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THE ETHICS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT*

Any just exposition of Christian Ethics must begin with the ethics of the Old Testament. For this there are two chief reasons: its preparatory character and its permanent value.

1. Old Testament Ethics is in order to Christian Ethics. "The law," we are told, "was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Gal. iii. 24). We cannot, therefore, appreciate the perfection that is in Him, unless we master the course appointed by Him as the preparation for it. This is as true of His ethical teaching as it is of His doctrine of grace. Even if the two were essentially different, instead of being different aspects of the same thing, this would be so. The law of Christ would be too spiritual for one who had not entered into the deep spiritual meaning of the law of Moses; and at the same time it is by contrast with the latter that the greater spirituality of the former best appears. The relation in this case is not unlike that between the text-books of the child and the scientific treatises of the man. The concrete illustrations of the former prepare for the abstract statements of the latter, and the naked truthfulness of the latter comes out most clearly when we put them alongside of the former's explanations and illustrations. These, though they make very plain certain

* In the course on "Christian Ethics" which Dr. Greene for many years gave to the students of Princeton Seminary, Old Testament Ethics as the basis of New Testament Ethics naturally received careful consideration. Since there is no subject which is to-day of more interest and even concern to the earnest student of the Old Testament than its ethics, it has been felt that a real service would be rendered by the publication of these lectures. For the privilege of doing this the Editor is indebted to Mrs. Greene.—[Ed.]

features of the truth, cannot but in doing so divide our attention. The inevitable tendency is for the thing symbolized to give way to the symbol.

2. Old Testament Ethics enters itself into the Christian's permanent rule of practice. The proof and illustration of this is the Ten Commandments. Both the basis and the summary of the ethics of the Old Dispensation, they form also the law which Christ came to establish and to fulfil. Thus they are of universal application and of perpetual obligation. They are as binding still as "the Sermon on the Mount." Indeed, one of the most important purposes of "the Sermon on the Mount" is to emphasize them anew by bringing out their spiritual meaning.

Nor is it altogether different even in the case of the Ceremonial Law. This, it is true, as well as what are called the positive requirements modifying the Moral Law, has been fulfilled and abrogated by Christ. The question whether a particular precept of the Old Testament is still in force may be determined by two inquiries: (1) Is it reënacted in the New Testament? If so, it yet binds. (2) Does it rest on a permanent reason? If so, it yet binds. For whether the particular precept continues obligatory or not, the principles that underlie it have not been abrogated.

We, for example, are not bound by the distinction between clean and unclean as respects food. Nevertheless, this distinction is not without instruction for us. We cannot study it and not see more clearly than, perhaps, we could in any other way that we ought to determine our course, even in such morally indifferent matters as meat and drink, not according to our impulses and feelings, nor merely by our own judgment, from the things themselves, but first of all by the divine law; that in the determination of what is right, now and always, what God says, if He has spoken, should prevail rather than what we ourselves may wish or think. This cannot but be impressed on us by the minute and sometimes apparently arbitrary regulations of Judaism as to food, and it is a truth which needs to be impressed on us in these days as

seldom before. The man often finds it advantageous to freshen his knowledge of what he understands by a reference to the pictorial representations of his childhood's primer; and in like manner great gain would come to the church of our time, did she study more frequently and carefully the ceremonial requirements of the Old Dispensation. There could not then fail to be less than there is of inattention to the commandments of God considered simply as His commandments and apart from their manifest inherent propriety. We could scarcely help feeling as well as theoretically believing the supreme importance of every "Thus saith the Lord." So essential, then, being the Ethics of the Old Testament, we proceed at once to its exposition.

The General Characteristics of Old Testament Ethics

These general characteristics are three:

1. It is nowhere stated, but is always assumed, that man has a moral nature and is under moral obligations; that he knows this; and that he ought to live to secure the highest good. In this respect the attitude of the Old Testament is the same that it is toward theism. The fundamental truths of both it takes for granted. Nowhere does it prove the existence of God. Everywhere it addresses men as if they believed and must believe in Him. Its positive teaching is that it is only "the fool," who says in his heart, "There is no God" (Ps. liii. 1).

In like manner, the Old Testament never undertakes to demonstrate the reality of duty, the obligation of virtue, the excellence and claim of the supreme good. It always speaks to those who recognize all this, who never question it, who could not doubt it. Nor has it any more positive teaching than that the way of immorality is the way of folly. In a word, it is as ethical as it is theistic. It is the former because it is the latter. It is both so essentially and manifestly that to prove or even state it would be superfluous.

2. The ethical system of the Old Testament is presented to us in, with, and through the religion with which it is connected. The Old Testament, unlike some ignorant enthusiasts of our own day, knows nothing of religion without morality, nothing of faith which does not issue in right life and character. Neither does it, unlike some learned philosophers of our own time, know anything of morality without religion, anything of conduct or character whose rightness or wrongness is independent of its relation to God. Hence, in the Old Testament the irreligious men are the immoral men, and the immoral men are the irreligious men. Thus Psalm xiv. 1, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good." Indeed, to the Old Testament writers the two conceptions are but different aspects of the same thing. Atheism is the worst form of immorality, and immorality is practical atheism.

3. In harmony with this mode of presenting the subject the Old Testament lacks altogether the specific abstract terms of Philosophical Ethics. We are taught much concerning duty, virtue, the supreme good, motive and end; but these words are not once used. The things are there, but the scientific labels are wanting. The names employed are those of practical religion. Such are the general characteristics of the Ethics of the Old Testament; and, it should be added, they are equally the characteristics of the Ethics of the New Testament.

The Fundamentals of Old Testament Ethics

1. It is "a morality of hope." Like the dispensation to which it belongs, its attitude is one of expectation. It looks ever forward to its explanation and its completion in Christ. He is its key. Himself fulfilling all righteousness, He reveals the real meaning of "the righteousness of the law." Hence arises a characteristic of the Old Testament as distinguished from the New: it is undeveloped in form and incomplete in material. Its significance lies in its preparatory nature, in its

disciplinary purpose. There is no fact with reference to it of greater importance than this.

2. Old Testament Ethics is personal as regards both its ground and its subject.

a. The ground of the ethical in the Old Testament is the express commands of the absolutely holy person, God, made known by historical acts of revelation.

We should suppose that this would be so. The Hebrew is conscious that he has lost the pure image of God. Israelitish thinking is always conditioned by the terrible fact of the fall. Perhaps, *the* distinction of Jewish history is that this event, of world-wide application and of eternal consequence, is the background against which all other events stand out. To the Jew, the race is ever fallen. He could not, therefore, we should judge, justify others or even himself in "leaning unto his own understanding," in searching in his own consciousness, for the great truths of ethics and religion. In his view reason would be too subject to the bondage of corruption to be taken as a guide: the appeal would be "to the law and to the testimony," to an infallible "Thus saith the Lord": there would be the absence of abstract philosophical statement to which reference has been made; instead of it, we should have particular divine commands.

This supposition is confirmed by the facts. Throughout the Old Testament God speaks and man hearkens; and the essence of moral activity is a childlike obeying of the divine commands laid on man. There is no need of philosophical analysis or inquiry into the nature of things. The command of God to man presents itself in a strictly positive definite form: "thou shalt," "thou shalt not," "thou mayest." For any other than God's will man has no need as he has no right to ask; he is simply to obey the will of God—this alone leads him to righteousness. To personal free self-determination and maturity man is to attain simply and solely through childlike obedience to the *word* of the Father. Hence, the Old Testament conceives of duty as what God *tells* man to do; it conceives of virtue as obedience to God's expressed commands; it con-

ceives of the supreme good as perfect likeness to God and so perfect sonship with reference to Him and so perfect bliss in Him, inasmuch as these are the result of such childlike obedience. It regards idolatry as the sin of all sins; for this, since it is apostasy from God, cuts the roots of all obedience to Him. Thus, the Old Testament grounds its ethics on the definitely expressed will of the divine Person.

b. Nor is its subject less personal. Man's obeying is as free as God's commanding. Man ought, but is not compelled. It is for him to choose whom he will serve, God or Baal. On his free choice his salvation is made to depend. "If thou hearkenest to my word, it shall go well with thee" pervades the entire Old Testament. Even when God enters into covenant with man He conditions the fulfilment on man's fidelity to it. Thus, the Old Testament emphasizes the freedom of its subject no less than the personality of its ground. Its essence is man's free obedience to God's sovereign commands.

3. The Old Testament conception of God is uniquely high. His unity is affirmed in opposition to polytheism and even to henotheism; His spirituality, in opposition to materialism; His personality, in opposition to pantheism. His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence are emphasized as in no other faith. To feel this, one has only to compare Jehovah with Zeus. He is neither a heartless deity like Zeus, nor a relentless force like the law of gravitation. On the contrary, He is "longsuffering and gracious." He is a god of infinite feeling as well as of infinite power.

More important yet, and even more characteristic, is the realization in the Old Testament of God's holiness. The deities of the nations, with scarcely an exception, participate in the imperfection of the nations; whereas Jehovah is "of purer eyes than to behold evil or to look upon iniquity." As is true of no other god, He is holy; and His great command is, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." As Neander has well said, "The apprehension of God came out in Judaism as it could not in surrounding religions." Here we find the secret of its ethical purity and power.

4. God's claim on man as expressed in His commands to him is all-comprehensive.

a. Human society is of God in all its essential relations and institutions. Hence, the family, which is the unit of society, must be kept pure; and so comes the importance attached in the Old Testament to family ethics.

b. Man's responsibility to God extends also to his relations to the inferior creatures and even to the soil. He has received dominion over the creation; but only to use it lawfully, in the fear of God and for His glory. This dominion of man over the creatures is bounded always by the commands of God in the case and by the demands of nature. One's cattle may not be worked on the Sabbath; for this is contrary to God's Fourth Commandment: but they may and should, even on that day, be led out to water; for this their divinely given constitution requires. In a word, while Old Testament ethics does not, like Buddhism, pay more heed to sick beasts than to sick men, it does secure to all inferior creatures the rights inherent in their nature. If it condemns the maudlin sentiment that would squander fortunes on homes for stray or sick cats, it affords the sure warrant for "The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals." In this respect, as in all others, it is distinguished by a regard for proportion.

c. Man's treatment of himself, both body and spirit, comes within the sphere of ethics. So far from being his own, he is God's; and he ought to use himself accordingly. Hence, sins against the body are denounced. In every way the health of Israel is to be guarded. Cleanliness is made a consequence of godliness. Sanitation becomes a religious duty. The result is that to this day the Jews are remarkable for their health and longevity. Nor are sins against man's spiritual nature forbidden less emphatically. For example, indolence and pride are prohibited; and these, as neglect of the body or physical vices, become sins because they are regarded, not so much as against ourselves as against Him who made us, who owns us, and who will be glorified in us. Thus the Old Testament protects man from his evil self and demands the care and culture

of himself. Because God's, he is bound to make the best use of himself for God.

d. The divine claim extends even to "the thoughts and intents of the heart." The law of Moses requires not merely the outward work, but above all and essentially also a pious disposition. It bears in contradistinction to the later Jewish outward legality, a very positive character of inwardliness. The basis and essence of all morality is the requirement that man should "love God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might" (Deut. vi. 5, x. 12, xiii. 3); he is to take the divine law to his heart, and observe it with his whole heart and his whole soul (Deut. v. 29); God desires not merely the external work, He requires our heart (1 Chron. xxii. 19, Prov. xxiii. 26); the saint not only fulfils the law, but "his delight is in the law of the Lord" (Ps. i. 2, cxix. 24, 35, 70); all obedience is simply joyous thankfulness for God's gracious guidance (Ex. xx. 2, *seq.*, Deut. iv, v); and, therefore, not merely the sinful act, but equally also the lust to evil, is sinful and damnable (Ex. xx. 17, Prov. vi. 25). In this intense inwardliness of its ethics Judaism differs radically from all other religions. Only Zoroastrianism really resembles it.

5. God's concern for the ethical life just considered is shown:

a. By provision for man's moral culture and education. Left to himself, sinful man mistakes impulse for law, the agreeable for the obligatory, present excitement for permanent good. God, however, is represented as coming to his help, as teaching him what his moral relations are, as quickening and refining his moral sense. God's personal rule is put in the place of impersonal law. Conscience speaks with the authority of His voice.

b. By new and peculiar sanctions to duty. Man is not left to be attracted to duty or deterred from wrong simply by conscience. As just intimated, right actions are represented as securing the approbation of God as well as of conscience. Indeed, it is the former to which attention is directed. "God's favor is life, and His loving kindness is better than

life," and these are shown to those who "fear Him and keep His commandments." Man is taught, too, that God's memory is ever enduring. He will not fail to reward the righteous; and He "can by no means clear the guilty."

c. By provision against hero-worship. Other nations deified their great men, and in doing so they made them less moral, if more intellectual and powerful than they had been as men. Israel, however, was not permitted to regard even her good men as moral ideals. Their righteousness and piety were not denied or unappreciated. Enoch and Noah are reverenced. The faithfulness of Abraham shines forth typically even into the New Covenant. Yet these, and others like them, are never presented as absolutely holy types of morality. On the contrary, the inspired records relate, even of the most revered characters, manifold sins, and sins which the Israelites unquestionably regarded as such; as, for example, Abraham's deceptions, Jacob's meanness to Esau. Of Judah, the ancestor of the Kings, there is recorded scarcely anything but evil. Moses resists faintheartedly the divine call, subsequently wavers in his faith, and is, for that reason, shut out from the land of promise. Even David and Solomon, courageous and wise though they were, were not represented as ideals. The Israelites were permitted to know of only *one* Servant of God who was perfect; viz., the longed for Anointed of the Lord. They were not suffered to look away from God as the ultimate ground and sole norm of the ethical. As His express commands determined their obedience, so His character was to be their sole standard.

6. Not only does God thus bring Israel into the closest personal relation to Himself, but He represents Himself as sustaining a unique relation to them. They are His peculiar and spiritual people because He is their covenant God. They believe on Him because of His covenant to be their redeemer. Indeed, it is out of this covenant relationship that their moral life is developed. Set apart unto God as a kingdom of priests, they were bound thereby to a life of the strictest moral purity.

a. This is the gist of the promise made to Abraham and

through him to the faithful of whom he was the spiritual father.

b. Indeed, the covenant of the law rests on the covenant of promise. The revelation of law was the gift of grace and revealed a relationship of grace. It was regarded as a crown of rejoicing, even a matter of boasting. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance." It was the rule whereby the gracious provisions of God's covenant promise were to be realized; and His grace was made known in nothing more truly than in this, that He had revealed to them so clearly because objectively the law which, as regards all others, He had written only on the heart.

c. This covenant promise and objective statement of the law, though given to Israel, were for the world. We cannot emphasize this too strongly. God places before Abraham at the very start, not a merely personal, but a world-historical goal: "In thee shall *all* the families of the earth be blessed," and He repeats this promise again and again in progressively more definite features. As in Adam all die, so in Abraham are all nations to be blessed and to be brought to the Accomplisher of salvation. For the first time in the history of humanity we find here, and in contrast to all heathendom, a definite world-historical goal of the moral life. Not an individual, not even a nation merely, but the whole world God would redeem from all iniquity and purify unto Himself as a spiritual people zealous of good works. Nothing less than this universal issue is the purpose of the particularism of the Old Dispensation. It elected Israel for unique ethical training that it might establish through them the reign of righteousness universally.

d. The blessing of this covenant, while characteristically temporal, is usually conceived of as essentially spiritual. From the very beginning it is intimated that mere material blessings do not constitute the full or the true reward of ethical living. Even in the first promise to Abraham there beams out through the earthly good a gleam of the heavenly one: "In thee shall

all families of the earth be *blessed.*" Abraham is to be, not merely by his example of faith, but also really, by his family, the beginning of a kingdom of God for all humanity. That is, to be himself in this kingdom of blessing and this kingdom in him, this is, for him, the highest good. Exactly similar promises of spiritual blessing in temporal goods, God gives to Isaac and to Jacob (Gen. xxvi. 3-5, Gen. xlviii. 4, etc.); Isaac's blessing upon his son Jacob relates, it must be granted, primarily only to temporal good (Gen. xxvii. 28, 29), but, nevertheless, with reference to the higher good (Gen. xxviii. 3-4). It is true that temporal well-being, and a continuance in the land, and long life are very often presented, —not, indeed, with reference merely to the individual, but also to the nation, as a divine blessing for pious fidelity,—as a high good and end; but as early as at the time of the conclusion of the covenant of God with the *people* on Sinai, the highest good appears as of a spiritual character: "If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine; and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Ex. xix. 5, 6); the highest blessing is the peace of God (Num. vi. 26, Ps. xxix. 11), the love of God, the compassion of God, and His covenant with men (Deut. vii. 9, 12, 13, xiii. 17, 18) so that they "may live long" (Deut. v. 33) and that God may be their "righteousness" (Deut. vi. 25); and in the First Commandment: "I am the Lord thy God. . . . Thou shalt have no other gods before me" the objective phase of the highest good is definitely expressed; anything else, save God, that man might regard as the highest good is, in fact, but a worthless idol; and, hence, the rejection of the covenant of grace works an everlasting rejection of him who rejects it (1 Chron. xxviii. 9).

e. As already implied, this conception of the highest good in Israel is seldom that of the individual's good. The modern theory of individualism had not taken possession of the Hebrew mind. Morality depends, not so much on the individual conscience as on the collective conscience of the na-

tion. It is a national deliverer rather than a personal redeemer for whom the saints hope. "Even when, as often in the Psalms, we hear the cry of some lonely penitent heart after purity, along with it the voice of righteous indignation against God's enemies is also heard, speaking in national rather than in individual tones." This may throw some light on the striking fact next to be alluded to.

f. While the Old Testament is characterized, as we have seen, by a spiritual conception of the highest good, the thought of existence after death is not directly brought to bear upon the moral life. Future eternal rewards are not presented, as is so commonly done in the New Testament, as motives of action or as a phase of the highest good. Several considerations render this peculiarity striking:

(1) The belief in immortality was so general throughout heathendom that the Israelites could scarcely have been ignorant of it.

(2) The high value which they put on personality, their constant emphasis of the freedom of the individual, would dispose them toward the general belief in existence beyond the grave.

(3) Such could hardly have failed to be their faith in view of the fact that they had lived for four centuries in Egypt, and that Moses had been educated in all the wisdom of this country, where precisely this thought of immortality most powerfully shaped the entire moral and religious life.

(4) Moreover, that such was the actual belief of Israel many passages indicate. For example: Gen. v. 24, xv. 15, xxv. 8, xxxvii. 35, Deut. xxxi. 16, xxxii. 50, 1 Sam. xxviii, Job xix. 26, 2 Kings ii, Ps. xvi. 10, xlix. 15, Prov. xv. 24. Nor may it be said that we are incorrect in our interpretation of these texts. Our Lord, who is the one infallible expositor, so understood them. At least, He represents belief in immortality as belonging to the faith of those who had only the Old Testament for their guidance. The question, then, why the eternal rewards of the future did not enter into

the Old Testament conception of the highest good becomes both interesting and important.

The following suggestions towards its solution may not be out of place:

(1) As has been already pointed out, the people of Israel was a world-historical one as was no other ante-Christian people. The entire hope and striving of the nation was directed toward the ultimate salvation of the human race. Thus both their highest goal and their supreme good was the coming of the world's Messiah. Now this messianic thought, at first feeble, yet constantly growing more definite, could not but throw temporarily into the background the individual's interest in his own future life. The prospect of the advent on earth of the world's Deliverer would be so comprehensive and so glorious as to absorb his attention, as to tend to exclude all thought of what would come to him himself after death.

(2) The Redeemer had first to appear before the future life could have real worth for the individual saint or be his highest good. Before this event the existence beyond the grave was a beclouded one, not only for the consciousness, but also *per se*. Many passages show that it was not conceived as a truly blissful life in the presence of God: "In death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?" (Ps. vi. 5); "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Ps. cxv. 17); "For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth" (Is. xxxviii. 18), etc. As Abraham rejoiced that he should see the day of the Lord, so also longed Abraham's seed for this day, only from which time forth they would seem to have thought that the life after death could be a truly blessed one. And we can see why this was. The New Testament clearly teaches that the bliss of heaven is to "be at home with the Lord." Now the Lord is not simply God; He is rather God incarnate, who "died for our sins and was raised again for our justification," and who "bone of our bone and flesh

of our flesh," as well as "the same in substance, equal in power and glory" with the Father, "ever liveth to make intercession for us." It is His infinitely sympathetic presence that will constitute heaven for us. Not, however, until Christ ascended victor over death and hell was this presence in heaven. It may not be wondered at, therefore, that it was the historical advent of the Messiah, the incarnate God, rather than the eternal rewards of the life to come that appealed most strongly to the Israelites of old. Christ's coming was necessary, not only to guarantee these rewards, but to give to them definite meaning and value.

(3) Though for the redeemed Christian the thought of a future eternal reward is a powerful and ordinarily a safe motive, for the not spiritually enlightened man there is in the same considerable danger. This will be that of selfish reward seeking, of a narrow-hearted striving after personal well-being rather than the salvation of humanity. Now, though the saints of the Old Covenant participated in many gracious gifts and so may not be regarded as merely natural men, still, they were not as yet fully enlightened. They would, therefore, be exposed to the danger referred to as the saints of the New Dispensation would not be. Moreover, because of the number and minuteness of the legal requirements to which they were subject, they were in greater danger of regarding their future salvation as a reward for their good works. The subsequent rise of Pharisaism evinced this. It was from this danger that God preserved the Israelites, in that, while He indeed promised them a gracious reward for their fidelity, He yet presented as such reward, on the one hand, only such temporal goods as most evidently could not be for the pious the highest good, and on the other hand, world-wide redemption, so that they were necessarily brought to the consciousness that the highest good was not the reward of their own at best poor works, but was the fruit of a future divine act of grace. These three considerations may explain, at least in part, the striking absence from Old Testament ethics of motives drawn from

the future life; why it is that its motives, even when most spiritual, are characteristically temporal.

There is a suggestive analogy between the attitude of the Old Testament toward personal immortality and that of the New Testament toward reunion with our friends in heaven. As emphasis on his own immortality would have taken the mind of the Israelite off of the coming of the Messiah, which after all was the chief thing and included also the other; so to put the emphasis for the Christian on his reunion with his dear ones in glory would take his mind off of union with Christ, which is the chief thing for him and involves his reunion with his dear ones who are in glory with Christ.

g. God can be truly obeyed only when His covenant promise which we have been considering is accepted. That is, the essence of Old Testament virtue is *faith.* From the nature of the case it could not have been otherwise. When God enters into covenant with any, confidence in Him must become their first and chief obligation. Under such circumstances, in view of what He is, the most self-sacrificing service would be only an insult, if He were not trusted absolutely. Hence, the covenant people of God trace their line back to him who was called "the father of the faithful" and "the friend of God" because at the divine call he hesitated not to leave his country and his kindred and his father's house, and, though not knowing whither he went, to go out in quest of a land that God had promised to him. So, too, as the people of God they named themselves, not Hebrews from their natural descent, nor yet from Abraham their spiritual father, nor from Isaac, nor indeed from Jacob's first name, but from his later God-given name, Israel, which he received after he had wrestled with the Angel and prevailed. Thus was intimated the sublime truth, not only that their ethical life, their obedience, was rooted in faith, but that their very faith was the gift of God. Their ability to do and to be what they ought to do and to be was not natural; it was a spiritual and gracious blessing. Jacob their progenitor is not regarded as such in his earlier self-willed and self-confiding life, but solely in his spiritually

transformed life, after that, in self-denying humility, having put off all self-righteousness, he had thrown himself in child-like faith at the feet of God and confided all his well-being to His blessing. Their true bearing toward God must be that of Jacob when he exclaimed: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." They must divest themselves of all mere naturalness and depend absolutely on their relation to God and His blessing on them. This was symbolized by the covenant-token of the people with God; viz., circumcision. The sign to them of the promise of the Messiah, it meant that their true life came, not from themselves, but from God.

h. Hence, as Old Testament Ethics begins by exalting God, so it ends by dignifying man. If it makes God absolutely supreme so that His mere word is the highest law, it bestows unique honor on man in calling him to be God's friend, to live by faith a life of constant communion with Him. Its conception of man, therefore, is that he is made in the divine image. Had he not been so created, the gift of faith could not have been given to him. Even God could not make a beast His friend; for the beast could not continue a beast and trust Him. The demand, therefore, made by God on man for faith presupposes in man by nature capacities like God's.

Nor is this conceived as true of Israel only. While the brotherhood of man appears less clearly in the Old Testament than in the New, it is, nevertheless, the fact that, more than the scriptures of any other religion, the Old Testament represents God as having "made of one blood all the nations of the earth." In at least three ways is this manifest:

(1) The origin of the race is ascribed to one pair, and propagation after the deluge is connected with a single family.

(2) The duty of sympathy and charity is based, not only on the fatherhood of God, but on the brotherhood of man, both in the Law and the Prophets. "Is it (the fast that I have chosen) not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him; and that thou hide

not thyself from thine *own* flesh?" (Is. lviii. 7, cf. Gen. ix. 4ff.).

(3) The reach of God's redeeming purpose embraces all families, as seen in the promise to Abraham already considered, and in the prophecies concerning the Gentiles. These, as Is. lvi. 6, include "the sons of the stranger" with the people of the Lord.

Thus, if the ethics of the Old Testament involved the conception of the Israelites as made in the divine image, it implied also that this is true of the race as such. Indeed, it is to the Word of God that we must go, if we would see most clearly the unique dignity of man. No greatness can equal that involved in his capacity of depending absolutely on the Most High.

i. The characteristic duty under the Old Testament is repentance. This means the "turning to God with grief and hatred from one's sins with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience." It is the necessary consequence of the Old Testament's conception of man as fallen. In such a condition, and even if no hope of salvation were held out, it would still be his first duty sorrowfully to acknowledge his transgression and earnestly to strive to amend his ways. Hence, it is that the last and greatest of the Prophets, he who sums up the Old Testament, could not have come otherwise than saying, "Repent ye." Even had he not heralded Him who is the propitiation for our sins, this must have been his characteristic message.

Such, then, in outline are the fundamentals of the Ethics of the Old Testament. Could we enter on its systematic exposition, we should find a development as beautiful and as significant as in the case of dogma. We should see, too, that while the ethics of the Pentateuch proceeds rather from the standpoint of law and duty, that of the Prophets starts out from the idea of goods; and that in Proverbs and the Wisdom Literature in general the controlling thought is of righteous expediency.

Nor would the progress and diversity of Old Testament

ethics be all that should claim our attention. The summary of the Moral Law in the Ten Commandments ought to receive extended and particular treatment. Especially should its application to the various ethical questions of modern life be discussed fully. What is meant by keeping the Sabbath holy? what is the honor due to parents from their children? how does the Sixth Commandment bear on capital punishment, on war, on suicide? what is the relation of the Seventh to divorce and to the social evil? what is the significance of the Eighth as regards property, communism, etc.? what constitutes a lie, and how far is mental reservation allowable? what has the Tenth Commandment to say to the modern multimillionaire? —these are but a few of the many practical and vital questions which even a partial discussion of the Decalogue must consider. Our limits forbid the consideration of them in this connection.[1]

The Objections to Old Testament Ethics

These appear in a variety of forms. They are presented sometimes courteously, sometimes offensively. For motive they have at one time the disparagement of the morality of the Old Dispensation in order to the exaltation of that of the New; at another, the exhibition of the God of the Bible as unethical and, therefore, false. Unbelievers make much of these objections. They dwell on them. They exaggerate them. For example, Mr. Mill says, "The Old Testament morality is barbarous, fit only for savages." Nor may it be denied that these difficulties often seem only too real to believers themselves. They find it hard to explain them away so as to satisfy others. They find it as hard, perhaps, so to explain them as to satisfy themselves. Dr. Geo. T. Ladd endorses the statement:

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[1] The following books may be consulted:—Bruce: *The Ethics of the Old Testament*; Hodge: *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, Chap. XIX, "The Law"; Boardman: *Lectures on the Ten Commandments*; Plummer: *The Law of God*; and especially so much of the "Longer Catechism" of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* as relates to the Ten Commandments.

"The Black Man of some shivering communistic savages is nearer the morality of our Lord than the Jehovah of Judges."[2] For these reasons, at least, these objections demand serious and candid consideration.

1. Before enumerating and discussing them separately, the following general principles, because involved more or less in the solution of most of them, should be stated, illustrated, and vindicated:

a. Every difficulty in the Old Testament, as elsewhere, ought to be considered in the light of its context. That is, an event which may seem to indicate a low ethical standard must be estimated, not as it is seen in its isolation, but as it appears when regarded as one of the long series of historical events to which it belongs. For example, if we were to read without any explanation that on a certain day in the city of New Castle in the state of Delaware a man had been seized, stripped to the waist, tied to a post in a public place, and given twenty-five lashes with a whip having nine lashes with three knots on each lash—if we were to read and consider only these particulars, we should be very likely to conclude that an act of outrageous cruelty had been committed and that the people of Delaware were decidedly barbarous. This judgment, however, would be reversed, when it was brought to our notice that this flogging was inflicted by a sheriff duly appointed, in accordance with an order of the court, and for the maintenance of justice; and especially when we were told that the man whose publicly inflicted suffering had so called forth our sympathy and our indignation was himself a bully and a sot who for years had amused himself with beating his wife. In view of all these facts, his scourging would be felt to be far from cruel, would be recognized as strictly just; and instead of denouncing the people of Delaware as barbarous, we should commend the vigor of their administration of justice.

Precisely so, there are many acts recorded in the Old Testament which impress us as inexpressibly cruel. When, however,

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[2] *The Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 226.

we observe that these are performed by "the chosen people" as the servants of God, in accordance with His explicit commands, and for the vindication of His law; and especially when we reflect that these acts of punishment were called out by centuries of the most unrestrained and revolting wickedness,—we can scarcely fail to think differently, we are constrained even to exclaim, "The Lord is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works." What would have been a great ethical difficulty, if viewed only by itself, is seen in the light of the context to uphold a high ethical standard. This principle is self-evidently just; and it cannot be too thoroughly grasped, too tenaciously held, or too frequently applied. It is the key to, perhaps, the majority of the difficulties in the ethics of the Old Testament.

b. That must not be regarded as immoral in the direct revelation of the Old Testament which would not be so regarded in the indirect but equally divine revelation of providence. The essential difference between the two cases is that in the former God is represented as acting immediately and personally; in the latter His action is through agents and instruments. In the Old Testament, for example, God is commonly set forth as Himself effecting or at least commanding the work of destruction. *He* brings the plagues upon Egypt, He overthrows the Egyptians in the midst of the Red Sea, He fights for Israel and destroys for them the Canaanites. Such things as these, however, take place again and again in the ordinary course of providence. Pestilence decimates peoples; tempests overwhelm fleets and thus, as in the case of the Spanish Armada, decide the destiny of nations; great kingdoms are stamped out as terribly as were the petty sovereignties of Palestine. In a word, essentially the same things are recorded in the Old Testament as in the book of providence. The difference is that in the former God either effects or commands them Himself or is represented as Himself controlling immediately the forces by which they are effected; whereas in providence His connection with the effect is not exhibited. This, however, does not warrant the inference that

there is not such a connection. On the contrary, we know that the forces of nature are the ministers of God, always under His control, ever doing His bidding. So far as accomplishing His sovereign purpose is concerned, it matters not whether He works naturally or supernaturally, mediately as in providence or immediately as He is so often represented in the Old Testament. In both cases, and in both equally, "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth." Must not, then, the responsibility of God be the same in the one instance as in the other? It is an old and a true saying, "Qui facit per alium facit per se." So far as the relation of God to events is not merely permissive—and certainly His relation to a large part of the events of providence is efficient—He may be said to be as truly the agent of the terrible works of providence as of the terrible works recorded in the Old Testament as His. If, therefore, immorality may be charged on it because of these works, must not the course of providence itself be regarded in like manner as immoral? And if, because of our theistic faith we do not regard, and, as a matter of fact, because of the constitution of our nature, cannot normally regard the course of providence as immoral, how can we view the essentially similar action of God described in the Old Testament?

c. In the sphere of all that is above reason as distinguished from what is contrary to reason, what God is observed to do in the course of providence rather than what we may think that He ought to do should be the test of morality or immorality in the Old Testament as elsewhere.[3] This is not so much a new principle as the positive aspect of the one just stated. For example, it seems to many iniquitous that the innocent family of Achan, who stole of the spoils of Jericho, should have been stoned and burned; and it appears to them to convict God of immorality that this was done by His command. Indeed, the natural judgment of man is that every one should stand or fall on his own merits only. This, however,

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[3] *Vide* Origen, Berkeley, Butler.

providence shows, is not the only basis on which God deals with us. The race has been so constituted, and has been so constituted by Him, that we cannot but be largely affected and our destiny materially influenced by our family relations. There is no drag on a good man so terrible as a bad family. His existence with such an incubus upon him will be a living death. There is no advantage to a bad man so great as that of a good family. Because of them he will escape in this life many of the natural consequences of his evil deeds. It has been appointed, therefore, that to a considerable degree men shall prosper or suffer, not merely according to their own merits, but according to their family relations; and this appointment, inasmuch as it is that of providence, we may not question, is also that of God.

Again, society has been so constituted, and has been so constituted by God, that we cannot but be largely affected and our destiny materially influenced by our national relations. The idle and vicious, though utterly undeserving, share the prosperity of the nation to which they belong. The good citizen, though abhorring and resisting the corruption in the administration of his government, suffers equally with the bad from the consequences of it. The nation, like the family, has, then, a life of its own; and the individuals who make up the nation participate in its life and stand or fall, not merely on their own merits, but also as the nation fulfils its mission or fails in it. In the life to come each individual will, we are taught, be rewarded strictly "according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad," but we see that in this life the reward is determined largely by family and national relations. We see, too, that these relations, since they condition character and conduct now, must affect indirectly even the reward of individual character and conduct hereafter. Nor may we question that the appointment that all this should be so, inasmuch as it is that of providence, is also that of God.

However unjust, therefore, it may seem to us that the innocent family of Achan should have shared his punishment, this is only what we observe taking place constantly in the

ordinary course of providence. The most virtuous are again and again destroyed by the sins of their family and overwhelmed in the ruin of their nation. We do not understand the nature of the family or of the national bond sufficiently to say why this is so, it is above reason; but we know that it is so, and that God has appointed that it should be so.

Now what we would make plain is that it is by these clearly divine because providential appointments that we should test the morality or immorality of the appointments alleged in the Old Testament to be divine. We should, for example, decide that, so far from there being anything immoral in the Old Testament's representing God as commanding that the innocent family of Achan should share his punishment, this is only what should be expected from the fact that the observed and undoubted providential government of God is evidently being administered on the same principle. That is, what we see that God is doing, and not what we think that He ought to do, should be the test of what He ought to do; His action rather than our moral sense should give the standard of right; unless our view of His providence can be shown necessarily to contradict our fundamental moral judgments as implanted by Him and as shaped by reflection on His own declared nature, the former should determine our moral judgments rather than the latter sit in judgment on His providence. In a word, in the large domain of all that is above reason, for example, the family bond and the national relation, as distinguished from what is contrary to reason, what we *see* God doing rather than what we ourselves of ourselves think that He ought to do should determine our moral judgment. That is, our intuition of goodness is concrete and objective. It is an intuition of God Himself. Goodness is what God is. For this there are the following sufficient reasons:

(1) The analogy of Dogmatics. If we would reach truth in it, we may not ask, What do we feel that God must be? nor even, What does reason say that He must be? On the contrary, we shall go hopelessly astray, unless we begin our inquiry by asking honestly, What does the infallible Word

of God say that He is? or, if we do not believe in special and written revelation, What have the works of creation and providence to declare as to the character of their Author? Then we may begin to infer and so develop our knowledge of God's character out of these particular manifestations of Himself in special revelation or in nature; but to reason out *a priori,* as so many do, as we are all disposed to do, what God must be, is simply to make for ourselves a god out of ourselves and no better than ourselves.

Now why should this be true in dogmatics and not be true also in ethics? These are not two independent sciences; but Christian Ethics is a department of Christian Theology. Though differing widely in subject-matter from the other department, Christian Dogmatics, it is identical with it in this, that the subject-matter in both is determined ultimately by the nature of God. The duty which He requires of us, the subject of ethics, depends no less on what God is than does what we are to believe concerning Him, the subject of dogmatics; and the one involves the other. Indeed, in one sense, the dependence of the former is more absolute, if we may be permitted the expression. The depth of God's nature, the essence of His essence, is the ethical. As Dorner says: "The ethical principle is the ultimate reason for the fact that God eternally wills Himself, or is the ground of Himself in all His attributes."[4] Now, as it is of this that the duty which He may require of us is the practical expression, it will follow that these requirements which mark the sphere of ethics, are and can be determined only by that which in a special sense is most fundamentally unique even in God. More, therefore, in ethics than in dogmatics even must what God is seen to do test what is affirmed of Him in written revelation, must His requirements as observed in providence decide the morality or the immorality of the appointments alleged to proceed from Him by the Old Testament.

(2) The justice of this principle becomes more evi-

[4] *Ethics,* p. 65.

dent in view of the perverting and blinding effect of sin. Even if by nature man had the ability to say what God might require of man, he could not but have forfeited this right when he fell; for in his fall he lost the ability on which the exercise of the right must have depended. Could it have been otherwise in view of the facts, that sin darkens the intellect—man has not now that clear perception of truth that the unfallen Adam had; that sin gives a bias to the will against the truth—even when it is accurately perceived there is an endeavor to get rid of it unless it be agreeable; that sin weakens the power even of intuition itself—hence, first principles, though innate, often continue quite undeveloped and unnoticed; and that it is a part of the punishment of sin that God frequently withdraws for a time common grace—thus there may be little or no attention to ethical truth? For a sinner, therefore, to let his own corrupt moral sense determine that an alleged appointment of God involves God in immorality simply because he himself does not approve of the appointment and in spite of the fact that other observed and acknowledged similar appointments of God vindicate the divinity and morality of the former, is irrational. It is as absurd as if one with a perverted aesthetic taste were to affirm that a given statue could not be by Phidias because he himself did not like it, and that, too, though another statue which he admitted was by the great Athenian revealed the same characteristics, and particularly the same offensive ones.

(3) The necessity as well as the justice of the principle under consideration appears in this, that the ultimate standard of right is, as we have seen that it must be, the divine nature. It being this, God's action cannot but be a more trustworthy interpretation of it than our opinion. In all other cases we would reason thus. We should decide that a man's life and works should determine our estimate of his character rather than that our judgment of what his character ought to be should do so. In a word, so long as the standard of right is objective to us, any revelation that it may make of *itself* will have more authority than any judgment of ours as to the

kind of revelation that it ought to make. This is due to the necessity of the case.

(4) Nor is there force in the objection which at first seems to be pertinent at this point; viz., that if we cannot trust our intuitions to tell us what God ought to be and to require of us, neither can we trust them, as we have done, to make known to us the divine nature as the ultimate standard of right. Because a faculty cannot do everything, it does not follow that it cannot do anything. Because your untrained eye cannot discern and appreciate the particular beauties of the Parthenon, it does not follow that it will not single out the Parthenon as the most glorious object at Athens. In like manner, because, in consequence of the infinitude of God, even if not in consequence of the deterioration of our faculties through sin, we cannot "find out God unto perfection," cannot harmonize His attributes, cannot explain His providence, cannot feel the ethical consistency of all His actions—it does not follow that we cannot perceive Him at once and of necessity to be the God of the world and the norm of the whole ethical creation. Just because of His infinitude and in spite of the deterioration of our powers, He must be this and we could not fail to discern it; and just because He is this, the very intuition which revealed Him to us as such must, it would seem, reveal Him also as one who could be known fully and accurately only so far as, before us and in forms level to our apprehension, He should Himself illustrate His attributes. Is it not thus in common things? How often do we feel that what impresses our senses most so impresses us largely because it is seen to be beyond our own comprehension. Again and again, the very faculties which make known to us the *existence* of a mystery make it known to us *as* a mystery. Why, then, may it not be so in the case of our innate idea of God? Because we may not from it reason out by ourselves His character and what He may require of us, it does not follow from this that we should distrust it as the basis of our belief that God exists, of our judgment that His nature is the ultimate standard of right.

Beyond this, it should be observed that our intuitions themselves *are* as trustworthy in what they tell us of the nature of God as in the assurance that they give of His existence. It is not the fact that they are to be depended on as to the latter, but doubted as to the former. They make known only necessary truth, truth which, if known at all, must be known truly. Even sin, therefore, has not perverted their discernment. What it has done is greatly to lessen it. What is recognized as really self-evidently, necessarily, universally, and persistently true is true, whether it relates to the existence of God or to the nature of God or to the constitution of things. The difficulty is that, because of sin, much less of such truth is discerned, and much of what is discerned is not appreciated. The real state of the case is, not that intuition deceives us as to what should be expected from providence, but that genuine intuition seldom now contemplates the details of providence. The objection under consideration derives its force, therefore, only from confounding intuition with what is not strictly intuition, that faculty on which we base our belief in God with mere inference or feeling that is radically distinct and much inferior.

d. The moral precepts of the Old Testament, as of the New, differ radically as to their ground, and any just estimate of the morality of either dispensation will depend fundamentally on the appreciation of these differences.

(1) There are laws which are founded on the nature of God directly. To this class belong the commands to speak the truth, to love God supremely, to be just, to be merciful, to be kind, etc. In these laws God requires us to be what He Himself is and because He Himself is so; and inasmuch as He is and must be "the same yesterday and to-day and forever," these laws can never cease to bind and can change in no respect. Their criterion is that they are absolutely immutable and indispensable. Any variation in them would imply a change in the nature of God, in that which is essentially immutable. Hence, truth always and everywhere must be obligatory; love always and everywhere must be a duty; justice al-

ways and everywhere must bind; pride, envy, and malice always and everywhere must be evil. And "always" and "everywhere" in this connection are taken in their widest application. They embrace eternity as well as time; heaven and hell, the universe, as truly as the earth. The laws that I have been describing always have bound and always will bind all rational creatures, angels and devils as really as men. Could God Himself wish it otherwise, which is impossible because of His nature, He could not have it so: His same immutable nature would stand in the way. Any representation of God, therefore, as countenancing a lie, as approving pride or envy, as calling on men to act from a malicious or cruel spirit, are not only immoral, but absurd. They represent God as doing what He cannot do just because He is *God*. Consequently, if the Old Testament did set forth God in any such light as this, it would be vain to try to defend its morality, nay, we should have to admit its absurdity.

(2) A second class of moral laws includes those which are founded on the permanent relations of men in their present state of existence, or, as it is often put, on "the constitution of things." Such are the moral as opposed to statute laws concerning property, marriage, and the duties of parents and children, of superiors and inferiors. A moral law is one which is binding in its own nature; that is, one which, because of what it is, ought to be a statute, and which would bind whether it were made a statute or not. A statute law, on the other hand, is one which binds only because it has been enacted by competent authority and which would cease to bind at any time if repealed by competent authority.

Now these laws which we are considering, like those under the first head, are moral. Their authority is in themselves. They do not bind us primarily because they have been enacted; but if they had not been enacted, it would be obligatory on us to observe them and to enact them. Though they concern us only in our present state of being, they are and must be permanent so long as the relations which they contemplate continue. So long as there is the distinction of sex, they will and must bind

men as men and women as women. So long as there are parents and children, they will and must bind parents as parents and children as children. So long as man is what he is, so long as his divinely appointed development depends on his having what is exclusively his own, the right of property will exist and ought to be recognized. These laws, therefore, though not founded, like those considered under the former head, on the essential nature of God, are like them moral, or in themselves binding, because founded on the nature of things; that is, on the constitution which God has seen fit to ordain. On the one hand, consequently, they are not necessarily eternal or eternally immutable. God need not have ordained the constitution He did ordain; and if He had not, the right of property, for example, would not have existed. We have no reason to believe that the constitution of all worlds is the same as that of ours, and so there may be worlds in which there is no such thing as property. We know that the constitution of our world will be changed at the coming of the Lord, and, perhaps, we ourselves may look forward to a time when the distinction of mine and thine will be no more. But on the other hand, these laws are moral and so in themselves binding so long as the present constitution of things continues. Unlike His own nature, God can change it; but until *He* does change it, those that live under it must be bound by the laws that are implied in it and grow out of it. This is only another way of stating the self-evident principle that everything should be true to its own nature and so should be determined by it, inasmuch as God is the author of its nature.

Between these precepts and those discussed under the former head there is, however, as has just been implied, a difference of great importance if we would estimate aright the ethical character of the Old Testament. The former, those grounded on the nature of God, even He may not, as we have seen, set aside or change. Were He to be represented as doing so, the representation would be both immoral and absurd. For example, to set forth God as commanding untruth would be to

set Him forth as commanding what would be both wrong and in His case impossible; for He is essentially immutable truth. The precepts, however, which are now under consideration, those founded on the existing constitution of things, such as the moral laws of property, of marriage, of obedience to parents,—these, though they may not be set aside by us, may be set aside by the authority of God. Thus it was not wrong for the Hebrews to spoil the Egyptians or to dispossess the Canaanites, because He whose is the earth and the fulness thereof authorized those acts. He had a right to take the property of one people and give it to another. The extermination of the idolatrous inhabitants of the promised land at the command of Joshua was as much an act of God as though it had been effected by pestilence or famine. It was a judicial execution by the supreme Ruler. In like manner, although marriage as instituted by God was and is an indissoluble covenant between one man and one woman, yet He saw fit to sanction under the Mosaic law, within certain limitations, both polygamy and divorce. While that sanction continued those things were lawful; when it was withdrawn they ceased to be allowable. That is, while the existing constitution of things must in and of itself bind those living under it just because it is God's order of things, God, inasmuch as He ordained it, can and may modify it and release from its implications when He pleases, provided always that He does this in consistency with His own immutably holy nature: that circumstances may arise in which and because of which the very righteousness of God may demand a modification of the requirements of the constitution of things appears in the fact that sin has entered into it and changed its conditions: and, therefore, the many passages in the Old Testament which represent God as modifying the requirements of the constitution of things are not immoral. This is only saying that the author of a constitution has authority over it.

e. As is implied in what has just been said, what would be wrong if done on one's own authority may become right when commanded by competent authority. For example, to kill a

man intentionally, unless in self-defense or war, is murder; but when the sheriff, in accordance with an order of the court, hangs a man, he does not commit murder, he simply does his duty. In like manner, though it would be murder if the church of to-day were to put heretics to death, it was not murder, but a clear performance of duty, when Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the Lord. And the reason is that whereas the Christian magistrate now has no authority forcibly to suppress idolatry and false religion, *God* required him to do this under the Old Dispensation. Nor may it be urged that God had not the right to make this requirement. Though, as we saw under the last head, human life ought to be regarded by us as sacred because its sacredness is involved in the existing order of things, God, the ordainer of this constitution, is not bound by it. On the contrary, the giver of life, *He* may recall it when and how He pleases, provided only that He act consistently with His holy nature. This is what He does in the case of the death of every one. It is a right which He is constantly exercising and of which, therefore, even were there no other reason, we should, in accord with our third principle recently expounded, say that He ought to exercise it.

f. We should never forget the preparatory character and disciplinary purpose of the ethics of the Old Testament.

(1) This does not mean that, as some apologists have claimed, God might do or command or sanction what was wrong. Though the Old Dispensation was essentially preparatory and disciplinary, this might not be. Even we would not think it right to lie or to approve thieving or to enjoin cruelty, in our intercourse even with children. Indeed, just because they were children and so were in training, would we feel ourselves under special obligation to set examples of rectitude and to require it. How much more, then, must God, even in the earlier dispensation, and we may say particularly in it, reveal Himself as absolutely perfect and as satisfied only with what is strictly right. As Dr. Vos has well said: "The truth of revelation, if it is to retain its divine and absolute character at all, must be perfect *from the beginning*. Biblical

Theology deals with it as a product of a supernatural activity, and is therefore bound by its own principle to maintain the perfection of revealed truth in *all its stages.*"[5] The objection, consequently, that the morality of the Old Testament is low and barbarous is not answered by saying, as so many do say, that such morality was all that was called for by a low and barbarous age. God cannot be other than "righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works," and to admit that He can be is to undeify Him.

(2) The preparatory character and disciplinary purpose of the ethics of the Old Testament do, however, imply:

(*a*) That it need not be and, indeed, may not be *complete.* The most righteous father does not expect his little children to be and to do all that he is and does. On the contrary, because they are little children and he would train them in virtue, he sets before them at first only so much of his standard as they as children can hope to reach. He does not, because of their immaturity, lower his own standard, but he does refrain from directing their attention to those features of his character which are too high for them to appreciate. He insists that the principle of their conduct shall be the same as his, but he does not look for nearly so wide and extended an outworking of the principle.

Now why should it be otherwise in the case of the absolutely holy Father of us all? While He may never reveal Himself as other than perfectly righteous, why may He not in the childhood of our race emphasize only those features of His righteousness which would be more readily understood and imitated? He must always be the God of love; but why may He not at first so reveal Himself as to call attention chiefly to His love for His chosen people, a form of love the most easily appreciated by them and so the best fitted to prepare for its higher because universalistic manifestations? He must always insist on a righteousness which extends, as we have seen that that of the Old Testament does, to "the thoughts

[5] In his "Inaugural Address."

and intents of the heart"; but why may not His earlier precepts, as is also true of the Old Dispensation, relate mainly to external conduct?

Nor may we reason from analogy only. Progressive revelation our Saviour declares to be the divine method of making known the truth. "I have yet," said He to His disciples, "many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth." Moreover, though we had not this explicit statement, the Bible as a whole would bear the same testimony. It is a development from beginning to end. If, on the one hand, we are bound to maintain the perfection of revealed truth in all its stages; on the other, it is evidently set forth with ever increasing clearness and fullness. That is, there is constant advance in revelation; and this advance, in the words again of Dr. Vos, "resembles the organic process, through which out of the perfect germ the perfect plant and flower and fruit are successively produced." Thus, full truth is not given until the end, and it is prepared for by the elemental truth made known at the beginning. Now if this be true of dogmatics, why should it not be of ethics also? It must be. Dogmatics and ethics are equally parts of the one revelation of God. They must, therefore, be controlled alike by the same principle. Not only, consequently, does analogy suggest that the divine preparatory and disciplinary revelation of ethics would properly be elementary and so incomplete, but this progressive character is of the very essence of divine revelation. We may wonder why this should be. It may seem strange to us that God should not have created the world fully developed, or that He should not at once make men "perfect in holiness"; but inasmuch as it has pleased Him to accomplish His eternal purpose gradually, to a large degree naturally, generally through ordinary means, we may not question the wisdom or righteousness of there being preparatory and disciplinary dispensations or of the revelation in these of ethical as well as of dogmatic truth being elementary and, consequently, incomplete. Only thus can there be progress. In a word, only

thus can the method which God has chosen of administering the universe be followed out. Indeed, the objection that the Old Testament can not be from God because its morality is elementary and incomplete, necessitates the objection that the scheme of nature cannot be from Him because it looks forward to special revelation and is entirely inadequate without it.

(*b*) That the ethics of the Old Testament is preparatory in character and disciplinary in purpose implies also that ethical principles may express themselves truly, though in the rudest forms, and that God may and should call for such rude but true expressions of virtue when higher ones are not possible. Thus the sacrifice of Isaac was a splendid exhibition of faith on Abraham's part. It is so referred to in Scripture. It was a conspicuously magnificent performance of the first duty of one who would be "the friend of God." Yet it was at the same time a barbarous performance. It shocks our better feelings. We cannot conceive of God as tolerating it now, and still less as commanding it. Nor would He do so to-day. In view of what we have come to know of Him through His progressive revelation of Himself, He would not now require what He did demand of Abraham. To do so would be to contradict His own revelation. This, however, does not affect the real nature of Abraham's act. Though the thing attempted was barbarous, the attempt expressed sublime faith. It was, moreover, an expression of faith which it was right for God to require. Otherwise, we must admit that He may not command virtue unless He can secure a complete manifestation of it. The fallacy of this principle, however, is evident. Were it sound, a father might not tell his child to show his love for him by destroying a certain valuable plaything. Because the right of property does not include the right of destruction, it is true that the father in calling on his child to show his love for him and confidence in him by destroying his property would be calling on him for an expression of virtue so rude as to deny the right of property. It would, however, be an expression of genuine love and

confidence, and it would be a legitimate one. It would be so because it was the highest of which the child was capable. What has he been told of property rights? How much could he understand with reference to them, had he been instructed? An expression of love and confidence, therefore, without reference to these rights is the highest that he can make. Is it not one, therefore, that he ought to make? Is it not one that he ought to be called on to make? Is not the father bound at every stage of his child's development to insist on the highest manifestation of virtue on the part of the child of which the latter is capable? Will not the very primitiveness and defectiveness of the child's conceptions only make it the more the parent's duty to call for such love, such confidence, such other virtue, as the little one, in spite of his ignorance and even by means of it, can render?

It is not otherwise in the case that has been cited, that of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. In devoting his son to death at the command of God, Abraham acted as if he had absolute power over his boy and so might do with him precisely as he chose. Here is the key to this very difficult narrative. Abraham shared in the views of his age; and these were totally lacking in any true idea of the individuality of man, any adequate conception of him as an independent person—a substantial being in himself whose life was his own. "To the ancient, man always figures as an appendage to somebody—the subject to the monarch, the son to the father, the wife to the husband, the slave to the master." Abraham, therefore, in common with the men of his day, felt that he had the right to sacrifice his son; for he owned him. He felt, too, that God had the right to demand this sacrifice of him; inasmuch as it was one that he had the right to make. In view of his time and environment he could have known no better. Had God revealed to him the sublime truth of the personality of the soul, it is questionable whether he could have appreciated it. It has taken thousands of years of divine discipline and revelation to develop the consciousness of this fact, and even yet it is far from being universally or completely developed. The

question, therefore, comes down to this: Should God have let Abraham's faith and love go unexpressed and so undeveloped because, in consequence of the ruling ideas of his age, he could not in the expression of the virtues just named, duly regard the rights of personality; or should he not rather have called for the expression of these virtues, and so have caused even Abraham's ignorance of these rights to praise Him by becoming the occasion of a sublime act of consecration? It is thus that He does in the case of the sinful wrath of men. History illustrates this as clearly as revelation declares it. Much more, then, may He not and should He not do so in the case of the innocent ignorance of His devoted children? Nor may it be replied that God might have called on Abraham for the sacrifice of something that he had the right to sacrifice. This, however, in the case under consideration, would not have answered the purpose. God's design was to call forth the highest expression of faith and love of which His servant was capable, and so one that could be typical of the life to be lived by the innumerable multitude of the faithful who should be blessed in him. Such an expression, however, could be made only with reference to what was most precious to Abraham. Now this was his son Isaac, his heir, he in whom was to be fulfilled the covenant promise. Circumstanced, therefore, as Abraham was, no other sacrifice than that of Isaac would meet the divine purpose; and yet this sacrifice was one that would not have been made and would not have been demanded but for the ignorance of that age of the rights of personality. In demanding this sacrifice, therefore, God was simply requiring the highest praise to Himself of which innocent ignorance was capable; and this, as we have seen, He ought to do.

Why He should leave men for ages in ignorance of the rights and duties involved in the constitution of society,—this may be mysterious; but inasmuch as He has, in His infinite wisdom, done this, then, so long as He does not, as in this case He does not, violate a moral precept founded on His own essentially immutable nature, He is bound to work even the

ignorance for all that it is worth. Only thus, it would seem, things being as they are, could ignorance be dispelled, men be developed, their ruling ideas be elevated, the coming of the Messiah be prepared for, the race be redeemed, the counsels of eternity be fulfilled. In a word, it is essentially involved in the divine plan that ethical principles may express themselves truly, though in rude forms; and that God may and should call for such rude expressions of virtue when higher ones are not possible. *This is the condition of the higher becoming possible.*

Let me sum up in the words of Canon J. B. Mozley: "Never again, indeed, while the world lasts, can that act be done within the Church of God: but that it has been done is the wealth of the Church and of mankind; and is the fruit of the spiritual policy of that Great Being who has educated the world, and who has worked to the highest advantage every step in the moral progress of mankind."[6]

(*c*) As would seem to be contained in what has just been said, that the ethics of the Old Testament is preparatory in character and disciplinary in purpose implies, further, that the *kind* of obedience which God ought to require now He need not and, indeed, should not have demanded under the earlier dispensation.

This does not mean that the standard of right and so the divine nature changes. It does mean that it is eternally and immutably right that the demands made on a person or on an age by the standard should be proportioned to the development of the person or of the age. The Sabbath can be kept holy only by being devoted strictly to sacred as distinguished from secular uses. This is the unchanging law. Surely, however, a wise parent would not expect his child to keep the Sabbath in the same *way* in which he does. While he would feel that the law bound his child just as much as it did himself, he would feel, too, that sacred did not mean for the child just

[6] *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages* (1877). Lecture II, "The Sacrifice of Isaac" (pp. 62f.).

what it did for himself; that the little one's observance of the day might be holy, though not nearly so spiritual as his ought to be; that because of the difference in their development it would be wrong for him to expect of his boy in this particular what he would and should exact of himself; and that were he to do otherwise, he would give his son a false impression of the beneficence and blessedness of the Sabbath law and thus, so far from securing developing regard for it and an ever more comprehensive observance of it, would make it either a "yoke of bondage" or a dead letter.

Now God is the best of fathers. He is infinitely wiser than the wisest of parents. May we doubt, then, that His treatment of us will be similar to that outlined above? Of course, right is right the world over and the same in one age that it is in another. Of course, too, however, the quality as well as the extent of its claim must depend on our capacity to appreciate the claim. That cannot be a duty for us which we are not sufficiently developed to be able to feel to be a duty. In like manner, as we saw, God might not blame Abraham for not recognizing Isaac's rights as a person; for Abraham lived in an age of such low attainments that he could not be expected to have discerned these rights. Just so, the sanctity of marriage ought to be insisted on always and everywhere. Nor is this done less emphatically in the Old Testament than in the New. The form, however, in the two is different. In the New Testament monogamy is invariably required. Men had then been developed up to an appreciation of this as the perfect relation. In the Old Testament a regulated polygamy was at times sanctioned. Men were not able then to bear the higher teaching of the New Testament on this subject. Nor would they ever have been able to bear it, had it been imposed on them without exception from the beginning. The claims of right must be urged gradually as men develop, if they are to be developed so as to meet its claims fully. Things being as they are, it would be the destruction of practical morality, were the right to be insisted on from the first in all its spirituality, or even, as we have seen, in all its comprehensiveness.

In a word, law is always and everywhere the same: but it means more to the man than it does to the child; and if it is to mean to the man what it ought to, it may not be expected to mean to the child what it does to the man.

Nor is this reasoning liable to the objection that it opens the way for lowering the standard of right. It has no reference whatever to raising or lowering it. It insists, on the contrary, that the standard is always the same, and that perfect conformity to its demands is invariably the requirement. It claims only that no one may be expected to realize that in the standard which he cannot, so far as his mental *capacity* or his *opportunity* is concerned, appreciate; and the only legitimate conclusion from it all is that, while we should hold up the same standard, we ought not to try to exact from all the same spirituality of conformity. This is only saying that the light in which it is given to men to see the standard ought to determine our estimate of the claim on them of the standard. That is, as Julius Müller has shown in his great work on *The Christian Doctrine of Sin*,[r] law and duty are not synonymous. The former is immutable; the latter varies according to capacity and opportunity.

g. Commendation of a character need not imply commendation of every element of that character. Because we admire Daniel Webster it does not follow that we approve the intemperance in drink into which he sometimes fell. Why, then, should it be otherwise in our interpretation of the Old Testament? Because David, one of its most glorious figures, was guilty of adultery, what right have we to claim that it sanctions adultery? Because it exalts Abraham as "the father of the faithful" and he was guilty of deception, what right have we to say that it approves deception? Should we not rather infer that it calls attention to his faith, notwithstanding his deception? Are we not bound so to interpret a book which declares strongly and formally against both adultery and deception? Otherwise, we make it contradict itself, and

[r] Vol. I, p. 67.

the presumption always is that of two interpretations that which maintains consistency is the more probable. Indeed, the principle that we are justifying would seem to be self-evidently true. It amounts simply to this, that a character or an action may be mixed; and because there is bad in it, it does not follow that the good cannot be discriminated or should not be praised.

h. We should not expect to resolve everything mysterious in connection with the ethics of the Old Testament. Less even than in the case of the evidences of Christianity may we hope to remove all difficulties. In the last analysis, God must always be, not only unknown, but unknowable. This is the latest utterance of science. It is the highest conclusion of philosophy. It is the positive teaching of revelation. All unite in asking: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know" (Job xi. 7, 8). It must be so. God would not be God, were He not the Infinite; and He could not be the Infinite, were He not, and must He not be, forever beyond the comprehension of the finite. Inasmuch, then, as the ethical is the very essence of His essence, should we not expect that in the revelation which He has made of His ethical nature there should be and should always be difficulties which we could not explain? And because ethical truth is so much more practical and, therefore, touches us so much oftener and so much more closely than dogmatic truth, as, for instance, the doctrine of the Trinity, should we not anticipate that the difficulties involved in the former would oppress us more than those arising out of the latter? Indeed, it would be a far greater difficulty, a much deeper mystery, were it otherwise.

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THE ETHICS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Objections to Old Testament Ethics (*Cont.*)

2. The leading objections to the ethics of the Old Testament may be reduced to the following seven:

a. God is represented sometimes in the Old Testament as partial, fickle, hateful, revengeful, and otherwise morally unworthy.

For example, in Gen. vi. 5-7 we read that when God saw the wickedness of man it repented Him that He had made him. This, however, is not becoming in God. Indeed, it is impossible. As the Scripture itself says elsewhere, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he not spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Again, God's dealing with Pharaoh, as recorded in Ex. vii-xiv, are inconsistent with any just conception of deity. He is represented as hardening Pharaoh's heart toward Israel, and then as overwhelming him in the Red Sea for his treatment of Israel; whereas the Bible itself says in another place "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (Jas. i. 13); and it is impossible for us to think of him as punishing anyone for sin which He Himself has caused. So, too, in 1 Kgs. xxii God is described as deceiving Ahab, and in Ezek. xiv. 9 as deceiving false prophets. These are but specimens of many objections of the same kind that might be adduced and that will, doubtless, occur to you. It cannot be denied that they are serious difficulties. If for no other reason, this would be so because unbelievers make great capital out of them. The deist Bolingbroke says: "It is blasphemy to assert that the

Old Testament writers were inspired, when they attribute such things to divinity as would disgrace humanity"; and Col. Ingersoll was continually sneering: "If the best that can be conceived of God is what the Old Testament represents him as being, then there can be no God."

To this objection we may make the following answer:

(1) The representation of God which is largely predominant in the Old Testament is that He is infinitely exalted, and absolutely perfect in moral excellence. He is "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. xxxiv. 6-7).

Even the objector concedes that this is the representation of God characteristic of the Old Testament. His argument is that its God cannot by its own showing be the true God, for He contradicts Himself.

Is the objector's course, however, a just one? Because a comparatively few of the Old Testament's representations of God seem to be at variance with the exalted character which it usually ascribes to Him, they conclude either that the character as a whole is so inconsistent as to be impossible, or that the predominant representation is false and the exceptional one true. Ought they not rather to infer that, if either must be false, it is the exceptional one; and that if the exceptional one fairly admits of two interpretations, then that one which harmonizes with the characteristic representations must be the true one. We have no right to assume that the author is inconsistent. If his statements can be harmonized, we are bound to do so. No one insists more strenuously than does the objector that his own utterances should be treated thus.

(2) To harmonize is possible and usually easy, if we take into account the context (according to our first principle) as well as the contents of each passage, the idioms of language, and the characteristics of the oriental mind. For example, the objectionable expression, "it repented him" in Gen. vi. 6 must be interpreted by the explanatory phrase in

the context "it grieved him." "This shows," says the excellent commentary of Keil and Delitzsch, "that the repentance of God does not presuppose any variableness in His nature or purpose. In this sense God never repents of anything 'because,' as Calvin has written, 'nothing happens unexpectedly to Him or unforseen by Him.' The repentance of God is an anthropomorphic expression for the pain of the divine love at the sin of man, and signifies that, as Calvin has also added, 'God is hurt no less by the atrocious sins of men than if they pierced His heart with mortal anguish.' "

Indeed, when, as in Jon. iii. 10, "repent" used in connection with God does indicate change, it does not mean a change in God's attributes and character, but only in His manner of treating men. It is not a change of will, but a will to change that is intended. This will to change, moreover, is in this case, the expression and the condition of a changeless will in the sense of disposition. Thus, if God had willed to treat the Ninevites after their repentance as He had threatened to treat them before their repentance, this would have proved Him mutable. It would have revealed Him as displeased, at one time with impenitence and at another time with penitence.[1] In this way it appears that in this case, as in many others, the objectors do not know what they are objecting to. Their objection is that when God repents He must be changeable, whereas He would be changeable, if in these instances He did not repent.

Again, take the objectionable phrase in Ex. x. 27, "But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart." This is evidently to be interpreted by the explanatory phrase occurring often in the context, "And Pharaoh hardened his heart." Nor may it be said that there is as much reason why this phrase should be interpreted by the other and objectionable one. The latter is inconsistent with the Old Testament's characteristic representation of God. It should, therefore, as has been already implied, be interpreted by the clearly parallel and explanatory phrase that would remove the inconsistency. Moreover, the

[1] Vide, also, Jer. xviii. 7-10.

idiom of the language shows, that, independently of the question of consistency, the interpretation just suggested is the one required. According to the Hebrew idiom a positive statement is often used as equivalent to the mere negation of its opposite. Thus in the Hebraistic Greek of the New Testament hate in Rom. ix. 13 ("Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated") does not mean what we mean by hate, but only the absence of that special love which God feels for those whom, out of His general love for all sinners, He has chosen to be His adopted sons. So in Matt. x. 37 to hate father and mother is the same as to love them less in comparison than Christ. In like manner, the meaning of harden is not to soften. When God hardens a man's heart, he simply leaves him alone and lets him do what we are told that Pharaoh did; viz., harden his own heart. "Pharaoh," says Luther in his *Table Talk,* "was hardened because God with His Spirit and grace hindered not his ungodly proceedings, but suffered him to go on and have his way." As Edwards says, "When God is spoken of as hardening some of the children of men, it is not to be understood that God by any positive efficiency hardens any man's heart. There is no positive act in God, as though He put forth any power to harden the heart. To suppose any such thing would be to make God the immediate author of sin. God is said to harden men in two ways: by withdrawing the powerful influences of His Spirit, without which their hearts will remain hardened and grow harder and harder; in this sense He hardens them as He leaves them to hardness. And again, by ordering those things in His providence, which, through the abuse of their corruption, become the occasion of their hardening. Thus God sends His word and ordinances to men which, by their abuse, prove an occasion of their hardening."[2]

Nor may it be objected that this is forcing into phrases the meaning that we wish them to have. If you were living in Turkey, you would not say, "I missed my steamer"; but you

[2] *Works,* Vol. IV, p. 548.

would say, "I caused my steamer to run away." Neither would you allow that you were giving an arbitrary meaning of your own to the phrase when you explained it as meaning only that you had missed the steamer. The idiom of the language would lead you to speak as you did, and it is not otherwise when God is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Once more, take the case in which God is reported to have deceived Ahab (1 Kgs. xxii), or that in which He is represented as deceiving false prophets (Ez. xiv. 9). Here the solution of the difficulty is not in a peculiarity of the Hebrew idiom, but in a popular conception. This is that whereby we are commonly conceived as doing what in strictness we only permit. Thus if a physician has neglected a patient who has died, he is said to have killed him; yet it is not the physician's neglect but the sick man's disease that is the efficient cause of his death.

Just so, God is said to have deceived Ahab when what really took place was that He suffered a lying spirit speaking through a false prophet to deceive him. Thus it was not God, but the lying spirit that was the efficient cause of the deception. Responsibility, therefore, can attach to God as the cause of the deception only when we forget that the language employed is popular rather than exact. God is represented as having deceived Ahab, for example, only because the popular mind does not discriminate between what one does and what he only permits and also because it overlooks the great difference between the sovereign God's relation to the permission of evil and ours. It is true that in 1 Kgs. xxii God seems to do more than simply permit the deception. He is represented as saying in heaven, "Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead? And one said on this manner and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so." What else, however, does this

mean than that, as God's eternal plan contemplates both the existence and the development of evil; so it provides for its own accomplishment by the foreordained permission of evil on the occasions when and in the ways in which evil can by its own working serve the divine purpose? Now there is no immorality in this. Why evil should arise and how it could arise under the government of *God* are insoluble mysteries; but they are just as mysterious to the believer in God, if he rejects Christianity, as if he accepts it. Indeed, the deist or rationalist is without the light which streams from the Christian revelation and which illumines and softens, if it does not solve, this dark problem. As our *Confession of Faith* well says, "The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful *bounding,* and otherwise ordering and governing of them in a manifold dispensation to His own holy ends; yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God; who being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin."[3] This is not saying that God does evil that good may come. It is saying that He takes evil *already* here, evil actually in manifestation, evil that, if left uncontrolled by Him, would of itself hinder the good; and then so overrules the tendency of this evil that of itself, though contrary to its own intention, it advances truth and righteousness. What does this indicate but a being as ethical as He is wise and powerful?

Nor may the objector reply that, while all this may be so, it is at least immoral for God in what claims to be His inspired Word to use these pictorial representations, popular phrases, and anthropomorphic expressions. If so, then it is immoral for the father to speak to his little boy as if he were himself a child, or for the scientist to lecture in the language of the people.

[3] Chap. V, Sec. 4.

b. The second objection to the ethics of the Old Testament is that it often gives the divine endorsement to character not approved by our moral sense. Not only is God, as we have seen, represented as immoral Himself, but even as distinctly approving what is immoral in others. Abraham is exalted as the most striking example of faith, yet he told lies. David is made the great type of Christ, yet he committed adultery and commanded murder. In general, the Patriarchs were not men whom we would care to invite to our homes; the Judges, so far from ornamenting modern society, would be almost sure to land in the lock-up; the Kings were not above the average of oriental monarchs; the Priests were only too evidently tainted with professionalism; the Prophets often exhibit spiritual imperfection; in a word, the men whom God chose to represent Him in the sphere of politics and religion were not such as we would suffer to serve us even in menial positions. This is one of the stock infidel objections. For example, Mr. Blatchford on "The Heroes of the Bible," in his book *God and my Neighbor,* says: "It seems strange to me that such men as Moses, David, and Solomon should be glorified by Christian men and women who execrate Henry VIII and Richard III as monsters. My pet aversion among the Bible heroes is Jacob; but Abraham and Lot were pitiful creatures." Now without pausing to show, what could easily be shown, that these charges are almost as false as they are malicious, it will be sufficient to remark by way of refutation as follows:

(1) Divine approbation in many of these cases where God's approbation is expressed, is explicitly based on and restricted to certain specified and admittedly commendable aspects of these characters. Thus it is as Abraham lives the life of faith that he is "the friend of God." This is made perfectly clear.

(2) In no case is divine approbation extended to those qualities which provoke our moral censure. Abraham is never praised for deceitfulness, nor is Jael praised *by God* for cruelty.

(3) In many cases divine disapprobation is pro-

nounced upon those points of character which we denounce, and the sins are visited with severe judgments. Thus the early deceit of Jacob was avenged through all his later years by the withering influence of the fear of man. The one great crime of David caused the evening of his glorious day to be darkened by the clouds of lust and blood. This connection between sin and suffering in the case even of the most illustrious and most specially chosen servants of God is brought out so clearly and is traced with such evident purpose that it seems impossible to escape the conviction that God would thus put Himself on record as condemning what is bad in *all,* and specially in all on whom He has set the mark of his peculiar approval.

In a word, the sufficient answer to the objection under consideration is the principle already approved and illustrated; viz., Commendation of a character need not imply commendation of every element of that character.

Nowhere, perhaps, is it more necessary to keep this principle in mind that in the interpretation of the passages in which, as it is often alleged, deceit and lying are commended. Such, for example, are Ex. i. 17-21 and Josh. ii. 4, and vi. 25, the case of the Hebrew midwives and that of Rahab the harlot. Thus God dealt well with the midwives, not because they lied to the Egyptians; but, because, though they lied to protect themselves, they feared Him rather than the king of Egypt and saved the men-children of the Israelites alive. Indeed, this is expressly affirmed to be the ground of His treatment of them. So, too, Rahab the harlot was spared in the sack of Jericho, not because she lied to her fellow citizens concerning the Hebrew spies, but because, as the eleventh chapter of Hebrews informs us, of her faith in the God of Israel. These and like cases, moreover, point the important and often forgotten truths, that no one is so bad that there is not some good in him, and this good ought always to be appreciated even when mixed with the bad.

c. A third objection to the ethics of the Old Testament is that it endorses, not only characters that we cannot jus-

tify, but even expressions of individual feeling towards one's fellows that are offensive to our moral judgments. These endorsements appear specially in the "Imprecatory Psalms," some fifty in number. All these, though not nearly to the extent charged, contain sentiments that shock us: and certain of them, as the 35th, the 59th, the 109th and the 137th, we can scarcely bring ourselves to read in private; and we could not, I suppose, and certainly should not read them in public worship without explanation. Nevertheless, most of the difficulty will be removed in their case by the following considerations:

(1) The style of these psalms means much more to us than it did to the authors. "The eastern minstrel employs intense and figurative words for saying what the western logician would put in tame and exact language. The fervid oriental would turn from our modifying phrases with sickness of heart. We shudder at the lofty flights which captivate him. But he and we mean to express the same idea." The occidental philosopher affirms that God exercises benevolence toward good men. Isaiah, however, means only this when he cries out, "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (Is. lxii. 5). In like manner the denunciatory phrases of the Old Testament are far more unqualified than we should select. The Hebrew poet sings: "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked." Yet these glowing words would not mean more than the precise terms that we would employ such as, "Good men will rejoice when they see virtue triumphant, even if its prosperity be attended with the just and needed sufferings of the vicious." Another illustration in point is the last verse of Ps. cxxxvii, "Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock." This expression on the part of the captives in Babylon means something altogther different from the utterly unchristian sense commonly given to it and that it seems to us to have. Inasmuch as Babylon was on a plain where there were no rocks, the literal meaning cannot be the true one. As Dr.

Howard Osgood correctly renders the passage the sense is "Blessed shall every one be whom God shall use to destroy to the uttermost Babylon and her children that chose and followed in her sins."[4]

Nor are conclusions like these arbitrary. Oriental life and character today are essentially what they were in Bible times and we find in the East the very same tendency to strong language and figurative expressions. For example, in a letter from Maulvi Fuoz ud Din to Rev. C. B. Newton, one of the best known of our Indian missionaries, we read as follows: "Respected Sir, Your post card came today. I read it but with countless sobs and sighs. Oh dreadful Bronchitis, may our gracious Redeemer and spotless Saviour annihilate you and throw you into hell!" We do not, however, find that the feelings of orientals are deeper than ours. On the contrary, there is abundant evidence that the reverse is often the case. We may, therefore, infer that the intense phrases of the imprecatory psalms did not mean and so should not now mean what they would, were we to choose them spontaneously as the expression of our emotions.

Moreover, the oriental style is less exact as well as more glowing than that of modern western nations. We discriminate between the sinner and his sin. We feel that we ought to love the former even when bound to denounce the latter. The oriental did not make this distinction. Unanalytic in mind and impulsive in disposition, he did not care to; and had he cared, it would not have been easy. The genius of his language was against it.

Nor may we find fault with God for permitting the writers of His Word to adopt this style. That would really be to object to His having made a revelation to the Jews or to His having revealed Himself at all except in modern times and western lands. If He would be understood, He must reveal Himself through the language and in the style of the people with whom He would communicate. This is a necessity aris-

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[4] This Review, Vol. I, p. 37.

ing out of the nature of things. Men being what and as God has made them even He could not have it otherwise.

(2) In the imprecatory psalms, and especially in the objectionable phrases in them, the psalmists identify their enemies with God's enemies. "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies" (Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22). Their own cause, therefore, the psalmists feel to be God's. Hence, in opposition to themselves they see opposition to Him. In this, and not in anything merely personal do we lay bare the root of their indignation.

Now who may say that such indignation is wrong? Nay: is it not even righteous? Ought it not to be expressed? Your private grievances considered as such you are not called on to redress. It was He "who spake as never man spake" who declared, "But I say unto you that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also" (Matt. v. 39, 40). And our Saviour meant what He said in this instance as in all others. Will it not be different, however, if your private grievances are so interlocked, as they usually are, with the public good that the injury to you is a crime against the state? Doubtless, you should forgive the burglar and let him go free, if you had no one and nothing to think of but yourself. You are not bound to insist on your own rights but often to waive them for the sake of others. Doubtless, however, you may not simply forgive the burglar, but ought to bring him to justice; for you do have others to think of than yourself. God has made you your "brother's keeper." And so while the wrong to yourself you should forgive, the crime against society you are bound to expose and punish.

Now will it not be much more so in the case of sin against God? How may we remain neutral when, as in this instance, the contest is between our loving Father and gracious Saviour, on the one hand, and His rebellious children, on the other?

Does not loyalty require us, not only to side with Him, but openly and emphatically to express our abhorrence of His enemies? Undoubtedly, we ought to love even the Devil in the sense of desiring his conversion; but there is not one of us who would feel any aversion to the imprecatory psalms, if they were regarded as directed at the Devil. But this is the case. The psalmists denounce their own enemies because they are the enemies of their God, and His enemies are all summed up in "the Prince of the powers of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."

(3) The imprecations in the Psalms rest in general on divine denunciations and predictions with respect to evil. They simply call on God to do in the case of His enemies what He has declared that He will do and what, therefore, ought to be done. It is not a desire, for personal vengeance, but a longing for the vindication of the divine justice in the divine way that is expressed. This distinction is most important. The mob that clamors for the murderer that by torturing him they may wreak their vengeance on him we cannot condemn too strongly. The mass-meeting, however, that passes resolutions calling on the authorities for the strictest enforcement of the laws we cannot praise too highly. Nor shall we temper our praise, if, in the course of the resolutions, crime is denounced in the most vigorous language and the infliction of the extreme penalties of the criminal code is most earnestly and even vehemently demanded. We can scarcely insist too strenuously on what we know ought to be done. In like manner, may the imprecatory psalms be fully justified. They simply call on God to do what He has said ought to be done.

(4) Nor is the idea which they thus give of God inconsistent with His character as set forth elsewhere in the Bible. This is true even of God as revealed in Christ. Isaiah predicts Him as one "who shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips shall slay the wicked" (xi. 4). And when Christ came He was anything but the synonym of weak gentleness. Indeed, it is precisely from Him that the most withering denunciations of wickedness

ever uttered proceed, and it is just He who represents Himself as pronouncing at the great day on those who would seem to have been only negatively rather than positively His enemies, the most terrific sentence ever passed: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. xxv. 41). Nor did this escape the attention of those who knew Him best. The imprecatory utterances of the New Testament, though not so numerous, are quite as fearful as those of the Old. "I would that they were even cut off which trouble you," wrote Paul (Gal. v. 12). "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works" (2 Tim. iv. 14), he also said. Even the Apostle of love portrays the martyrs as crying with a loud voice, and saying: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth!" (Rev. vi. 10). Indeed, the general spirit of the New Testament overawes us by its references to God as a "consuming fire," "into whose hands it is dreadful to fall"; "for if he that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?" (Heb. x. 28, 29). So far, therefore, from these imprecatory psalms putting the Old Testament out of harmony with the New, it would be out of harmony, did it not contain the imprecatory psalms or something like them.

(5) Indeed, these psalms are peculiarly in place in the Old Testament. The divine method, as the popular method, of declaring the whole truth, is by giving at one time an unqualified statement of one element of it and at another time an equally unqualified statement of the antithetic element. Thus, while the calm philosopher surveys comprehensively the two elements and reduces them to the principle that includes them both, the earnest orator prevails by dwelling on one at a time. When he would arouse his fellow-citizens to enlist for the invasion of the enemy's territory, he says nothing of the importance of strengthening the home-guard; and when he

would improve the latter, he makes no reference to the army for abroad. Though he recognizes the claims of both, he urges but one claim at a time, and that without qualification.

It is thus that God, that He may adapt His revelation to the popular mind, has been pleased to do. The doctrine of free-will is asserted in one place without qualification; the doctrine of divine sovereignty is affirmed in another quite as unlimitedly. Both together make up the whole truth; if both were not stated, the whole truth would not be expressed.

Now the New Testament is, as we have seen, characteristically, though not exclusively, the Gospel of the grace of God. Divine grace, however, is supported by divine justice, and divine justice prepares for divine grace. Without the latter, grace, God would lack the most glorious trait of His moral character. Without the former, justice, the fundamental attribute of His essential nature would be wanting. In order, therefore, to the truth, both the justice and the grace of God, His wrath against sin and His mercy to sinners, must be emphasized. Consequently, as the New Testament is the gospel of the latter, it is most appropriate that in the Old Testament the stress should often be laid on the former. Such terrible psalms as the imprecatory ones are needed to balance the supremely gracious invitations of our Saviour. But for these psalms, the proportion of truth would not be maintained. And it should be added that there is so much of maudlin sentiment in the preaching and in the Christian life of our day largely because these imprecatory psalms are passed over unread. If we persist in ignoring those scriptures which were inspired to show us how God would have us abominate sin, we may not expect to hunger and thirst after righteousness as He wishes us to do. Our Saviour's example, moreover, should be decisive. His use of these psalms forbids our disuse of them.

d. A fourth objection to the ethics of the Old Testament is that, in addition to endorsing, as we have just seen, expressions of individual feeling that offend our moral judgments, it represents God as explicitly requiring in some instances acts condemned by our moral sense. For example,

Abraham is commanded to sacrifice Isaac; Moses, to deceive Pharaoh with reference to letting the people go; the people to deceive their Egyptian neighbors by pretending to borrow jewelry from them when they had no intention of returning it. This objection culminates in the charge that God expressly required courses of action towards nations and races, which courses of action are utterly abhorrent to our better feelings. Thus with reference to the Canaanites the divine command to Israel was: "Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days forever" (Deut. xxiii. 6). Indeed they were charged to drive them out summarily; to destroy them utterly, 'showing no mercy, to save alive nothing that breathed.' They were to exterminate absolutely all who stood in the way of their undisputed possession of a land to which they had no claim either in law or equity, at least from the human standpoint.

And this mission Joshua strictly fulfilled. Acting on the command of Moses, which was received from God, he smote all the cities "with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed all the souls that were therein; he left none remaining." Moreover, the subsequent neglect to execute this ordinance was named as criminal disobedience to Jehovah, and for it Israel had to pay a terrible penalty.

We do not wonder that the deist Bolingbroke should have written: "Nothing can be conceived more unworthy of an all-perfect being than the manner in which the people were taken from Egypt and the way in which they got possession of Canaan." Even we cannot read the bloody story without shuddering, and we quite commonly refrain from reading it rather than face the awful fact that these deeds of blood were committed by the express command of God.

Nor is the difficulty a sentimental one only. At first sight, it is more perplexing to the intellect than it is distressing to the heart. These wars seem to involve cruelty, and to proceed from and to express a cruel disposition on the part of Israel. They appear also to be unjust. The innocent perish with the guilty, and the command is that it should be so. Respecting

Amalek, God told Samuel to "slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (1 Sam. xv. 3).

As, however, we saw when we considered the radical difference as to ground between the moral precepts of the Old Testament, God can neither command nor sanction cruelty or injustice. His essentially kind and just nature renders this an impossibility. He would not be God, if He could. It is the same with the alleged commands to lie. God can neither lie Himself, nor tell any to lie. Himself the truth, He could neither do so, nor wish to do so. These difficulties, therefore, not only appear to involve God in immorality, but they seem to make Him inconsistent with Himself and thus destructive of Himself. Could they be proved to be real, it would indeed, follow, not only that God was evil; but also that, being this, He was not *God*. No less serious than this is the ethical difficulty that we are about to examine.

We should observe:

(1) In all cases in which God is charged with having commanded lying, etc., a correct exegesis will, it is believed, refute the charge. For example:

The Israelites were not told to *borrow* of the Egyptians on the eve of the exodus, neither did they pretend to borrow. What they did, and what God told them to do, was to *ask*. So the Hebrew verb *shā'al* means; so the LXX αἰτέω signifies, with the added idea of demanding; so is the Vulgate *postulo*; and finally such is now the rendering of our Revised Version. "And it shall come to pass," it reads, "that when ye go, ye shall not go empty: but every woman shall *ask* of her neighbor, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians."

Nor may it be urged that the request of the Children of Israel would be regarded by the Egyptians as a demand for a loan and that, therefore, deception was really to be practiced, though a lie was not formally to be uttered.

Even if Moses had not spoken without reserve of the entire departure of the Israelites, the plagues which followed one after another, and with which the God of the Hebrews gave emphasis to His demand as addressed through Moses to Pharaoh, "Let my people go, that they may serve me," must have made it evident to every Egyptian, that all this had reference to something greater than a three days' march to celebrate a festival. And under these circumstances no Egyptian could have cherished the thought that the Israelites were only borrowing the jewels they asked of them, and would return them after the festival. What they gave under such circumstances they could only give or present without the slightest prospect of restoration.

Still less could the Israelites have had merely the thought of borrowing in their mind, seeing that God had said to Moses, "I will give the Israelites favor in the eyes of the Egyptians; and it will come to pass, that when ye go out, ye shall not go out empty." If, therefore, it is "natural to suppose that these jewels were festal vessels with which the Egyptians furnished the poor Israelites for the intended feast," and even if "the Israelites had their thoughts directed with all seriousness to the feast which they were about to celebrate to Jehovah in the desert"; their request to the Egyptians cannot have referred to any borrowing, nor have presupposed any intention to restore what they received on their return. From the very first the Israelites asked without intending to restore, and the Egyptians granted their request without any hope of receiving back because God had made their hearts favorably disposed to the Israelites.[5]

Nor, I should add, may the morality of their thus despoiling their oppressors be questioned. It was done by the command of God; and He whose 'are the silver and the gold and the cattle on a thousand hills' has the right to dispose of them, consistently with His own absolutely holy nature, to whomsoever He will.

Nor would it be difficult to discern a righteous reason for the exercise of this right in this particular case. It was but just that the nation which had brought the people of God into bondage should be required to help them on the occasion of their exodus, that thus the wrath of man should be made to advance the kingdom of the Most High.

Equally susceptible of vindication is the petition of Moses to Pharaoh that the people be allowed to go into the wilderness to sacrifice. This did not involve deception. God did not mean that the people should get permission to go away to sacrifice and then should avail themselves of the opportunity to

[5] Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Vol. I, p. 446.

escape. On the contrary, He told them to seek permission to sacrifice because, as He Himself said, He was sure 'that the king of Egypt would not let them go, no, not by a mighty hand.' Indeed, so far from God's course being the tricky one that many have tried to make it out to be, it was prompted by both justice and mercy. Mercy disposed Him to cause the favor asked of Pharaoh in the first instance to be so moderate, that he could easily have granted it, had he chosen to do so and thus have disciplined himself to accede to the request for the release of the whole nation, a request which, if made at first, would have been too much for him. On the other hand, the purpose to manifest His justice disposed God to cause the favor asked of Pharaoh to be so reasonable that his obduracy might appear so much the more glaring, and might have no excuse in the greatness of the requirement. In short, God's foreknowledge resolves the difficulty that we are considering. The whole narrative is based on it. Moses was directed to make his request with the divine assurance that it would not be granted. He was aware from the first that it was designed to furnish a just occasion for the plagues, "the mighty hand" by which at last they were to be delivered.

(2) The ethical difficulty presented by the wars of extermination is a more comprehensive, if not more serious one. It proceeds, not only from the acts of the Children of Israel as a nation commissioned by God to drive out and destroy the original inhabitants of the land of promise, but also all acts of individuals in more or less conscious furtherance of the divinely revealed policy of extermination, as, for example, the killing of Sisera by Jael.

The solution of this difficulty requires us to consider:

(*a*) The intrinsic rightfulness of God's policy of extermination. This may be vindicated on the following grounds:

(i.) God, because God, has the right to destroy both nations and individuals; and it is a right which He is constantly exercising. As God, He is the author of life and of death. Even the king of Israel asked, "Am I God, to kill

and to make alive?" (2 Kgs. v. 7). As life is an absolutely free gift from Him, it is His to recall it whenever He pleases and in whatever way He pleases consistently with righteousness.

Moreover, the constant exercise of this right by God demonstrates it. By the natural instrumentality of pestilence and famine or by men as His agents of destruction God, throughout all history, has been wiping communities and even nations out of existence. This is a fact which no believer in providence can deny. It is a fact, too, which proves the point at issue. Surely God, who must do right, has the right to adopt as His policy and even formally to command what He is continually doing. This is only another form of the self-evident truth, that the right to do involves the right to do deliberately and avowedly.

(ii.) The justice of God's exercise of this right in adopting a policy of extermination in the case of the Canaanites is fully *manifested* (in the case under consideration) by:

(a) The uniquely gross wickedness of the nations to be exterminated. This was such that they deserved destruction. As Geikie says, "The heathenism of Palestine and Syria was so foul and degrading in every sense, that there is no State, even at this time, which would not put it down; if necessary, by the severest penalties."[6] So abominable were many even of their every-day vices that they may not be named, much less described, in public. We are accustomed to think of Rome in the time of the empire as the synonym of corruption and iniquity. Yet Juvenal in his Third Satire bewails the spread to Rome of the vices which 1500 years before Joshua had been commanded to root out by exterminating the nations who practised them, as a calamity marking the utter decay of the times. When, therefore, we are disposed to question the intrinsic rightfulness of God's policy respecting these nations, let us remember how wicked they were; and

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[6] *Hours with the Bible,* Vol. II, p. 397.

that, as we read in Deut. ix. 4 and 5, "Not for thy righteousness or for the uprightness of thine heart dost thou go in to possess their land; but for the wickedness of these nations Jehovah thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that He may establish the word which Jehovah sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." It was then because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord dealt with them as He did.

(β) This appears more clearly in view of the warning that they had. They were not cut off without notice. On the contrary, abundant opportunity for repentance was afforded. When the day of vengeance came, "Forty years had passed since the news of the passage of the Red Sea, and of the wonders in Egypt, had proclaimed the greatness of Jehovah above all gods. The recent conquest of the kings of Gilead and Bashan had no less vividly shown that a mighty invincible Power fought on the side of Israel, and rightfully claimed universal homage. The certain punishment of impurity by this Almighty Being had been seen, moreover, in the fatal plague with which He had smitten even His own people for mingling in the abominations of Baal-peor. Rahab in Jericho had heard of these judgments, and, doubtless, the conviction of the people at large through the land, however they may have stifled reflection, was the same as hers, that 'Jehovah, the God of Israel, was God in heaven above and in earth beneath.'"[7] If, therefore, because of the enormity of their sins they deserved the punishment which they received how much more must this have been the case in view of the warning which they had!

(iii.) The mercifulness, in addition to the justice of God's policy of exterminating the inhabitants of Canaan appears:

(α) In the fact that their iniquity, had it been rebuked less sharply, would have ruined the surrounding nations. In an important sense the inhabitants of Canaan were

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[7] *Ibid.*, p. 398.

cut off that the rest of the world might not be corrupted. That is, they were treated justly that a far greater number might be treated mercifully. As regarded the world as a whole, it was a very merciful policy.

(β) This appears more clearly in view of the relation of this policy of extermination to the development of the divine plan of salvation. The former was directly in order to the latter. Indeed, the latter was conditioned on the former. The nation out of which the Messiah was to arise, through which the highest manifestation of God on earth was to be made known among men, must not only have a local abiding place, but must in it be kept pure and distinct from all others as "the chosen people." Hence, it was that, in addition to being given the land of promise, they were commanded to destroy its inhabitants. Had they been permitted merely to subjugate the Canaanites, contact with them would still have corrupted them. Objection to the fate of these nations, therefore, is really an objection to the highest manifestation of the grace of God. He commanded the Canaanites to be destroyed that the Saviour of the world might be revealed.

(iv.) Nor may it be replied that in spite of all this, the divine policy of extermination involved doing evil that good might come. We do not so reason in like cases. If the offenses of Turkey against civilization should become so great, as it is not impossible that they will, that the Christian powers of Europe should be compelled to strip her forever of her dominions, it would not be objected that the necessary war would bring suffering and death to thousands of Turks who had no part whatever in the atrocities of their nation. While this would be greatly deplored, it would be recognized that it was inevitable; that, society being constituted as it is, the innocent in close connection with the guilty must suffer when the latter are punished. The execution of justice upon them, therefore, especially if it be inspired by a purpose of mercy to the world as a whole, is not doing evil, that good may come. It is rather doing good in spite of certain necessary evil consequences. It is analagous to the action of the surgeon who

does not refrain from amputating the gangrened limb, though he can not do this without cutting off much healthy flesh. But this is not all. Not only, as we have just seen, would we not condemn in our own case a policy in kind, if not in degree, like the divine policy of extermination, but certain principles that we have already established should justify it for us on God's part. One of these is that we may not object to God's doing immediately and personally what we do not object to His doing mediately, through providence. The other is that in all that is above reason we should judge of what God ought to do, not by our opinion in the matter, but by what He is observed to do in providence. Now nothing is more certain than that providence is administered on the principle that individuals share in the life of the family and of the nation, to which they belong; and that, consequently, it is right that they should participate in its punishments as in its rewards. Hence, God's policy of exterminating the Canaanites does not lay Him open to the charge of doing evil that good may come. Though many innocent persons could not but suffer, it was *right,* because of the relation in which they stood to the guilty, that this should be. So much for the intrinsic rightfulness of the divine policy.

(*b*) The rightfulness of the method chosen by God for carrying out this policy.

(i.) We must not forget the customs of those remote times. A mode of executing divine judgments that would seem terrible in our age was only the natural thing in antiquity. To kill all the men, or even all the population, of a conquered town, was the common practice in war. In commanding Joshua, therefore, to exterminate the Canaanites for Him because of their idolatry and lust, God did but do, as we have seen, what strict justice to them demanded and what mercy to the world at large called for; and He did it according to the method of the times.

Now this is God's way. Ordinarily He acts through men as His agents, and usually by the methods in vogue among them. If not in themselves wrong, He adopts these unless they

are inadequate to His purpose, or prejudicial to the men whom He makes His agents.

(ii.) The extermination of the Canaanites by the Israelites was not prejudicial even to their spiritual interests. It has been claimed that it must have been. This, however, cannot be shown; and there are even indications that the contrary was the case.

(α) The Children of Israel need not have been made ferocious by the terrible judgments that they were called on to execute. God could protect them from the natural and evil effect on their dispositions of their deeds of violence. Himself the "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" and able to 'turn the hearts of men as the rivers of water are turned,' we must admit this.

(β) This that God could do it was plainly His purpose to do. Not only was it impressed again and again on the Children of Israel that they were to exterminate the Canaanites solely in obedience to God and not at all because of private passion; but in several ways they were most significantly protected while executing their terrible commission.

For example, they were not left to their own discretion or caprice in interpreting the commission. They were to do what God commanded and just what He commanded, and that under the severest penalties. Could they have been shown more impressively that it was as the expressly authorized agents of God, and not in the gratification of personal feeling, that they were acting?

Again, these wars of extermination they were never allowed to regard as precedents. Even with the command to drive out and exterminate the Canaanites, they were given for their permanent rule: "If a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. xix. 33-34). Thus were they taught the extraordinary nature of their commission. They were not to expect that even God would call

on them again for this strange work of judgment. Once more, in the performance of it they were limited, and the danger of it was subsequently as well as at the time clearly implied. Thus, aggressive war was permitted only at certain specified points and for certain specified objects. Otherwise, war was to be merely defensive. Under no circumstances was war for war's sake encouraged. Because he had been a man of war, David was denied the honor of building the temple. In these and in other ways were the people guarded against the indulgence of a fierce spirit and even against the development of a warlike disposition. It was kept impressed on them that always and in all respects they were to be the executors of the will of the Lord.

(γ) These protective measures were successful. "Fresh from the scenes of Jericho and Ai, the Children of Israel gathered between Ebal and Gerizim, to listen to the words of the Law, which proclaimed a blessing upon purity, justice, order, and truthfulness between man and man; demanded absolute obedience to a holy God; and denounced curses on impurity, injustice, sensuality, and wrong-doing. Mere bloodthirstiness or savage ferocity cannot be rightly attributed to a people capable of such a transaction, however different their ideas may have been in some respects from ours."[8] They must have felt that they were acting by the authority of God.

(iii.) So far from the method of exterminating the Canaanites by the agency of the Children of Israel being inadequate to the divine purpose it would seem to have been specially adapted to it. It secured the removal of the heathen from the land and their destruction as effectually as a pestilence could have done; and, in addition to this, it impressed on the Israelites as a pestilence, of the ravages of which they would have been only positive spectators could not have done, the exceeding sinfulness of the idolatry which they were called on thus terribly to root out. We may not doubt that it

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[8] *Ibid.*, p. 400.

was largely because we always feel more that in which we ourselves have a part that God commanded the Israelites rather than the forces of nature to be the executors of his justice.

(*c*) In closing this discussion of the wars of extermination it should be remarked that we may not object to these portions of the Old Testament when, without reprobation, we acknowledge, in our own time, in ourselves and others the same feelings as those by which the Israelites were prompted, and when we approve precisely the same course in our own day as we condemn in the age of Joshua. Indeed, let our circumstances but resemble those of the Children of Israel on their entrance into Canaan and we feel as they felt and judge that what they did is the only thing for us to do. For example, in the East-Indian mutiny, at the time when the belief in the Sepoy atrocities (since exploded) prevailed throughout India, many letters were received from that country, from conscientious and religious men, containing phrases to this effect: "The Book of Joshua is now being read in church. It expresses exactly what we are all feeling. I never before understood the force of that part of the Bible. It is the only rule for us to follow." It is not necessary to our argument that we should approve this sentiment as the highest that could and so should be expected of our age. It is quoted simply to show how circumstances may often give an entirely new meaning to familiar passages of Scripture and in so doing remove much of their offence.

e. A fifth objection to the ethics of the Old Testament is found in its sanctions. It is claimed that the sanctions by which it commends and enforces what it requires, are mercenary and, therefore, inferior, if not immoral. Thus, Bolingbroke says that God purchased the obedience of His people; the book of Proverbs is charged with motives of prudence rather than of love; the human agent, affirms Munscher, is taught to regard the present rather than the future; and in general it is insisted that sanctions like these, which embody good and ill and do not demand virtue simply for its own

sake, are inferior and demoralizing. They could not result in a high type of character, and so they are unworthy of a God of high character.

The solution of this difficulty, at first sight serious, is to be sought along the following lines:

(1) In order to the vindication of a sanction it must be shown: (*a*) that the sanction is right in itself; that is, that it binds men to duty and deters them from sin by means in themselves right; (*b*) that in addition to being right in itself, the sanction is adapted to those to whom it is given; (*c*) that besides this, the sanction, if inferior, is so related to the higher as to prepare for the appreciation of them.

For example, we may at once admit that if a father were to expect his children to do right simply for right's sake, he would be using a higher sanction than if he were now and then to promise a half-holiday as the reward of obedience or to threaten the loss of a half-holiday as the punishment of disobedience. Nevertheless, we should have no difficulty in justifying his procedure. A half-holiday is good in itself. It may be a very trifling good as compared with many others, but still it is a good. Neither is it wrong that it should be a reward of virtuous action. On the contrary, we instinctively feel it to be right that the sum of good things and not merely the highest good things, should follow virtue; and if so, then that the lesser good things should do this as well as the greater. Indeed, one of the strong arguments for a future life is based on the fact that such a life is felt to be demanded that the glaring inequality between virtue and the few good things which in many cases it enjoys in this life may be evened up. In using, therefore, the half-holiday as a sanction in the training of his children a father would be doing only what was in itself right.

He would be employing, too, a sanction adapted to those whom he would train. Abstract considerations, such as right for right's sake, though the highest, would probably not appeal to little children. While they might feel, they could not appreciate the full claim of the right simply as such. They

would not be sufficiently developed morally to do this. A half-holiday, however, if made a reward of virtue in their case would commend to them most strikingly the excellence, if not the uniqueness of virtue. That must be good, they would feel, which secures to us such a good as a half-holiday. Thus this sanction, in addition to being right in itself, would be effective; it would prompt that right action which a higher, though more spiritual, sanction would be powerless in the case of children to secure.

Nor would it be open to the objection that the action which it would prompt, while virtuous in matter, would not be so in motive; that the children, because they would do right only for the sake of reward, would not really do right. The unexpressed premise in this reasoning is not necessarily true. Lower motives are not incompatible with higher ones. Because a child eagerly anticipates the promised half-holiday, it does not follow that his obedience is not determined chiefly, or even solely, by love for his parents. Many a child would obey just as fully if no half-holiday were promised. In his case, therefore, it encourages him to obedience without necessarily taking the place of the right motive to obedience. Instead of destroying that motive, it makes it easier for it to operate. Of course in the case of a child who had no affection for his parents it would not be so, but it is not the case of such a child that we are considering.

Nor is this all. Not only does the half-holiday make it easier for the child who loves his parents to obey them from love to them; but developing in this way true obedience, it develops the child's whole moral nature. Now it cannot do this, and not develop the child beyond the possibility of resting content with it itself as the reward of obedience. In a word, in a virtuous child its tendency will be to reveal its own insufficiency and so finally to stimulate a longing for virtue for its own sake.

(2) These three conditions are all met in the case of the inferior sanctions so characteristic of the ethics of the Old Testament, and so often referred to as an objection to it.

(*a*) These inferior sanctions are right in themselves. The temporal blessings in which they consist and which are promised as the reward of obedience to God, are His good gifts. As such, moreover, they ought to follow virtue. This, as has been remarked, is our instinctive and so true judgment. It must, therefore, be right that God should promise them as a consequence or reward of obedience. Otherwise, we are driven to the untenable position that God may not promise as a reward what ought to be one.

(*b*) In addition to being right in themselves, the inferior sanctions of the Old Testament were adapted to those to whom they were given. Besides being permissible, they were effective. The rewards which they presented were such as a rude and partially developed people could appreciate and by which they could be stimulated. This the standards on which we are accustomed to insist would have been powerless to do. Considerations like the claim of right for its own sake would have been too abstract to appeal to those who abhorred abstractions of every kind. The blessedness of God's favor regarded simply by itself, would have been too spiritual to influence sufficiently those who were far from spiritually minded. Moreover, as we have seen, motives drawn from the future life would not only lack definiteness and power for the Old Testament believer, but would even be dangerous as tending to make him think more of his own future good than of the world's Messiah whose advent, as things were, should fill up with its glory the whole future. Thus, so far from its being wrong for God to use these inferior sanctions predominantly under the Old Dispensation, His employment of them is a conspicuous exhibition of His wisdom. Higher sanctions alone would have been ineffective and some of them would have been even dangerous.

(*c*) These lower sanctions were so related to the higher as to prepare the way for their appreciation. In no case did the lower necessarily exclude the higher. From the first it might have been said, Do right because it is right. In many cases, moreover, God's favor is distinctly presented as

the highest good, the true reward of virtue, the real reason why men should do their duty. Indeed, as we saw, this is one of the fundamental characteristics of the Old Testament. Its temporal goods involve spiritual blessings. The former were but the signs of the latter, and it was this fact that gave to them their supreme value. They were good, chiefly because they were gifts expressive of the divine favor, and they were not regarded as nearly so good as this favor in and of itself. The highest blessing is represented as "the peace of God," and no blessing is so temporal as to be independent of this for its own worth. Though, therefore, the sanctions characteristic of the Old Testament were inferior because temporal, not only were they on this account specially adapted to the age, but their inherent tendency was to prepare men for the appreciation of higher because more spiritual sanctions.

And in yet another way does this appear. The very absence of motives drawn from the future life would tend as the people became more spiritually minded to make them feel the insufficiency of all merely temporal good. They would realize that it could not be the whole reward, the full result, of virtuous living; and thus they would be prepared to appreciate a truth clearly revealed as far back as Abraham's day at least; viz., that God alone is our "shield and our exceeding great reward." Need more be said to vindicate the inferior sanctions of the Old Testament? They were right in themselves; they were specially adapted to those to whom they were given; their tendency was toward the appreciation of the highest sanctions. So far, therefore, from affording any ground for objection to the Old Testament, its use of inferior sanctions would rather seem, in view of the constitution of human nature and the progressive character of revelation, to vindicate the wisdom as well as the righteousness of God.

f. A sixth objection to the ethics of the Old Testament is that in it the principle of human brotherhood receives only very partial and inconsistent treatment. Thus Bolingbroke declares that the particularism by which the Jews were taught to regard themselves as God's "peculiar people" made

them selfish and took them out of obligation to the rest of mankind.

To this we would reply:

(1) It is not the fact that the brotherhood of man is not clearly taught in the Old Testament. If we compare it with other contemporaneous writings, nothing is more significant than the emphasis which it lays on this principle. Thus in Ex. xxiii. 9 the Israelites were forbidden to oppress strangers. In Lev. xix. 33 they were instructed to treat them kindly. The doors of the Jewish sanctuary were kept guardedly open to proselytes. Num. xv. 15 declares, "As ye are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord." Deut. x. 18 represents God as loving the stranger.

The Prophets lay even more stress on this principle. Mic. iv. 2 predicts that many nations shall come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob." Isa. lvi. 7 foretells how "God's house shall be a house of prayer for all people." Isa. lxvi. 19 prophesies the declaration of God's "glory among the Gentiles," and the whole sixtieth chapter is given to describing the access that the Gospel shall have to all the nations of the earth. Indeed, the injustice of the objection that we are considering should be apparent when we remember, as has been remarked, that it is in the Hebrew Prophets that we find the first philosophy of universal history and that the "Chosen People" were the only one in all antiquity that had any, even the least conception of a redemption for the world.

(2) Were all this otherwise, however, the objection would prove too much. It would bear against the providential distinctions which God is constantly making and which all men cannot but observe. It would amount to this: if God ought not to make the Israelites His chosen people, neither ought He to treat the American nation as if they were His chosen people. We would seem to have been distinguished by Him as favorably as ever the Jews were. The charge of particularism is as proper in one case as in the other. Unless, therefore, we are so inconsistent as to set aside a principle

that we have already established; viz., that we should judge how God ought to represent Himself in special revelation, not by what we naturally think that He ought to, but by what He is observed to do in the course of providence,—unless we are so inconsistent as to go back on this principle, we may not acknowledge the force of the objection under consideration. It objects to an indisputable characteristic of "the Judge of all the earth," with reference to whom, however great may be the mystery, we instinctively and so truly feel that He must do right. Could He do otherwise, He would not be *God*.

(3) The objection mistakes the nature, ground, and aim of the particularism of the Hebrew system and, indeed, of the particularism in the divine administration in general. The Hebrews are represented in the Old Testament as brothers in one human race, and as made to differ for a time largely that good may result to all. Such is the nature of the particularism objected to.

This closer relation of the Hebrews to God is not a meritorious one. It is not the consequence of what they are in themselves, but of what God in the exercise of His sovereign grace would make of them. Such is the ground of the particularism in question.

Its aim is twofold:

(*a*) Defensive: that they may be kept from contamination as being the sons of His love and so His special agents on earth.

(*b*) The securing more general and effectual application of divine grace to the whole human race. A "wall of partition" is at first erected; but, as we have seen, it is from the first made known that this wall is ultimately to be thrown down. Jerusalem is thus separated from the world, but it is that the world may "look for redemption in Jerusalem." Thus the objection under consideration falls. Indeed, it and the objections to the doctrine of election in general proceed on three glaringly false principles: first, that God may not favor some that they may be agents of blessing to all; second, that God cannot love all, unless He shows His love in the

same way to all; and third and fundamental that God is bound to treat all sinners, we do not say justly, but alike.

g. The seventh and final objection to the ethics of the Old Testament is that it contains positive precepts and indirect requirements and sanctions that are in conflict with the teachings, and implications of the New Testament and so with high morality. To be more specific, the objection is that under the Old Testament loose divorce and polygamy were sanctioned, also slavery and also retaliation. How, then, it is asked, can the moral system of the Old Testament be from God? We would answer:

(1) These precepts and sanctions to which exception is taken, though given by Moses, were given by him on the authority of God. This is of vital importance. Had they proceeded from Moses, they would have been immoral. Inasmuch as the constitution of human society is such that slavery and loose divorce and polygamy are against its very nature, Moses could not be justified, had he commanded any one of them himself. As we have already seen, so long as the present divinely appointed order of things continues no *man* may *of himself* do or enjoin anything contrary to it. Because it is of divine appointment its expressed or implied precepts are binding in their own nature.

God, however, since He is the author of this constitution, may modify, or may even set aside, the requirements involved in it. As we have also seen, it is not in this instance as it is in the case of precepts founded on the essential, and consequently, immutable nature of God, such as the precept to speak the truth. These even God cannot change. The particular kind of moral precepts, however, that we are considering, those grounded on His free constitution of things, He can and may, as has just been remarked, recall or suspend; and should there be a right occasion for this, that is, should the interests of righteousness so require, then, of course, He ought to do it. The objection, therefore, that the Old Testament teaching as to divorce and polygamy and slavery is inconsistent with that of the New Testament amounts in it-

self to nothing. Instead of objecting, we should inquire if a sufficient reason for the difference between the Old and New Testaments in this respect cannot be discovered. These are precepts which God can and ought to suspend, should the interests of righteousness so require. Hence, it is for the objector to show that these interests do not in the cases in question so demand.

As to the precepts enjoining retaliation, it is quite similar. In the enactment "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" there would be nothing immoral, if this exaction were not contemplated as about to proceed from a cruel vindictive disposition in gratification of private revenge. Now this was expressly guarded against. Limits were put on the avenger. Strict justice he was to secure, but more than strict justice—never. Retaliation, therefore, as called for in the Old Testament it could not be immoral for God to require. He would merely be commanding the enforcement of justice pure and simple; and this, of course, He has always the right either to do Himself or to enjoin on others. While He must be just even in His mercy, He need not temper His justice by mercy; for, as will be remembered, it is of the very essence of mercy, that, unlike justice, its exercise depends on the free choice of God instead of being a necessity of His nature. Hence, while for no reason could God cease to be just, and to command justice, many reasons may arise why He may not and should not require mercy. Therefore, though it would have been immoral in the Israelites, had their acts of retaliation been independent of the divine command, for the law of kindness obtained under the Old Testament as truly as under the New; it was not immoral, since these acts were because of and according to God's command: and it at once devolves on us to ask if there were not reasons why God should thus enjoin under the Old Testament what we know that He distinctly forbids under the New.

(2) These reasons in all these cases we find in the fact that these enactments, though not prohibitory, were invariably regulative.

(*a*) That we may appreciate this, let us put ourselves, if we can, in the age in which the precepts that we would vindicate were given. We should then find polygamy and divorce in general use or rather abuse. We should meet a hardhearted and rebellious people who not only did not regard the marriage relation as supremely sacred, but who were even disposed to act as if it were not sacred at all. In this deplorable state of things we should scarcely deem it prudent, it would seem, to forbid altogether a practice so common as divorce, especially in view of the disposition to dissolve marriage without divorce and even to do away with marriage altogether. Might not divorce, however, be regulated? and if so, would it not be better to regulate it than to prohibit it? So radical a measure as prohibition would be likely to be utterly disregarded. A law regulating divorce, however, would probably be heeded. Through such a law, the husband might be prevented from casting off his wife without ceremony. He might be restrained even from putting her away in a passion. He might be required to take time to consider the matter, to bring it before some scribe or learned man, to go through the long and slow formalities in order to a legal divorce. In this way much more opportunity might be given for the reconciliation of husband and wife. In this way the regulation of divorce would lessen the number of divorces, while the absolute prohibition of it would, doubtless in that rude age result in utter disregard of the marriage relation. In this way a regulative enactment would do all that could be done then to guard its sacredness. Who will say that under such circumstances such an enactment would not be most expedient? And this being so, who will deny that in this expediency we have a sufficient reason for God's sanction of divorce and toleration of polygamy under the Old Dispensation? Indeed, the case being as it was, would He not have acted immorally, had He not thus exercised in the interests of morality His own proven right to modify or even to repeal the precepts implied in His own constitution of things? Had He not done so, it would simply have been failure on

His part to do what for Him as God was right that absolute right, as far as was then possible, might be approximated.

(*b*) Take slavery. Were we to go back to the time of the Pentateuch, we should find it well-nigh universal. We should discover, too, that, with scarcely an exception, it was horribly cruel. Egyptian bondage would seem to be the type rather than the exception. Certainly it was no more oppressive than the slavery with which, hundreds of years later, we meet in Greece and even in Rome. Nor is this all. In that rude age of which we are speaking slavery, while it need not have been as rigorous as it was, could scarcely have been other than universal. Indeed, it is difficult to see how it can be dispensed with in certain phases of society without, at all events, entailing severer evils than it produces. When, for example, war is carried on for conquest or revenge, there are but two ways of dealing with the captives, namely, putting them to death or reducing them to slavery; and slavery is the milder of the two. Thus in this and in many other cases slavery was the better of the alternatives that offered, and may hence be regarded as in such an age a blessing rather than a curse.

Under these circumstances, therefore, it would scarcely seem possible to prohibit slavery altogether. If it were done, there would be no likelihood that any would heed the prohibition. Moreover, though it should be possible, it would not appear to be wise. The better of two necessary alternatives, it would be an evil to do away with it. It could, however, be regulated. While sanctioned, it might be rendered less oppressive. With considerable prospect of being regarded, we might admonish the master to treat his slave, "not as a bond servant, but as an hired servant and a sojourner," and again, "not to rule over him with rigor." We might even, with some hope of carrying our point, provide for a termination of servitude in the case of individual slaves and enjoin masters when that time should in any case arrive 'not to let the slave go away empty, but to remunerate him liberally out of his flock, his floor and his wine-press.' We might thus, as the Mosaic law did, while sanctioning slavery, regu-

late and restrain it in very many directions. In this way we should both render it less oppressive and should foster a sentiment which would tend toward the abolition of slavery. Thus, while we should not eradicate it at once, we should do all that, under the circumstances, could be done towards its extinction.

Who will say that in this we should not have a sufficient reason for God's sanction of slavery under the Old Dispensation? Indeed, the case being as it was, would He not have acted immorally, had He not thus exercised in the interests of morality His established right to modify or even to repeal the precepts implied in His own constitution of things? Had He not done so, it would simply have been failure on His part to do what for Him as God was right that absolute right, as far as was then possible, might be approximated.

(*c*) Again, take the law of retaliation. Were we to go back to the age of the Judges, we should find, that "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. xxi. 25); that it was right in his own eyes to get all that he could out of his neighbor; and that in consequence injustice, cruelty, and unrestrained vengeance were well-nigh universal. Under such circumstances it would seem to be worse than folly to preach the doctrine of "the Sermon on the Mount," "Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you" (Matt. v. 44). So to preach at that time would be to do what the same sermon elsewhere forbids; viz., to "cast your pearls before the swine" (Matt. vii. 6). Not only would the preaching be disregarded; it would be despised and the preacher, very likely would be destroyed. It might be possible, however, to publish a law of strict retaliation, such as "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Matt. v. 38). In this way, though mercy would not be called into exercise, justice could be secured. In this way much cruelty could be prevented and much violence could be rebuked. In this way, too, right could be emphasized and distinguished sharply from might. Nor would this be all. By not merely sanctioning strict retaliation as a right, but insisting on it as a duty, the sense of justice

would be developed, as we may say, positively. Men would be made to feel that while the passion for revenge might not be gratified beyond what was strictly just, wrong ought to be punished as much as was just; that while no pains should be spared to subordinate personal feeling to justice, every effort should be made, and in spite of any inconvenience, to vindicate justice. In this way also great good would be effected. Mercy would not be developed but the only possible foundation for true mercy would be laid. For after all, it is bound to degenerate into a maudlin sentiment, unless it rests on a vigorous conception of justice. Now such as we have seen being the age in which the law of retaliation was introduced, and such as we have just observed being the effect of the operation of the law, who will say that its enactment was not the most expedient course at that time open? Such being the case, who will deny that we have in this a sufficient reason for God's publication of this law? Indeed, the facts being as they were, would He not have acted immorally, had He not thus exercised in the interests of morality His undoubted right to refrain from enjoining mercy, to insist on strict justice only? Had He not done as He did, it would simply have been failure on His part to do what was for Him clearly right that absolute right, as far as was then possible, might be approximated, and even that mercy itself might hereafter be safely developed. This, in a word, is only another illustration of the principle already established, that many things which God ought now to require He ought not to have exacted, as He did not, under the former preparatory and disciplinary dispensation.

(3) Nor may it be objected that God's conduct in these cases is like that, for example, of municipalities which license the admittedly evil saloon, hoping by thus regulating it to work toward its entire prohibition. The objection overlooks what is essential; viz., the difference between man's relation to the present constitution of things and God's relation to it. That difference, as has already been often pointed out, is this. Man, because included in the present constitution

of things, is bound by the laws which it implies; and he is thus bound just so long as the present constitution of things continues. Hence, for him of himself to license the saloon even with a view to at length prohibiting it, or for him of himself to sanction unscriptural divorce even for the purpose of finally abolishing it, would be to do evil that good might come. Inasmuch as the present constitution of things, in which he is included and by which he is bound, is such as to render both intemperance and loose divorce contrary to it, man has no right of himself to license or tolerate either for any purpose for even a moment.

God's relation, however, to the constitution of things is radically different. Because He is the author of the present constitution of things and so independent of it, He is not bound by it as is man, but is bound only by the righteousness of His own essential nature. Hence, for righteous reasons, God may modify or repeal for the time being the implications of the constitution of things though that constitution continues. Thus He may declare that divorce under certain limitations shall not be wrong; and if *He* does so in the interest of righteousness as *He* will and must, then it will neither be wrong for men to use divorce within those limitations, nor for Him to provide that they may. In a word, while man, if he were of himself to license loose divorce, would be doing evil though he were to act out of regard for righteousness; God, when He licenses it, is simply doing what He as God has the right to do and what thus in His case is right, that good may come. Of course, it would be otherwise in the case of precepts such as that requiring truthfulness which are founded on His immutable nature. These even He may not and cannot change on any account. God never relaxes in the interest of idolatry or because of idolatry. This is because idolatry is against His nature. Laws, however, like those which we have been considering and which are rooted only in the order of things which He Himself has freely appointed He may modify when the "hardness of men's hearts" or other

abnormal reasons, as the changes wrought by sin, render such a course in the interests of morality.

(4) Nor may it be objected either that God's policy in regulating the evils under consideration instead of prohibiting them seems to be a recognition of the false principle that ability limits obligation. His concession is not to inability, but to incapacity; not to a lack of moral power growing out of a sinful disposition, but to a weak because undeveloped moral nature. Now for this latter, which we call incapacity, men may not be held responsible. It is self-evident that one may not be required to be or to do what he has not the faculties to be or to do, or what he has not the opportunity to be or to do. The standard of right is the same for a child as for a man, but the child may not be expected to realize the standard as the man is expected to. He is too little.

Nor may it be replied that the incapacity of the Israelites was in part the result of sin; that their wickedness both retarded their moral development and weakened their moral perceptions. This is true. It does not, however, alter the case. As Dr. A. A. Hodge says, "this irresponsibility arises solely from the bare fact of the inability (incapacity). It matters not at all in *this respect* whether the inability (incapacity) be self-induced or not, if only it be a real incapacity. A man, for instance, who has put out his own eyes in order to avoid the draft, may be justly held responsible for *that act,* but he can nevermore be held responsible for seeing, i.e., for using eyes which he does not any longer possess."[9] In like manner, God might not have made concessions to any inability of the Israelites that consisted in the want of proper desires and affections, that, in a word, was voluntary and so sinful; but He might, and He did, make numerous concessions to lack of capacity or of opportunity; and He might as He did do so when this lack of capacity or of opportunity was in large part the result of sin. This would not be to affirm the false principle that ability limits obligation; it

[9] *Outlines of Theology,* p. 344.

would be to affirm the true principle that the nature and not the origin of a human condition determines the relation of its consequences to responsibility. For the consequences of what is voluntary and so moral, however caused, we are responsible; and so God may not make concessions to these consequences: but for the consequences of what is not moral, for what is incapacity rather than inability, however caused, even though the result of sin, we are not responsible, and so God may, and often should as He does make concessions to these.

(5) The difference between the Old Testament and the New in the respects under review is formal rather than real; of degree only, and not of kind. The inconsistency alleged and objected to is one of appearance merely. True identity does not reside in looks or even in sameness of material, but in unity of organizing principle. The plant in full flower appears altogether unlike the little blade which first makes its way above the ground, and its elements are constantly being destroyed and renewed and increased and modified. Nevertheless, the plant in full flower is the same with the little blade; there is the most beautiful and wonderful consistency between them; the organizing principle of both is identical.

Precisely so, the moral requirements of the Old Testament are inferior to those of the New, and they differ from them in number as in degree: but in spite of this, there is no inconsistency; there is a true identity; the organizing principle of both is one and the same; the purpose of the Old Testament's numerous accommodations to the moral immaturity of the age was that an age might be prepared for wherein with the prospect of being appreciated, that moral standard could be urged in its entirety which from the first had been the only true one, even the perfect holiness of God.

h. On this whole subject of ethical objections to the Old Testament it should be remarked in closing that the objections are not so much to specific details of God's action or permission as to the general method according to which

He has decided to administer the universe. There cannot be growth without development. We can conceive of the creation of a fullgrown plant; but we cannot conceive of a growing plant without first the seed, then the blade, then the bud, then the flower, and then the fruit; and while we may regard each one of these stages as perfect looked at by itself, we must consider it inferior to that by which it is followed.

Exactly so, there cannot be a growing evolving universe without development. It is necessarily involved in the very conception of such a universe, that it should advance by successive stages; that, consequently God should reveal Himself to these by degrees adapted to their power of appreciation; and that these degrees, while they should be perfect considered in themselves, should be inferior to those for which they were to be the divinely provided preparation. Even God Himself could not have it otherwise, were He to choose to create such a universe and to administer it according to such a method. The progressive character would be an essential and so indispensable part of the kind of universe chosen, of the sort of method of administration decided on. To object, therefore, to the relatively inferior because essentially preparatory and progressive nature of Old Testament ethics is really to object to the wisdom and righteousness of God's eternal purpose. This is to make our little and miserable selves rather than the glorious nature of the infinite God the ultimate standard of right. And this is as foolish as it is impious. Common sense is as much against it as conscience.

3. In what, then, will the complete vindication of Old Testament ethics consist?

a. As has just been shown, it is not required of us to relieve the ethical system of the Old Testament of the charge of inferiority to that of the New. Indeed, were it not inferior to it, that would be a decided objection. It would then be out of relation to and so unfitted for its own stage in God's scheme of ethical progress.

b. What, however, is required of us, if we would vindicate the ethics of the Old Testament, is:

(1) To evince, as has been done, that this inferiority consists in incompleteness only and so involves no imperfection and thus no immorality. The inferiority is that of the seed to the blade, that of the blade to the budding plant, that of the bud to the flower, that of the flower to the fruit. Though inferior to the flower in development and so failing to manifest not a few of its beauties, the bud is just as perfect as the flower, if we consider it in relation to its function in the expanding life of the plant. While it is a very incomplete exhibition of the life of the plant, there is in it nothing out of harmony with the life principle of the plant. Indeed, were it more nearly complete, it would be out of harmony with the general development of the plant. Both in itself, therefore, and in its adaptation to the growth which it expresses and forwards it is perfect.

Now precisely this must be, as it has been, proven in the case of the ethics of the Old Testament. It must be shown, that its precepts require only what God may rightly enjoin; only what men ought to do, either because of the nature of God, or because of the divinely appointed constitution under which they live, or because of the positive command of God: and in addition to this, that these divine requirements, whether as involved in the divine nature, or as implied in the constitution of things, or as grounded in a "thus saith the Lord," are so adapted to the moral attainments of the age as to be appreciated by it and to develop them. That is, the vindication of the ethics of the Old Testament calls on us first of all, to establish that, while less nearly complete than and so inferior to New Testament ethics, both in itself and with reference to the moral life that it expresses and would forward, it is *perfect*.

(2) We must show, that, with all its incompleteness and consequent inferiority to New Testament ethics, Old Testament ethics is so different from and so superior to the ethics of all contemporaneous religions as to be most evidently divinely unique. Not only is it all that it should be in itself: but in the respects in which it is most manifestly this,

it is conspicuously out of analogy with the other ethical systems of that day; it is so evidently not of earth that it must be from heaven. Its characteristic features are clearly of unearthly origin. These features, these elements of unique superiority over the ethics of that age, are as follows:

(*a*) The emphasis put on the personality of God. As we saw, this is *the* characteristic of the ethics of the Old Testament. It refers everything to the will of God. Duty is what He bids us do; virtuous is what He would have us be; the supreme good is His voluntary and gracious favor. Elsewhere we find only the crudities of polytheism, or the abstractions of pantheism or the inconsistencies of dualism. In the Old Testament—that is, in its dogmatics and ethics—we discern not a trace of these: God is always conceived, not only as a single and supreme, but also as a self-conscious, willing and, therefore, personal being.

(*b*) The emphasis put on the holiness of God. Among the ethnic religions no such doctrine was inculcated. No Greek entertained such a belief: Zeus was an adulterer. The gods of the Semites were their shame: the cruelties of Moloch sacrifice were joined with the abominable pollutions of Asherah worship. In a word, the conception of Jehovah as the Holy One, as the Righteous Ruler, was original. It was a unique excellence of Old Testament ethics.

(*c*) The emphasis laid on the personality of man. In striking contrast with all heathen views, according to which man is either subject to nature or has nature constantly before him as a cramping and never wholly to be overcome power, the Old Testament teaches, that man is made in the image of the divine Person; that, like Him, he is a free and ought to be a holy being; that dominion over nature has been given to him; and that he will be held strictly accountable for the use which he may make of his freedom.

(*d*) The resulting practical conception of evil. Heathen ethics relegated it almost exclusively to the purely ideal sphere. It conceived of evil as a mere possibility, or as an exceptional and isolated reality, or as a natural necessity

which underlay all human guilt and in which, consequently, guilt lost its distinctive character as guilt. The Old Testament, on the contrary, and as might have been expected from its unique discernment of divine and human personality, looks evil earnestly and squarely in the face, and regards it as a sad all-prevalent reality, the guilt of which lies in the free act of man, and is participated in without exception. Thus the feature which makes Shakespeare distinctly a Christian dramatist is that he refers all conflicts to such voluntary offences, though the transgression may be but slight, and have taken place in the inner world of the thoughts. "Hence, it is not the power of fate, but the law of righteousness to which he gives prominence in the intricate fabric of human affairs."

(*e*) The spirituality of the ethical life. This results from the Old Testament's vivid conception of both sin and personality. Righteousness attaches fundamentally to the will, to the heart, to the personality; and it is not only the sinful act, but equally the disposition to evil that is condemned. Of course, it is not denied that here and there heathen moralists, as notably the Zoroastrians, insisted on purity of heart. What is affirmed is that all heathen systems of ethics, as also the later Pharisaism of the Jews themselves, put the emphasis on outward works. It is the singular glory of Old Testament ethics that, also like the New, it has for its first and great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. vi. 5).

(*f*) The Old Testament makes faith the root of true obedience. As it points to the will of God as the sole standard of duty, so it points to the grace of God as the only adequate power for duty. Heathen ethics is characteristically self-sufficient. Seneca voiced its prevailing feeling when he wrote in his 31st epistle: "The cause and foundation of a happy life is self-confidence. What is the need of prayer? Make yourself happy: rise up and fashion yourself worthy of God." How different the teaching of the Old Testament,

that it is only when man accepts in faith the divine promise of salvation, and only on the basis of this faith, that he is able to attain to true obedience of life. And the difference in the result of the two systems is equally striking. The history of heathenism is the history of moral deterioration. Even Stoicism, through trusting in itself, lost itself. The history of Israel, on the contrary is the history of moral development. We have but to pass from "the law" to "the prophets" to realize that, in spite of its glaring faults, the "chosen nation," through trusting in the Messianic promise, were growing toward God. In the not a few whom the Saviour would seem to have found "waiting for the consolation of Israel" and "looking for redemption in Jerusalem" we see the unique power of faith in Jehovah. In the scattered but glorious remnant we discern the solitary instance in that day of growth in true virtue.

(*g*) The hope for the future that pervades the Old Testament. From the protevangelium to the last word of the latest prophet its look is ever forward, nor is there ever a doubt that that look will be rewarded. In sharpest contrast with this is the attitude of the ethnic faiths. Their gaze was always backward; their "golden age" was ever in the past. Hence, their characteristic note became one of weariness, if not of despair. When Christ appeared it was a world without hope that He found. The obligation to righteousness was felt, but the attainment of righteousness was given up. The ancient Zoroastrian sufis, it is true, did look forward to the coming of a mediator called Soseoch, who would put down Ahuman, and breaking all chains, usher in a golden age of righteousness and peace. This, however, was to be preceded by a general conflagration, a destruction of the present order of things. Even they knew only of equal conflict between good and evil here and now. They were not aware of the divine Spirit who giveth us the victory. They did not look confidently on to a day when He should be poured out on *all flesh*.

(*h*) This moral regeneration and the redemption of which it was part were conceived of by the Old Testament

as for the world. The "peculiar people" of God, the Hebrews alone of all antiquity were taught to regard Him as the Saviour of *all* men. The cultured Greek called his neighbors barbarians. The disciplined Roman considered the nations around him as fit only to be subjugated. It is not more true that the ancient world despaired of moral salvation than it is that, had they conceived of it, they would have thought of it and desired it, each individual nation, only as promised to itself. In almost no respect does Old Testament ethics show its superiority to all other systems so conspicuously as in this, its universalism.

(*i*) The already and frequently implied progressive character of Old Testament ethics. Nowhere does this appear so clearly as in relation to the particularism and the universalism which we have just been considering. The first conception of charity, for example, was that it should not extend outside the nation of Israel. The stranger who had not become a citizen was to be beyond its reach. This limitation, however, is one that tends to pass away. In the book of Ruth a Moabite woman is taken into a Hebrew family and becomes famous as the ancestress of King David. The beautiful prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple does not fail to include "the stranger that cometh out of a far country." In the Prophets the universal spirit of love begins to breathe out hopes of a time when of Egypt and Assyria it shall be said by God, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance" (Isa. xxx. 25). As another has written, "All this shows that while the moral codes of other nations either remain where they began, or else grow narrower and less pure with the progress of years, that of Israel tends to purify itself, and to widen out into a stream that shall carry cleansing and blessing to all mankind." A law with such inherent power of working out to wider accomplishment, and with such force of self-purification, was the product of no mere human legislation. A divine hand was all the time guarding its evolution.

(*j*) It is, however, just at those very points at

which, as we have seen, objection is taken most decidedly to the ethics of the Old Testament—it is precisely at these points that the unique transcendance and so the divine origin of the system may be most clearly brought out.

(i.) The marriage law. We must admit, in view of its sanction of polygamy and of loose divorce, that it does not raise marriage to the height of the Christian view. Nevertheless, where is the heathen system that conceives of the moral significance of the family so highly as does the Old Testament, or that puts marriage so clearly on the religious and moral basis? The very fact that it was the law of God that sanctioned divorce emphasized the truth, only partially if at all recognized in other systems, that marriage is normally a religious union and not a mere civil contract. This conclusion, moreover, is sustained by the state of society among the Jews. This shows that they regarded their marriage laws as we have done. Family life among them was uniquely pure. The position of women and of children was singularly high. While in the mind of Plato, for example, the state included only three classes, the men of thought who ruled, the soldiers who fought, and the laborers who produced; and while in his *Republic* the woman could not be the loved mother at the head of the home, but only one whose low function it was to bear children and do housework; and while, consequently, he knew nothing of a morality valid alike for men and women; and while Aristotle regarded women as only nature's failures in the attempt to produce men,—in the Old Testament we find no specific rules as to the treatment of women laid down, but the wife is treated as having an equal interest with her husband in the family and an important part in carrying out the divine purpose. Though a woman, she had legal rights. Indeed, it is just in the sphere of that divorce legislation to which so many object that the excellent practical effects of the ethics of the Old Testament come out most clearly. The home of the Israelite was the brightest spot in the ancient world.

(ii.) Slavery. Serious objection has been raised

as we have seen to the Old Testament system on the ground that it directly sanctioned this. Yes: it did; but we have only to contrast the slave laws of the Hebrews with those of other nations to be impressed with the unique moral superiority of the former. "All the powers which we are accustomed to connect with slavery, in modern as well as in ancient times,—the absolute surrender of the slaves to the arbitrary will of the master, his right to chastize them without limit, to employ them in unremitting toil, and even to kill them with impunity —all these are set aside by the Mosaic law. It changes the slavery of Israelites into an exceedingly mild service relation, and by extremely humane regulations it protects the slavery of non-Israelites from arbitrary and severe oppressiveness. To even foreign slaves it gives a part in the worship and in the blessings of the people of God. It granted them the right to become naturalized, a step which must sooner or later have resulted in their independence and complete fusion with the nation."

Compare this condition of things with that, for example, in Greece or Rome. In both the slave was regarded as no more a human being. He had become simply a piece of property to be treated according to the work that he could do or the price that he would bring. This is the point of the whole difference, but no difference could be greater or more awful. Old Testament ethics considers the slave still a man made in the image of God. Aristotle in his *Politics* says, "A slave is just a movable instrument endowed with life, which, under direction, gives motion to other inferior instruments." At Rome slaves were commonly classed with wagons and oxen: and Cato the Censor, that model husband and father, that representative of the best Roman virtue, forbade his slaves to entertain any sentiments of piety, reserving such exclusively for himself; and he exposed them remorselessly in old age, when there was no more possibility of selling them, to storm and starvation. Can we study this fearful contrast and not be constrained to ask, Whence the difference? Can we seriously ask the question, and not be forced to look above for

its answer? The humaneness of slavery among the Hebrews, its inherent and evident tendency toward strict justice, put it so out of analogy with anything of its kind on earth at that time that we must turn away from earth for its origin. This is so from our point of view even more than it would be, had slavery been prohibited altogether by the Old Testament. It is simpler and easier to forbid an objectionable practice entirely than it is to regulate it in the interests of morality. In Hebrew slavery we have the one instance of slavery which guarded the slave from oppression and the master from degradation. Does not this strengthen the presumption that it was sanctioned and regulated by a higher than human wisdom? Men cannot make with evil even such (so-called) compromises as do not themselves involve evil and not run the risk of falling into evil, and this is a reason why it is never right for men in any way to tamper with evil. God, however, can make even the wrath of men to praise Him; and this is the reason why, by accommodating His legislation to the low moral capacity of men in things that do not contradict His immutable nature, it is right for Him to work even such low moral capacity for His own glory. Of this we have, perhaps, no better illustration than Hebrew slavery.

(iii.) The Old Testament doctrine of retaliation, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Ex. xxi. 24, 25). It sounds hard and it is unchristian; but contrast it with similar precepts in other ethical systems, and at once the superiority and inferentially the divinity of that of the Old Testament will appear. "Thus the law of retaliation which is to be found in the Hindu code is framed in an entirely different spirit from that of Scripture. The idea of justice, which is an essential part of the Jewish law, is violated in the Hindu, as will be seen from the following extract from Professor Monier Williams' *Indian Wisdom*: 'The three most conspicuous features of Manu's penal laws are exactly those which mark the earliest forms of criminal legislation; viz., severity, inconsistency, and a belief in

the supposed justice of the lex talionis; the latter leading to punishments which, in later times, would be considered unjustifiably disproportionate to the offences committed and sometimes barbarously cruel. Thus: "With whatever member of the body a low born man may injure a superior, that very member of his must be mutilated. A once born man insulting twice born men with abusive language must have his tongue cut out. Should he mention their name and caste with insulting expressions, a red hot spike, ten fingers long, is to be thrust into his mouth. Thieves are to have their hands cut off, and then to be impaled on a sharp stake. A goldsmith detected in committing frauds is to have his body cut in pieces with a razor." ' "

Thus while it is true that the Hebrew law lacks the mercifulness so characteristic of the precepts of the Gospel, it is quite as true that it is shaped by an idea which is as divine as that of mercy and which is altogether lacking in the ethnic laws of retaliation; viz., justice. Hence, if it is with respect to its lex talionis that we are disposed specially to object to Old Testament ethics, it is also precisely in connection with this law that one unique and inferentially divine feature of this ethical system appears most clearly; viz., its subordination of private passion to strict justice.

(iv.) The wars of extermination. These are often objected to on the ground that they were wars of extermination. When, however, we contrast them with the common usuages of war in those fierce times, the sternness of Joshua seems wonderful in its dignified restraint. Compare his actions, for example, with that of the Assyrian king Sardanapalus.

They brought me word (says that monarch)
That the city of Suri had revolted
Chariots and army I collected.
From the rebellious nobles
I stripped off their skin and made them into a trophy.
Some I left in the middle of the pile to decay.
Some I impaled on the top of the hill on stakes.
Some I placed on the side of the pile, in order, on stakes.

I flayed many within view of my land, and
Arranged their skins on the walls.
I brought Ahiyababo to Nineveh. I flayed him and
Fastened his skin to the walls.
I drew near to Tela.
I besieged the city with onset and attack.
Many soldiers I captured alive.
Of some I stripped off the hands and feet; of others I cut off
The noses and ears, and I destroyed the eyes of many.
One pile of bodies I reared up while they were yet alive,
And I raised another of heads on the height within their town.
Their boys and their maidens I dishonored.

Where can we find anything, even in the most terrific judgments described in the Old Testament, that will compare at all with this by no means unparalleled record from the *Cuneiform Inscriptions of Western Asia*?

What, then, shall we think of the ethical system of the Old Testament, which, while it required, as we have seen, the extermination of the inhabitants of Canaan, nevertheless, restrained "the chosen people" from all unnecessary harshness in the execution of their terrible work as the agents of the vengeance of the Lord? When we remember the universally and almost necessarily brutalizing effect of participation in deeds of blood, can we help feeling that the Israelites could not have kept themselves from torturing the captives, could not have contented themselves with simply exterminating them, unless they had realized they were acting always and only as the ministers of Jehovah, and that His law, unlike all others then in force, forbade the cruel disposition and even the passion of private revenge.

(*k*) The unique and inferentially supernatural superiority of the ethics of the Old Testament appears finally and yet more significantly in the humane spirit that pervades it. Not only does it prohibit, as we have seen, all unnecessary harshness; it is characteristically and positively kind. A law that exacts strict justice, for which reason it is often objected to as harsh, it is also a law whose spirit, as truly if not so conspicuously as in that of the New Testament, is love.

The Mosaic code did, it is true, employ the death penalty

more frequently than we do, yet it never employed or allowed cruelty in punishment. Its criminal legislation was vastly more humane than that of England only 150 years ago. This, particularly in that barbarous age, is worthy of notice.

We may not, however, content ourselves with negative proofs, when positive ones are so numerous that we can mention only a few of them.

For example, the provision made for the poor, "When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and the stranger. I am the Lord your God" (Lev. xix. 9, 10). To this add other provisions for the poor. It was said that the poor were never to cease out of the land (Deut. xv. 11). Therefore, "Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land" (Deut. xv. 11). Every man was to have a care for his neighbor, and if he saw him "waxing poor and falling into decay"—getting behind-hand, we should say —he was by law to relieve him (Lev. xxv. 35-37), even though he was a foreigner. No interest was to be taken of such an one, nor any increase; i.e., no payment in any kind over and above the amount loaned. In this and in other respects the law of the Old Testament was much more humane than the best legislation of today. A law of Massachusetts, for example, allows pawn-brokerage. It sets no limit, and makes no provision with regard to it, except a fine for carrying it on without a license. The poor man who is compelled to pawn his watch or his furniture is at the mercy of the broker for the best bargains that he can make; and it generally turns out that the article is lost for a tithe of its value. Our system of pledges is by attachments, mortgages, and bonds, under which, in failure of redemption, the law knows no mercy, and is always in favor of the creditor—never of the debtor.

Set now in contrast with this the Mosaic law. Pledges might be taken; but certain articles, for instance the upper

and nether millstones and the widow's raiment might not be taken. But when pledges were taken of the poor they were not to be kept over night. When it was raiment especially it was to be returned before sundown. It was a law in favor of the poor. Still further, with reference to the poor, the fatherless, and the stranger, as if the provision noticed were not enough, every third year there was to be a tithing of the increase for them. The stranger also was not to be vexed or oppressed, as was the custom among the surrounding and barbarous nations, the remains of which custom are to be found in modern legislation in the form of passports, imposts, prohibitions and disabilities laid upon the foreigner and his traffic.

But enough. In the words of one who has made the institutions of the Old Testament the subject of special study, "The Mosaic, so far from being a barbarous or bloody code, surpasses beyond comparison every other code of the world ever known, for delicate, thoughtful, and beneficent humaneness. . . . No one, I suppose, will accuse Professor Huxley of prejudice in favor of the Old Testament, yet he says: 'There is no code of legislation, ancient or modern, at once so just and so merciful, so tender to the weak and poor, as the Jewish law.' "[10] Now how could this have been? how could it have been in that barbarous age, how could it have been in the case of a people like the Israelites whom many events show to have been by nature no more humane than their neighbors, unless the legislation had been inspired throughout by the Spirit of Him who afterwards came from heaven to earth "to preach the Gospel to the poor"; and who was sent to "heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Let us sum up. The objections of the ethics of the Old Testament we have tried to answer and we believe that we have answered. In itself and in its adaptation to its age this

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[10] *Agnosticism and Religian,* p. 200.

moral system has been shown to be perfect though incomplete. As, however, more than this is needed to vindicate it, so more also, we think has been evinced. The other essential condition of a divine ethical system has been shown to have been met. The unique excellence of Old Testament ethics, and nowhere so strikingly as at those very points with reference to which, as we have observed, objections are raised most frequently and most vigorously, sustain abundantly, were there nothing else to fall back on, the careful judgment of Mr. Illingworth, expressed in his Bampton Lecture; viz., "The Old Testament Scriptures stand in lonely eminence, as they have always stood, immeasurably superior to all else of their kind."[11]

Princeton. WM. BRENTON GREENE, JR.

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[11] *Personality, Human and Divine,* p. 173.