NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

AN OUTLINE

OF

EVOLUTIONARY

ETHICS

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PREFACE.

The object of the present essay is disclosed in the title; it is that of presenting, in as few words as possible, an outline of a System of Ethics based upon the doctrine of Evolution. Accordingly, I have avoided entering into a discussion of the value of any of the special virtues—to do so would require a volume, not a pamphlet—being content with putting forward what I conceive to be the essential principles of a Science of Ethics, leaving it for those who are interested, to pursue the subject further. There is, therefore, no attempt at completeness in this essay; it is meant as an outline, and an introduction, nothing more. Nor is there in any sense, a claim of originality on behalf of the ideas suggested; that, again, has not been my object. I doubt whether there is a single original idea throughout the whole. I have simply aimed at putting in a small compass, and in plain language, conclusions that are at present locked up in bulky and expensive volumes, which the average individual has neither time nor opportunity to consult or study systematically. Students of Mr. Herbert Spencer's Works, Mr. Leslie Stephen's "Science of Ethics," and Mr. Henry Sidgwick's "Methods of Ethics," will recognise readily how much I am indebted to these writers.

Where direct quotations occur, I have named the sources from which they are drawn; to have particularized my indebtedness further would have meant more notes than text. My one object has been to place the subject in a brief, clear, and convincing light; if I have succeeded in doing that, I am quite content.

I.—Introductory.

In endeavouring to carry out the oracular utterance: "Man know thyself," there is no branch of study at once so interesting and so important, as that which relates to conduct. At bottom, all our social, religious, and political questions find their supreme justification or condemnation in their influence upon human behaviour. A question that had no reference to conduct, one that could not possibly influence it for better or worse, might interest the mere spinner of words, but to the earnest thinker or sober reformer, it would be valueless. It is true that the seeker after knowledge has not always an ethical end as the conscious object of his studies; he—to use a common phrase—"seeks knowledge for its own sake;" but it is clear, on reflection, that the only reason why increased knowledge should be regarded as of value, is, that it will enable us to better adjust our actions to the varying circumstances of life. The fears often expressed, lest some new theory of knowledge should weaken the force of accepted moral precepts, is, again, a tacit admission of "the sovereignty of ethics;" and, when genuine, may be regarded with a certain amount of favour. Even unwillingness to depart from old forms and customs when not pushed too far is good; a querulous dissatisfaction, with existing conditions being quite as foolish as a slavish adherence to obsolete customs.

But customs and ideas, be they ever so firmly rooted, reach, eventually, a stage when they are either summarily dismissed, or are called upon to show decisive proof of their title to our respect and obedience. This fate, which sooner or later overtakes all institutions has in our own day beset ethics; and at the great bar of human reason, our ethical codes and teachers are called upon to show reason why we should still follow their lead. In the region of morals, as elsewhere, old lights are fading and new ones are beginning to dawn; and, perhaps, the fading of the old lights would be matter for unalloyed gratification, were it not that while many have lost faith in the old teaching, they have not yet advanced sufficiently to have a sincere trust in the new.

Much of this want of confidence in such guides as

modern science has furnished us with, is doubtless due to the inability of many to accustom their minds to fundamentally different conceptions from those in which they were nurtured; but much also is due to the unnecessary obscurity of writers upon ethical subjects. May I venture to say—and I say it with all becoming humility—that a number of needless difficulties have been allowed to encumber the subject of morals. Writers have approached the subject with such an amount of religious and transcendental prejudice; have dwelt so strongly upon the sacredness, the sublimity and the difficulty of the subject, that their method has served to create difficulties that have no right to exist. Plainly, if we are going to make any real headway, we must sweep away all this rhetorical and metaphysical fog, and deal with human conduct in the same careful and unimpassioned manner that we deal with the subject matter of any of the sciences.

That this subject has its special difficulties, none will deny—the complexity of the factors renders this inevitable—but these difficulties need not be increased by the discussion of a number of casuistical questions that have scarce an existence in real life; nor need they blind us to the fact that a science of human conduct is both necessary and possible. Human actions are among the facts of existence; their causes and results—when they can be ascertained—are constant, and they must, therefore, be collected, arranged, and studied, in precisely the same way that the geologist or chemist deals with the facts that come within the scope of his respective department of knowledge.

But before ethics could assume anything like a thoroughly scientific form, it was essential that many other branches of knowledge—particularly physiology and psychology—should be fairly well developed; and the shortcomings of earlier systems may be partly attributed to the incompleteness of the necessary data. A scientific system of ethics can only be constructed upon data furnished by a number of other sciences; and this necessary knowledge has only been forthcoming within very recent times. But where facts were wanting, fancy filled the gap, and theories of morals were propounded which satisfied without enlightening, and darkened that which they pretended to explain.

The great weakness of all theological and metaphysical systems of morals, is, that they take man as he is, without reference to his past history or evolution, and proceed to frame rules for his future guidance. The result is just what might be expected. It is precisely what would happen to a man who set himself to write a description of the British constitution, without any reference to the history of its gradual development: certain features would be misunderstood, others under or over-rated, while many would be left out of sight altogether. The only way to understand what is, is to find out how it became so; and this rule is as true of moral ideas as it is of social institutions and national customs. It is in this direction, in emphasising the importance of the element of time in our speculations concerning the universe, that Evolution has left its clearest impress upon modern thought. Until very recently, writers—with rare exceptions—were agreed in taking the order of the universe as fixed from the beginning. Creation being thus taken for granted, there remained merely a constitution to discover; and all enquiries as to how this constitution reached its present condition were looked upon as beside the mark, or were met by the dogma. "and God said, let there be—" Gradually, however, first in one department, then in another. there grew up the idea of development, and instead of the present condition of things being regarded as having come into existence fully formed the conception of its gradual formation, through vast periods of time began to gain ground. As philosophers regarded the physical universe, so they regarded man's moral nature. No matter how widely moralists differed, they were in substantial agreement thus far—they all viewed the moral nature of man as being constant, as having been always as it is; and from this hypothetically constant human nature, proceeded to elaborate their ethical theories—with much satisfaction to themselves, if not with benefit to others. As a matter of fact, however, human nature is as variable as the conditions amid which it exists—or even more so—while our moral instincts, appetites, and aversions, which were taken as primary endowments of the race, in the light of more correct knowledge, are seen to be the results of slowly acquired experiences stretching over thousands of generations. As

I have said, it is in this direction that the influence of Evolutionary thought is most apparent. What others took for granted, we now find it necessary to explain—the problem from being—"given certain instincts what is our reason for calling them moral?" has expanded into "How have the moral feelings come into existence, what is their nature, and how far should their authority extend?"

It is these questions that I purpose attempting to answer in the following pages.

II.—The Meaning of Morality.

The business of the following essay, be it repeated, is a study of conduct from a purely scientific standpoint; that is, to establish a rational foundation for moral actions, and a reasonable motive for their performance, apart from all religious or supernatural considerations. To the student of ethics there are two sources from which may be drawn those facts upon which moral rules or laws are based. The first is the study of all those mental states to which praise or blame may be attached. The subjective view of ethics has hitherto claimed by far the larger share of attention, at times utterly excluding any other aspect of the subject; and whatever good might have resulted from a close examination of mental states, has been frustrated owing to its neglect of an equally important division of ethics, namely, the study of conduct from the objective and historic side. It is this aspect of the scientific treatment of ethics that is brought into prominence by the doctrine of evolution. Its main features are comparative and historical; it embraces a study of customs as affected by race and age, and even the actions of all animals whose conduct exhibits any marked degree of conscious forethought. The importance of this branch of study can hardly be exaggerated: introspection unchecked by objective verification is responsible for most of the errors that abound in philosophical writings; while the historical and objective method has thrown as much light upon mental and moral problems in fifty years, as had been shed by the introspective method in as many generations. Following Mr. Herbert Spencer, we may define the subject matter of ethics as "the conscious adjustment of acts to ends;" and the object of ethics the statement of such rules as

will lead to the realisation of the welfare of those for whose benefit such rules are devised.

The main questions that ethical systems are called upon to answer are :—What is morality ? Why are some actions classed as moral and others as immoral ? How did our moral instincts and feelings come into existence ? and, What are the conditions of their preservation and improvement ?

In the discussion of all questions such as these, much time is saved, and much confusion avoided, by setting out with a clear idea of the meanings of the cardinal terms in use. All things that we seek to avoid or possess, whether they be actual objects or states of consciousness, fall under one of two heads : they are either good or bad. Health, riches, friendship, are classed as good ; disease, poverty, enmity, are classed as bad. We speak of a good horse, a good knife, a good house, or the reverse. Upon what ground is this division drawn ? In virtue of what common quality possessed by these different objects is the above classification made ? Clearly it is not because of any intrinsic quality possessed by them. Considered by themselves they would be neither good nor bad A knife viewed without regard to the purpose of cutting, or as an object exhibiting skilled workmanship, would be subject to neither praise nor censure. An action that neither helped nor hindered self or fellows, would awaken no feelings of approbation or disapprobation. It is only in relation to some end that we have in view that an object becomes either good or bad, or an action moral or immoral. Further, an object that may be classed as good in relation to one end, would be classed as bad in relation to another. A horse that would be valuable for deciding a wager as to speed, would be of little use for the purpose of ploughing a field. As Professor Clifford pointed out, the fundamental trait that determines goodness is efficiency—the capability of an object or an action for reaching a desired end. A thing must be good for something or for someone ; a knife for cutting, a horse for carrying or drawing, a house for shelter ; fresh air, pure water, good food, because they promote a healthy physique ; and each will be classed as possessing a greater degree of goodness as it reaches the desired end in a more effectual manner. A good action,

may, therefore, be defined as one which attains the end desired with the least expenditure of time and energy. A further distinction needs to be pointed out between the terms good and moral; for in the light of the above definition, the two terms are by no means always synonymous, although they may be so in special cases. A man who so adjusted his actions as to commit a burglary in the most expeditious manner, might be rightly spoken of as a good burglar, but no one, I opine, would speak of him as a moral one. Nevertheless, an action becomes moral for the same reason that an action becomes good, that is, in view of a certain result to be attained, although in this case certain ulterior considerations are involved.

Now, in examining all those actions classed as moral, I find them to be either socially or individually beneficial, while those actions classed as immoral are injurious either to the individual or to society; while actions which neither injure nor help are classed as indifferent. Even in the case of those actions that are performed instinctively, the justification for their existence or practice is always to be found in reasons arising from their social or individual utility. Analyse carefully the highest and most complex moral action, and it will be found in its ultimate origin to be an act of self or social preservation. Press home the enquiry why the feeling of moral obligation should be encouraged, and the answer will be the same. This fundamental significance of the terms used, is frequently veiled under such phrases as Duty, Perfection, Virtue, etc. Thus Immanuel Kant declares that "No act is good unless done from a sense of duty." But why should we act from a sense of duty? What reason is there for following its dictates? Clearly a sense of duty is only to be encouraged or its dictates obeyed because it leads to some desired result; there must be some reason why a sense of duty is to be acted upon, rather than ignored, and in the very nature of the case that reason can only be found in the direction indicated.

Nor can we on reflection and in the light of modern science, think of moral actions as having any other origin or justification than their tendency to promote the well-being of society. Given a race of animals with a particular set of surroundings, and the problem before it will be "How to maintain a constant harmony between

the species and its medium ; how the former shall adjust its movements in such a manner as to ward off all aggressive forces, both conscious and unconscious, to rear its young and preserve that modifiability of actions requisite to meet the needs of a changing environment ; without which death rapidly ensues." This is the problem of life stated in its plainest terms ; a problem which presses upon savage and civilised alike, and one with which we are all constantly engaged. It may be said that we are all engaged in playing the same game—the game of life—and ethics may be spoken of as the rules of the game that we are always learning but never thoroughly master. The one condition of existence for all life, from lowest to highest, is that certain definite lines of conduct —determined by the surrounding conditions—shall be pursued ; and just as any invention, be it steam engine, printing press, or machine gun, is the result of a long series of adjustments and readjustments reaching over many generations, so our present ability to maintain our lives in the face of a host of disturbing forces, is the result of a long series of adjustments and re-adjustments, conscious and unconscious, dating back to the dawn of life upon the globe. Self-preservation is the fundamental cause of the beginnings of morality, and only as the sphere of self becomes extended so as to embrace others does conduct assume a more altruistic character. At beginning these adjustments by means of which life is preserved are brought about unconsciously, natural selection weeding out all whose conduct is of an undesirable or life-diminishing character ; but with the growth of intelligence and the conscious recognition of the nature of those forces by which life is moulded, these unconscious adaptations are superseded—or rather have superadded to them—conscious ones. It is this conscious recognition of the nature of these forces by which life is maintained, and of the reason for pursuing certain courses of conduct, that is the distinguishing feature of human society. Human morality seeks to effect consciously what has hitherto been brought about slowly and unconsciously. It aims at this, but at more than this ; for a system of ethics not only seeks to preserve life, but to intensify it, to increase its length and add to its beauties. It declares not only what is, or what may be, but what ought to be.

Moral principles or laws, therefore, consist in the main in furnishing a reason for those courses of conduct which experience has demonstrated to be beneficial, and the acquisition of which have been accentuated by the struggle for existence.

In this case, however, progress is effected much more rapidly than where the evolution is unconscious, while the ability to discern more clearly the remote effects of our actions renders that progress more certain and permanent. We maintain ourselves, we rear our young, and lay up the means of future happiness in virtue of the presence of a particular set of instincts or the formulation of a number of rules which experience has demonstrated to be beneficial. It is a detailed account of these actions and the reason for their existence that constitutes our moral code. Long before moral principles are formulated society conforms to them. Custom exists before law; indeed, a large part of law is only custom recognised and stereotyped; the law, so to speak, does but give the reason for the custom, and by the very exigences of existence such customs as are elevated into laws must be those that have helped to preserve the race, otherwise there would be a speedy end to both law and law-makers. As, therefore, in the course of evolution only the societies can continue to exist whose actions serve, on the whole, to bring them into harmony with their environment, and as it will be these actions the value of which will afterwards come to be recognised and their performances enforced by law, there is brought about an identification of moral rules with life preserving actions from the outset, and this identification tends to become still closer as society advances. The impulses that urge men to action cannot be, in the main, anti-social or society would cease to exist. In the last resort, as will be made clear later, a man will do that which yields him the most satisfaction, and unless there is some sort of identity between what is pleasant and what is beneficial, animate existence would soon cease to be. Morality can, then, from the scientific standpoint, have no other meaning except that of a general term for all those preservative instincts and actions by means of which an individual establishes definite and harmonious relations between himself and fellows, and wards off all those aggressive forces that threaten his existence.

We have now, I think, reached a clear conception of what is meant by a "Moral Action." A moral action is one that adds to the "fitness" of society; makes life fuller and longer; adds to the fulness of life by nobility of action, and to its duration by length of years. An immoral action is one that detracts from the "fitness" of society, and renders it less capable of responding to the demands of its environment. The only rational meaning that can be attached to the phrase "a good man," is that of one whose actions comply with the above conditions; and his conduct will become more or less immoral as it approaches to or falls away from this ideal.

III.—The Moral Standard.

Although I have but little doubt that the majority of people would on reflection yield a general assent to the considerations set forth above, yet, it may be complained, that they are too vague. To say that moral actions are such as promote life, it may further be said, is hardly to tell us what such actions are, or to provide us with a rational rule of action, since our verdict as to whether an action is moral or immoral must clearly depend upon our view as to what the end of life is. The man who holds that all pleasure is sinful, and that mortification of the flesh is the only way to gain eternal happiness, will necessarily pass a very different judgment upon actions from the one who holds that all happiness that is not purchased at the expense of another's misery is legitimate and desirable. The justice of the above complaint must be admitted; it remains, therefore, to push our enquiries a step further.

Ethical Methods, in common with other systems, pass through three main stages—Authoritative, critical, and constructive. The first is a period when moral precepts are accepted on the bare authority of Priest or Chieftain. In this stage all commands have an equal value. little or no discrimination is exercised, and all acts of disobedience meet with the most severe punishment.* The second period represents a season of upheaval occasioned either by the growing intelligence of men perceiving the faults or shortcomings of the current teaching, or a healthy revolt against the exercise of unfettered authority. And then,

*As in the Bible where picking up sticks upon the Sabbath merits the same punishment as murder.

finally, there ensues a constructive stage, when an attempt is made to place conduct upon a rational foundation.

It is not very easy to point out the line of demarcation between the different stages, nor is it unusual to find them existing side by side, but they are stages that can be observed by a careful student with a tolerable amount of ease. And in this latter stage the difficulty is, not so much the formulation of moral precepts, as furnishing the reason for them. The great question here is, not so much "How shall I be moral," as—"Why should I be moral," it is this question we have now to answer.

All Ethical systems are compelled to take some standard as ultimately determining the rightness or wrongness of conduct, and we may roughly divide all these systems into three groups—two of which regard the moral sense as innate, and the third as derivative. These three groups are, (1) Theological systems which take the will of deity as supplying the necessary standard, (2) Intuitional which holds the doctrine of an innate moral sense that is in its origin independent of experience, and professes to judge actions independent of results,* (3) Utilitarian, which estimates conduct by observing the results of actions upon self and fellows, and holds that our present stock of moral sentiments have been acquired by experience both individual and racial.

Concerning the first of these schools—the theological—its weakness must be apparent to all who have given any serious attention to the subject. For, setting on one side the difficulty of ascertaining what the will of deity is, and the further difficulty that from the religious world there comes in answer to moral problems replies as numerous as the believers themselves, it is plain that the expressed will of deity cannot alter the morality of an action to the slightest extent. It does not follow that spoiling the Egyptians is a moral transaction because God commanded it, nor are we justified in burning witches or stoning heretics because their death sentence is contained in the bible. It would be but a poor excuse after commit-

* We have used the term "Intuitional" to denote the method which recognises rightness as a quality belonging to actions independently of their conduciveness to any ulterior end. The term implies that the presence of the quality is ascertained by simply looking at the actions themselves without considering their consequences.—SIDGWICK, "METHODS OF ETHICS" bk. I. c. viii, sec. i.

ting a crime to plead that God commanded it. The reply to all such excuses would be, "crime is crime no matter who commanded it; wrong actions must be reprobated, the wrong doer corrected, or society would fall to pieces," and such a decision would have the support of all rational men and women. A belief that my actions are ordered by God can only guarantee my honesty as a believer in deity in carrying them out, but can in no way warrant their morality.

Further, those who claim that the will of God as expressed in a revelation or discovered by a study of nature, furnishes a ground of distinction between right and wrong, overlook the fact that all such positions are self-contradictory, inasmuch as they assume a tacit recognition at the outset of the very thing they set out to discover—they all imply the existence of a standard of right and wrong to which God's acts conform. To speak of biblical precepts as good implies that they harmonize with our ideas of what goodness is; to say that God is good and that his actions are righteous, implies, in the same manner, a conformity between his actions and some recognised standard. Either that, or it is a meaningless use of terms to speak of God's actions as good, and at the same time claim that it is his actions alone which determine what goodness is. In short, all such terms as good and bad, moral and immoral, take for granted the existence of some standard of goodness discoverable by human reason, and from which such terms derive their authority. This much appears to me clear:—either actions classed respectively as moral and immoral have certain definite effects upon our lives or they have not. If they have, then their effects remain the same with or without religious considerations; and granting the possession of an ordinary amount of common sense, it will always be possible to build up a code of morals from the observed consequences of actions. If actions have no definite effects upon our lives, then those who believe that our only reason for calling an action moral or immoral lies in the will of God, given in revelation or expressed in the human consciousness, are committed to the startling proposition that theft, murder and adultery would never have been recognised as immoral had these commands not have been in existence. This last alternative is rather too ridiculous to merit serious

disproof. In brief, neither the theologian nor, as we shall see later, the intuitionist can avoid assuming at the outset of their investigations all that he seeks to reach as a conclusion. The very phrases both are compelled to use have no validity unless there exist principles of morality derived from experience—and this thay are constantly seeking to disprove.

Nor do the advocates of a dim religious sense manifest in the human mind, fare any better than those who hold the cruder form of the same doctrine. The strength of their position is apparent only; due to the vagueness of language rather than the logical force of their ideas. Dr. Martineau—who may be taken as one of the best representatives of the religious world upon this subject—declares that if there be no supernatural authority for morals, "nothing remains but to declare the sense of responsibility a mere delusion, the fiduciary aspect of life must disappear; there is no trust committed to us, no eye to watch, no account to render; we have but to settle terms with our neighbours and all will be well. Purity within, faithfulness when alone, harmony and depth in the secret affections, are guarded by no cautionary presence, and aided by no sacred sympathy; it may be happy for us if we keep them, but if we mar them it is our own affair, and there is none to reproach us and put us to shame."* To all of which one may say that that conduct can hardly be called moral which needs the constant supervision of an eternal "cautionary presence" to ensure its rectitude To refrain from wrong-doing because of the presence of an "all-seeing eye," whether its possessor be a supernatural power or a mundane policeman can hardly entitle one to be called virtuous; and society would be in a poor way indeed did right conduct rest upon no firmer foundation than this. A man so restrained may not be such a direct danger to society as he would otherwise be, but he is far from being a desirable type of character. Surely purity, faithfulness to wife, children and friends, honesty in our dealings, truthfulness in our speech, and confidence in our fellows, are not such poor, forlorn things as to be without some inherent personal recommendation? Indeed, Dr.

* "A Study of Religions," II. p. 40.

Martineau himself is a splendid disproof of his own position, for if there is one thing certain about a man of his type, it is that the absence of religious beliefs would influence his conduct but little for the worse, while it might even give more breadth to his sympathies and character. True morality finds its incentives in the effects of actions upon self and fellows, and not in fears inspired by either god or devil. As Mr. Spencer has said, "The truly moral deterrent from murder is not constituted by a representation of hanging as a consequence, or by a representation of tortures in hell as a consequence, or by a representation of the horror or hatred excited in fellow men, but by a representation of the necessary natural results—the infliction of death agony upon the victim, the destruction of all his possibilities of happiness, the entailed suffering to his belongings. Neither the thought of imprisonment, nor of divine anger, nor of social disgrace, is that which constitutes the check on theft, but the thought of injury to the person robbed, joined with a vague consciousness of the general evils caused by a disregard of proprietory rights . . . . Throughout, then, the moral motive differs from the motives it is associated with in this; that instead of being constituted by representations of incidental, collateral, non-necessary consequences of acts, it is constituted by representations of consequences which the acts naturally produce."* Of all moral sanctions the religious sanction is the most delusive and unsatisfactory. Changing as human nature changes, reflecting here benevolence and there cruelty, sanctioning all crimes at the same time that it countenances much that is virtuous, it is an authority that people have appealed to in all ages to justify every action that human nature is capable of committing. Surely a sanction which justifies at the same time the religion of the Thug and the benevolence of the humanitarian must be an eminently fallacious one? And yet we are warned that the removal of the religious sanction will weaken, if it does not destroy, morality! I do not believe it. Conduct can gain no permanent help from a false belief, and no permanent strength from a lie; and had the energies of our religious teachers been devoted to impressing upon the people

* "Data of Ethics," sec. 45.

under their control the natural sanction of morality they might have been kept moral without a sham of a priesthood, or the perpetuation of superstitious beliefs that are a stain upon our civilisation. But we have been taught for so long that religion alone could furnish a reason for right living, that now that time has set its heavy hand upon religious creeds and death is claiming them for its own, many honestly fear that there will be a corresponding moral deterioration. Yet of this much we may be certain, so long as men continue to live together morality can never die; so long as suffering exists or injustice is done, there will not be wanting those who will burn to release the one and redress the other. Nay, rather will the value of life and of conduct during life be enhanced by stripping it of all false fears and groundless fancies. Whatever else is proven false this life remains certain; if it is shown that we share the mortality of the brute we need not share its life, and we may at least make as much of the earth we are now in possession of as the heaven we may never enter. As George Eliot says, "If everything else is doubtful, this suffering that I can help is certain; if the glory of the cross is an illusion, the sorrow is only the truer. While the strength is in my arm I will stretch it out to the fainting; while the light visits my eyes they shall seek the forsaken."*

The intuitional theory of morals while displaying fewer errors than the scheme of the theological school, yet presents a fundamental and insurmountable difficulty. With the general question as to the nature and authority of conscience, we shall deal more fully when we come to treat of the "Moral Sense." The question at issue between the intuitionist and the upholder of the doctrine of evolution is, not the present existence in man of a sense of right or wrong, but whether that sense is an original endowment of the species or has been derived from experience. According to this school right and wrong are known as such in virtue of a divinely implanted sense or faculty=soul or conscience; we recognise the virtue of an action as we recognise the presence of a colour, because we possess a special sense

* "Romola."

fitted for the task ; and it is impossible to furnish any other reason why it should be so. Right and wrong are immediately perceived by the mind as such, and there is an end of the matter. A plain and obvious comment upon this position is that the intuitions of men are neither uniform nor infallible in their judgments. Instead of finding, as the intuitional theory of morals would lead us to expect, that moral judgments are everywhere the same, we find them differing with race, age, and even individuals. The only thing common to the moral sense is that of passing judgment, or making a selection of certain actions, and this much is altogether inadequate for the purpose of the intuitionist. The moral sense of one man leads him to murder his enemy ; that of another to feed him ; in one age the moral sense decrees that polygamy, death for heresy, witch burning, and trial by combat are legitimate proceedings, and in another age brands them as immoral. Obviously, if our intuitions are to be regarded as trustworthy guides, there is no reason why we should adopt one set of intuitions more than another. All must be equally valuable or the theory breaks down at the outset. If, however, we pronounce in favour of the intuitions of the cultured European and against that of the savage, it must be because of a comparison of the *consequences* of the different intuitions upon human welfare ; and in this case the authority of the moral sense as an arbitrary law-giver disappears. If the moral sense be ultimate, then our duty is to follow its dictates. Any questioning of what the moral sense decides to be right involves an appeal to some larger fact, or to some objective guide. To arbitrarily select one intuition out of many and label that and that only as good is simply to set up another god in place of the one dethroned. All moral growth implies the fallibility of our intuitions, since such growth can only proceed by correcting and educating our primary ethical impulses. There is one point, however, which seems to have escaped the notice of intuitionists, and that is, that the existence of their own writings is a direct disproof of the truth of their position. For if all men possessed such a faculty as it is claimed they possess, its existence should be sufficiently obvious as to command the assent of all ; there could exist no such questioning of the fact as to necessitate the

existence of the proof offered. No man ever yet needed to write a volume to prove that the sun gave light, or that men experience feelings of pleasure and pain, and an intuition that is co-extensive with humanity, which is not reducible to experience, and which is the very groundwork of our moral judgments should be so obvious as to be independent of all proof. The mere fact of it being called into question is sufficient disproof of its existence. But, as already said, the diversities of moral judgments are fatal to the hypothesis. Press the intuitionist with the question why he should prefer the intuition of one man to that of another, and he is compelled to forsake his original position and justify his selection upon the grounds of the beneficial effects of one and the injurious effects of the other; thus constituting experience as the final court of appeal. The conclusion is, then, that neither the theologian nor the intuitionist can avoid taking into consideration the effects of action in the formation of moral judgments; both of them when pressed are compelled to fall back upon something outside their system to support it; neither can justify himself without making an appeal to that experience, which according to his hypothesis is unnecessary and untrustworthy.

Turning now to the last of the three schools named—the utilitarian—let us see if we can derive from it a satisfactory standard of right and wrong. Practically the question has already been answered in our examination of "the meaning of morality," where it was determined that moral actions were such as led to an increase of life in length of days and nobility of action; but as this may be thought too vague it becomes necessary to frame some more detailed expression.

The essence of Utilitarianism may be stated in a sentence it asserts that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness pain and the privation of pleasure.*" Act so as to ensure the happiness of all around you, may be said to be the one great precept of Utilitarianism. According to this doctrine all things become of value only in so far as they minister to the production of happiness, while the end of

*J. S. Mill, "Utilitarianism" p. 9.

action is always the production of an agreeable or pleasurable state of consciousness. The correctness of this position admits of ample demonstration. Indeed, the fact that happiness is the end contemplated by all is so plain as to scarcely need proof, were it not that the means to this end have by long association come to stand in consciousness as ends in themselves. Yet a very little analysis will show that each of the prudential or benevolent virtues must find their ultimate justification in their tendency to increase happiness. As Mill says: "The clearest proof that the table is here is that I see it; and the clearest proof that happiness is the end of action is that all men desire it." Upon every hand we are brought face to face with the truth of this statement. It matters little whether we take the honest man or the thief; the drunkard in his cups or the reformer in his study, the one object that they have in common will be found to be the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. The difference between men does not consist in the fact that the motives urging them to action are generically different, they are not; the difference consists rather in the kind of happiness sought after or the means adopted to obtain it. As will presently be made clear, feeling induces action at all times and under all conditions. The immediate cause of conduct is the desire to bring into existence a pleasant state of consciousness or to subdue a painful one—although there is plainly much diversity in the pleasures sought after. The biological reason for this pursuit of pleasure will be seen later; but that the tendency of actions to produce happiness is our sole reason for classing them as good will be seen by imagining the contrary to be the case. Suppose, to quote Mr. Spencer, "that gashes and bruises caused agreeable sensations, and brought in their train increased power of doing work and receiving enjoyment; should we regard assault in the same manner as at present; or, suppose that self-mutilation, say by cutting off a hand, was both intrinsically pleasant and furthered performance of the processes by which personal welfare and the welfare of dependents is achieved; should we hold as now that deliberate injury done to one's own body is to be reprobated; or again, suppose that picking a man's pocket excited in him joyful emotions by brightening his prospects; would that theft

be counted among crimes, as in existing law books and moral codes? In these extreme cases, no one can deny that what we call the badness of actions is ascribed to them solely for the reason that they entail pain, immediate or remote, and would not be so ascribed did they entail pleasure."*

The difference between a selfish and an unselfish action is not that in the latter case the feeling itself is absent—this is never the case—the difference is that in a selfish action a man's happiness is in things confined to himself, while in an unselfish action his happiness embraces the happiness of others likewise. Does a man give away his last shilling to one poorer than himself; it is because he escapes the greater pain of witnessing distress and not relieving it. Does the martyr go to the stake in vindication of his belief? It is because to hide those beliefs, to profess a belief which he did not entertain, to play the hypocrite and escape persecution by an act of smug conformity, would be far more unbearable than any torment that intolerence could inflict.

Whatever man does he acts so as to avoid a pain and gain a pleasure; and the function of the ethical teacher is to train men to perform only those actions which eventually produce the greatest and most healthful pleasures. And let it not be imagined for a moment that in thus reducing the distinction between good and bad, to the simpler elements of pleasure and pain, that we have thereby destroyed all distinction between them. Far from it. The perfume of the rose and the evil smell of asafœtida remain as distinct as ever, even though we reduce both to the vibrations of particles; and we shall not cease to care for one and dislike the other on that account. And so long as a distinction is felt between a pleasurable and a painful sensation, so long will the difference between good and bad remain clear and distinct; it is a distinction that cannot disappear so long as life exists.

A complete moral code is but a complete statement of actions that are of benefit to self and society in terms of pleasure and pain; and, therefore, until we can cease to distinguish between the two sets of feelings we can never

* "Data of Ethics," sec. 2.

cease to know the grounds of morality and to find a sound basis for its sanctions.

Every individual then acts so as to avoid a pain or cultivate a pleasure. A state of happiness to be realised at some time and at some place, is an inexpugnable element in all estimates of conduct; is the end to which all men are striving, no matter how they may differ in their methods of achieving it. Unfortunately, such considerations, as have been pointed out, are disguised under such phrases as "Perfection," "Blessedness," &c. And yet, to quote Mr. Spencer once again, "If it (Blessedness) is a state of consciousness at all, it is necessarily one of three states—painful, indifferent, or pleasurable," and as no one, I presume, will say that it is either of the first two, we are driven to the conclusion, that after all, "Blessedness" is but another name for happiness.

Or take as an illustration of the same principle, a plea that is sometimes put forward on behalf of self-denial, which, it is urged, contravenes the principle of utility. It is claimed that that conduct is highest which involves self-sacrifice. But, clearly, self-sacrifice, as self-sacrifice, has little or nothing to commend it. The man who denied himself all comfort, who continually "mortified the flesh," without benefiting any one by so doing, would be regarded by all sane thinking people as little better than a lunatic. The only possible justification for self-sacrifice is that the happiness of self in some future condition of existence, or the happiness of society in the present, will be rendered greater thereby. Even the fanatical religionist indulging in acts of self-torture, is doing so in the full belief that his conduct will bring him greater happiness hereafter. So that once more we are brought back to the same position, viz., that no individual can avoid taking happiness in some form as the motive for and sanction of his conduct.

Here, then, upon the widest possible review of human conduct, we are warranted in asserting that the ultimate criterion of the morality of an action is its tendency to produce pleasurable states of consciousness. To speak of an action as good or bad apart from the effect it produces upon human life, is as absurd as to speak of colour apart from the sense of sight. An action becomes good because of its relation to a human consciousness, and apart from

this relation its goodness disappears. As Spinoza says—"We do not desire a thing because it is good, we call it good because we desire it."

This, then, is our test of the morality of an action—will it result in a balance of painful feelings? Then it is bad. Will it produce a surplus of pleasurable ones? Then it is good.

But although, in ultimate analysis, to desire a thing and call it good, or the performance of an action and call it moral, is merely another way of saying the same thing, it by no means follows that all desires are to be gratified merely because they exist. Nothing is plainer than that the gratification of many desires would lead to anything but beneficial results. Our desires need at all times to be watched, controlled and educated. It is in this direction that reason plays its part in the determination of conduct. Its function is, by the perception and calculation of the consequences of actions, to so train the feelings as to lead us eventually to gratify only such desires as will ultimately lead to individual and social happiness.

And not only is it clear on analysis that the avoidance of a painful state of consciousness or the pursuit of an agreeable one, is the underlying motive for all our actions, but it is difficult to see how it could be otherwise. An ethical relation between ourselves and an object can never be established by simple perception; nor is perception ever the immediate cause of action. The immediate cause of action is, as I have already said, feeling; that is, we associate pleasurable or painful feelings with an object perceived, and shape our conduct in accordance with past experience.* No abstract conception of life and its duties could ever give rise to action, were not such conduct closely associated with pleasant or

* May we not justly affirm, as we clearly perceive, that the intellectual life does not supply the motive or impulse to action; that the understanding or reason is not the cause of our outward actions, but that the desires are? Our most effective energies spring from our most urgent needs. . . The desire is the fundamental expression of the individual's character. . . In fact the power of the understanding is reflective and inhibitory, being exhibited rather in the hindrance of passion-prompted action, and in the guidance of our impulses, than in the instigation of conduct; its office in the individual, as in the race is, as Comte systematically and emphatically pointed out, not to impart the habitual impulsion but deliberative. —Maudesley, "PHYSIOLOGY OF MIND," p. 357.

painful feelings—as escaping censure, personal approbation or disapprobation, direct personal reward or punishment, or the admiration of our neighbours. We may put the case briefly as follows : Every action consciously performed aims at calling into existence a particular state of consciousness. States of consciousness, so far as they are the subjects of ethical judgments, are of two kinds—agreeable and disagreeable, or pleasant and painful. The former we desire to maintain, the latter to destroy. By experience pleasurable feelings have become associated with a particular object or the performance of a particular action, and the possession of the object or the performance of the action is the means by which such agreeable sensations are revived It is upon this principle only that the past can serve as a guide in the present; although the past can never induce action, the future alone can do this. Our conduct is necessarily based upon the belief that the future will resemble the past, and that actions which resulted in happiness in the past will have the same effect in the future. If, then, the motive resulting in action is the wish to revive and return some state of consciousness, and if all states of consciousness are either painful or pleasurable, and if it is further admitted that pleasurable states are sought after and painful ones avoided, then it becomes clear that the ideal state is one in which pleasurable states only are experienced ; or, as it is briefly described, a state of happiness.

And now having reached the conclusion that the production of a pleasurable feeling is the end of all our actions, the question remaining to be answered is, "*why* should happiness be the end of action. what is it that constitutes happiness, and what justification for the pursuit of happiness is there to be found in a study of the laws of life ?"

Here we may be met with the remark that happiness is an extremely variable factor, that it varies at different times and with different individuals ; the happiness of the drunkard or the debauchee is quite as real as the happiness of the philosopher, and therefore upon what grounds do we class one as bad and the other as good ? The drunkard may say, "my conduct yields me pleasure, while to imitate yours would prove extremely irksome and painful, and therefore I prefer to keep on my present

course in spite of all that may be said concerning other sources of happiness, the beauty of which I am unable to appreciate." In what way, then, the evolutionist may be asked, can we prove the drunkard to be in the wrong? This objection, although a fairly common one, yet represents an entire misunderstanding of the utilitarian position. Certainly pleasures of a special kind accompany such actions as those named, for, as I have shown, conduct must always be produced by feeling, and feeling always aims at the one end; but it is not by taking into consideration the immediate effects of actions only and ignoring the remote ones that any sound conclusions can be reached, this can only be done by combining both, and when it is shown, and it will not be disputed, that the immediate pleasures of the drunkard carry with them as final results a long train of miseries in the shape of ruined homes, shattered constitutions, and general social evils, we have shown that these actions are not such as produce ultimate happiness, and therefore have no valid claim to the title of good.

But waiving the discussion of such objections as these, the problem facing us is, "granting that the end of action is as stated, in what way can we identify what *is* with what ought to be; or how can it be shown that actions which rightly viewed yield happiness and actions that preserve life are either identical or tend to become so?" This question, it is clear, can only be thoroughly answered by determining the physiological and psychological conditions of happiness.

The incentives to action, it has been shown, is the desire to call into existence, or to drive out of being a particular state of consciousness. All changes in consciousness are brought about either by sensations directly experienced, or by the remembrance of sensations previously experienced. We receive sensations by means of what are called faculties—including under that term both organ and function. Of a certain number of possible sensations some are pleasant, others are unpleasant; the former we seek, the latter we shun; and the desire to revise the agreeable states of feeling is the immediate motive for all our actions.* A pleasurable feeling, then, results from the

* To say that we seek the revival of a *disagreeable* feeling would be a contradiction in terms.

exercise of our energies in a particular direction ; the question is, in what direction ? It is in answering this question that Mr. Spencer has made one of his most important contributions to ethical science, and thereby placed the utilitarian theory of morals upon a thoroughly scientific footing.

Clearly, the indiscriminate exercise of our faculties, or the promiscuous gratification of our desires, will not lead to ultimate happiness. Apart from the existence in ourselves of desires which being either of a morbid character, or survivals from times when the conditions of life were different, and the gratification of which would therefore be looked upon as anything but desirable ; even the exercise of what may be termed legitimate desires needs to be carefully watched and regulated. Indeed a large part of wrong-doing results, not from the *existence* of a faculty, but from its misdirection ; an intemperate gratification of desires that, rightly directed, would yield but good. No one, for example, would condemn the desire of people to " make a name," a perfectly legitimate and even laudable aspiration ; yet, owing to the method adopted, there are few desires that lead to greater wrong-doing.

Again, over indulgence in any pursuit, as in over eating, over studying, or over indulgence in physical exercise, is likely to lead to extremely injurious results. And equally significant are the pains—cravings—that result from too little exercise in any of these directions. If, therefore, conduct that approaches either extreme leads to painful results, the implication is that a pleasurable state of consciousness is the accompaniment of actions that lie midway between the two. But actions that leave behind naught but a diffused feeling of pleasure, imply that the body has received just that amount of exercise necessary to maintain it in a state of well being, and are, therefore, healthful actions; or in other words, pleasure—using that term in the sense given to it above—will result from the exercise of each organ of the body up to that point necessary to maintain the entire organism in a healthy condition. Concerning the quantity of exercise required no hard and fast rule can be laid down, it will differ with each individual, and even with the same individual at different times, the amount of exercise necessary to keep one man in a state of health would kill another, and *vice versa.*

Thus, from a biological standpoint we may define happiness as a state of consciousness resulting from the exercise of every organ of the body and faculty of the mind up to that point requisite to secure the well being of the entire organism; and from the psychological side, the gratification of all such desires as lead to this result. Now if this be admitted as true, it follows that pleasure-producing actions and pain-producing actions are, in the long run the equivalents of life preserving and life destroying actions respectively; that as Spencer says, "Every pleasure raises the tide of life; and every pain lowers the tide of life," or as Professor Bain has it—"States of pleasure are connected with an increase, and states of pain with an abatement of some, or all, of the vital functions;" * and therefore to say that the tendency of an action to produce happiness is the ultimate test of its morality, is simply saying in effect that that conduct is moral which leads to a lengthening and broadening of life.

And not only is this the conclusion reached by an examination of animal life as it now is, but it is a conclusion logically deducible from the hypothesis of evolution and the laws of life in general. The connection between pain and death, and happiness and life, is too deeply grounded in general language and thought not to have some foundation in fact. The general accuracy of this connection is witnessed by all physiologists and medical men, the latter of whom readily recognise how important an element is cheerfulness in a patient's recovery, while the former demonstrates that pain lowers and pleasure raises the general level of life.

And upon no other condition could life have developed upon the earth. As has been pointed out, action springs directly from feeling and seeks to obtain pleasure either immediately or remotely; therefore, unless the pleasures pursued are such as will preserve life the result is extinction. Imagine for example that life-destroying actions produced pleasurable sensations—that is a state of consciousness that animals sought to bring into existence and retain—that bodily wounds, impure foods, and exhausting pursuits generally, yielded nothing but pleasure, and would, therefore, be performed eagerly,

* "Senses and the Intellect," p. 283.

it is obvious that such a state of things would cause a rapid disappearance of life altogether. Illustrations of this may be readily found in individual instances, for example, opium eaters or excessive drinkers, but it is clear that such habits could not maintain themselves for long upon a general scale. Something of the same thing may even be seen in the case of lower races, that, coming in contact with European culture and finding pleasure in the performance of actions suitable to their past life but unsuitable to their present one, have become extinct. Thus, as Mr. Spencer puts it. "At the very outset, life is maintained by persistence in acts which conduce to it, and desistence from acts which impede it; and whenever sentiency makes its appearance as an accompaniment, its forms must be such that in the one case the produced feeling is of a kind that will be sought—pleasure, and in the other case is of a kind that will be shunned—pain." * And again, "Those races of beings only can have survived in which, on the average, agreeable or desired feelings went along with activities conducive to the maintenance of life, while disagreeable and habitually-avoided feelings went along with activities directly or indirectly destructive of life; and there must have been, other things being equal, the most numerous and long-continued survivals among races in which these adjustments of feelings to actions were the best, tending ever to bring about perfect adjustment." † The answer, therefore, to the question, "Why should we pursue happiness?" is, that we cannot do otherwise and live. Pursuit of happiness, properly understood, means conformity to those conditions that render a continued and healthful life possible. The final and ultimate reason for performing any action is that a special desire exists urging me to do so, and the reason for the existence of that desire must be sought for in deeper ground than consciousness—which is relatively a late product in biologic evolution. It is to be found in those laws of life to which all living beings must conform, and to which natural selection, by weeding out all of a contrary disposition, secures an intrinsic or organic compliance. Morality is evidenced in action before it is explained in thought; its justification, the causes of its

* "Data of Ethics," sec. 33.
† "Principles of Psychology," Vol. i. sec. 128.

growth, and the nature of its authority, are to be found in the natural conditions of existence, and depends no more upon the presence of a mysterious self-realising ego than upon a conception of God furnished by current or future theologies. It is a false and ruinous antithesis that places virtue and happiness as two things distinct from each other. Virtue has no meaning other than can be expressed in terms of pleasure; as Spinoza said, "Happiness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself."

The utilitarian formula that actions are right which promote pleasure, and wrong which promote pain receives, therefore, the fullest possible justification from an examination of the laws of life. Higher authority than that can no system have.

The various steps of the above argument may now be recapitulated.

(1) Conduct is always *immediately* dependent upon feeling.

(2) The immediate object will be to invite agreeable, and obviate or modify disagreeable states of consciousness.

(3) Therefore, unless there is a general agreement between conduct that preserves life and conduct that produces agreeable feelings, the race must die out; while life will increase in length and breadth as that general agreement becomes explicit and complete.

(4) But in the course of evolution the inevitable result is the weeding out of all such organisms as pursue life-destroying acts with pleasure, and there is thus produced a gradual identification between the performance of life-preserving actions and the production of agreeable states of consciousness

It is in supplying us with these generalisations that the doctrine of evolution has placed morality upon a perfectly secure and impregnable foundation, and ethics upon the same level as other departments of scientific knowledge. It makes morality incumbent upon the individual and society alike by showing its identity with those processes that make life worth living. That at present many find pleasure in the performance of actions that lower the tide of life, does not militate against the truth of the doctrine stated above. We are in a transitional state, partly military and partly industrial, we have clinging to us many traces of the savagery, from which we are just

emerging, and there is necessarily a conflict between many of our inherited instincts and present ideals. But there can be little doubt that this conflict between what is and what should be will decrease as the course of evolution proceeds; until becoming weaker by disuse, the lower and undesirable instincts shall have finally disappeared. Meanwhile a scientific ethic should do precisely what a law of astronomy or of biology does—describe what takes place and explain how it takes place. Astronomical and biological laws give nothing new, they merely formulate in comprehensible terms what takes place in their separate departments. The function of a science of ethics is, similarly, to describe accurately the actions of men and why and how such actions take place; to trace the causes of morality, to formulate the conditions and nature of perfect conduct, and leave such rules to be put into operation as rapidly as wisdom may devise or circumstances permit.

IV.—The Nature and Authority of Conscience.

It may be asked, "If the foregoing account of the nature of morality is admitted to be correct, what becomes of the authority of conscience? Is it merely a name, or is it, as the ordinary man believes, a divinely implanted faculty enabling one to distinguish finally and decisively between a right and a wrong action? 'Ordinary experience,' it may further be said, 'shows that men do not determine the rightness or wrongness of actions by any mathematical calculation as to the pains or pleasures resulting from them, but rather by a direct appeal to conscience, and when conscience declares in favor of or against a particular course of conduct there is no more to be said upon the matter.

"Upon this hypothesis man does right for pretty much the same reason that a dog 'delights to bark and bite,' because 'tis his nature to.'

Now, there is in the presentation of the case a certain amount of truth, but it is entangled with a much larger amount of error. For example, no one denies the existence in man of a moral sense *now*; all our language presupposes its existence. Neither is it denied that men are swayed by the dictates of what is called 'Conscience.' As Mill says:—'The ultimate sanction of all morality is a

subjective feeling in our minds." A man will act as his conscience directs, and provided that he has fulfilled certain preliminary conditions, we hold that he is right in doing so. The phrase—'A conscientious man' has quite as definite a meaning to the Utilitarian as to the Intuitionist. It is in the carrying out of these preliminary conditions—*i.e.* instructing, checking, and improving our conscience, comparing its deliverance with the deliverance of that of others—upon which the dispute mainly turns.

The question really at issue is not the existence of a moral sense, but whether this moral sense is always trustworthy in its decisions; whether it does not need to be constantly checked and corrected; and whether instead of being a single indecomposable faculty it may not be resolved into simpler parts, as a chemical compound is shown to be made up of a number of simpler elements? This is substantially the whole of the matter in dispute between the evolutionist and the intuitionist. The latter regards the moral sense as innate and virtually independent of experience; the former asserts that it has been built up from much simpler feelings acquired during the development of the race, and that examination proves that, just as a single nerve centre is composed of clusters of ganglia, which are again composed of fibres and cells, so the apparently simple moral sense is really a highly complex process, due to the gradual accumulation of the experiences of simpler sensations acquired during ages of past evolution. It would, indeed, be quite possible to take successively all the vices and virtues upon which our present moral sense passes a rapid and decisive verdict, and show how gradually each feeling of approval and disapproval has been built up. There is, for example, no action upon which the moral sense of the cultured European passes such a ready condemnation as the taking of life. And yet it is quite certain that this special feeling of aversion is a comparitively late product in human evolution. With many of the lower races the wrongness of taking human life is confined almost entirely to the family—and not always there; but within the tribe personal vengeance is permitted, and even when that is disallowed by public opinion the murder of the member of another tribe only serves to exalt the murderer in the eyes of his fellows. In the dark ages a man's life was

valued in an inverse ratio to his social importance, and the church drew up a scale of punishments in accordance with that estimate, murder of an ecclesiastic being punished by torture and death, that of a serf by a fine of a few pence. Even in modern civilised Europe, hundreds or thousands of lives may be shed to satisfy political passion or national vanity; and only in the higher types of the race is there a lively and constant repugnance to the taking of life, whether if friend or foe. Indeed, the fact that moral sense is acquired and not innate appears on reflection, to be so plain as to cause some little surprise that the opposite opinion should ever have been seriously entertained for any length of time.

But apart from the historical aspect of the subject, what we are more directly concerned with here is the nature of those conditions which have resulted in the growth of conscience. It would take too long to discuss fully the nature of consciousness—even if it were not a matter of psychology rather than of ethics—but we may put the matter briefly in the following manner :—

Reflex action is of two kinds; the first, irritability, is due to the simple excitation of a piece of living matter, and is shared by all living tissue wherever it may be found. In virtue of this quality the organism responds to certain stimuli and shrinks from others; and it is plain that unless the stimuli to which the organism responds are such as are beneficial the result will be death. The second class of reflex actions is that in which actions have become instinctive by frequent repetition. It is a matter of common observation that any action frequently performed tends to become organic, or instinctive: that is, a purposive action is preceded by certain molecular rearrangements in the fibres and cells, and centres of the brain; a repetition of the action means a repetition of the disturbance; and by the frequent recurrence of such rearrangements there is set up a line of least resistance along which the nervous energy flows, with the final result of a modification of nerve tissue, and the existence of a structure which in response to a certain stimulus acts automatically in a particular manner. "The order of events," says Maudesley, "is presumably in this wise: by virtue of its fundamental adaptive property as organic matter, nerve-element responds to environing

relations by definite action; this action, when repeated determines structure; and thus by degrees new structure, or—what it really is—a new organ is formed, which embodies in its substance and displays in its function the countless generalisations, so to speak, or ingredients of experience, which it has gained from past and contributes to present stimulation," * Now the mental side of this physical acquirement expresses itself in the principle known as the association of ideas. When in the course of experience a certain set of ideas is constantly occurring in the same order, the revival of any one of the term will bring about a revival of the remainder of the series. As illustrative of this we may note how when any particular object is presented to the mind, as for example an orange, the mind calls up the associated sensations of taste and smell, neither of which is immediately presented to it; and there may even be present the idea of certain injurious or beneficial effects following the eating of the fruit. Here it is evident the secondary sensations are revived because they have always accompanied the primary one, and it is clear that the mind has gone over a chain of causes and effects, although we may not be conscious—indeed we seldom are—of all the steps intervening between the first and last term of the series. But to anyone who pays attention to the working of the mind it is obvious that this power of rapid summing-up has been acquired very gradually, and that what the mind now does rapidly and decisively, it once did slowly and hesitatingly; just as the firm steps of the man are preceded by the faltering steps of the child, or the rapid adding up of columns of figures by the trained accountant becomes a long and wearisome process in the hands of the amateur.

Now the verdict passed upon action by the moral sense is merely another illustration of the same general principle. Just as we have learned to associate a certain number of qualities with an object the moment it is perceived, so we have acquired by experience, individual or social, the habit of associating a balance of pleasures or pains with a particular action or course of conduct, even when an entirely opposite conclusion is immediately presented to the mind. Apart from certain actions which give rise

* "Physiology of Mind," p. 397.

to painful or pleasurable feelings as long as their effects endure, experience has shown that certain actions while directly painful are ultimately pleasurable, while others immediately pleasurable are ultimately painful. This experience has been repeated so frequently that the desire attaching to the end has become transferred to the means: as in the case of a man who begins by loving money because of its purchasing power, and ends by loving it for itself, the means to an end becomes thus all in all. Thus, the means and the end become jammed together, so to speak, in thought, and the mind having in view the after results of an action, passes an instantaneous judgment upon it. A trained biologist will draw from a very few facts a conclusion which is by no means apparent to the untrained mind; long experience has familiarised him with the process, and the conclusion suggests itself immediately to the mind; and one might as well postulate an innate biological sense to account for the one process as postulate an innate moral sense to account for the other.

The existence of a moral sense in man is simply an illustration of the physiological law that functions slowly acquired and painfully performed become registered in a modified nerve structure, and are handed on from generation to generation to be performed automatically or to take their place as moral instincts.

Two things have prevented people seeing this clearly, first, the problem has been treated as being purely psychological, and, secondly, moral qualities have been viewed as innate instead of acquired, and the question of development consequently ignored. Both of these causes have helped to confuse rather than to clear. Underlying all mental phenomena there is and must be a corresponding physical structure; and it is only by carrying our enquiries further and studying this physical structure that we may hope to understand those mental qualities, feelings, or emotions to which it gives rise, and, secondly, it is not by contemplating the moral instincts of man as they are to-day that we can hope to understand them. This can be done only by reducing them to their simpler elements and carefully studying the causes and conditions of their origin and development. And when we analyse the contents of our moral judgments, we find precisely what the hypothesis of evolution would lead us to expect,

namely, the majority of such actions as it sanctions are found in the light of sober reason to be conducive to individual and social welfare, while such as it condemns are of a directly opposite character.

The decisions of the moral judgment are thus neither more nor less than verdicts upon conduct expressed by the summed-up experience of the race; and although such judgments carry with them undoubted authority in virtue of their origin, they, nevertheless need to be constantly watched over and corrected when necessary. For, granting that a certain presumption exists in favour of a verdict passed by "conscience,"—since it argues the possession of a mental habit acquired by experience, and which would never have been acquired had not such conduct as led to its formation been once useful,—such verdicts cannot be admitted to be final; for nothing is of commoner occurrence than to find that habits and customs that are useful at one stage of human development are dangerous at others.

All that the existence of a moral instinct can prove beyond doubt is that it was *once* useful, whether it is useful now or not is a matter to be decided by ordinary experience and common sense. A function owes its value to its relation to a particular environment, and therefore can only retain its worth so long as the conditions of life remain unchanged; any alteration in the condition of existence must involve a corresponding change in the value of a function or in that cluster of moral tendencies classed under the general name of "conscience." While, therefore, conscience may urge us to take action in a particular direction, it cannot give us any guarantee that we are acting rightly. All that we can be certain of is the existence of a feeling prompting a particular action, and with that our certainty ends. To discover whether the dictates of conscience are morally justifiable we need to appeal to a higher court. The voice of conscience is, as experience daily shows, neither uniform nor infallible in its decrees; its decisions vary not only with time, place, and individual, but even with the same individual at different times and under different conditions. In brief "acting up to one's conscience," to use a common phrase, is indicative of honesty only, not of correctness, it can mean merely that we

are acting in accordance with certain feelings of approbation or disapprobation that have been called into existence during the evolution of the race and by the early moral training of the individual. Nothing is plainer than that the conscience needs correction and admits of improvement; the fact of moral growth implies as much, and this alone should be sufficient to prove that conscience is an acquired and not an original activity.

That conscience represents the stored up and consolidated experiences of preceding generations, subject of course to the early training of the individual, there can be little doubt. Given living tissue capable of responding to certain stimuli and shrinking from others, and we have the raw material of morality; for the only tissue that can continue to exist will be such as responds to stimuli favourable to its existence and shrinks from such as are unfavourable. The reverse of this it is impossible to conceive. Once the conditions under which life persists becomes fairly understood, and the above conclusion becomes almost a necessity of thought. There is thus secured from the outset a general harmony between actions instinctively performed and life-preserving ones; and natural selection by preserving the lives of those animals whose actions serve to establish the closest harmony between themselves and their environment serves to accentuate the formation of such habits as render the performance of life-preserving actions certain and instinctive. This feeling of moral approbation is, as I have already said, not the only example of the principle here emphasised, viz.: that separate and successive acquisitions become so blended together as to form an apparently single faculty. It is exemplified alike in the skilled mathematician and the trained mechanic, and is, indeed, co-extensive with the world of sentient life. From monad to man progress has meant the acquisition of such habits—physical, mental, and moral. Our moral equally with our intellectual faculties have been built up gradually during the course of human development. We each start life with a certain mental and moral capital that comes to us as a heritage from the past. Functions that took generations to acquire are found as parts of our structure, and their exercise has become an organic

necessity. Frequent repetition has converted certain actions into habits; physiologically these habits imply the existence of a modified nerve structure demanding their performance; while mentally and morally such structures and functions express themselves in the much debated and misunderstood, moral sense.

V.—Society and the Individual.

In the foregoing pages morality has been dealt with almost exclusively from the standpoint of the individual; I have purposely omitted certain factors that aid moral development in order that fundamental ethical principles might not be obscured. I have shown the groundwork of morality to lie in the very constitution of organic matter; and that rules of ethics are merely generalized statements of those courses of conduct which serve to establish a harmony between organism and environment, or, in other words, to maintain life.

Yet it must be evident to the student that one very important factor—the social factor—must be considered if our system is to be complete. The influence of society in developing morality must, it is plain, be considerable; for although the reason for right conduct, and the motives that lead to it, must ultimately be found *in the nature of the individual*, yet, if we seek for a full explanation of the individual's character, we must be referred back again to the structure of that society of which he is a part. For at bottom, the only reason why each individual should possess a certain number of moral qualities of a particular character, is that he belongs to a society that has developed along special lines. The individual, as he is to-day, is a product of the race, and would no more be what he is apart from social organization, than society could be what it is apart from the individuals that compose it. Each quality or action is good or bad in virtue of its adaptation or non-adaptation to an environment; and to speak of goodness or badness apart from such relations is to use words that are void of all meaning. From whence do such words as "honest," "justice," "duty," &c., derive their significance if not from the relations existing between the individual and his fellows? Place a man upon a desert island, and what becomes of any of these qualities? All moral conduct requires a medium; in this case society

is the medium in which morality lives and breathes ; and it could no more continue without it than a bird could fly without the atmosphere. The proof of this is seen in the fact that any disturbance in the social structure involves a corresponding change in the relationships of men and women. All periods of change, religious or social, have influenced for better or worse existing ethical institutions and ideas, and few will doubt that should any great economic change occur to-day there would ensue a speedy re-arrangement of moral ideals.*

It is therefore in the structure and development of the social organism that we must seek for an explanation of existing moral principles ; by this method only can we understand how it is possible to obtain from a race of beings, each of which is primarily moral by the instinct of self-preservation, a social morality. The general manner in which this result has been attained has been already indicated, but it remains to trace out the process in greater detail.

In his profoundly suggestive book, "Physics and Politics," Bagshot has pointed out that the great problem early society had to face was, "how to bend men to the social yoke," to domesticate him in short. Man untrained and savage needed to have his energies checked, his impulses educated, and the whole of his nature practically transformed before he could become either social or ethical. A number of forces, natural, religious, social and political, have contributed to bring about the desired result : and although they overlap one another, still it is easy to determine their position and approximate value.

Not to reckon with the possession of certain fundamental life-preserving instincts, which are an inevitable product of the struggle for existence, and which must be the common property of all sentient being, the struggle against natural forces must early have driven men into the adoption of additional life-preserving courses of conduct. The conduct that furthered a fuller life may not have been consciously adopted, but from the fact that all who did not adopt it would disappear, its performance would be rendered tolerably certain. Further, even were not social organisation a heritage from man's animal

* The fact of a movement of change proceeding from an ethical impulse in no way affects this statement.

ancestors, the struggle against nature would soon have driven man into co-operation with his fellows. The advantages of combination are too great not to give those who are more amenable to the restraints of social life a tremendous advantage over such as are not. The cohesion and discipline of a tribe would be of far greater importance in the primitive than in the modern state. Natural selection would, therefore, work along the lines of favouring the preservation of the more social type of character. In a tribe where some of its members showed but little inclination to work with their fellows or submit to the discipline laid down, such individuals would be weeded out by a dual process. They would fall easy victims to the tribal enemies, and the type would be discouraged by public opinion. They would thus leave few or no descendants to perpetuate their qualities; and by this dual process of elimination the type would tend to die out, and there would be gradually formed in its place one that to some extent regarded individual and general welfare as being inextricably blended. But this living together necessarily implies the existence and cultivation of certain sentiments and virtues that are not purely self-regarding. If people are to live together and work together, there must of necessity be some sense of duty, justice, confidence and kindness, let it be in ever so rudimentary a form; but these virtues must be present, or society disintegrates. Without confidence there could be no combination, and without justice combination would be useless. But the great thing in the first stage is to get the individual to obey the voice of the tribe and submit to its judgments; and so long as a quality brings this end about it is of service. It is in this direction that the fear of natural forces, represented by early religions, and fear of the chief as the representative of the gods on earth, have played their part in domesticating man. The chief and the priest both dictated and enforced certain lines of conduct; where the conduct enjoined gave the tribe an advantage over its competitors, it flourished; where the conduct enforced was of an opposite character, it was either altered or the race went under in the struggle. So that here again there would be brought about an identification of habitual and life-preserving conduct. The discipline thus enforced was stern, the after results were

disastrous, but it was useful then ; and, as Bagehot says, "Progress would not have been the rarity it is if the early food had not been the late poison."

Mr. Francis Galton has shown* that a want of self-reliance has been of great benefit to many species of animals, inasmuch as it led to their presenting a united front to an enemy that could not have been successfully resisted by any other means ; and undoubtedly, as he proceeds to argue, a too great tendency to break away from custom and initiate movements on one's own responsibility, would at the outset destroy whatever social life existed. Of course these coercive forces by means of which man is first domesticated, are not altogether consciously directed or invented ; it cannot be said that any man invented a custom, although it may be said humanity invented them. Custom among savage races will grow out of the most trifling circumstances or coincidences. Many customs rise up and die out, and eventually out of a multitude that are tried only a few survive ; pretty much as out of a number of seeds that may be scattered only those strike root that find themselves amid favourable conditions.

The first step, then, in the growth of the state and morality, is for each individual to recognise that living with others implies that all his impulses shall not be gratified promiscuously ; that it is wrong to go against the expressed opinion of the tribe, or, better still, that his interests are in some mysterious manner vitally connected with the interests of the whole. This is secured, primarily, by the operation of natural selection, later by conscious innovation ; the sphere of self unconsciously extends until it takes in the whole of which the individual is but a part. But apart even from those influences which serve to foster moral feelings, the existence of family life gives us a very definite point from which to commence our investigations. It has been made pretty clear by numerous investigators that the genesis of the state is to be found in the family. From that it passes by natural growth through the patriarchal and tribal stages to the nation ; and therefore one must seek in the structure of the family for the beginnings of much that is afterwards expressed in the tribe.

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* "Human Faculty," pp. 70-79.

The young human being has a longer period of infancy and helplessness than any other animal. For several years its existence, and consequently the existence of the species, is dependent upon the unselfish feelings of others.* The family is, therefore, a much more powerful influence in the moulding of the human character, than it is with other animals, and it is consequently in the family that we must look for the first clear outline of the social virtues. Most of the virtues that are not purely self-regarding will, I imagine, be found to have had their origin in this source. Here must first have found clear expression the virtues of forbearance, kindness, and a certain rough sense of justice. The sense of justice is however very slight, being little more than the arbitrary dictates of the head of the family, a condition of things that lingers even when the family has blossomed into the tribe. Still the main point to be noted is that it is in the family that the individual is first brought into constant relationship with creatures similar to himself; these others constitute a part, a very important part of his environment, and he is necessarily compelled to adjust his actions accordingly. It has been shown above that "Goodness" consists essentially in a relation—the maintenance of a balance between an organism and its environment. Whether that environment be organic or inorganic the principle remains the same, although in the former case the influence of the environment is clearer and more direct. As, however, in the family the surroundings of each unit is partly made up of similar units, and, further, as the medium of each is tolerably uniform, adjustment will involve here (1) development along pretty similar lines, and (2) adjustment in such a manner, that the welfare of all the units becomes in some measure bound up with and identical with that of each. Each one is affected in somewhat similar manner by the same influence, and the presence of pain in any member of the family gives rise to similar representative feelings in self. In this circumstance we find the beginning of sympathy which plays such a large part in evolved conduct, and which consists essentially in the process sketched above.

The next expansion of self occurs when the family

* I adopt the conventional terms here, but the precise meaning to be attached to the words "SELFISH" and "UNSELFISH," will be considered later.

developes into the tribe or state. Here the relations of man become more varied, the interests wider; and the constant clashing of interests renders necessary the framing of laws for the general guidance. What had already taken place in the family now takes place in the state, a re-adjustment must be effected in order to establish a more satisfactory relation between the individual and the new environment. In particular, the ideas of justice and duty must undergo a great expansion and elevation. But even here the demands of right conduct are strictly limited to the tribe; duties and obligations have no reference to outsiders. Very plainly is this shown in the Bible, "Thou shalt not steal" did not mean the Israelites were not to "spoil the Egyptians," nor "Thou shalt not bear false witness" mean that they were to be truthful to their enemies; nor did the command "Thou shalt not commit murder" prevent the Jews putting to death the people whose lands they had invaded. Virtue here was purely local. It was not until a much later stage of human development, when the tribe had grown into the state, and the expansion of the state had given rise to a community of nations with a oneness of interest running through all, that the idea of virtue as binding alike upon all was finally reached; although we have still lingering much of the tribal element in that narrow patriotism which finds expression in the maxim, "My country, right or wrong."

In the history of Rome we can trace these various stages with tolerable clearness. One can watch Rome developing from the patriarchal stage to the tribal, thence to the nation, and finally to the world-wide Empire with its far reaching consequences. At each of these stages we can discern a corresponding development in moral ideals. Confined at first to the tribe, morality grew until it absorbed the nation; and finally its universal dominion involved as a necessity rules of ethics that should press with equal force upon all, and which expressed itself generally in the doctrine of human brotherhood. As Lecky says, "The doctrine of the universal brotherhood of mankind was the manifest expression of those social and political changes which reduced the whole civilised globe to one great empire, threw open to the most distant tribes the right of Roman citizenship, and subverted all

those class distinctions around which moral theories had been formed." *

It is by such natural and gradual steps as those outlined above that morality has developed. Its rise is upon precisely the same level as that of the arts and sciences. Given living tissue and the struggle for existence, and a moral code of some sort is the inevitable result. Just as inventions grew out of individual needs, so morality grew out of social necessities. One feature in the process of development is clear, and that is that the expansion of moral theories, and their purification, has at each step been dependent upon an expansion of the *organic* environment. As this grew wider and more intricate there was necessitated a re-adjustment of moral ideas. Feelings that at first applied only to the family were afterwards extended to the tribe, then to the nation, and lastly, as a recognition of a oneness of interest independent of nationality began to dawn upon the human reason, to the whole of humanity.

I have endeavoured to make this process of development as plain as possible by keeping clear of many considerations which, while bearing upon the subject, were not altogether essential to its proper consideration. Yet, it is obvious, that if the above outline be admitted as substantially correct, the relation of the individual and society is put in a new light; it is no longer the attributes of a number of independent objects that we have to deal with, but the qualities of an organism; and hence will result very important modifications in the use of terms and in the structure of our moral ideals.

In the first place the arbitrary division hitherto drawn between self-regarding and social acts can no longer be maintained, or at least not without serious modification. The distinction usually drawn between self-regarding and social conduct, although valuable enough for working purposes, cannot be an ultimate distinction. It can mean no more at bottom than the division of mind into emotion, volition, and thought. Man's moral, mental, and physical nature forms a unity, and all divisions that may be made are divisions erected to suit our conveniences and not such as exist in nature. As the individual is an integral portion

* Hist. European Morals. Ed. 1892. I. 340.

of society, is indeed a product of social activity, his actions have necessarily a double aspect, his fitness as an individual determines his value in the social structure, and conversely the perfection of the structure has a vital bearing upon his own value; and therefore although we may fix our minds upon one portion of his conduct to the exclusion of the other, such a state of things no more exists in reality than the Euclidean line without breadth, or a point without magnitude.

But it does not follow that because the distinction usually drawn between the two classes of actions is inaccurate that there is, therefore, no such thing as gratifying individual preference at the cost of injury to others. That is by no means the case. The important thing is having a correct understanding of the sense in which the terms are used.

It has, I think, been made clear that however it may be disguised the main end of the action is always the pursuit of pleasure or the avoidance of pain; and therefore, unless we choose to confuse ourselves with what Bentham called "question begging epithets," it is plain that a man can only desire the well-being of others in so far as their happiness becomes in some manner bound up with his own. This result is brought about by two methods: directly, by the growth of the sympathetic feelings which makes the sight of suffering painful, and indirectly through the desire of the good opinion and friendship of those with whom we are living. Sympathy, although not so important as many have imagined it to be, is yet an extremely potent factor in moral evolution. Indeed, sympathy, which may be defined as the process of presenting to the mind the pleasures and pains endured by others, and making them our own, so to speak, is involved in the very nature of knowledge and in the structure of society. Social life is impossible, bearing in mind our fundamental maxim, unless animals find some amount of pleasure in the mere fact of being together. Were it otherwise there would be disunion. This simpler form of sympathy quickly gives rise to other forms of a much more complex character. Beside the general circumstance that creatures living amid the same general set of conditions come to have nearly identical feelings aroused by similar stimuli, it is obvious that a large part of the value of gregarious-

ness will depend upon the ability of certain individuals to arouse by their actions feelings of a desired kind in others. A member of a herd of animals scenting a special danger, excites by its actions sympathetic feelings on the part of the other members, thus enabling them to prepare for defence in a similar manner. Otherwise the warning that is given on the approach of danger would be of little or no value. Thus, the development of a society involves a capacity of entering into the pleasures and pains of others; and this power is further heightened by those social sanctions which prescribe and enforce certain lines of conduct—sanctions which are much more powerful in primitive societies than in modern ones, owing to the smaller individuality of its members.

The distinction, therefore, between a selfish and an unselfish act is not that in the latter case egoistic feelings have no place; this would be impossible; it is simply that in the evolution of society a transfusion of the egoistic feelings occurs owing to which their distinctive features are lost, pretty much as the special properties of a number of elements are lost when merged into a chemical compound. In the conflict of mutual self-regarding interests a number of re-adjustments and compromises occur, until the result assumes a different character from that presented by the individual elements. The discussion about egoism and altruism has, as a result of ignoring these considerations, been largely a barren one. It is impossible to live for others unless one lives for self, it is equally impossible to live wisely for self and ignore duties to others. Therefore, as Maudesley says, "It is not by eradication but by a wise direction of egoistic passions, not by annihilation but by utilisation of them, that progress in social culture takes place; and one can only wonder at the absurdly unpractical way in which theologians have declaimed against them, contemning and condemning them, as though it were a man's first duty to root them clean out of his nature, and as though it were their earnest aim to have a chastity of impotence, a morality of emasculation." *

A second and no less important consideration is one that has been already pointed out generally, namely, that a

* "Body and Will" p. 167.

science of ethics can only reach safe generalisations by taking into consideration the social structure of which the individual is a part. To separate man from society and then hope to understand his moral nature, is like attempting to determine the function of a leg or an arm without reference to the body. Such qualities as duty and justice are, as I have said, purely social, and therefore the reason for their existence cannot be found in the nature of the individual considered apart from his fellows, any more than the movements of the earth could be understood apart from the influence of the rest of our planetary system. Indeed, a great many of the objections commonly urged against a scientfic system of ethics will be found to be based upon this short-sighted view of the matter ; and thus as Mr. Stephens has pointed out, must lead to error and confusion.

That man is a social animal is a statement frequently made and easily illustrated, although few of those who use the phrase have apparently considered all that is involved in the dictum. Yet in that sentence lies the key to the whole problem. As G. A. Lewes says, "The distinguishing feature of human psychology is that to the three great factors, organism, external medium and heredity, it adds a fourth, namely, relation to a social medium, with its product the general mind."* It is this "fourth factor" which gives rise to a purely human morality and psychology, and so speak, lifts the individual out of himself and merges him in a larger whole.† From the first moment of his birth man is dependent upon the activities of others for nine-tenths of those things that render life endurable, and the feelings engendered in the course of evolution bear an obvious relation to this dependence. The love of offspring, regard for the feelings of others, readiness to act in unison with others, all form part of those conditions that make the perpetuation of the species possible ; and consequently without such instincts and sentiments the individual as he now exists would be an impossibility. And in such cases where these sentiments were absent—the

† To live for self is as scientifically and ethically absurd as to live for others. The true ethic consists in giving to self-regarding and other regarding claims their due weight, while at the same time demonstrating their interdependence.

* "Study of Psychology."

love of offspring for example—these individuals would leave few behind to perpetuate their qualities, and the type would thus tend to disappear. On the other hand, the kindly disposed person, the sympathetic, or such as come up to the tribal ideal of excellence, would be held up for imitation and respect; and thus by a dual process of weeding out anti-social specimens, and by cultivating social ones, the development of a higher type would proceed. Indeed, we can scarcely conceive the cause of evolution to have been otherwise. Natural selection works by favouring the possessors of such qualities as establish a more perfect balance between organism and environment, and in developing customs and instincts the course of social evolution has been to bring out and cultivate such as were favourable to the welfare of social structure and repress those of a contrary character. Each of the social virtues may have its rise traced in this manner, by showing how it has contributed to individual and social development.* The tendency of natural selection in preserving those communities in which the members are most at one in feeling and action is to bring about not merely an ideal, but an actual identification of individual and social welfare, and this in such a manner that each one finds the fullest expression of his own welfare in the combined happiness of all around him.

This truth, that man might properly be regarded as a cell in the "social tissue," was recognised in a vague and rather fanciful manner long ago;† but it is owing to the unparalleled scientific activity of the last half century that this conception of man has been placed upon a solid foundation, and a scientific view of human life and conduct made possible. We now see that the phrase "social organism" or "social tissue" is something more than a mere figure of speech, that it expresses a fundamental fact and one that must be constantly borne in mind in the consideration of social problems. What, indeed, is society or the social medium but a part of the individual? One's whole being, intellectual and moral, is composed of

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* A very interesting inquiry might here be opened concerning the influence upon the general character of leading or much admired individuals.

† Plato, Republic, book v. 462.

innumerable relations between it and others. My nature has been and is being so continually moulded by this social medium that my pleasures and pains have become indissolubly connected with the pleasures and pains of others to such an extent that I could no more be happy in a society where misery was general than I could travel in comfort or indulge in the pleasures of art, science, or literature, apart from the activities of those around me. The mere fact of being brought up in a society so identifies all our ideas and customs with that society as to defy their separation from it. This is well illustrated in the case of young men and women who are brought up within the pale of a particular church. They become part of its organisation, they identify themselves with it, and its losses and gains become their own. If all this is witnessed in a single generation, how much more powerful must the co-operate feeling become when society has been constantly developing along the same lines for countless generations with its sanctions enforced by organic necessity? The process must obviously result in the direction above indicated, that of bringing about a union of individual desires and actions with social well-being; while the growing intelligence of man, by perceiving the reason and value of this mutual dependence of the unit and society, must be constantly taking steps to strengthen the union and increase its efficiency.

Here, then, we have reached a conclusion, or at least to go further would involve a lengthy discussion of matters into which we have no desire to enter. But if the foregoing reasoning be sound, we have reached a point from which the reader will be enabled to lay down a clear and satisfactory theory of morals such as will place the subject upon the same level as any of the arts and sciences.

The principles involved in the preceding pages may be briefly summarised as follows :—

(1) Maintenance of life depends upon the establishment and continuance of a definite set of actions between the organism and its environment.

(2) In the ceaseless struggle for existence this is secured by the preservation of all those animals whose

habits and capabilities best equips them to meet the demands of their environment, natural selection thus accentuating the value of all variations in this direction.

(3) As all conduct has as its immediate object the pursuit of pleasurable, and the avoidance of painful feelings, and as life is only possible on the condition that pleasurable and beneficial actions shall roughly correspond, there is set up a general and growing agreement between pleasure-producing and life-preserving conduct.

(4) As experience widens and intelligence develops, those actions that make for a higher life become more certain and easy of attainment; while the pleasures formerly attached to the end of action become transferred to the means, these becoming an end in themselves.

(5) The conditions of life bearing upon all with a certain amount of uniformity, and therefore demanding a like uniformity of action, leads to a gradual modification of nerve structure and the creation of corresponding general sentiments, which, handed on and increased from generation to generation, express themselves in our existing moral sense.

(6) The moral sense, therefore, while possessing a certain authority in virtue of its origin, needs to be continually tested and corrected in accordance with the requirements of the age.

(7) All progress involves the specialisation and integration of the various parts of the organism, individual and social. By the operation of this principle there is brought about an identification of individual and general interests; inasmuch as each one finds his own happiness constantly dependent upon the happiness of others, and that a full expression of his own nature is only to be realised in social activity.

From all of which we may conclude that:—

"The rule of life drawn from the practice and opinions of mankind corrects and improves itself continually, till at last it determines entirely for virtue and excludes all kinds and degrees of vice.* For, if it be correct to say

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* Hartley, "Observations on Man," II. p. 214.

that the moral formula is the expression of right relations between man and the world, then it follows that the pressure urging man to the performance of right actions—*i.e.*, actions serving to broaden and perpetuate life—must on the whole be more permanent than those impelling him to the performance of wrong ones. This, it will be observed, is merely making the broad and indisputable statement that evolution tends to maintain life.

The course of evolution is therefore upon the side of morality. By the operation of the struggle for existence we can see how "the wicked are cut off from the earth;" and the more righteous live on and perpetuate the species. Right conduct is one of the conditions of existence, and is as much the outcome of natural and discoverable laws as any of the sciences to which we owe so much. What has prevented it assuming a like positive character has been the extreme complexity of the factors joined to the want of a proper method. Here, again, we are deeply indebted to the doctrine of evolution for having thrown a flood of light upon the subject, and making tolerably clear what was before exceedingly obscure. Under its guidance we see the beginnings of morality low down in the animal world in the mere instinct of self-preservation, and its highest expression in the sympathetic and kindred feelings of men living in society. And between these two extremes there are no gaps; it is an unbroken sequence right through. As I have said, the process has practically assumed the shape of an expansion of self, from the individual to the family, from the family to the state, and from the state to the whole of humanity.

Morality thus rises at length above the caprice of the individual or the laws of nations, and stands a lawgiver in its own right and in virtue of its own inherent majesty. That which was a matter of blind instinct at the outset, and later of arbitrary authority, becomes in the end a matter of conscious perception pressing upon all alike with the authority of natural law.

The outlook, then, to the rationalist is a perfectly hopeful one. From the vantage ground afforded him by modern science he can see that a constant purification of conduct is part of the natural order of things, and although in a universe of change one can hardly picture

a time when there will cease to be a conflict between good and bad motives, yet the whole course of evolution warrants us in looking forward with confidence to a time when the development of the permanently moral qualities, or of such powers as serve to keep men moral, will be sufficient to hold the immoral and anti-social tendencies in stern and complete subjection; for however much the forms of morality may change with time and place, that in virtue of which right conduct gains its name, must ever remain the same.