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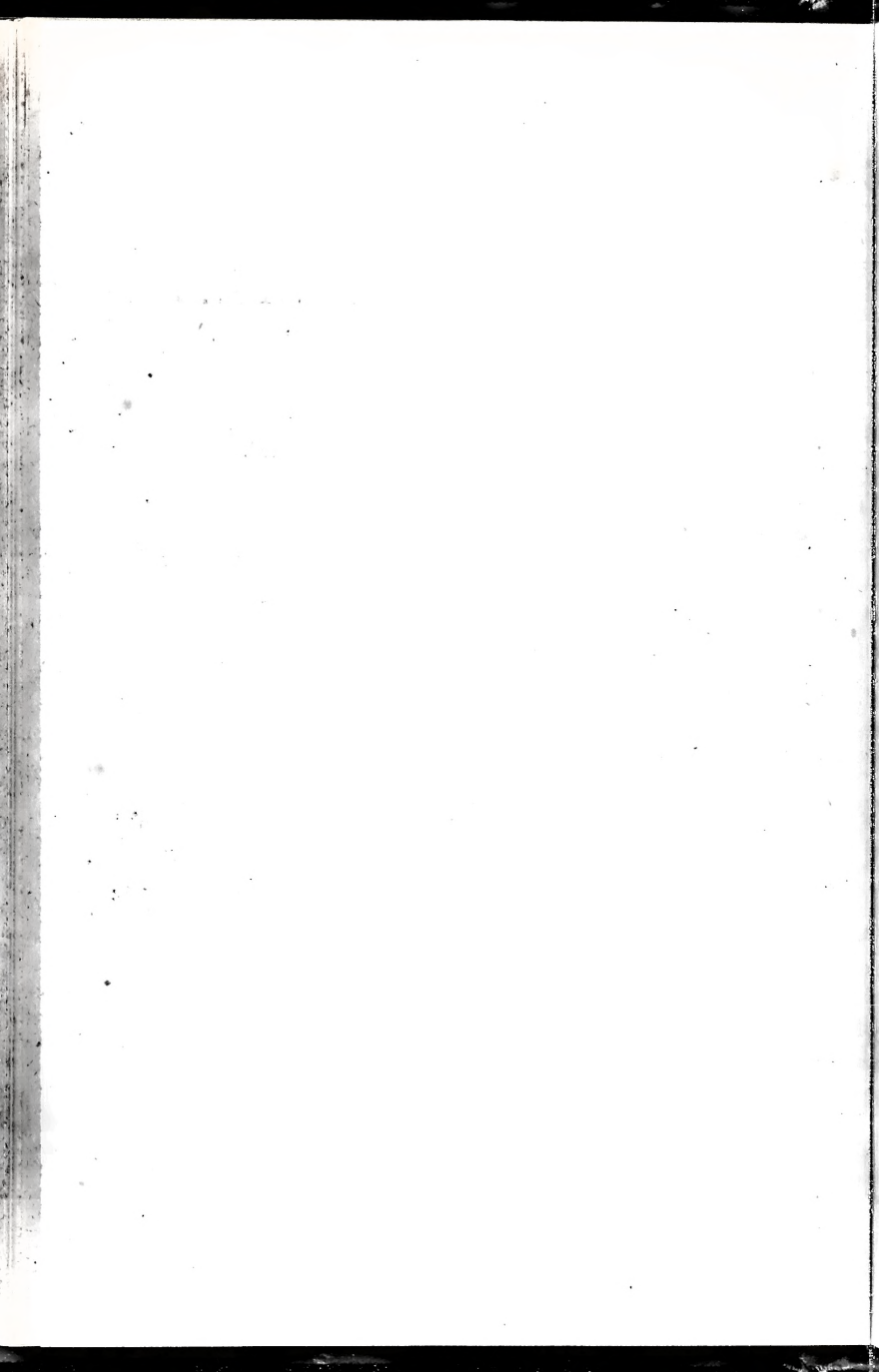
ON MORAL EVIL.

A LETTER FROM A FRIEND.



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ON MORAL EVIL.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It cannot be disguised that in this age there is a great amount of atheism, or, what is nearly akin to it, great distrust of God, arising from the difficulty of reconciling the phenomena of moral evil with the attributes of a holy and beneficent God.

For *your* readers there will be no necessity to enter into any consideration of those explanations which orthodox theology has given to account for the existence of moral evil, because those explanations cannot be reconciled with the most approved conclusions respecting primitive man, and because the theories of the remedy for moral evil do violence alike to our highest instincts and to the honour of God.

I shall, therefore, confine my attention to the purely rational side of the argument, in the hope of getting a hearing from those wise and thoughtful men amongst us who are willing to listen to reason, and to accept whatever can be shown to harmonise with the facts of human nature and the moral instincts.

In dealing with a theme almost exhausted by controversy, of stupendous interest, and of very nearly inscrutable mystery, it is impossible to refrain at the outset from putting in a plea for indulgence, on the score of my deeply felt incapacity to handle the subject worthily; and, what is far more important, it is necessary to caution my readers against any hasty conclusion unfavourable to moral effort, which might be drawn from a sort of outside and comprehensive

view of the whole subject. My sole object in meditating on this momentous theme is to strengthen, not to weaken my own sense of duty, to deepen, and not to efface the moral obligations engraved upon my own conscience. In writing therefore for others, my aim can only be to endeavour, by setting forth the truth, or what I believe to be the truth, to serve the cause of pure morality and true religion, to lead my fellow-men by the shortest and most direct road to triumph over moral evil in themselves, and to make that triumph easier for others.

I must assume that there is a God—a moral Governor of mankind—a Being from whom has emanated all that we are and all that we desire, to whom can be traced, so to speak, the ultimate *responsibility* of all that happens throughout the universe. There was a time when I felt disposed to question this complete and undivided sovereignty, but I perceive that it is no longer tenable to conceive of a First Great Cause of all things, and yet to deny the connection with that cause of any of the visible undisputed phenomena of the world. God must be all or none; that is to say, the Almighty power and perfect wisdom and foreknowledge which we attribute to God, prevent the possibility of any accidental frustration of His purpose, or the real rebellion against Him of any one of His creatures. Of every part of His creation, we must at all times affirm that it is exactly what the Creator intended that it should be then and there; and of every thought, word, and deed, of men, we must likewise affirm that each one is part of God's original plan, and is the direct or indirect result of forces which He himself, foreknowing all, set in operation at the beginning of time. Find me the basest man you know, and try if you can, to separate him and his depraved condition, in any single point of his history or antecedents, from the chain of God's order and providence. Find one gap if you can, where a missing

link betokens an independent set of forces ; shew me but one instance in which his thoughts, words, or deeds, are his own—independently of his Creator—and I will then admit that the Creator is not ultimately responsible for what that man is, or for what he has done.

I know he has done worse when he might have done better, but how was such a depraved choice made possible to him ? Whence did he get his evil bias ? From his companions ? or early training ? or from inherited moral weakness ? So far as he is concerned, he had no control over *two* of these corrupting influences, and, in all probability, as little control over the lot into which he was cast. As a creature, he is the victim rather than the criminal, and in the sight of the Creator he may be an object of pity, but never of hatred. But his parents were wicked before him, and transmitted the increased tendency to evil ? Granted, and the man's very birth into the world, may have been the result of an unlawful, perhaps an adulterous union. At first sight, it might seem as if the very creation of this bad man had been taken out of the Creator's hands, and done in spite of His holy will. But a moment's consideration shews that we are only pushing the difficulty further and further back, and at last we should have to ask the question regarding the first and least corrupted of the man's ancestors (if the first were really the least corrupted) ; Who made these people, in the first instance, what they were, knowing what would be their debased offspring after a thousand generations ? It was still God at the beginning who constituted man as he was, liable to these moral aberrations and corruptions, and having a certain degree of liberty within which he *could* do evil instead of good ; it was still God who knew all the endless and countless variabilities of the human will and character, and who, foreknowing it all, did not prevent or provide for the prevention of those

results which we call evil. In the foregoing case you will observe that I have admitted the worst form in which moral evil can be imagined to take shape, viz. —in the steady downward course of moral debasement, from slight weakness to actual sin, from bad to worse, spreading and growing continually more loathsome from generation to generation, giving no hope of amendment or of arrest in its downward course. All we know of primitive man teaches us that just the contrary of this has been the course of mankind, that mankind began with a far lower moral condition than we have now, that mankind is continually rising and advancing (as a whole), and that superior moral races take the place of those which are inferior. But I took the other hypothesis, because the greater includes the less. If under the worst aspect of human depravity we must still trace the ultimate responsibility to our Creator, *a fortiori*, we must surely do so in considering human depravity under the more favourable aspect, which is offered to us through modern researches into the history of primæval man.

The atheist and the profligate may, however, be inclined to cry exultingly that I have given them all they ask. The atheist says, There cannot be a God, because of all this moral evil in the world. I admit the facts which are called evil, and I say the ultimate responsibility of them lies with the Creator. I cannot deny that God is the cause of all things. The profligate and the criminal may rejoice to think that God is to blame for what they do; and that, as the Creator is responsible, they may as well do as they like.

Much as one deplores the mis-use of any truth, it affords no just ground for keeping it back, or for putting a falsehood in its place. There ever will be persons who must derive temporary injury from the announcements of truths, however wholesome for the mass, or salutary for mankind in the future. We

cannot be silent, and miss our chance; I ought rather to say, we must not neglect our bounden duty, lest some evil effects should mingle with the good effects of what we have to make known. The world would never have emerged from its primitive barbarism, had its wise men and seers waited till all possible danger of the mis-use of truth was past. Like one who said, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," I would only caution my readers against fastening on any one isolated fact or truth, to the exclusion of other facts and truths which we are equally bound to recognize. If it be true that God is the author of all that happens, is the ultimate cause of all which we call evil as well as of all which we call good, there are other truths and facts of our nature and moral organization quite as fundamental and important, which we cannot ignore without perverting the first cardinal truth respecting our Creator's responsibility.

It has been well said, the use of abstract instead of concrete terms has given rise to an enormous amount of error in philosophy in general, and in ethics in particular. The terms "evil" and "sin" when used as abstract terms are fraught with mischief. There can be no moral evil apart from some thought, word, or deed, of man. There can be no sin without a sinner. In endeavouring to discover what moral evil or sin is, we shall go astray at the outset, if we begin to define the abstract term, as theologians vainly do. We must study men and women, their desires, motives, and actions; and from that study we may come in time to be able to generalize, and come to use abstract terms in safety.

Let us then first consider what are the factors in ourselves which go to produce an immoral act. We are certainly conscious of having a body, which is the subject of certain normal and natural desires. This body, so far as we can discover, is in one respect analogous to the individual beings around us, in

every class of animal life. The body at all times seeks its own pleasure and satisfaction. It is endowed with absolute self-love, and is made dependent on its own selfishness for its very life and power. All its functions and its appetites are arranged for its own good, its own safety, health, enjoyment, and that without any regard to the safety, health, or enjoyment of any other body, *i.e.*, whenever such foreign interests stand in its way.

Just as the different individuals in the vegetable and animal worlds, each and all, struggle for existence, if not for supremacy, so the bodies of men and women are by nature under the same law of self-preservation; and, but for the moral element in us which has led to civilization and self-denial, we should differ in nothing fundamentally from the animals around us. This is as much God's own doing as all the rest of the Kosmos. It is quite as necessary to our very existence, and to the perpetuation of the race, that our bodies should be organized as they are, as that the world should keep its mean distance from the sun and revolve diurnally on its axis. I find, then, all I am in search of to explain the source of our wrong-doing, in the very constitution of our bodies and brains; that is to say, we are constituted by nature to gratify our bodies as we please, just according to our several tastes, or the varying dominance of certain appetites, utterly regardless of any interests or pleasures but our own. Even some beautiful instances of happiness shared with others, do not form exceptions to this rule. I may delight in cherishing my wife and in feeding my little ones, but in this I only share the same lovely instinct of many birds, quadrupeds, and insects. It adds to my own comfort to contribute to theirs; and I may discharge this function all my life, without a spark of moral goodness entering into a single act of fatherly devotion. Another man may prefer the gratification of being constantly drunk; and so he seeks his own

pleasure at the entire sacrifice of his family. In both cases, the course of conduct pursued may be suggested by the desires of the flesh, and as natural to the body as eating when hungry, and drinking when thirsty. By far the largest number of evil deeds belongs to the class which we rightly call self-indulgent. And of the rest, which are predatory, destructive, brutal—such as the deeds of rapine, cruelty, and murder—we can only say they are the acts of the indulgence of less common appetites—such as envy, anger, jealousy, revenge, and the like—which are more or less exceptional, but which, equally with other appetites, originate in the bodily and cerebral frame. Now, it is manifest, without the necessity for illustration, that some appetites and natural cravings may be, and are constantly, gratified without any sin at all; and also that in some instances it would be a sin not to gratify them. To these facts we must add a third, viz., all the natural appetites whatever (and by the term “natural” I, of course, exclude appetites which are created or aggravated by cerebral disease) are in themselves needful, beneficial to the welfare of individuals possessing them, and, subject to certain control, good for the world at large.

The appetite for sexual intercourse, which is generally considered the most fruitful source of moral evil, I believe to be, on the contrary, one of the highest and noblest of our physical desires, and manifestly necessary for the world's welfare. That it has been abused, and in many cases unduly stimulated, is no argument against its intrinsic value. Even that ambition or envy, which is the spring of robbery, and the fruitful source of tyranny and injustice, is a necessary adjunct to our natural state. Without the desire to emulate others, and to possess for ourselves what we perceive has added to their comfort or advantage, we should be infinitely less active and progressive than we are, if indeed progress in the arts of civilisa-

tion were then possible at all. And that very anger which leads to cruelty and to murder, is an element in our constitution just as vital to the protection of the race—to the protection not only of individuals who are the subjects of anger, but also of others under their care—as the desire for food and the instinct to cherish our offspring. I cannot find a single element in man's nature, not even the murderous element and love of cruelty, which has not its rightful place in the economy of man, as an animal—and I might also add, of man considered as a moral agent, destined for immortality.

I need not enlarge further on this factor of moral evil. It must be evident to any one who will carefully examine several instances of sin, that it invariably arises on one side from the action of some physical impulse or appetite—that it is always an act done to gratify the animal part of our nature. I now proceed to consider the other factor, without which moral life cannot be produced.

On examining ourselves, we find a principle or power within us which is more or less in antagonism to our natural physical impulses. It matters little to our argument whether we call this inward controlling power by the name of Reason, or Conscience, or Love. We are considering only the thing itself, the nature of which we shall discover from the observation of its mode of action; and we can therefore for the present waive discussion as to its proper name.

While a very large portion of our life is spent in the unrestricted indulgence of some of our natural desires, with which no voice within us interferes, there are at the same time other natural desires which are under the control of an inward power, antagonistic to their indulgence, either altogether or beyond certain limits.

The body cannot do as it likes in all cases, without being brought more or less under the censure of an

inward voice, which either checks the body in its wish for gratification, or, being disobeyed, punishes the body by reproaches or remorse. Every one knows that he is thus under restraint, and that there is no possibility of his doing just what the appetites and impulses of his flesh suggest, without being opposed from within by a power which demands the submission of his will, or bitterly reproaches him when that power is disobeyed. Illustration is scarcely required here, but we can all recall instances of the remarkable exercise of this power. Some persons have felt the tendency to theft or falsehood, and know that this inward power has held them in check. Some have had a similar tendency to intoxication, and have felt the same restraint, whether they have obeyed it or not. The free indulgence of sexual appetite is subject to the same control, or punished by loss of self-respect whenever that control has been defied.

And yet the *proper* indulgence of appetites has not been thus interfered with or censured. We find anger sometimes justified, sometimes forbidden. Love of wealth, the same. Even strict truthfulness may sometimes, and for certain ends, be relaxed. A person in a very critical state of health may be lawfully screened by deception from the danger of being killed by a sudden shock, which some fatal news might cause. Of course, cases in which deception is justifiable are extremely rare. I only instance one, to show what I am aiming to prove—viz., that the inward controlling power permits, under certain circumstances, those actions which, under other circumstances, it would unhesitatingly forbid. There must be a law forbidding, an inward power or voice restraining, in order to evolve sin out of any act of physical impulse. We see this exemplified in human society. The existence of law must in every case precede the birth of crime. Different states have not always the same laws. I may whistle for my dog in the streets of London on

a Sunday without infringing any statute or municipal regulation. If I do the same in Glasgow, I am tapped on the shoulder by a policeman, and reminded of the law which turns my harmless or benevolent action into an offence. In England bigamy is a felony. If I am a Turkish subject, I may have four wives if I please. Then again, some evil things are not prohibited at all. Many forms of fraud and extortion are perfectly legal. Prostitution, and the use thereof, are not crimes, nor even misdemeanours. From this it is evident that states and governments make certain crimes by enacting certain laws. That is, the law alone is the legal measure of certain acts. Where no law against them has been passed, the actions are not recognised as offences.

Now, in precisely the same way, a man can only *sin* when he disobeys the inner law which forbids certain thoughts, words, and deeds. A certain act may present itself to a thousand different persons as an act which *their* consciences would forbid, and so they may come to call that act *immoral* under all possible circumstances, and no doubt they would be right in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand. For this is how the standard of morality has been formed in all ages, and why it is gradually rising. But we should fall into a serious mistake if we tried to make a leap over the one man's conscience, and, ignoring *that*, denounced him as guilty of immorality, simply because he did what public opinion had condemned. If the act was sinful at all, it was so only because it was done in disobedience to the man's own conscience. The mere fact that a multitude of men have a common experience about a certain act does not entitle them to make the philosophical error of ignoring a principal factor in the product of sin. It is not necessarily sinful—nay, it is sometimes greatly virtuous—to act in direct violation of public opinion; so this in itself would not be enough to convict a man of immorality.

A man does right so long as he exercises that degree of control over his physical appetites demanded by his inner moral sense. The moment that he oversteps that limit, or disobeys the inward voice, he commits an act of immorality.

Supposing he should outrage public decency in England, so far as to marry two wives, and supposing him at the same time to be a trained-up Mormonite, taught from infancy to believe that polygamy is lawful in God's sight, we should do right in punishing him as a felon for his felony, but we should be wrong in accusing him of immorality, because his conscience had sanctioned his conduct. This brings us to perceive that merely *written* laws, whether in the Bible or in the Statute Book, are not by themselves the other factor in the product of moral evil. Unless there is a *sense of obligation* there can be no *sin*. There may be crime against the State, or a violation of Bible precept, which some may deem irreverent or impious, but there cannot be sin, without a violation of one's own sense of moral obligation. Moreover, there may be some laws of the State which are bad laws, and some Bible precepts directly opposed to morality, in which case disobedience would be virtuous, though, in the one instance, punished by the State, and in the other by the public opinion of the orthodox; there may be other cases, too, in which a man might be a grievous sinner, though he had broken no written law anywhere.

This may be deemed a dangerous doctrine to teach, but, in the first place, it is not a doctrine at all, but a question of fact as to what constitutes guilt—for guilt can only be the result of previous sense of obligation. And men only feel obliged or bound to do that which they can do. They never really feel bound to do what is known to be beyond their power, and therefore they never can feel guilty for omitting to do what is impossible to them, or for

doing what they really could not help. The previous sense of obligation which alone can constitute a subsequent sense of guilt springs from within, and not from without; it is a part of ourselves, and is one of the modes in which the inner voice or conscience acts upon our lower nature. It cannot be so dangerous to speak the truth about any matter as to say what is false—nor can it endanger morality to endeavour to get a right understanding of the true nature and source of immorality.

The two factors of moral evil, then, are simply the whole physical nature on one side, and on the other, an inward power or law which sometimes opposes our natural instincts and seeks to control them. The action of the physical nature by itself is neither moral nor immoral.

The submission of the physical nature to the moral sense is virtue. The rebellion of the physical nature against the moral sense resulting in action is vice or moral evil. Conscious conformity to the moral sense is morality. Conscious disobedience to it is immorality.

From observation and induction, we are enabled to form moral codes, for the greater facility of education, *i.e.*, for the cultivation of the moral sense, and for the welfare of society. But it is putting these cases quite out of place, to teach that they must be obeyed merely because they are recognised codes, or to describe the infringement of them as immorality, upon any lower ground than that infringement is in every case a violation of individual moral obligation. In a general way, it is true, that certain acts are immoral, done by whom they may, and under any circumstances; but it will only mislead us to suppose that they can ever be immoral except in one invariable way, *viz.*, in that they do violence to the moral sense of every individual who commits them.

It may here be objected: The moral sense gets

weaker the oftener it is violated, and the appetites of the flesh get stronger the oftener they are indulged. In this case it is said, men may go on doing wrong, from worse to worse, until they cease to feel any sense of moral obligation, or any sense of guilt in the commission of those acts which were once felt to be immoral; and at last they become as hardened and indifferent to right and wrong as the beasts of the field, and yet, according to my theory, it is alleged, they would not be immoral, for their conduct would not violate any inner law or moral sense. Hence, if any one wished to escape the unpleasantness of being morally controlled, and the remorse of a guilty conscience, it is urged, he would have nothing to do but to be sinful to the utmost of his power—doing all he could, and as fast as he could, to kill all conscience within him.

This would be indeed a formidable objection to the promulgation of the statement that men are only immoral, sinful, guilty, in exact proportion to the activity of their moral sense, unless the objection were based on a misconception of the possibilities of man's nature. The supposed case of a man extinguishing, by repetition of immoral acts, all moral sense whatever, is purely gratuitous and unwarrantable. We have no reason for supposing that any man, unless diseased in body or mind, can by his own act rid himself of a sense of moral obligation. It is true that it is in our power to increase and develop that moral sense by cultivation and strict obedience, but it by no means follows that it is in our power to destroy it altogether; even, if for a time we can contrive to weaken and resist it.* I refuse to believe in the possibility of a

* Granting that this does take place in some instances, the fact does not overthrow the author's theory. The depraved man has ceased to sin by ceasing to be what God created him. He has fallen lower than a sinner, for he has forfeited his natural human condition. The myth of Nebuchadnezzar would seem to have this meaning.—*Note by a Friend.*

man thus destroying his moral sense after having had one in normal exercise, until such a man is produced and exhibited. All my experience goes to prove that men cannot lose their moral sense, and it more frequently happens, that the self-reproach and remorse grow deeper, the more sin has been indulged.

But granted such a case as the objector mentions. Some few instances of the kind among many millions would not overturn the overwhelming testimony on the other side. Exceptions would but prove the rule. The great mass of mankind are incapable of losing their moral sense, and they would not be less or more under its influence for any theories which might be started to account for its agency in producing moral evil. Vast numbers are kept as they are, neither better nor worse, through the chief agency of custom and public opinion. Their good and their bad actions are alike the result of moulding circumstances, and surrounding example, rather than of any conscious moral effort, or immoral resistance of conscience.

Times and opportunities come to all for virtue and vice, but the even tenor of many lives is, by comparison, seldom disturbed by any great conflict between the flesh and the moral sense. The usual aspect of such lives is best described as *un-moral*, not as moral or immoral at all. Great drinkers, great profligates, and great criminals, are as much the exception as great heroes, great moralists, and great martyrs. Both classes, both extremes of honour and baseness, are doubtless the products of much moral conflict, of which the easy-going world knows little or nothing. A celebrated preacher, a man of exemplary life and morals, once said to me, "If I had not been a saint, I should have been a devil," and, really, to look at him was enough to make one believe his words. There was tremendous power in his head, and the furrows of spiritual conflict had been ploughed deep into his very face. The very good and the very bad are near

akin, depend upon it. And the judgment of God, who knows all, may be very different from ours, as to the exact moral status of each one—

Then gently scan your brother man,
Still gentler sister woman ;
Though they may gang a kenning wrang,
To step aside is human.

One point must still be greatly dark,
The moving why they do it :
And just as lamely can ye mark
How far perhaps they rue it.

Who made the heart, 'tis He alone
Decidedly can try us ;
He knows each chord—its various tone,
Each spring—its various bias :

Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it ;
What's done we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted.*

From the foregoing observations on the source of moral evil, we cannot but draw some important conclusions.

(1). There is no such thing at all as moral evil, apart from the thoughts, words, and deeds of moral beings, *i.e.*, of beings endowed with a moral sense, a power which offers resistance to the physical impulses. Therefore, there is nothing so absurd as to suppose that evil has originated in any spiritual being or devil ; or has been imported into man's nature from without, or, still less, is the result of God's defeat, or of some flaw or defect in His original plan.

(2). The mere fact of man being able to commit an immoral act furnishes evidence of his superiority over other kinds of animal organism. He could not sin unless he first possessed a moral sense—a sense of obligation. It is a mark, if anything, of divine favour,

* Burns' Address to the Unco Guid.

rather than of divine anger. It is the token of God's blessing rather than of God's cursing.

(3). It is an indication of man's destiny. What possible benefit could be derived from the endowment of man with a moral sense, if this life were the only field for its exercise? If this be the only sphere in which the moral sense will ever be developed, then its presence in human nature must be admitted to be a profound mistake, a mere wanton disturbance of human animal contentment, without any corresponding advantage. The moral sense is to some men an incessant check on the appetites and inclinations of the flesh, submitted to only for the sake of an *eternal moral progress*, which man's inmost heart desires, and for which *alone* he is willing to make the sacrifices of his fleshly indulgence. To undergo all this in pure delusion—a delusion for which no set of priests, or prophets, no sacred books or churches are responsible—a delusion purely originating in the highest and noblest part of man's own nature, is to submit to a moral government based on immorality—to be kept truthful and honourable by a lie, and to be the utter dupe of the Creator. If men can bring themselves to believe that this faith in eternal moral progress after death is utterly false and without foundation, they can only do so by denying the goodness of God, and by affirming that, if there be a Creator at all, he must be the most treacherous and cruel of fiends.

(4). As the relative powers of the flesh and the moral sense are absolutely due to the Creator, partly by the constitution of each man's nature, and by the circumstances in which he is placed, and over which he has often no control, it follows that the failure of the moral sense to regulate the body must be regarded by the Creator in a very different light to what is generally supposed. It is, of course, right to employ language which conveys in the most clear and forcible manner the divine authority of the moral sense, and

to teach young persons and men of little intellectual culture how wicked and wrong it is not to control themselves; and so we naturally say, "God is angry with sin." "God will punish it." I say this language is in use among us from the exigencies of the case, and is justifiable only so long as we find it the best by which to convey the incontrovertible truth that it is man's duty to control himself, and to act in strict obedience to the moral sense, and further, that disobedience will entail painful consequences in order to train him back into obedience and virtue.

But if this be kept well in view, and insisted on by teachers, and preachers, and parents, they will be more successful in their efforts to promote virtue, and to diminish moral evil, if they ascertain clearly how all sin is really punished, and skilfully expose the numberless fallacies commonly entertained with regard to punishment; and if to this they add true views of God's relation to the world, and of His moral government, they will get rid of those dreadful notions about the Creator which make the lives of so many needlessly sad, and weaken morality by weakening hope. It is *not* true that sin is always punished by bodily pain. Pain administered as punishment can only serve to discipline the body, just as little children may be trained into civilized animals by a little wholesome chastisement in early years, which must on no account be inflicted after the moral sense is sufficiently developed to make them ashamed of having done wrong. As a matter of fact, the body gets more punished by virtue than by vice. Provided a vicious man is prudent in his self-indulgence, he can secure comfort and gratification to his body by his very sins; whereas, in very many cases of true virtue, the body suffers by the moral conduct of the individual. To use an old Bible phrase which is very expressive, "the flesh, with its affections and lusts, is mortified." Being called to a life of moral excellence is, in many instances, really

being called to a life of much physical pain. Loss of liberty, loss of pleasure, and often positive discomfort, and even misery, have arisen purely out of the rigid exercise of moral control. We cannot, therefore, look for the punishment of moral evil in the region of physical pain or bodily discomfort. As the only reward or compensation for virtue is to be found in the satisfaction of the moral sense, either on account of what has been gained by self-conquest in moral progress, or on account of some manifest benefit which has been conferred thereby on others; so the only true punishment for moral evil—that is, pain which can be felt as punishment—is in shame and remorse. Our Creator has so ordered it that we *must* reproach ourselves for all failure in duty, for all conscious disobedience to the higher law within us. He has so constituted us, that we blame ourselves in exact proportion to our real guilt; that we measure our own guilt by the previous sense of obligation, which is, in turn, measured by the power of doing right of which we were conscious at the time of the sinful act. Thus a man's own sense of guilt is the exact measure of guilt. Of course, that sense of guilt may not come into exercise all at once. The better feelings may be overpowered by a delirium of self-indulgence, which, for a time, makes him as it were out of his mind; but when he comes to himself, and reviews his conduct, the full sense of guilt comes over him, and he is tortured by shame and self-reproach. There is just this difference between God's moral government and ours: *we* cannot reach the inner life; we can only deal with the body: and so the criminal is punished by us in his body. We take our revenge, just or unjust, for his offences by various methods of inflicting pain on the cerebral and physical frame of the offender. But God's way of punishing is just the opposite. For the most part the body is left alone, or only indirectly affected

through the emotions. God makes the sinner to be his own judge and his own executioner. The stings of remorse are the only real ministers of divine justice. Thus we are brought by a single step to question the accuracy of that common sentiment, "God is angry with sin," "God will surely punish it." These common phrases plainly declare a change of mind or feeling in God, and a determination on His part to interfere—to do something—in consequence of our sin. Though well intended and often practically useful, because not clearly understood, these phrases are unsound and untrue. God cannot be made angry by anything whatever which occurs in the universe which He himself has planned and built. God cannot be the subject of variable emotions, such as are common to the finite human being. God cannot be disturbed by any consequence of those manifold forces which He at first, foreknowing all, set in operation. It is quite absurd to talk of God's anger at all, when one contemplates the complete foreknowledge which must have ever filled the Creator's mind. To say that one is displeased, or angry, is to express that the will of the angry person has been thwarted, his plans in some way defeated; and to ascribe such defeat to any part of God's plans, is to divest Him either of Infinite Power or Infinite Wisdom. To say that God is angry with sin, is only to use a figure of speech whereby we wish to describe the fact that our own moral sense has a divine authority for the control of the body in which it dwells. Beyond that, the phrase is false and misleading, and has done infinite mischief in the world by representing sinful man as an object of God's displeasure, and as an offender doomed to some terrible fate. So, too, the phrase, "God will surely punish sin," misleads us by carrying away our thoughts from the present punishment which the Creator has made man to inflict upon himself. It originates all sorts of absurd and cruel theories of delayed vengeance, brew-

ing wrath, and a future hell of endless torment, when, all the while, the only just, and suitable, and beneficial punishment is being already borne. Besides this, the punishment of moral evil by shame and remorse, is in itself *remedial* and not vindictive. It is a pure medicine, and not the scourge or axe of an executioner. It contains the germs of repentance and amendment of life, and was intended to do so.

We have been too long under this horrid nightmare of the dread of God, and the sense of His anger. It is "high time to awake out of sleep." Men have been estranged from their great Friend, who alone knew how to help them. They have lived all their lives under a dark cloud, or in the wild endeavour to lighten up their gloom by the glare of reckless reveling. They have sometimes abandoned all efforts at self-control, and smothered the appeals of conscience, by trusting to "atoning blood" or "imputed righteousness." They have multiplied schemes on schemes for escaping from God, though all the while He was their Father and Friend, and no more angry with them than the tender mother is angry with her sick babe.

I am not afraid myself of believing that God is not angry with sin, and that He will not punish it by any other method than that already in force—through the moral sense itself. Though I have long held this view, it has never made me careless about right and wrong, or diminished, by the weight of a grain, the burden of self-reproach whenever I have done amiss. I don't know what I might have been, or have done in the whole range of sins, but for the constant and steadfast assurance of God's unabated love and friendship. It has helped and not hindered me in the struggle between good and evil. So I am not afraid to tell the truth to my fellowmen, whenever I can tell it wholly, and not partially. At the same time, God's own provision for the moral progress of mankind is ample and

unassailable. We can only do temporary harm, if even that, by our false theories. We cannot unmake a single man, woman, or child, or wrest from them the moral sense which God has given.

(5.) It is a relief to turn from the ugly distortions of man's relation to God, as described by theologians to those happier views which you have done so much to make known. In the pamphlets on "The Analogy of Nature and Religion" and "Law and the Creeds," and others in that series, we breathe an atmosphere of calmness and hope, instead of the alarm and despair fostered by the old theologies.* Moral evil is only relative; we create it, so to speak, by our aspirations, by our widening knowledge, and by our increasing desire to walk in the will of God. We learn by it what we have been created for, and what destiny God has in store for us. We cannot shut our eyes to the fearful and wicked things which are done in the world, but we ought to be thankful that we have the power of seeing them to be wicked and fearful, the sense of abhorrence of them, and the capacity for struggling against their commission by ourselves, and for making a manful attempt to remedy their bitter consequences, and prevent them in future. We are apt to forget that there was a time when people who were accounted holy and saintly, and believed themselves to be so, practised lying and fraud without a sense of shame; † when a man fervent in piety, and full of honest trust in His Maker's love and righteousness could turn brigand, and seize other men's wives for his own lust, and day by day make deadly raids upon the property and dependants of the man who was giving him a shelter and a home, and all this without any sense of having done amiss, or broken the law of common humanity. ‡ The very saint who was called the Father of the Faithful §

* This subject is also treated in "The Sling and the Stone," in various sermons on sin.

† Jacob, &c.

‡ David.

§ Abraham.

could deliberately tell a lie in order that his own wife might be taken to be ravished in a royal couch, without the necessity of his being previously murdered. What should we say now if such deeds could be done, as they once were done, without exciting any sense of shame or calling forth the indignation of a whole people?

Times have changed indeed, and morality has made great strides. True, many fearful crimes are now perpetrated, but they are no longer committed without the abhorrence of the multitude. Terrible inroads on domestic morality have been lately revealed to us through our Divorce Courts, but only to meet with the reproaches and indignation which they deserve. And to pass from classes to individuals. We have had living amongst us in the past century, men whose virtues had never before been reached, much less surpassed. Such men leave their impress on the age which follows them, by an improved standard of morals, and so the whole race is lifted on, step by step, up the mountain of holiness which leads to the throne of God.

But each man, as his body falls asleep in death, wakes up, as we believe, to a new life in the world which we cannot see, wherein the great work begun here is carried on more rapidly, with fewer falls and blunders than we make in our earliest essays at moral progress here below. There are vast differences between us on earth, as to the degrees of the strength and development of the moral sense, but this no more hinders us from believing that all must take the same blissful journey upwards to light and goodness, than the fact of our children being of different ages prevents our believing that they will all in succession grow up to manhood.

Whatever view we take of evil, we can only struggle against it as we ought when we are assured that the contest is not hopeless, and that a great and kind

Friend has subjected us all to it for a purpose which shall bring infinite good to every one. If our aspirations are above our capacities, the result will be a temporary sense of bitter failure ; it need not involve any sense of guilt for any failure but such as was clearly within our power to prevent. It need not involve any regret—still less despair—so long as we are sensitive to our position, earnestly desiring to improve. And while we can take comfort from the assurance that God cannot be angry with us, we shall be only more angry with ourselves for not achieving what we might have achieved, and for failing when we might have prevailed. The love and friendship of God will thus cast a bright light about us in our deepest sadness and bitterest repentance, and will strengthen us more than anything else to amend our lives, and to conquer the foe that stands still before us.

I have only briefly, and very imperfectly, touched on this vast subject, but the little I have said may lead some of your more able readers to correct my errors and to supplement my defects.

Ever most truly yours,

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To THOMAS SCOTT, Esq.,
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POSTSCRIPT.

A REVIEW of one of your pamphlets, "Is Death the End of all things for man," in the "*Rock*" of June 10th, leads me to add a few more words, which may help to correct the erroneous impressions now current amongst the orthodox, respecting our views of rewards and punishments. The writer of that Review represents the author of the above-named pamphlet as being "shut up to one or other of the only other possible doctrines—the reward of all, or the punishment of all, or haply, a temporary punishment of some, in order to the ultimate issue of the reward or blessedness of all."

I cannot, of course, answer for the author of that pamphlet, but most Theists are agreed in believing that all men will be gradually brought to a state of holiness at last. It is not a question with them of reward and punishment at all, but one relating to the good purpose of God in having created us. That, in this process of becoming holy, the punishment of remorse will still be used hereafter, as it is in this life, is, to say the least, highly probable; but it does not involve any notions of Purgatory, such as are referred to by the Reviewer in the "*Rock*." As to reward, the only reward for which the Theist hopes or seeks to attain is that of *success*—of becoming at last what he wishes and tries to be—of being able to do the perfect will of God, and to love it entirely. Happiness of any other sort is out of all consideration, and the hope of it has been cast away as one of the attractions of our childhood. The blessedness of being good, of growing up into perfect sonship to God—this alone is our aspiration and our well-grounded hope. We do not pretend to describe, or even to suggest, the details of

God's future discipline of us, which must remain hidden from our knowledge on this side the grave, but only so far as analogy helps us, we believe that moral discipline *will* be carried on with each of us when we die, and that then, as now, we shall find in the punishment which comes by remorse the best medicine for faults still incurred. To compare this to the doctrine of Purgatory is to disclose an entire ignorance of our standpoint. The Reviewer, after stating, in his own language, the doctrine that *all* will hereafter be blessed, goes on to say, "It has no foundation to rest upon excepting general notions respecting the goodness of God, and His purpose and His power to make His creatures happy."

Now this hope does not rest at all on "general notions," many of which are rejected by the Theist, and none of which are ever accepted by him as authoritative, but the hope, wherever it exists, rests on the individual's *firm belief* in the goodness of God, and in His purpose and power to make His children *good*. What foundation for our hope, we ask, can possibly be so strong, or so wide, as this conviction of God's good purpose, and His boundless power to carry it out? No voices from without, no parade of Church authority, no library full of Bibles and Testaments, no miracles of raising the dead, no word of Christ Himself, or of the whole army of martyrs, not even the chorus of angels or archangels, and all the company of heaven, could make so certain our blessed hope as this still small voice in our own hearts, "God is love." Those who cannot feel this are yet unbelievers; they do not know what real faith is; they do not yet "understand the loving kindness of the Lord." From the dark cloud of orthodox infidelity, the wind moans and the atmosphere is loaded with profound gloom; the hope of the final bliss of all is swept away by a scornful scepticism which reckons on the sympathy of the "Christian" multitude. "Now, with respect to this doctrine" (*i.e.*, the final good of all) it might be

enough to say that it has no foundation to rest upon, excepting general notions respecting the goodness of God," &c. Can infidelity sink lower than this?

Another fallacy lies near at hand. After erroneously putting the term "happy" for "good" (a confusion which we studiously avoid, although it may be true that the only real happiness consists in being good), the Reviewer asks, "Why is there any unhappiness in the universe at all? God could prevent it, but He does not. There must be good reasons for His refraining, and how can we tell that these reasons shall cease to act when men cease to live in this world? If the existence of suffering in the world were incompatible with the Divine goodness, the existence of it for a lifetime, or for an hour, were as incompatible with that goodness as its existence throughout eternity. This can never be answered."

We don't want to answer it; we quite agree with the Reviewer that unhappiness is in the world, might be preventible by God, is not prevented by God for certain *good reasons*. We further agree in believing that God's good reasons will continue to act in the next world as in this. We accept this life with its present share of unhappiness only and entirely on the ground that God is working by this means, amongst others, to certain ends, of which the chief is that every man under present discipline shall be made good at last. We do not rebel against the suffering—nay, we would not wish one iota of it diminished, if thereby God's good purposes should risk a failure. We believe in Him, and therefore we are willing to bear what He appoints. We trust Him implicitly, and therefore are willing to wait, in perfect confidence, in sure and certain hope.

But the Reviewer, to whom I should be sorry to attribute, even by mistake, any opinions which are not his, seems evidently to think his closing sentence in the above paragraph a triumphant argument for the endless torment in which he believes.

The fallacy lies in his not distinguishing between the abstract and the concrete. "Suffering," I beg to remind him, implies a sufferer, or sufferers. Now, it *does* make all the difference to Divine goodness whether a human being suffers for a time, with a view to his final good, or suffers for all eternity. This "suffering" which exists in the universe is a state into which multitudes of individuals are being born, and out of which they are constantly passing. The suffering may only be correctly described as eternal as regards its permanence as a system, and the unbroken succession of individuals subjected to it (supposing that this present state of human life is to continue on the earth for ever). But as regards the *beings* who suffer, it is not only not eternal, but temporary; as compared with a millennium, even very temporary, and as compared with eternity, in the language of the apostle, "it is but for a moment."

Were it not temporary, and inflicted for a purpose beneficent to the sufferer, suffering would be really incompatible with the Divine goodness; but this just makes all the difference. The orthodox man believes in the endless suffering of some human beings whom God has created, who were actually born morally weak, and who were perhaps so trained and circumstanced that moral improvement was hardly possible to them at all; or, to speak in more orthodox terms, they "rejected the Saviour," because they had not that "faith" which the New Testament affirms "is not of ourselves, but is the gift of God."

To remain for ever and ever wicked and unhappy, incurable by God, even if He had the will to redeem and reform the poor sinner, would be a standing witness of the triumph of evil over good, of the defeat of Him whom the very orthodox call "Almighty."

No! the existence of suffering in the world, when once understood, is *not* incompatible with the Divine goodness, but rather one of its strongest proofs, *but*

only when understood. As a means to an end, as inflicted for a time on each individual, in order to secure his everlasting good, it is a mark of God's fatherly love for us all; but without this condition it would convey to us, an irresistible evidence that we were the sport of a fiend, or the victims of the most gigantic blunder.

The Reviewer, of course, after what he had^rsaid, could not help falling into the error of supposing that morality would be weakened by the final prospect of universal happiness. Taught as we teach it, the doctrine of final good for all can only tend to strengthen our moral sense; and to hasten, not to retard, amendment. Our belief is, *not* that God intends us all to be indiscriminately 'happy,' but that He intends to make us all *good*, to make us not only obedient to His will, but to love it, and be drawn towards it by impulses from within corresponding to His laws without. That is our *summum bonum*, the only fruition of our earthly trials for which we have any right to look to our Creator, and that of itself teaches the supreme importance of losing no time in beginning, and relaxing no effort in continuing, the great work of our moral progress. I cannot do better than remind the Reviewer and his readers of the "*Rock*," of these apostolic words which on this subject express the mind of the theist so forcibly: "*Work out your own salvation, for it is God who is working in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure.*"