government, the bench of judges, the reverend clergy and the members of their various churches, the mercantile and manufacturing interests, and the periodical press, not only the secular, but that which called itself "religious." To oppose the tyranny in question was not only to excite the rage of its perpetrators and their partisans in these various classes, but to risk the failure of one's own means of living. Nevertheless, the young man of whom I speak trusted so thoroughly in God, and saw so clearly that duty led in the path of justice and righteousness, that he espoused the cause of the black sufferers, the least, the lowest, and the weakest of his human brethren, and never ceased speaking and striving in their behalf until their yoke was broken. From the beginning of this struggle the clergy set themselves against him, and threw every discouragement in the way of the accomplishment of his object; and the majority of them stigmatised him also as an infidel, holding his practical maintenance of righteousness as nothing while

he withheld his assent from their theological dogmas. The most amazing feature of their position, however, was this: that, claiming Jesus, the great teacher of righteousness and exemplar of self-sacrifice, as the final judge of men, they assumed that he would class Garrison with tyrants and oppressors for condemnation. This judgment was not merely the spite of such partisans of slavery as Blagden and South-side Adams, President Lord, and Bishops Soule and Hedding, but the deliberate verdict of the theological system they taught. Orthodoxy spoke through their mouths in that decision.

Let us look at another instance. A man of good character, pure morals, and keen sensibilities, seeing the ruin wrought among his fellow-men by intemperance, devotes his life to the work of rescuing from it as many as possible, and of warning those yet uncontaminated against the beginnings which tend towards such an end. He spends years of assiduous labour and self-sacrifice in these efforts, and dies as he lived. But, as he had merely loved and helped his brethren without acknowledging Jesus 'as either Christ, or Lord, or vicarious sacrifice, Orthodoxy classes him with drunkards and drunkard-makers, and condemns him to partnership with them in sin and suffering throughout eternity.

Take one case more. A good and pure woman applies herself to seek and to save those of her sisters who are emphatically called "lost." She follows them in their wanderings, and counsels, helps, and saves such of them as do not refuse her good offices. Her life is crowned with the blessings of those who were ready to perish. Reclaimed wanderers, reunited families, follow her memory with honour, gratitude, and love. But as she had never believed in purification by "blood," as she had never applied for God's favour through an "atoning sacrifice," Orthodoxy assumes that God will class her with prostitutes and seducers, removing from her, at the same time, all possibility of benefiting or reforming them!

Such are some of the absurdities resulting from the Orthodox dogma that men, on the death of the body, are permanently to take place in one of only two classes, and that the dividing line will be, not character, but redemption by blood.

Orthodoxy, claiming that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men," necessarily claims Fatherhood for God, and brotherhood for the human race, with the duties and responsibilities belonging to those relations. A father is bound in duty to love and benefit his children; brethren are bound in duty to love and help one another.

By men these duties, however obvious, are often violated. Many cases have been known in which a brother has first hated and then killed his brother. If, however, on examination of such a case, the murderer should be found to have acted by instigation and direction of the father himself, this would intensify the horror and the crime. Yet precisely this, the direction of brothers in very many cases to kill brothers, and in one case the command to a human father to kill his son, is what Orthodoxy attributes to the Universal Father.

Orthodoxy, through its dogma of the infallible inspiration of the Old Testament, teaches that God, by the mouth of Moses, commanded the sons of Levi to kill great numbers of their brethren the children of Israel. Here is the record:—

"Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses; and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For

Moses had said Consecrate yourselves to-day to the Lord, even every man upon his son and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day."—Ex. xxxii., 26—29.

Again, Orthodoxy teaches that God, by the mouth of Moses, gave to the Hebrew nation the command here following:—

"Of the cities of these people which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth; but thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee."—Deut. xx., 16, 17.

And one small portion of the execution of this command, after the taking of the city of Jericho, is thus recorded:—

"And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword."—Josh. vi., 21.

Thus, according to portions of the Old Testament history, God himself has abused and violated the relation of fatherhood equally with the very worst of those inhuman fathers whom men imprison and hang for violence done to their own children. According to that history, he has many times enjoined his human children to kill their brothers and sisters, expressly forbidding the exercise of pity or compassion, even to women and babes. That a semi-barbarous people should have imagined a deity capable of giving such orders, is conceivable. The wonder is that Christians, sharing the civilisation, the intellectual culture, and the enlarged humanity of the nineteenth century, should take these notions for reality, and take the belief of the semi-barbarians for proof of such reality.

Then there is the story of Abraham and Isaac, too well known to need rehearsal. That the grand old

Arab sheik should not have philosophised enough to distinguish that the God who had put paternal love into his heart *could not* undo and reverse his own work by the command here in question, is conceivable. It is even conceivable that Paul, educated a Jew and a Pharisee, and living only in the dawn of Christianity and civilisation, should have spoke of Abraham's purpose to cut his son's throat as a specimen of meritorious faith. The wonder is that sharers in the present grade of English and American intelligence should continue to think thus unworthily of the Universal Father, and content themselves with Abraham's poor idea of him.

But Orthodoxy calumniates God, and misleads its hearers in regard to him, by a doctrine even worse than the above. That system teaches:—

1. That God will for ever inflict unspeakable torments upon millions of the men and women he has created here.

2. That this doom will be inflicted upon these persons as a punishment for living in accordance with the inclinations and propensities with which they were born.

3. That, throughout the eternity which is to follow this short mortal life, God has provided that these sufferers shall receive no benefit from repentance and reformation, and shall have no encouragement from him in the attempt to do right rather than wrong.

We hold the deliberate killing of a child by its father to be one of the greatest of crimes. To kill him by slow torture would excite our highest indignation. To wish to keep him alive to suffer *unending* torture would be the extreme of fiendishness. Yet precisely this is what Orthodoxy represents its God as not only wishing, but as actually doing, after elaborate preparation before the human race was created!

Such is the Orthodox view of the attitude of God's Fatherhood to sinners; but one feature of its action

upon saints is equally noteworthy and hardly less repulsive.

It is regarded as the crowning excellence of Jesus that he came to seek and to save the lost, and that his life was actually spent in such seeking and saving. Men have ranked also as worthy of the highest honour and applause his followers in later times, men and women who, out of affectionate solicitude for their kind, devoted their lives to the help of the suffering and needy. Howard and Florence Nightingale, Clarkson and Garrison, applied themselves to the relief of material suffering; Mrs. Fry, Henry Martyn, and Harriet Newell went out as preachers of repentance and reformation. These felt impelled by the mental and spiritual nature which God had given them to choose and pursue this work. In it they found their highest satisfaction. If, in the next world, they retain the characteristic excellences which distinguished them here, their predominant desire will be still to seek and save the lost; and, according to Orthodoxy, "the lost," by thousands of millions, will be there, suffering far more than they ever did on earth. Orthodoxy assures us, however, that the souls of missionaries and other philanthropists will not be *allowed* to enter upon this ministry of love in the future world. Will God make them miserable by forcibly preventing the exercise of this strongest impulse of the nature he gave them? Or will he obliterate this divinest of their faculties, crush out from their souls all desire to relieve the suffering, and reform the sinful, and make them morally inferior in heaven to what they were on earth? Let Orthodoxy choose between the horns of this dilemma.

The system of Orthodoxy, including, as it does, tenets unjust and dishonouring both to God and man, does not furnish a solid basis, either of direction for the present life or hope for the future. Its Gospel, providing for damnation not less thoroughly than for salvation, is *not* "glad tidings;" its Bible, a vain attempt to unite Juda-

ism and Christianity into a single rule of life obligatory upon all men, contains such inconsistencies, self-contradictions, imperfections, and errors mingled promiscuously with its truth and wisdom, as to prove it neither an "infallible" nor a "sufficient" rule; its heaven is a fabrication childish in its irrationality and absurdity; and its hell is a libel upon God not surpassed by the worst imaginations of heathen mythologists. This system, I say, does not furnish a solid basis for our trust.

Where shall those look for a guide who have heretofore thoughtlessly accepted this system?

First of all we must content ourselves with such guides and such lights as *God* has provided. He has given us reason and conscience, but has not chosen to make either of them infallible. He has put into our hearts expectation of, and aspiration towards, a future life, but has told us nothing of its place, manner or form, of its occupations or its capabilities. He has bestowed various powers, physical, mental, and spiritual, for the ordering of our earthly life, with the means of knowing that these are of different grades, and that the lower should be subject to the higher. He has provided that conscious wrong-doing shall be followed by self-reproach, and by the impulse to turn away from the evil and turn to the good; and he has given us hope and perseverance, the impulse to seek further light, and the stimulus to rise and press forward after every fall.

Such are the materials and the instruments of welfare which God has placed in our hands. Nevertheless, as the ignorant and uncultivated, that is to say, the majority of mankind, prefer happiness to welfare, and desire a short and easy road to it, there have always been persons or parties offering to furnish the commodity thus sought for. Just as there have always been empirical practitioners, offering "infallible" remedies for the ills that flesh is heir to, just so the Catholic and

Protestant churches undertake to *insure* future happiness for you, if you will trustingly submit yourself to their manipulation. The Jew, the Mohammedan, and the Brahmin offer a similar prize as the result of following *their* infallible systems. These all undertake to give what God, in his wisdom, has chosen to withhold. Infallibility is not to be found among men, and those who trust to men's assumption of it will be disappointed.

For best use of this world, and best preparation for the next, a faithful employment of God's methods, above indicated, seems most reverent, most rational, and most promising.

