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THE ETHICS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

“THE OLD TESTAMENT will still be a New Testament to  
him who comes with a fresh desire of information.”

—FULLER.

THE ETHICS  
OF  
THE OLD TESTAMENT

BY  
W. S. BRUCE, M.A.  
MINISTER OF BANFF



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## ERRATUM

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Page 23, line 8 from foot, *for* "possession," *read*  
"prophets."



# THE ETHICS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT



## INTRODUCTION

OUR aim in this volume is to exhibit in short compass the Ethics of the Old Testament in its historic growth and development. It is desirable that we should know what were the sources of moral activity in Israel, and what is the correct interpretation of the life that was lived under the Mosaic Law. We shall try to discover what good men in those days thought of duty, on what grounds they based obligation, and how they endeavoured to fulfil the great end of life.

The ethics of the Old Testament does not start with any abstract theory of virtue. We need not expect to find in it anything approaching scientific method. It was not given in a form that claimed perfection; and it bears the marks of incompleteness on its face. It is a morality designed by God for a people at a rudimentary stage of reli-

gious education. Its fulfilment is to be found in a higher ethics, of which it is prophetic. It ran its race through that early dispensation looking unto Jesus, in whom it blossomed into perfection, and emerged from the stage of hope into one of ever-deepening reality.

But although scientific form be wanting, we shall find, as we examine the history of Israel's growth, that there is a progress from the external to the internal, from the form to the substance, of true morality. Even when, after the Exile, a serious declension from a lofty ethical attitude takes place, the lapse only helps to exhibit the deficiency of the prevalent legalism, and in reality serves a highly educative purpose.

At the present time this subject is one of growing importance. Of recent years a great revival of Biblical study has taken place. The Scriptures of the Old Testament have been invested for all Christian minds with unusual interest, and therefore constitute a peculiarly inviting field of research. The richness of their material, the variety of their forms, the antiquity of their origin, and the unity in which that wonderful variety of topic and treatment is harmoniously blended, have all combined to render this study attractive. To many minds that old book is becoming a new book, standing in new relations, enriched with new contents, and filled with spiritual

meaning. And at the heart of its great historical movement we see a Power, not ourselves, making for morality. The ethics of the Old and that of the New Testament are linked into a solidarity of life and interest. The historical method has helped us, as from a mountain top, to distinguish the trend of the great moral purpose which runs from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of the Revelation of St. John. We understand more clearly the significance of St. Augustine's words: *Novum testamentum in vetere latet: vetus e novo patet.*

The battle of the critics regarding the authenticity and literary features of these ancient writings is not yet ended. The grain is still upon the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite, and vigorous arms ply the flail. But we are confident that the inspired word will yet be victorious, and that this threshing-floor will be purchased for an altar to Jehovah (2 Sam. xxiv. 21). We have not, however, felt it necessary to the discussion of our main theme to enter into historical details or to determine anything as to the manner in which the Pentateuch was composed. It has been sufficient for our immediate purpose to be able to trace a clear development of ethical truth parallel with the growth of Revelation, and to note the well-marked stages of this advance. Of such ethical progress the evidence is ample, and is but little affected by questions of

historical criticism. If we should ultimately have to give up some old and revered traditions that have come down to us regarding the growth of the Canon of the Old Testament, yet the laying aside of these will only the more reveal the intrinsic beauty and perennial freshness of the Scriptures. The loss will prove a gain. The soil will be the better for the critics' sifting, and where weeds once stood, flowers and fruit will grow.

One gain we have already reaped. The results of the thorough methods of study applied to these sacred writings have now been gathered up into a very helpful Biblical Theology of the Old Testament. That theology has arranged the varied material in accordance with its historical development and its relative value, giving each part its proper setting in the organic whole. It has distinguished for us a theology of authors and periods, of law and prophets, of wisdom literature and psalms. It has found types of doctrine in the Old Testament as clearly defined as the Petrine, Pauline, and Johannine types in the New. And by a synthetic process it has sought so to combine all these together as to present the theology of the Old Testament in a unity; while each portion finds its due place in the advancing history of Revelation, and conduces to its organic completeness.

We mention this science because it has a

very close connection with our subject. But we need scarcely add that every other part of the encyclopædia of theology has shared in the benefit and received new life and vigour.

This revived interest in the Old Testament Scriptures will certainly awaken in many minds a deeper concern in the solution of those moral difficulties that connect themselves with that dispensation. Those difficulties are not few, and have brought perplexity to many a tender Christian conscience. That perplexity has been increased rather than diminished by some of the methods employed in solving them. Deeds of very doubtful morality have been excused in a manner that could give little satisfaction to a thoughtful mind. The real difference between the old and new Covenants has been ignored or misunderstood. We are convinced that it is only in connection with a general presentation of Old Testament ethics that these difficult passages can be satisfactorily explained. The force of the argument drawn from them vanishes as soon as the course of ethical education in Israel is understood. No solution of any value can be offered until we have comprehended the disciplinary method of Revelation in the Law and the Prophets. It will be found impossible to explain the treachery of a Jael, or the blood-vengeance of a Gideon, or the employment, as instruments of God's revealing grace, of morally defective

agents, unless we have first grasped the pedagogical purport of the Law, and apprehended the correct relationship of Jehovah to His people.

Of old time God spake to the fathers "by divers portions and in divers manners." This was necessarily so; for their moral training began at the very lowest stage. It was a long curriculum of education, by slow yet sure gradation, from those early days of ignorance, "which God winked at," up to the fulness of time when Jesus Christ appeared. And it is absolutely necessary that we should learn to judge of the conduct of these men in relation to their moral environment and the stage of ethical advancement that they had reached. If wisely and rigidly carried out, this broad principle will go far to modify, if not remove, those difficulties we have mentioned. Individual cases may remain to be estimated on their own merits and in their historical connection. But once we have grasped the unifying divine purpose that threads all the parts of the Old Testament on its one string, and have learned to regard these parts in their relation to the whole historical development, we shall not fail to see "that the justification of the Old Testament method lies, not in itself at any particular stage, but in its result as a whole."<sup>1</sup>

It is a fundamental canon of literature that,

<sup>1</sup> *Lux Mundi*, p. 329.

before we presume to pass judgment on any literary structure, we must know it not only in its parts but in its totality. Partial views are invariably mistaken views; partial statements always give an imperfect representation. Critics will easily find difficulties in the Old Testament that "violate every canon of conscience" if they do not make an effort to understand the method of Revelation and the divine purpose of grace that runs like a golden thread through Hebrew history from its beginning to its end. Let them be content to glance only at portions of it, without seeking to comprehend the grandeur of its proportions and the purity and benevolence of its aim as a whole, and it need not be to us a matter of any wonder that they should miss its true meaning. Just because they have not looked at the morality of the Old Testament in the light of the nation's strange history and environment, they will blunder over the incompleteness of its ethics, its rudimentary legislation, and its defective sense of individual rights. But let us first regard these Scriptures as a living organism; let us ascertain the genesis and the laws of the development of the ethics that they teach; let us understand the determining principle out of which all originate, and to which they again yield a rich return; let us think ourselves back to the exact circumstances of the time—and then we shall see these moral truths in their correct

relation and perspective. And, in the light of the whole, we shall estimate aright the relation and significance of the various parts.

Many books and pamphlets have been written on the moral difficulties of the Old Testament; but with the exception of a few, they have dealt with them apart from the ethical principles that underlie the structure of the Old Testament Revelation. Need we, then, wonder that the solutions and explanations have been almost as many as the authors, and that scarcely one agrees with another? We have spent some time in reading through a number of these pamphlets and books, and we have come from the study of them with the conviction that until the fundamental principles of Old Testament ethics have first been established, it is worse than useless to attempt the solution of these problems. They can be explained, and the justice and force of the explanation can be appreciated, only in the combined light of the progressive education of Israel and of the character of that early dispensation. We shall then see that the end is the test of a progressive revelation, and that Jehovah, in carrying out His moral purpose, was long-suffering and gracious, and content for the sake of ethical ends to "take Israel by the hand," and to lead him even as a nurse leads a child.

In addition to the advantages of such a

treatment, in relation to these moral problems, other benefits will be apparent. Every science is the better for being set in its own light, and having its parts distributed according to their organic connection. Christian ethics is now being cultivated apart from the theology of the New Testament, to the advantage of the science, and with enormous benefit to every student of Scripture, and every preacher of divine truth. In like manner, it will be found useful to give the ethics of the Old Testament a separate treatment. Between this science and Old Testament theology there is a more intimate relation than between New Testament theology and Christian ethics. For the latter does not confine itself to the ethical material given in the Gospels and Epistles, else it should be called the ethics of the New Testament. Its duty is to give due interpretation to the Christian consciousness of to-day, as well as to that of the apostles. The spirit of Christ still dwells in Christians and brings forth the fruit of righteous character and holy living. Christian ethics is therefore "the science of the moral life determined by the Spirit of God."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the Ethics of the Old Testament is in its origin and method historical. In no sense of the word can it be called a speculative science. It springs from an historical revelation, and it must consistently pursue the historical method.

<sup>1</sup> Rabiger, *Theol. Ency.* S. 43.

We fully grant to Old Testament theology the right to deal with "the religious and the moral life of Israel as a connected whole."<sup>1</sup> But in this connection the ethics can receive only a very incidental and subsidiary treatment. We believe it will be found useful to remove it from that subordinate position, and to give it a treatment by itself. It has its own ground, its own essence, and its own great end. And these can be rightly set forth only when it is exhibited in its integrity and historical development.

The two sciences have much in common, but the aim of each will determine its method. Biblical theology deals with the objective revelation contained in the Old Testament. Ethics looks at that revelation as the rule to which Israel must subjectively rise. The former will unfold that wonderful organism of Divine deeds and testimonies which begins with the creation, and advances towards its completion in the person and work of Christ. The latter will show how Israel was to co-operate in this purpose of grace as a free agent, and how that purpose met and satisfied ethical wants. The goal of Old Testament theology is Jesus Christ, the mystery hid from ages, but revealed in the fulness of time; the goal of ethics is the moral perfection of Israel, and, through Israel, the realisation of the

<sup>1</sup> Schultz, *Old Testament Theology*, chap. i. (T. & T. Clark's Trans.)

world-wide kingdom of God. Hence it is that we must speak of Old Testament ethics as an ethics of hope. The full reconciliation of man with God, the total removal of the terrible discord that divides them in the Old Testament, is yet to come. The perfect morality lies in the future. Its complete realisation is to be found in the world-embracing kingdom of God.

This contrast will be referred to again in succeeding chapters; but unless it be firmly grasped at the outset, the ethics of the Old Testament will be burdened with unnecessary difficulties. In Christianity alone does morality reach its perfection, since there alone man has attained to a full consciousness of sin, and has risen through redemption to moral freedom. But in the Old Testament man is only a pupil, to be educated by a wholesome discipline of law into a knowledge of his sinfulness and of his need of deliverance from sin's yoke. Not yet has God Himself, the objective ground of ethics, been personally and historically revealed by the Incarnate Son. Not yet has the Divine Spirit written His Law upon the heart of His people. The Israelite is still conscious of an antithesis subsisting betwixt him and Jehovah, and lives only in a hope, sustained and fed by sacrifice and symbol, of a coming reconciliation. Still is his adoption into true sonship distant, though he is encouraged in many ways to strive to realise it. The command to him is an outward thing, a yoke

and a burden. If a faithful son of Abraham, he will give to it the obedience of a true servant; but he cannot dare to rise up into the assured communion and frankness of one that is a freeborn son. He is still subject to the divine pedagogic spoken of by St. Paul in Gal. iii. 19: "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions till the seed should come to whom the promise was made. . . . 24. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster (tutor) to bring us to Christ." <sup>1</sup>

#### I. CONTRAST BETWEEN THE ETHICS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE ETHICS OF PAGAN ANTIQUITY.

Between the ethics of pagan antiquity and that of the Old Testament there is a difference of the widest and most radical kind. There is no trace of gradual transition from the one to the other. That difference is first seen in the pagan conception of God and of man's ethical relationship to Him. When God is conceived of as a great nature power, it is impossible for man to stand in free relationship to such a deity. If God is but another name for the cosmos, which is clothed with all the attributes of deity, then personal relations

<sup>1</sup> Oehler's *Old Testament Theology*, S. 5 (T. & T. Clark); Ewald's *Lehre der Bibel von Gott*, chap. i. ff.

with such a divinity are out of the question, and morality becomes but a calculus of prudential obedience and adjustment to a power greater than man. Now, as distinguished from the ethics of the Old Testament, where the relations of man to God are all-important, we find that the attention of heathendom is directed mainly, if not altogether, to man's relations to the natural world, or to the supersensible world of abstract being. But since to paganism the deity was only another name for the cosmos, or (as Plotinus would have said) for the highest kind of abstract being, the result was that the Greek and the Alexandrian never realised their personal relationship to God. In fact they could not, from their ethical point of view, rise beyond the morality of the state, or that morality which would realise its ideal by abstraction from all that is earthly and sensuous. But where morality is merged in politics, or where the ethical life is conceived of as deliverance from the defilements of corporeal life, or as a mystical elevation to some supersensuous sphere, it is clear that no progress in ethics is possible. We need not wonder, therefore, if in Greece and Rome the sphere of morals did not stretch beyond the narrow limits of nature, and was never regarded as including anything more than national and tribal law. It follows from this that it was essentially a morality between man and man. For where man's

relation to a personal God is not apprehended, anything approaching an universal ethics is impossible, and only individual virtues can be manifested. Ethics was thus deprived of its unity. An individual might be esteemed for his generosity though lacking in the counterbalancing virtue of thrift; or the sin of unchastity might be glossed over by the offender's patriotism. Morality became but a catalogue of separate virtues, and was deprived of that penetrating bond of union which it receives when the realm of human personalities is bound by innumerable links to the great central personality, God.

Even as between man and man, this morality was not unlimited. Plato could not speak of it as valid for the slaves, without whose help, notwithstanding, he believed society was unable to exist. Regarding virtue as right insight into life, as simply knowledge of a superior kind, he was convinced such knowledge could not be mastered by slaves. The path to virtue was consequently a royal road, open only to the *élite* of mankind—the philosophers, who were able to take high flights of thought beyond this earth's horizon into that spiritual ether where God dwelt. The cultivation of ethical truth was not for slaves and such like; it was the proper task and privilege of the aristocracy of talent. This is a view which contradicts the essential idea of morality, and differs *toto*

*cælo* from that of the Old Testament. Plato has, no doubt, an apprehension of man being made in the image of God, since he urges his pupils to aim at likeness to God as the highest good, and affirms that mundane life should be shaped after the model of the divine ideas. But this likeness to God is never spoken of with any assurance. And to Plato the real relation of mankind in general to God remains an uncertainty.

Any bond that the philosophy of the Academy sought to weave between morality and religion was entirely dissolved by Aristotle. According to the latter, conduct has no relation to the supramundane realm, but only to the state. Obedience to God is out of the question, since He has no ethical relation to man. Morality springs entirely from our rational nature; and being confined in the sphere of its action to the state, it assumes of necessity a political aspect. And hence it came about in the life of the Greeks that religion and morality were totally dissevered, and we find at last in that country the lamentable resultant of an irreligious morality and an immoral religion.

How different all this is from the conception of ethics prevalent throughout the Old Testament! There the personal, living God is set forth as the ground of morals, and all good is absolutely referred to His will. Morality revolves around Him as the planets around

the sun. He is the sublime prototype, the personally holy pattern after which man's life must be shaped. And He rules this world for the good of all His creatures, alike the free-man and the slave, the barbarian and the Greek. That antagonism between moral existence and a non-moral fate which was such a standing riddle to the Greek mind, finds its ready solution in the divine goodness, which is ever ruling the world and guiding it on to its future goal. The starting-point is the infinitely holy God; and the end of it all is the perfection of man living in communion with that same Divine Father, and in a life of true moral freedom.

But the radical defect in ancient ethics is the absence of the knowledge of sin. To whatever moral height Greek philosophers attain, it is here that they all come short. When the ground principle of morals was the *νοῦς*, it was impossible to bring the *μετάνοια* within the sphere of obligation, far less to feel that deep penitence which breathes in the fifty-first psalm. Pagan ethics spoke of evil; and the problem of suffering caused by that evil lay heavily on its heart. But it thought of it as something isolated, or else as a necessity of things lying behind all human guilt. The Old Testament, on the other hand, opens with the story of man's fall from purity, and speaks of sin as originating in man's free choice. Sin is direct antagonism

to the will of a holy and just God. Paganism, looking to man's relationship to the powers of nature, saw only the inevitable suffering that must ensue. But the Old Testament, looking to man's personal relationship to God, saw the foulness of his sin as it issued forth from his own guilty heart.<sup>1</sup> It is injustice, it is unmerited suffering, it is evil, that is known to Greek and Latin poetry ; it is personal transgression, it is sin, that is the burden of the prophets of Israel. Accordingly, to Plato evil seems inherent in this world of sense and corporeity, and there is no possibility of vanquishing it ; the highest good is to transcend it by a flight into the world of supersensuous ideas. But in Israel there is an expectation of deliverance from sin. A great hope is set before it of a Messiah, a Servant of God, who will break the spell of evil and will inaugurate a world-wide reign of righteousness.

## II. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OLD TESTAMENT ETHICS.

It is advisable, before entering on historical details, to present to our readers, at the begin-

<sup>1</sup> "To the ancient Jew man is pre-eminently an ethical being, and his speculative ability is quite secondary. Hebraism is further unique in this respect that it clearly sees that the disorder in man's nature is deeper than any intellectual impotence, deeper too than the opposition of the appetites and the reason ; that it is a breach in his being, caused by his own self-will."—W. L. Davidson, *Theism and Human Nature*, p. 52. Burnett Lectures.

ning, the general characteristics of this science. Principles are apt to be lost sight of amid a multitude of details. It will give the reader a better grasp of the subject, if at this point we briefly sketch the ethical view of life and of history found in the Old Testament. As was said, there is no such thing as scientific form attaching to this subject. Yet it must not be supposed that it is devoid of consistency, or that a doctrine of Supreme Good does not pervade it. Unsystematic though it may seem at first, we shall discover that a great moral purpose runs through the whole of the history of Israel, and that its ethics has a distinct doctrine of Good and of Duty.

Now, in the Old Testament, the Supreme Good is nothing less for Adam than the realisation of the divine image in himself. Man as created and coming from the plastic hands of God is made to complete in his own nature his likeness to God. He is designed to live a free personal life in communion with his Maker, and evermore to grow up into God-likeness. Man is the masterpiece of Creation, and is therefore to have dominion over all the other creatures. He is their chorægus and master, giving voice to their inarticulate cries, and expression to their needs.

Pagan ethics usually spoke of man as mastered by nature, as its slave and victim. But the Old Testament opens with the story of man standing with his foot over nature, and in

the enjoyment of personal liberty. Adam's superiority over the animal is shown by his giving names, at God's command, to all the beasts of the field and the fowls of heaven. Language is the manifestation of man's dominant power; he who can name the lower animals has by his free intelligence risen above that sphere in which they move.

But this ideal state does not long continue. The Fall takes place, and all is changed. What was a blessing becomes a curse, and the Highest Good is thrown forward into the far distant future of a Messianic hope. Old Testament ethics does not linger in the realm of the ideal. It at once recognises the fact that man no longer lives in a state of moral innocency, and that the capacity of virtue implies the possibility of falling from it. Sin now becomes an actualised fact. And so there arises on the part of man a long struggle against evil, constituting a history which we know to have been shaped by God to higher ends.

The Messianic hope begins to brighten upon man's vision, and henceforward the Highest Good becomes a great world-historical goal. God now separates to Himself from surrounding peoples the man of faith and his family; he who gives God unconditional obedience, who trusts Him implicitly, becomes the father of a nation through whom all the world is to be blessed. The Supreme Good is

not to be realised in any narrow particularism that would limit the divine favour to one family or one land. For a time, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made, it may be so. But the ultimate goal, to which the whole Old Testament moves, is the establishment of a kingdom of righteousness, in which all shall share in the blessings promised to the faithful patriarch; and they shall be called Abraham's children who have Abraham's faith.

As we shall afterwards see, at certain times Israel lost sight of this goal, and proved unworthy of the divine election. But their seers and prophets ever set it before them; they dwell upon it with much eloquence as the grand consummation of their national history. Through Law and Prophets, through Psalms and Wisdom Literature, this fundamental conception of the chief end of Israel's existence has a continuous, unhesitating development. The most strenuous moral effort of the nation is to be directed to making their land God's land, to realise in their home in Palestine "a symbol of the eternal home, a shadow of the Supreme Good."

It is true that, in the course of this ethical education of Israel, earthly goods are spoken of in themselves as an end of man's moral effort, and as a mark of the divine approbation of obedience. The idea of the Highest Good at first is the enjoyment in Canaan of those

material blessings that the heart of man delights in. The reward of righteous service shall be unblighted oliveyards and vineyards, springs of water and flocks of cattle, and all that can add to the material prosperity of a nation. The wife shall be as a fruitful vine, the children as olive plants; there shall be peace in the borders, and plenty in the home, long life, and lasting posterity. But it will be found that, in the interpretation of the Covenant given by the prophets, this thought of the good is enriched with ethical contents, and becomes ultimately the sum of all earthly goods crowned with the blessing of fellowship with God. So that the ethics of the Old Testament cannot be charged with eudæmonism, nor with filling out its conception of moral good by means of utilities alone. It does allow room for these utilitarian values; but the external blessings are of worth only when they are conjoined with the higher blessings of God's favour and presence.

The prophets indeed teach that it may yet happen that these temporal goods shall vanish, and that the very land and homestead in Israel may be reft from the family to whom for generations it belonged. But amid such deprivation of earthly goods, God Himself shall become their greater treasure. Habakkuk gives voice to this conviction of a rich inheritance in Jehovah:—"For though the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the

vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. iii. 17, 18).

It is to be observed that this conception of the Highest Good in Israel is never that of an *individual* good. The modern theory of individualism, which has been one of the ruling ideas of the day, had not taken possession of the Hebrew mind. The truth of a personal immortality had not yet been brought to light. Rather that conception of collectivism, which appears to be rising on the political horizon of to-day, dominates the Old Testament. Morality is based, not upon the individual conscience, but upon the collective conscience of the nation. It is the people of Israel, and not the individual Israelite, that the prophets know as Jehovah's elect one. The servant in Isaiah to whom the blessings are promised is the nation of Israel. The Messianic thought that is embedded in this phrase is constantly expanding throughout the Old Testament; and it tends to keep the interests of the individual out of sight. The hope of the saints was for a great national Deliverer rather than for a personal Redeemer. Even when 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 rather in national than in individual tones. Indeed, it is impossible to explain the intense yearning for vengeance on the foes of Israel, found in the Psalms, except on the ground that the writers feel they are but voicing a national sentiment.

The distribution of the task of Ethics requires us also to notice the mode in which this Highest Good is to be realised, that is, the Old Testament doctrine of virtue. And here that doctrine assumes the very simplest form. The objective principle of Old Testament morality is just the will and the character of God, as revealed to man. The basis of Ethics is not found in the moral consciousness, since sin has defaced the image of God in man, and the human spirit requires to be awakened to its deepest needs. God speaks and man must obey. The will of Jehovah is the one ethically good thing for Israel, for it is the will of the covenant God, who has chosen them to be "the people of His own possession." By divers portions and in divers manners was it revealed unto the fathers by the possession. Sometimes by the giving at a critical turning-point of history of a name, which conveyed a conception of God's character, such as Israel at that moment pre-eminently required. Sometimes by direct communications of His mind to the men of faith, whose prompt obedience had rendered them fit instruments for His use.

Sometimes through neither patriarchs, nor prophets, nor godly women, but in deeds of wondrous grace and condescending love; deeds which, when taken in their right connection, constituted a history that presented unquestionable marks of being divinely shaped and moulded. It must not be forgotten that Revelation is not of necessity tied down to the prophetic record, and that it may be given in the form of a national history of wondrous deliverances, no less than in the shape of a book.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of Israel's history, behind the many miraculous deeds wrought by Jehovah in defence of His people, lay the manifestation of His loving will and gracious purpose. The plagues sent on Egypt were designed, not less to be a punishment for Pharaoh's hard-heartedness, than a revelation of God's love, and an encouragement to Moses to continue in the path of simple obedience to the divine behest. The acts no less than the words of Jehovah declared His will; and it was this that gave these acts their special form and significance.

And when Israel had been led out of Egypt, and found itself a nation, with need of government and worship, then did Jehovah reveal His will in that law which was not only a νόμος τῶν ἐντολῶν (Eph. ii. 15), a law that both commands and demands, but was also a revela-

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Rothe, *Zur Dogmatik*, p. 78; Prof. Bruce, *The Chief Design of Revelation*, ch. i.

tion of the gracious relationship in which He stood to His people. Though it was given in flaming fire from Sinai's thundering top, and heard by Israel with awestruck countenance, yet it was a revelation of a loving will and not of an offended Sovereign Justice. "Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God assayed to go and take Him a nation from the midst of another nation, by signs, and wonders, and war, and by a mighty hand, . . . according to all that the Lord your God hath done for you in Egypt before your eyes?" (Deut. iv. 32, 33). In that Law the Divine Will was explicitly laid down in commandments which were to regulate the order of the whole commonwealth, in all its social, religious, and political relations, and to shape the daily life of the people, so that they might always live in loving communion with God.

On the other hand, the subjective principle of Old Testament morality is a free, loving obedience to this holy will of God. Everywhere in these Scriptures is obedience, unhesitating, implicit, trustful, commended as the primary virtue of the faithful. No analysis of man's consciousness, to find a ground for morals, is ever attempted. Has God spoken? If so, it is enough. Or has He revealed His will by deeds and miraculous providences? Then no more is needed to induce Israel to

obey. Still we shall find that during the ethical progress which is made by the nation, the motives to such obedience become increasingly moralised, and that the obedience of the faithful servant tends to develop into the joyful communion of the loving child. This obedience to God is by the prophets enriched with new moral contents, and the fear of God is united with the love of God. The Psalms of the post-exilic period speak of the Law as an object of constant meditation and of love; while the wisdom literature throughout regards it with the deepest reverence, and all individual action is regulated by the principles of fidelity and righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

But there was another aspect than that of grace in the Sinaitic Law. The commandment at first was outward and positive, uncongenial to man's inner nature. Its definite purpose, under this aspect, was to bring an indictment against the life, and to work only wrath (Rom. iv. 15). "The law came in beside, that the trespass might abound." "I had not known sin except through the law." It was a yoke, and not an inner principle at one with man's personality. Whence it is clear that the motive of the moral life *at first*

<sup>1</sup> Alles einzelne Handeln regelt sich nach den Grundsätzen der Treue gegen diesen Zweck der Gerechtigkeit, Zuverlässigkeit, und Güte. Das äusserliche und das kultische Handeln treten zurück, oder ordnen sich in die Treue gegen Gottes Zweck in Israel ein. Schultz, *Studien und Kritiken*, 1890, erstes Heft, S. 57.

was not love but simple compliance with the will of Jehovah, whose one desire was the good of Israel. But this obedience is to be one of faith, a trust unhesitating and unqualified. And this obedient faith, as exhibited in such saints as Abraham, Moses, Caleb, Joshua, brings with it every Old Testament blessing, whilst its absence is equally marked in the king whose disobedience caused the Spirit of the Lord to depart from him.

As simple obedience to God's command is virtue, so disobedience is sin. In the instance quoted above, Saul might have had good reasons for refusing to delay any longer. Yet Samuel has no hesitation in declaring his disobedience a sin of such magnitude, that it would cost him his kingdom. It was rebellion against the will of God on the part of God's chief minister, and that was enough. In the striking language of that prophet, "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected thee from being king" (1. Sam. xv. 23). It follows from this that the sin of sins, in the Old Testament, that which in the Decalogue is first condemned, because it cuts the very roots of obedience, is the sin of apostatising from God, and falling into idolatry.

From this brief statement of the Fundamental Principles of Old Testament Ethics, it will be seen that it is a preparatory Ethics.

Much training had to be done by it, before Israel was redeemed from the grossness of the life of Egypt, and the stubbornness of the wilderness, and converted into "vessels meet for the Master's use." It is a morality in which stages of progress can be traced through the patriarchal period, through Mosaism and prophetism; and in which we shall find a constant deepening of the sense of sinfulness. It was intended to prepare the chosen people for that time when, what was lacking in the Decalogue should be supplied, and the *power* to make men keep God's Law should be given in the God-man Jesus Christ, "who in His true manhood presents the Law in living form, who is personal Virtue, and who for this very reason becomes also the prime source of the realisation of the End for which the world was made, that is, of the kingdom of God, . . . . in which Law, Virtue, and the Highest Good have become united and blended."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dörner, *System of Christian Ethics*, p. 53 (Clark's Translation).

## CHAPTER II

### THE ETHICAL CHARACTER OF THE OLD TESTAMENT REVELATION

THE moral and religious teaching of the Old Testament is given in connection with the history of God's chosen people. Israel's history is more than the history of Egypt, or of Palestine. It embodies, and is meant to embody, a divine Revelation. Israel is a people selected by God, for the purpose of realising in its religion the salvation of the whole race. Without any false supernaturalism being introduced, the nation in its historic growth becomes the instrument through which is mediated to mankind a revelation of grace. Consequently the religion and the ethics of the Old Testament are always set forth in a natural form. They grow with the people's growth and strengthen with the people's strength. The divine power works at the heart of the history, yet there is nothing violently unnatural about it. The people realise that they stand in personal and moral relations to a personal and moral Deity, and

therefore the ethics of the Old Testament has both a theistic and a naturalistic basis.

Before going further, it is necessary to notice here the attempt made by some critics, in adjusting the religion and morals of Israel to the modern doctrine of evolution, to derive the ethical monotheism of the Old Testament from purely natural sources. Since the time of Hegel, it has been customary, in one school of philosophy, to speak of the idea of Jehovah as having sprung out of the worship of nature. The religion of Israel is represented as one of the necessary stadia in the course of the journey, which primeval man had to make between the religion of nature and that of spirit. It is one of the moments, just as were the religions of Greece and Rome, in the development of monotheism out of heathen polytheism. Of the three religions, indeed, it is spoken of by Hegel as being far from the highest. So far from bringing God and man into closer relations, the Old Testament religion seemed to him to make their separation more complete than ever, and to remove the Godhead to a remoteness of sublimity that rendered faith next to impossible. In the later Hegelian School of the Left, however, there is recognition made of Judaism as an intermediate stage between the pagan religions and that of the New Testament, the stage of authority and law, as contrasted with Christianity, the stage of reason.

The recent theory of Graf and Wellhausen is neither so meagre nor so mistaken as these, although it is impossible to reconcile it with many positive statements made in the Old Testament, and with a number of salient facts occurring in the history. This view represents the religion of Israel, not as originating in a divine act or acts of grace, but as springing from a purely natural source. Jehovah, the God of Israel, is spoken of as if He were developed out of a family, or tribal deity. The conception of the great "I Am" is the genuine outcome, is the legitimate product, of nature worship;<sup>1</sup> and no other origin can be admitted. In this way the distinctive characteristics of Old Testament Revelation and of Israel's history are entirely obliterated. The consciousness which Israel possesses, and which the prophets repeatedly express, of being called of God by acts of divine power to a special mission, is ignored. And attempts are made so to accentuate the resemblances, and minimise the differences, between the religion of Israel and that of surrounding heathen nations, as that the differentia of the elect people shall no longer be visible. Everything in its history comes into it from natural sources. No theocratic element can be permitted to be introduced *ab extra*. Such an element is there; but it, too, is a growth from

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Wellhausen's *History of Israel*, p. 433, and Kuenen's *Prophets and Prophecy in Israel*.

a natural basis. The genius of Israel will sufficiently account for what Kuenen called its ethical monotheism.

But we have good reason for refusing to admit that this ethical monotheism is a natural upward growth from a previous polytheism. So far from its being such, it was directly opposed to the ancient beliefs of the Semitic peoples. These races were unable to rise to the conception of a holy and moral Deity, exalted above nature, and with power to control it for ethical ends. They were content to rest in a belief in a plurality of gods governing the world of which they themselves formed an integral portion. The monotheism of Israel was entirely opposed to the idea, cherished on both political and religious grounds by the nations contemporary with the chosen people, that each people, and even each tribe, possessed its own peculiar deity, whose worship secured the return of reciprocal benefits, and laid upon them corresponding obligations. Indeed we know, from the historical record of the Old Testament, that this opinion often asserted itself with great strength among the Hebrews. It was nothing else than this that led them to those frequent lapses into idolatry, which would otherwise, in view of their unique history, be inexplicable. But those lapses only go to prove that the natural element was all the while present in Israel, and that ethical monotheism was not

the natural outcome of Semitic genius. If the religion of Israel had only nature as its basis, then the difficulty arises, How could the idea of God, the Holy One, who hates all sin, be developed out of nature-worship? And if, for the moment, we admit the possibility of such a development, where are the historical facts that go to support it? The characteristic marks of the Jehovah religion are found not in points of similarity, but in features of positive difference from the other Semitic religions.

From the bare monolatry of which men like Kuenen and Stade speak, it would have been morally impossible for Israel to climb up by natural steps to the ethical monotheism of the prophets, which regards Jehovah as the only true God, and as the Ruler, not of one nation, but of the whole earth.<sup>1</sup> In these features of it, the religion of Israel presents points of sharpest antagonism to the beliefs of contiguous races. In its most essential and characteristic elements it is opposed to them. In their first conception of it, the character of Jehovah appeared to His people a moral character. From the very beginning of their national career, the idea of holiness was present. This central attribute, since it was not a development of the national spirit, must therefore, have been revealed. The Israelite mind was, ever too prone to dwell upon the mere attri-

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Kuenen, *Nat. Religions*, pp. 113, 118; Stade, *Geschichte*, Bd. i. pp. 430, 439.

bute of strength in Jehovah, and to rely on this as their sure defence against their enemies. They believed the divine might was so pledged to their side that God must support their battalions, even though it were at the expense of His righteousness.<sup>1</sup> But the prophetic teaching contradicts this popular idea, and reiterates the truth, that the very sufferings that come on the nation, come from the righteous hand of the Lord, whose hatred of sin is such that He will severely punish His own people that offend, and will rather let them be vanquished than aid them in a wrong cause. It was quite within the scope of His educative purpose to permit a national disaster, such as captivity, to befall Israel, with a view to their purification by such painful discipline, and to the strengthening of their moral and spiritual fibre. This is admitted by all the best representatives of the religious consciousness in the nation. The prophets invariably ascribe such a moral purpose to Jehovah. But since this contradicted the popular creed, and in many instances went right against the grain of Israel, it is evident that it was the result of direct revelation from heaven, and not a natural product of the people.

From Israel's personal relationship to this wise and holy God, emerges the ethical view of life which is common to the Old Testament. Such a view was not gained through a process

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Lux Mundi*, pp. 161, 162.

of reflection on man's moral nature, but was certified to the people by much discipline, and by direct teaching on the part of God's servants. Throughout the whole history of Abraham and his descendants, this assurance of their being set apart, and called to live a moral life, asserts itself. Abram's nephew, dwelling in polluted Sodom, is conscious of his ethical superiority to its inhabitants, and his righteous soul is vexed with their filthy conversation. The feeling of intense revulsion to the crime produced throughout the land by the story of the Levite and his concubine (Judges xx.), is a proof that the people felt they occupied a level of morality far superior to that of the Canaanitish races. In the Levitical code this finds very clear expression: "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances" (Lev. xviii. 3). After detailing the crimes and immoralities which they are forbidden to commit, it continues (vers. 26, 27): "For all these abominations have the men of the land done which were before you, and the land is defiled; but ye shall keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations: I am the Lord your God."

The subject is one that might be discussed at great length. But so much we have felt

bound to say as essential to the purpose of this volume. No proof, worthy of the name of evidence, has yet been adduced to show that this consciousness of Israel's personal relation to a moral Ruler, and of their ethical superiority over other races, was reached by philosophic thought, or by a train of reasoning. It springs out of that historic covenant relationship which was established by God between Himself and the people of His choice. Through this relation Israel attained to its conception of one holy and true God, a God who has His people's moral good so much at heart that, to perfect it, He will not spare them many bitter trials.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DETERMINATIVE PRINCIPLE OF MORALITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

IN every code of morals the essential thing is to bring some quickening positive principle into vital touch with human life. If, on the one hand, the task set before us be to realise a good so transcendental that it can have no practical contact with the common life of the busy world, it may be a morality for dreamers and sentimentalists, but it is powerless to shape the life of the mass of mankind. If, on the other hand, pleasure is the sole end of life and the measure of the good, then man's moral life-task is degraded into a doctrine of prudent calculus, guided by the principle of self-love. While again, if a dualism be maintained between matter and spirit, and the life-aim be to reach a Stoic indifference to everything but virtue, and to maintain a constant contest of the spirit with our physical nature, virtue is apt to develop into a proud self-sufficiency or into a suicidal contempt of the earthly life; and man himself becomes the measure of all things.

Among the people of God in the Old Testament, religion escaped these extremes. They did not dream of making themselves the judges of virtue. The foundation of virtue was not laid in any study of man's moral nature and capacities. But in the ethical conception of God, whose character and will had been made known to them, both in words and deeds of grace, they found the one grand and positive principle of all moral life. It was owing to this cause that Hebrew ethics never fell away into a powerless empiricism, or a dreamy, unpractical philosophy of virtue. And if, in the later days of the Essene asceticism, a form of monastic morality took possession of certain Jewish communities, yet this was done not from any stoical indifference or pride, but from a purely religious motive; and the mistake was one rather regarding the meaning of religion than the rule of morality.

In Israel, God Himself, the all-wise, holy, and good, is the prototype of all moral life and conduct. Though existing from eternity in complete blessedness, He is revealed as one who is willing to become the centre of the entire realm of human personalities. Of His free love and condescension He stoops down from His throne in the heavens, and deigns to dwell among His people. In spite of their ignorance and degradation, He is desirous to associate them with Himself in the carrying out of a great purpose of love towards the

whole world. They necessarily conceive of Him as a vital moral Force, aiming at their truest good, and for the sake of this end separating them for the time being from all contiguous idolatry. As has been often remarked, it is the personal character of Jehovah that gives to the worship of Israel its feature of separateness. He was not like the gods of Moab and Ammon. He was immanent in the world, yet transcended it. The world was not the cause but an effect of God. He was distinct from it, a Spirit freed of all corporeal matter, a spiritual Force, making for morality, and ruling in righteousness. All this is far away from the heathen mode of contemplating Deity. It explains also the religious character of the Hebrew morality. The religious beliefs and the ethical life of Israel are so intimately connected by this fundamental conception of the character of God that they cannot be separated. "Here Jewish ethics joins on to theology; but the theology itself is essentially ethical."<sup>1</sup> In this respect it does not differ from the morality of other primitive nations. In the initial stages of a nation's existence the borderland of ethics and religion is always unsettled. They coalesce at many points. It is only in later times, when thought has strengthened and time has been given for much meditation, that the lines of demarcation

<sup>1</sup> Dr. W. L. Davidson, *Theism and Human Nature*, p. 53 (Burnett Lectures).

are evenly drawn, and they stand apart. Other nations had also a religious ethics. But Israel alone had a clear and certain consciousness of one God, pure and holy, above the world, and not deistically shut up in it, Lord of the world of nature and of men, a spirit dwelling in freedom, supramundane and personal.

It is therefore natural that in Israel the apprehension of moral law should run parallel with their progressive apprehension of the ethical character of Jehovah. At first this character is revealed mainly in designations or names of the Deity, by means of which an advancing series of revelations is given, and the true idea of His nature is bodied forth. Those names occur at important critical junctures in the history of the chosen people, and they are evidently designed to convey all the religious comfort and ethical truth that lie in the name. Kuenen points out<sup>1</sup> how, at every turning-point in Israel's later history, there stands a prophet who is commissioned to bring some word of God to the people. What the prophet did in later days was effected in earlier times by the giving of a new name, representing some new ethical feature in the divine nature. And, let it be observed, the revelation lay not alone in the name, the mere word, but in the adaptation of the name to the occasion that called it forth. The name set

<sup>1</sup> Hibbert Lectures, 1882, p. 231.

forth an aspect of the divine nature that met and satisfied Israel's deepest need. It was a word of cheer for their time of despondency, a word of courage for their cowardice, a revelation of grace for their worthlessness, or of forgiveness for their transgression.

The Book of Genesis, opening with the story of the creation, sets forth God as the One who is before and above all that He has made, the God of power and majesty. Accordingly, the names made use of in this Book are expressive of those features of His character. In the first chapter He is *Elohim*, the God of power, the plural form connoting His unlimited greatness, the plural of majesty. Again, in His communings with Abraham, who amid heathen surroundings deeply felt the need of a Helper, He is *El Shaddai*, the all-powerful, all-sufficient One, who against all appearances of sense will yet make the childless patriarch (Gen xvii. 4) the progenitor of a race as numerous as the sands of the seashore, and will establish him in possession of the land in which he is a stranger. By the same name He declares Himself to Jacob returning after many wanderings to Bethel, and wearied of the troubles caused by his cruel sons. "I am El Shaddai; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins" (Gen. xxxv. 11). And so His Omnipotence shines out on the background of Jacob's

weakness, and lets the perturbed patriarch know that God will be sufficient for all his needs.

But the name by which, above all others in the Old Testament, the moral attributes and personality of God are declared, is the famous tetragrammaton, *Jehovah* or *Jahve*. The full theological import of the name will be found very fully discussed in the various works on the theology of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> What concerns us, with respect to ethics, is to point out that the name connotes moral attributes, and contains a strong affirmation of the self-existence of God, and consequently of His personality. The absolute Being is the most perfect of all Beings. Jehovah is "He who is" self-determined in all His acts. His is a continuous and consistent activity throughout all the changes of Hebrew history. The name was given to Moses that he might thereby carry to his brethren, enslaved in Egypt, an assurance of God's personal interest in their well-being and a promise of effective help. Thus the name, revealed at this turning-point of the nation's history, spoke of the free personality of God, of His absolute independence and invariable faithfulness. Here is a great advance in the ethical idea of the Godhead. It is a revelation calling forth Israel's

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the origin of the name, and its bearing on Old Testament religion, *vide* Robertson's *Early Religion of Israel*, ch. xi.

trust in and obedience to One who is a self-existent Personality, and with whom they may continually have personal (*i.e.* ethical) relations. Jehovah has a purpose of His own which He will faithfully carry out with unerring constancy to a great ethical end. His divine activity, He says to Moses, will be made manifest in order to lead His people out of slavery into liberty, and especially into a bond of fellowship with Himself constituting a moral relationship of the most enduring kind. And when this revelation of His nature was followed by deeds of saving power, by that wonderful deliverance from Egypt in which the nation first realised its existence, and to which it never ceased to look back with triumphant assurance of God's moral intentions toward it, still more deeply was the ethical personality of God wrought into the consciousness of Israel. To know Jehovah, to serve Him, and to give Him the glad response of a faithful obedience, became the aim of that people. The struggle involved an effort which braced their better nature, and ended by elevating them in the scale of morals far above surrounding nations.

The ethical idea of God conveyed by means of these names is afterwards more fully developed throughout the history of Israel. To the heart of the earnest Israelite He becomes known as *Adonai*, "my Lord," a term expressive of loving confidence in a Sovereign

Master. There is connected with the original signification of this word the sense of God's proprietorship in His people as well as of His sovereignty over them. In this was couched a strong ethical motive, which becomes influential in Christian ethics, being accentuated especially in the Pauline theology. As the Apostle of the Gentiles found strong consolation, in the raging sea-tempest, from the vision granted him by the Lord, "Whose I am and whom I serve," so the Old Testament saint delighted to call God by the name that helped him to realise that he was both the subject and the property of his Lord. He need not fear the wicked man : he would do righteously and speak truthfully, for Adonai owned him and would take care of His own. Being His, he and his household would lack no good thing. Being His, they must also walk in a way that was worthy of their Lord, and that would bring no dishonour upon His name.

Closely connected with this view of God's nature is that other description of Him as a God of mercy and of condescending graciousness. The very fact of His making known through Moses His concern in Israel's deliverance, and His determination to lead them into liberty, is a proof of His condescending love. The philosopher's God is all-sufficient to Himself and beyond emotion ; but the God of the Old Testament "delighteth in mercy" : He

is "long-suffering and gracious." There is infinite moral beauty and consolation in this conception of God. He is not a heartless Jupiter, nor a frigid, relentless force, like the law of gravitation. But He comes out of the dread silences to work for His people's salvation and to purify their lives with His loving fellowship. Rude and uncultured as the Israelites were, this idea of God was brought home to their heart in those names that reveal His nature, and proved a strong factor in their moral education. They knew that He was not at rest in His own boundless perfections, but delighted to come into loving and personal relationship with His people. In that most glorious of all the theophanies, which is recorded in Exodus xxxiv., this feature of His character is emphasised: "And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty" (R.V.). The merciful side of Jehovah is here exhibited in all its fulness, while at the same time it stands alongside of His justice. Mercy is His delight, and judgment is His strange work. From the standpoint of Exodus this is a very striking statement, and is in fact an early anticipation of the doctrine of the Epistle to the Romans, that

“where sin abounded grace did much more abound.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet though His mercy save men from sin, He will not acquit them in it. The guilty will not be “cleared” by a love exercised at the expense of justice. The divine mercy has an element of resentment as well as of pitiful kindness. Jehovah is a just God and a Saviour: and man’s justice must correspond to God’s. The thought of the divine justice penetrates all the moral and religious views of the prophets. It gives them assurance that, on the one hand, God will vanquish wickedness and will smite it with condign punishment; and that, on the other hand, though the afflictions of the righteous are many, He will deliver them out of them all. It is this quality in God which, when reflected in man, draws the sharp lines of division between the righteous and the godless. It also explains the peculiarity of the righteous Israelite asking to be judged “according to his righteousness,” while he prays to be kept back from presumptuous sins and confesses their dominion over him; a peculiarity that is very puzzling until the ethics of the old covenant be correctly understood.

Another aspect of this justice is expressed in the theophany of Exodus xxxiv. God is one

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Old Testament Theologies of Oehler, Schultz, and Riehm on these names of God. Also Luthardt, *History of Christian Ethics*, § 11 (T. & T. Clark).

who will "visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children, upon the third and upon the fourth generation." In His government of the world, the great law holds that as a man sows, so he shall reap. Though mercy is granted to the sinner, the mental and physical effects of his wrongdoing remain and descend. God's anger goes down to even a fourth generation with its inheritance of unrighteousness. By the grace of God good may come out of this heritage of suffering; but all the same the truth holds that no sin stands alone, that the influence of the past will be felt upon the future; and that in the principle of heredity, the hand of a righteous ruler may be seen at work.

Inasmuch as God as God manifests Himself by many works of active power and unceasing operation, he is known to Israel as the *living* God. By this revealed feature of His character a real ethical purpose is served. It is in communion with the living God, as contrasted with the dead idols of heathendom, which can do nothing for their votaries, that faithful men are to find help in every necessity. The God of the Hebrews is no mere cosmic force, a *Natura naturans*, with no ear to hear, no hand to help. But He is a living Spirit, a personal God, interested in His people's well-being. That this is the significance of the term is clear from the first instance in which it is used.

God interferes for the preservation of Hagar's life, and she calls the well Beer-lahai-roi, *i.e.* the well of the living One who sees me.<sup>1</sup> In the prophetic books and in the Psalms this name of God is much used in a way that is full of ethical import. The earnest Israelite felt his God was One he could lean upon and live by. No accumulation of the world's goods, neither cattle, nor oliveyards, nor storehouses, could be a man's life. Love must meet love, and heart meet heart, and God must be a veritable, ethical Personality. Otherwise, in the midst of the plenty of a land flowing with milk and honey, man will be unable to accomplish his life-task. As a moral being he can serve no power that is not a living God.

We come now to that conception of God which is peculiarly characteristic of the God of Israel, and which helped that people to attain a degree of enlightenment in religion that made them the religious teachers of their day. Jehovah is the *Holy One*. "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness?" Here we shall see how the apprehension of moral law in Israel runs parallel with the progressive apprehension of the divine character, and how the nature of its morality is determined by the contents of its belief. Jehovah is essenti-

<sup>1</sup> Keil differs in his interpretation. But see Oehler, vol. i. 149, *opus cit.*

ally the God of Holiness: and for the entire realm of human personality, as well as for Himself, holiness is the absolute law. The term is met with at the very commencement of Israel's existence as a nation, and in connection with their deliverance from the perils of the Red Sea. Throughout the whole Old Testament "the Holy One of Israel" is a frequent form of address. The primary meaning of the word seems to be freedom from all impurity. To sanctify is to cleanse; to be morally and religiously clean is to be holy. But this negative idea of separation from what is impure does not exhaust the meaning of the word. Had God been thought of only in His absolute transcendence, dwelling apart in infinite purity from all sinful men, this conception of His aloofness from mundane matters might have exercised its influence on the more thoughtful minds, but it could have had no ethical influence on the illiterate multitude. But in the giving of His law to Israel He oversteps the limits of this absolute transcendence, and makes known to His people His holy will. Thereby He raises them above the sphere of natural life into an ethical commonwealth in which He, the Holy One, dwells. "He inhabiteth the praises of Israel." He abides among them, the centre of all their moral and religious life.

This relationship lies at the foundation of the Law, and forms the ground of Jehovah's

claim to Israel's obedience. His will was a holy law, by which they must shape their conduct.<sup>1</sup> He is an ever-present God, who cares for their wants and desires to rule all their life for holy ends. So that at the very foundation of the theocracy this highly ethical idea of God took possession of the mind of the nation and wrought in them a sense of their high privileges and of their obligations to walk in the way of His commandments. They were bound to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. They were the people of His inheritance, and the fundamental law of their whole existence was found in the injunction, "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

This idea of God is not correctly represented as the outcome of the later conception of the divine character by the prophets. On the other hand, a careful examination of Amos and Hosea will show that, according to their own representation at least, they struggled, not so much to present a new idea of God, as to prevent the conception which Israel already had from being obscured and lost. They were not preachers of a new ethical monotheism, but they desired to call the people back to the old paths, and away from alliances with other races, whose religions were distinguished only by their baseness. Schultz<sup>2</sup> declines to mention God's holiness among His moral attributes,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lev. xi. 44, and xxii.—xxvi.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. ii. p. 167, *opus cit.*

because "it does not express any one side of His character, but describes the general impression which the pious have of God's relation to His creatures." He holds that even in such a phrase as "the Holy One of Israel," it might possibly be only the exclusive character of His relation to Israel that is indicated. The expression in that case would be but slightly different from the title, "God of Israel." And he adds (p. 170): "In the very earliest times the word must have denoted the consuming glory of the Semitic God . . . At anyrate it was primarily not a moral but a material idea." But surely, had this negative idea been the only conception of God's holiness, the incomparable majesty, the consuming glory of Jehovah would never have become, as Schultz afterwards affirms they did become, "the consolation and hope of His people." If His holiness is most emphatically manifested "when He resents and avenges any breach of His covenant rights," He would have been an object of terror and dread to every Israelite. But if it were so, how could the thought of God's holiness become such an inspiration to the prophets of Israel in their efforts to purify and exalt the nation? The inspiration came from another source. It arose from the covenant relationship between God and His people, any departure from which the prophets denounced as foul adultery. God's holiness was to be, not only a holy will in Himself, but

also a rule for man's action. "The idea of the divine holiness became a purifying and consecrating power in the religious thought and moral conduct of the people of Israel, who felt themselves called to be a holy nation, even as the Lord their God was holy"<sup>1</sup>

This profoundly ethical view of the divine character had important moral results. The will of this holy God was to be done on earth; and it was to be realised in a holy nation of His own possession. It found expression in that Law which He gave to Israel, and which was not only to mould the external life of the community, but to be a symbol of the will of God in the community. It was to embrace the family and the national life, the days of work and the days of festival, the field and the temple and the tent. Everything should bear the mark and signature of holiness.

It is needful to emphasise this point, in order to show that the holiness of God was regarded by the Hebrews, not as merely one of His attributes, but as the character of God that must shape their laws and lives, and work as an ethical force in their practical everyday life. In later times the prophets thoroughly comprehended this. It was the main theme of their impassioned preaching, and became in them a burning passion for righteousness in the heart and life. In the prophecies of

<sup>1</sup> Smyth's *Christian Ethics*, p. 124.

Ezekiel, especially in the closing chapters, the subject receives great prominence.<sup>1</sup>

We have deemed it right to treat this subject at some length, so that it may be clear that the standard of right living in Israel found its ultimate sanction in the revealed will and character of God. "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness," and His people must every day exhibit it. As He is, they ought to be. Their national prosperity will depend upon their obedience to His will, or, in other words, on their right-doing. Righteousness in Old Testament ethics is right conduct, and has not acquired the theological significance attached to it in the Pauline writings. In that sense of the word Israel must be righteous as God is righteous, and holy as God is holy. With our nineteenth century enlightenment we may deem this a matter of course and a trite commonplace. We never suppose that any but a good man, a man of right conduct and integrity, could lay claim to being a religious man. But how have we come so universally to this conclusion? Why is this such an ethical commonplace with us? It is the result of centuries of Christian thought. But among the ethnic religions of Moses' time no such

<sup>1</sup> In that remarkable body of laws in Leviticus, contained in ch. xvii-xxvi, the whole of the commands are marked by the distinctive character of holiness. See Driver, *Introduction to Literature of Old Testament*, pp. 43 and 276; Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to History*, pp. 357 and 378.

doctrine was inculcated. No Greek entertained such a belief. Zeus was an adulterer; Aphrodite was personified voluptuousness, and her worship was designed to lend a religious sanction to sensuality. Whereas Jehovah is One who has both made the world and rules it in righteousness. He is a moral Power, everywhere making for righteousness and against unrighteousness, making for holiness and against sin. In this character He was pre-eminently elevated above the deities of the pagan Semites. Their gods were their shame. They were immoral divinities, whose worship was so surrounded and bound up with everything that was foul and immodest that it was a shame to speak of them. Theirs was a religion in which "lust dwelt hard by hate" and all the moralities of life were outraged. Moral conduct was not demanded by it; morality formed no essential part of it. The cruelties of Moloch sacrifice were conjoined with the abominable pollutions of Asherah worship. Baal was the god of force and patron of military prowess, who gave his help to tyrants that worshipped him, however brutally and illegally they might act. The Israelites were well acquainted with the religion of Egypt too; a religion which built up society upon the basis of its creed, and conceived of man very much as it thought of God. But in Egypt Pharaoh was worshipped as divine, and had all godlike qualities attri-

buted to him. The result was that man was regarded as having no rights of his own : he was a tool of the tyrant, and found a place among his goods and chattels. The conception of him as a free, conscious personality never entered the head of a Rameses or a Meneptah. Wherever nations are without moral duties and a moral faith they fail to organise society for moral ends, and usually fall under some kind of unrighteous despotism.

We can perceive then what a moment of transcendent importance to morality it was when the revelation of a holy and righteous God was made to Israel, and when all the powerful forces of religion were converted into moral forces. The Science of Comparative Religion enables us to see that the character of the deity is regulative in every religion. As the god is, so are the people. And it further shows that this highly ethical conception of God, found in the Old Testament, must have been got by revelation, and was not the outgrowth of naturalistic development. There is no conclusive proof that this lofty ethical monotheism was the product of the interaction of Israel's peculiar genius and environment. Such a view startles us by its assumption that Israel is the creator of the idea of Jehovah, and not the created. If so, it is very difficult to reconcile this wonderful aptitude of Israel with the fact that all other Semitic religions are notorious for their very

debased conception of God. With them every god was a created being, sunk in nature's grossness—passionate, variable, lustful. Indeed, among the ethnic religions, the Semitic are conspicuous for their degraded ideas of deity. In Phœnicia, where idolaters were the neighbours of the Jews, the gods were the vilest of the vile. Among them there was a total severance between morality and religion. The latter was not an ethical force; and where it had influence, it operated towards criminal ends. Besides, the history of Israel shows that the nation was no exception to the tendency to degeneracy; and against their proclivities a continual protest is maintained by the whole goodly fellowship of the prophets.<sup>1</sup>

The foregoing facts, based upon the truth of the Old Testament record, go to constitute an ethical doctrine of God which was never surpassed in the world until, in the fulness of time, the manifestation of God in Christ took place. Jehovah, the Holy One, the righteous and just Ruler, is an ethical Deity; and the revealed conception of His character and will formed the basis of a moral society in which all men had equal rights and duties; while every fresh revelation of His nature brought to Israel a quickened sense of their obligations.

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Schultz, *opus cit.* ch. vii.; Robertson's *Early History of Israel*, pp. 168 and 242.

## CHAPTER IV

### ISRAEL THE PEOPLE OF GOD'S POSSESSION

IT was entirely of God's grace that Israel became the depository of His Law. He who created the whole earth desired to have a people who should live in communion with Him, and be peculiarly His own. The first message, sent by God through Moses to the multitude at the base of Sinai, was this: "Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now, therefore, if ye obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people." The Law is based upon this gracious relationship, and upon the providential guidance which followed it. Thus there is established between God and His people a relationship of a highly moral character. His divine love has been set upon them; and the lofty communion into which they are called lays upon them corresponding obligations, necessitating a life and conduct

conformable to their privilege. Yet it is not privilege that is put into the foreground so much as service—service of God, and therefore service in co-operation with God. That they have been selected to be co-workers with Him in carrying out His great purpose of love to all mankind is the thought that must lie at the basis of all their action, and determine it to ethical ends. They must surrender themselves without any reserve to be His humble instruments. They must become a people through whose whole public and national organisations a divine purpose may find expression, and so reveal to mankind the true character of their Covenant God. Their government is to be a divine sovereignty, and their constitution a theocracy (to use the word coined by Josephus)<sup>1</sup> in which God is the true Head and Source of all power. Regarding every department of their life—political, educational, ecclesiastical—they will receive instructions from Him, warnings in danger, and guidance in difficulty. And He will give them a Law fully expressing His will, and capable of meeting every emergency that may arise, when duly interpreted by His commissioned servants, the prophets.

On the other hand, the people, being the special possession of Jehovah, are separated from the rest of the nations and consecrated to a holy service. To fit them for this mission

<sup>1</sup> *Contra Apionem*, ii. 16.

they are summoned out of Egypt, as Abraham was from Ur of the Chaldees, that they may dwell in the land set apart for them. That separated or consecrated life is not to be an easy life ; it is a separation to much hardship, to a long course of moral training in the wilderness ; it is an election to sufferings, to captivities in Assyria and Babylon. God's elect ones are not to be envied by the slothful and the languid. It entailed on them an aloofness in Palestine from the great empires on either side. Everything was devised for the purpose of maintaining them intact in this condition of holiness as God's people, God's exclusive property, that they might transmit to others the moral and religious truth that had been revealed to them. That truth was too lofty to be at once grasped by men's minds. And, accordingly, Israel was set apart to learn those lessons, so that, when they had become apt scholars in this school, they might afterwards become teachers of mankind. There was a divine intent at the heart of it all. Israel was separated from the world for a time in order to serve lofty ethical ends.

This grand idea is one that inspires every one of the Old Testament writers. It is a much grander and higher conception of election than the narrow, individualistic one, common to Calvinistic theology. It is an election to service, not to privilege, and is pervaded by a "social teleology." In later times it is true

the prophets clothe Israel, the servant of Jehovah, with a more definitely Messianic meaning. But still the divine election of the one chosen Servant is for service and for the good of the many (Isa. liii. 5, 11).

Thus there sprang up in the consciousness of Israel an assurance of their being in filial covenant relationship with God. And as they were, through many providential dealings, gradually trained to be the fit instruments of His will, and their national life became shaped by this divine purpose, they came to realise how their whole moral life must be conditioned by this fellowship with God. Their right to that fellowship was attested by two sacraments—Circumcision and the Passover, both acts of covenant consecration. The former was a “bloody sacrifice” (Ewald), a dedication of the life to God by a painful purifying of the source of life, and it had both a moral and a religious significance. Israel was to serve God, and the continuation of its life was to be clothed with holy associations; while in the Passover the people were to regard themselves as God’s peculiar property, created by His gracious act of deliverance.

Thus as the changes and chances of life come to Israel, their moral history deepens and enlarges. Their Covenant God will guide them through the wilderness; He will be protection in danger, and light in darkness, will give food for their hunger and water for

their thirst; and in return they will consecrate to Him their service; and all their motives will be moralised by a holy ideal, and by the elements of love and gratitude entering into their obedience.

Further, as God's people, Israel is specially called to be a nation of priests. "Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests,"<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* at once a royal and priestly people. The tribe of Levi, set apart to minister in the daily sacrifice, simply formed the nation's representatives. "The consecration of the people to God receives official expression in the priesthood" (Schultz). They were bound thereby to a holy life, and to the strictest moral purity. Unclean persons should not enter their congregation; but Jehovah was to dwell among them and sanctify them. Their religious institutions should all speak to them of this hallowing presence; and by means of the laws of purification and holiness they should strive to realise the type of life thus set forth.

On this conception of Israel as God's property and priesthood great stress is laid by the prophets and psalmists, and many ethical duties are deduced from it. They are "His people and the sheep of His pasture." They were no longer to live as if they were their own. And as the nation developed in

<sup>1</sup> So the LXX. translates βασιλείου ιεράτευμα. In the Targum of Onkelos, "Kings and priests."

spirituality, we find a progressive ethicising of this relationship. God becomes to them more truly the Holy One, and they are willing to subscribe themselves as His (Isa. xlv. 5). There was to be no reserve in their consecration, no giving of ninety-nine parts and withholding of the hundredth; else the whole act of consecration was undone. The truth was foreshadowed which Paul afterwards set at the head of the Christian code of morality—"Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." Israel was to find the dynamics of duty in this relationship to Jehovah. No calculating ethics should be theirs: but to God who had redeemed them, and called them unto the dignity of a kingdom of priests, the flame of a sacrificial enthusiasm should ever burn.

It belongs to Old Testament theology to trace at full length this steady advance, and the purification in the conception of the relations of Jehovah and His people. What it concerns us, in the interest of ethics, to note is, that the consciousness grows in Israel that they are a holy people, and that upon this basis all the ceremonial laws are made to rest. How great an advance in moral culture this implies can be estimated only by a comparison with the surrounding nations. Jehovah is a moral Deity, with a righteous will, and hating evil with the whole force of His nature. And His people must be like Him, must be His

priests, His associates in His grand purpose of proclaiming and effecting the salvation of the whole world. That is an ethical ideal, accompanied by an ethical motive, to which nothing in the religions of other Semitic peoples is found to correspond. It remained, indeed, an ideal above Israel, and exhibited its divine origin, as their failures to live up to it manifested their human weakness. This at least is certain. Such a people, so circumstanced and so constituted, could never have produced of themselves such a moral ideal. A newly-emancipated horde of slaves, undisciplined and impatient of restraint,—this call to a life of lofty moral aims came into terrible conflict with their lawless passions, and stiff-necked stubbornness. How could that be a product of the nation which contradicts all their old feelings and habits? We have only to look at the awful immorality in which the other nations lay weltering to see how untenable the theory is. The standard of morality at this stage was not given by Israel. It was set by Jehovah, the Supreme Lawgiver, and Himself at once the embodiment and the inspiration of all virtue and goodness.

It cannot fail to be noticed that the moral necessities of the nation are more regarded than those of the individual. The family of Abraham are at first selected as the organ of salvation, and as they grow into a great nation they are regarded in all the divine dealings as

a unity, or a unitary social group. The truth of individualism had to wait for full acknowledgment until the Christian era; and the intense individualism of our century is utterly foreign to the spirit of the Old Testament. It is with Israel as a nation that the Covenant is finally established. If the law of worship be broken and the service of Jehovah be forsaken for that of other gods, it is as a nation that they are warned they shall be punished. Individuals may thus be overlooked; but had individual rights been placed first in the order of development, nothing less than anarchy would have taken place. In course of time, as the mission of the nation grew more clear, the responsibilities and rights of the individual received additional emphasis, and were developed into prominence. But at first it was with the family group that God entered into the gracious relationship of salvation: and He was content to have the basis of ethics for a time laid not in the individual but in the family conscience.

Hence we find in the Old Testament that the family is first, and not the individual. There is no doubt that this compelled a temporary concession to customs that belonged to a very rudimentary stage of morality, and that "because of the hardness of their hearts" a laxity of divorce was permitted which the Christian law of marriage utterly condemns. No doubt, also, this threw

into the background the individual's interest in a future life, and obscured the doctrine of personal immortality. But Jehovah was content to gain one great moral end at a time. And on the basis of a stable, pure family life He laid the future growth of the ethical and religious influences that developed into the Christian family and the organised and perfected social state.

So it was that salvation in Israel came to a man by his birth into the family founded by Abraham. "He was a Jew who was one outwardly." He might prove unworthy of his parentage and ancestry: yet birth into the family of an Israelite is undoubtedly in the Pentateuch reckoned as birth into the kingdom of God. His connection with covenant privileges is through his descent in the family line. This was far below the New Testament doctrine of entrance into God's kingdom, through the new birth of John iii. But for wise ends the Lord founded the Church in these early days upon the basis of the family, and placed it first in the order of salvation. When in this century we find many, notwithstanding our long experience of the worth of the Christian home, subordinating the family to the state, and affirming the collective total to be strong enough to bear the strain of the whole of our social duties, we may understand in some measure why God determined that during slow centuries of growth society

should be broad based upon the family life.<sup>1</sup>

This truth, thus embedded in the Hebrew consciousness, was in course of time stripped of its temporary entanglements and accretions by the lessons of history and by the prophetic teaching. It came to be seen by spiritually-taught men that "they are not all Israel who are of Israel," and that there was One who was a Father to them of whom Abraham might be ignorant, and whom Israel might not acknowledge.

The organic connection of the individual with the nation becomes part of Israel's consciousness. It is expressed throughout the Old Testament in no way more frequently than in their hostility to idolatrous races. With such they must have nothing to do: their severance from them shall be complete. They shall not intermarry with them, nor trade with them, nor have any fellowship with them. Even the social usages of these Goim must be shunned. The land they are to live in is given by promise, and they must abide within its limits. It is not without meaning, in connection with this particularism, that the Old Testament seems to hinge the completion of the divine kingdom on their maintaining their connection with the land of Canaan. Salvation, from the Old Testament

<sup>1</sup> Vide Smyth's *Christian Ethics*, p. 442 f.; Martensen's *Ethics*, vol. i. p. 202.

standpoint, is restricted to those who are within the fold of Israel, and fellowship with Jehovah is impossible to the idolaters of Moab and Philistia. But the prophets foresee a time coming when this limit shall cease, and all nations, flocking to Mount Zion, shall make it the centre of the wide world's worship. The shell of this particularism contained the kernel of a universal religion. In itself it tended to foster a contempt for foreigners and a national pride that are contrary to the spirit of Old Testament religion. But, as we shall afterward see, many expressions that seem immoral in their bitter antagonism to the Gentile races, find their explanation in this restriction of covenant fellowship. The prophets do not speak of the heathen as hopelessly given over to punishment; but, as a nation, Israel is undoubtedly the elect people, and only through them can the heathen world be blessed.

## CHAPTER V

### ISRAEL'S CODE OF DUTY

#### 1. *Righteousness in the Old Testament*

FROM a people who had been received of grace into the fellowship of faith, Jehovah demanded the grateful response of a righteous life. Their righteousness was rooted in faith; it recognised the grace of the divine election, and delighted to keep the divine commandments. This righteousness is not by any means equivalent to sinlessness; but it keeps the Law within the heart. It loves God's statutes, and finds therein not bondage but liberty. It recognises the inmost meaning of the Law to be the outcome and expression of God's favour; and its supreme delight is to run in the way of His commandments with enlarged heart. The only way to blessedness is by the path of obedience. This obedience of faith lay at the foundation of the covenant with Abraham; and it was this that invested that covenant with moral elements.

In ancient Israel the deep and painful con-

sciousness of sin, so characteristic of New Testament saints, is not prominent; and the faithful expect to be recompensed according to their righteousness and the cleanness of their hands. There is, for example, in David's treatment of Saul in the wilderness a fine instance of noble generosity that moves the heart of every reader. It sounds strange to our ears to hear him say that, because he would not put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, therefore the Lord should render to him according to his righteousness and faithfulness. But there was no inconsistency in his use of the term. Some of the psalms contain what may seem to us startling protestations of spotless purity, as, "I will wash mine hands in innocency, so will I compass Thine altar, O Lord." In not a few there are professions of integrity, and prayers that God may judge the Psalmist, and vindicate his uprightness and innocence, professions and petitions which seem at first to be alien to that deeper consciousness of sinfulness which is one of the most precious gifts of Jesus Christ. "It grates upon ears, accustomed to the tone of the New Testament, that a suppliant should allege his single-eyed simplicity and steadfast faith as pleas with God, and the strange tone sounds on through the whole psalm. . . . But such professions are not inconsistent with consciousness of sin, which is, in fact, often associated with them

in other psalms (xxv. 20, 21 and vii. 11, 18). They do indicate a lower stage of religious development, a less keen sense of sinfulness and of sins, a less clear recognition of the worthlessness before God of all man's goodness, than belong to Christian feeling. The same language, when spoken at one stage of revelation, may be childlike and lowly, and be swelling arrogance and self-righteous self-ignorance if spoken at another stage."<sup>1</sup>

It must also be observed that many of these professions of inward purity and of integrity are not so much denials of sin as asseverations that the writer's heart was honest and his intention pure. They are made by him in answer to base charges of malignant opponents. He is surrounded by evil men that will not scruple to blacken his good name and misconstrue his best motives. Is it to be wondered at that "the answer of a good conscience" should often spring to his lips. Such a response is the outcome of a healthy moral feeling, and is removed by whole diameters from the Pharisaism that finds salvation in keeping the commandments, and puts the Law in the place of the merciful Father. It is perfectly consistent in the Old Testament saints to make such professions, and yet to add, in the spirit of one who came through the synagogue into the Christian Church, "Yet am I not hereby justified."

<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Psalms*, by Dr. A. Maclaren, vol. i. p. 252.

In the New Testament we find that the apprehension of personal sin becomes far more profound and ethical, in proportion as a consciousness of the inwardness of the Law's requirements is reached. It is the purpose of the pedagogy of the Law to awaken the conscience and to effect conviction of sin by holding up the divine command as a standard of righteousness. But in the Old Testament we must frankly admit that, as soon as evil-doing has been repented of and restitution made according to the Mosaic code, one may be termed a righteous man.<sup>1</sup> Rather a legal status in Israel than an ethical attainment is implied in the term. At the same time, there is no trace of the idea that a man's salvation is due to his own righteousness. Everywhere salvation is spoken of as the direct result of the free grace and mercy of God. "The divine life bestowed through grace is received by faith alone" (Schultz).

In the post-Exilic period the place of faith was taken by a legal righteousness, and fellowship with God was gauged by the amount of religious rites performed. The centre of true religion was transferred from a gracious and merciful God to an external legalism; and law took the place of grace. This externalising of righteousness continued in Pharisaism through the Hasmonean age until Christ's time; and it appears in Christian ethics as a

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xi. 3, 5, 6, 18; xii. 3.

righteousness of works, in contrast with the righteousness which is by faith.

This leads us to the historic proclamation of the Law and to a consideration of its character and purpose.

## 2. *The Giving of the Law*

In the Old Testament the word "law" is invariably used as meaning some manifestation of the will of God. It is usually called Torah, or instruction. It was regarded by the Jews as the fountainhead of all knowledge, and as the one thing worth teaching to their children. In the New Testament it has a much wider signification. Sometimes there it refers to the Moral Law, at other times to the Ceremonial. Very often it means the teaching of the Pentateuch in contrast with the doctrine of the prophets; while in other places it includes the whole scriptures in which the mind of God is expressed. But in the Old Testament the Law by distinction is the Law revealed from Sinai, and given to Israel through Moses the man of God. In the solitude of the sacred Mount did the Divine Presence make itself known to this chosen leader. The majestic cliff, rising like a huge altar and visible against the sky in lonely grandeur, is the very image of an *adytum*, an audience-chamber, wherein no din of earthly discord might interrupt the

intercourse which the Almighty deigned to hold with His servant and prophet. Here God "came down upon Sinai," and gave to Israel the most splendid gift that a nation could receive. "The delivery of the Moral Law," says Kalisch, "formed a decisive epoch in the history of the human race, and was the greatest and most important event in human history."

Popularly, Moses is known as the lawgiver. But though he is called so by the Jews themselves, they never mean to imply that he was the *fons et origo* of the legislation to which his name is attached. There is no doubt that his Egyptian education specially prepared him for being the inspired medium of the divine Revelation. But it was not out of the resources of his own mind that the legislative code sprang. He was but a *προφήτης*, a spokesman for God. And it was not as a legislator like Solon or Justinian that he was said to have given the Law to Israel. Moses himself originated nothing. He was but the pen in the hand of the Almighty, communicating what he had already received.

The Law was given through Moses; but it was accepted by the people and ratified by a sacrificial offering, without which no covenant was regarded as binding. In Ex. xxiv. 3-9, we have the account of the formal ratification of this Covenant between Jehovah and Israel. Moses first rehearsed all the

words and the "judgments," *i.e.* the Decalogue and the whole of the statutes following, in the ears of the people, and got their formal assent. Then he wrote them down in "the Book of the Covenant," the first book actually mentioned in Holy Writ, and the nucleus around which all later legislation gathered. Building an altar, he caused burnt-offerings and peace-offerings to be laid upon it, to signalise the fact that it was not on legal grounds alone, but by an act of grace, that Israel was admitted to this privilege. There was grace as well as commandment in this New Covenant. No covenant of a similar character is afterwards found in the Old Testament.

Of the purpose of the Law, and the end it was intended to serve, two very different views have been taken. It is common for theologians, following the lead of the inspired writings of St. Paul, and especially of the Epistle to the Galatians, to dwell entirely upon that aspect of the Law which is prohibitory, which presents it as a ministry of condemnation and not of righteousness, of bondage and not of freedom, as a letter that kills and not a spirit that gives life.<sup>1</sup> That this was the final intent that lay beneath the Law, there can be no doubt; and the pupil of Gamaliel had gone through a legal stage of pre-Christian experience, which has its proper

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 6, 7, 9.

place in the moral order of every sinful life still, prior to conversion. But that this pedagogic aspect is not the only view we may take of the Law is perfectly clear from innumerable statements in the Old Testament. The Law, as it was given at Sinai, bears upon its front gracious features. These are apt to be forgotten by such as remember only the Pharisaic exaltation of the Torah in the Hasmonean Age to the position of an absolute *summum bonum*, or simply dwell on its use as a schoolmaster to lead to Christ. The Pharisee misunderstood or ignored the normal relationship between God and man, under which the Sinaitic Law was given, a relationship of grace on the one side and of faith on the other, into which the principle of Pharisaic legalism can have no admission. It is a mistake to regard the Law only from the point of view of an outward command or criterion, to be used as a measuring-rod to bring home to men their deficiencies, and convince of sin. The Law contained the conditions on which God would continue to dwell in covenant fellowship with His people. Were the pedagogic intent its only purpose, it would be difficult to understand the language of Ps. cxix., or the sentiment of the singer, "The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes . . . more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much

fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Ps. xix. 8, 10). To every sincere and honest Israelite, God's statutes were capable of being translated into a song. They spoke of privilege as well as of precept.

That this giving of the Law to Israel was felt to be an act of favour on God's part, and a great honour to the nation, is abundantly proved. In Deut. iv. 7, it is asked: "For what great nation is there that hath a God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is, whensoever we call upon Him? And what great nation is there that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this Law, which I set before you this day?" . . . Ver. 32. "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from the one end of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?" Israel, therefore, understood that the giving of the Law was part of that manifestation of grace, by which they were to be the people of the Covenant, the people among whom Jehovah should dwell, and through whom His purpose of salvation should be mediated to mankind.

This was doubtless the primary aspect in which the Law presented itself to the chosen

people. Jehovah was their King, "the strength of their help, and the sword of their excellency." And a King's communications with His people must be regulated in a manner that shall secure reverence for Him, and the means of exalted intercourse for them. Lived up to, this Law will ensure unbroken fellowship. It is a revelation of the condescending mercy of God, who desires to associate with Himself a holy people. Its principle is expressed in the words: "I am the Lord your God; ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and shall be holy, for I am holy; and ye shall keep my statutes to do them, for I am the Lord your God" (Lev. xi. 44, xx. 8).

That the Covenant of Law rests on the Covenant of promise is clear from the fact that in the giving of the Law the initiative comes from God. We find this in the statement which prefaces the decalogue: "I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt." So also, at the beginning of the Book of the Covenant, it is said: "Ye see what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagle's wings, and brought you unto myself" (Ex. xix. 4). In these passages there is no mention made of Israel's desert. Out of His love God sets forth this relationship of grace, and establishes the conditions on which it is to be maintained.

The primary feeling of a pious Hebrew towards the Law was not one of fear and un-

certainty, but it was a truly joyful consciousness of divine favour. The Law is no heavy burden that galls the shoulders. It is, on the other hand, a crown of rejoicing, even a matter of boasting. It is the distinguishing mark of Jehovah's favour towards His own people. The sanctuary where the pious worshipper meets Him is not a place filled with the terrors of a broken commandment, but is rather like a fountain out of which flows fresh water to a thirsty soul—

“ So have I looked upon Thee in the sanctuary,  
 To see Thy power and Thy glory.  
 For Thy loving kindness is better than life,  
 My lips shall praise Thee.” (Ps. lxxiii. 2, 3.)

The variety of phrase under which this feeling finds expression in the Psalms and Prophets is very striking. It is this element which gives such a bright colour and glowing reality to Old Testament religion. It brightened all those joyous festivals in which they celebrated their deliverance from the house of bondage, and thanked God for His goodness in the plentiful harvests of their fruitful land.

If the Law is regarded only from the standpoint of the legalist, it is entirely misconstrued. “ It is in the first instance a gift of grace. It shows the people a way of life which embraces and defines all the circumstances of their natural life. A non-Israelite,

or an unbeliever, cannot fulfil it ; but a believer will not feel its restrictions irksome.”<sup>1</sup> So far from irksomeness being the primary thought in connection with it, the very opposite is clearly the fact. “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound” of it. “They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance.” We misrepresent God’s purpose and do the Hebrews an injustice, when we imagine the pious members of that commonwealth ever hanging the head like a bulrush, and striving to appease their conscience, and gain salvation with tears and legal sacrifices. To them God was a Father, and Israel was “His son, His firstborn.” The idea of redemption through grace alone was the fundamental idea of the nation’s position. This idea is placed at the head of the Decalogue. An Israelite, realising his place as one of the community redeemed by God, trusting and loving God as his nation’s Redeemer, was a just man, and lived by faith a joyous, happy life. His relation to God was one entirely of grace, “a relationship which was to obtain realisation in the righteousness of faith that is in Christ” (Rom. x. 6 ff. ; cf. Deut. xxx. 11–14).<sup>2</sup>

But let us not forget that in the development of the moral consciousness of Israel, a deepening of the sense of national failing took

<sup>1</sup> Schultz, *opus cit.* vol. ii. p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Luthardt, *History of Christian Ethics* (Clark’s Trans.), p. 45.

place. With this there came a clearer perception of the relation of the individual to God and of his responsibility, as a moral integer within the nation, for its shortcomings. And then the other aspect of the Law became prominent, as the prophetic teaching expounded its meaning and accentuated the individual consciousness of transgression. Then the Law was seen to be not only the gift of a gracious Lord, but a commandment intended to act as a check upon transgression. That this purpose lay in it from the first cannot be doubted. The Law was given to erect a barrier against sin, and the man that crossed the barrier must bear the penalty. Without being able to remove the inward stain of sin, it accentuated the evil of it, and brought home to the conscience a sense of its exceeding sinfulness. Paul's education in a school of legalism, so characterised by its objectifying of ethics, necessarily led him to dwell upon this great purpose of the law. He develops it at length in the powerful analytic of Rom. vii. Had it not been for the Law's measuring-rod, he had not known sin; but now conscious of a deep sense of personal guilt, he utters this cry, *de profundis*, "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" He affirms that lust should not have appeared as lust to him, had not the Decalogue, in its closing commandment, gone beyond the ex-

ternal domain of precept into the inner realm of motive, and said, "Thou shalt not covet." "Moreover, the law entered that the offence might abound" (Rom. v. 20). It was in this opposition between the commandment and his inward moral state that he realised the burden of that legalism which perpetually harassed his conscience, and landed him in slavery to the letter that killed. The very existence of a commandment forbidding the sin added intensity to the desire to gratify it. Stolen waters are always sweet; forbidden pleasures have a spice and flavour that are not found in the ways of righteousness. "Sin, finding occasion, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence," says St. Paul. So far from aiding him in this awakened stage, the Law, bepraised by the Rabbis, only aggravated his difficulties and emphasised his sense of helplessness. Conscience would persist in speaking of higher principles of duty, and whispering in his ears the stinging word, "imperfection." It is an experience we all go through. Protestantism began with St. Paul, and the morality of the Old Testament in him gave place to the awakened Christian consciousness. Hence it is that Romans vii. is a bit of autobiography, which possesses for us undying interest. It is a prison-cell, in which we have all been confined. And blessed are they who through faith have been able to walk out of the dark

dungeon of the seventh of Romans into the glorious light and liberty of the eighth.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who, if not St. Paul, belonged at least to the Pauline school of theology, regards the Law from a similar standpoint. If he thinks less of it as designed to lead to a clearer knowledge of sin and to discipline the moral sense, still he feels that its purpose is to drive home the conviction of the need of a sacrifice for sin that would satisfy divine justice, and to exhibit the powerlessness of Levitical offerings to cleanse the conscience. In his view, the Law shut a man up to the hope of a Messianic Deliverer, who should offer one all sufficient sacrifice for sin, and then sit down at the right hand of God.

This view is confirmed by what is said of the Law in the Gospels, which, though not so directly bearing on the point in dispute, is quite consistent with the view expressed in the Epistles referred to. Our Lord affirms that it was not for the purpose of encouraging, but of restraining and discouraging, divorce that the precept regarding it was given. "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives" (Matt. xix. 8). This was, however, but an adjustment to the level of morality at that time reached in Israel. It was not intended to be an encouragement of the moral infirmity that led to divorce, but to be a curb upon it until

they should reach and realise a principle under which such a check would not be required. In the time of Moses the people would not have understood the deeper principles laid down in Eph. v. regarding Christian marriage. The laws of marriage were therefore an adjustment to the rudimentary stage of Israel's morality. It was a temporary concession to their ethical imperfection,<sup>1</sup> which was not intended to be permanent. Similarly, the law of revenge and the practice of polygamy were permitted, to the astonishment of many people in these days who cannot understand why what is condemned in the New Testament should be temporarily tolerated in the Old. But these practices were but concessions to moral weakness; for education without adjustment to the pupil's stage of progress is in religion what cramming is in education, and so far from invigorating, it weakens the moral powers. The divine permission of these practices was therefore conditioned by restrictions that checked the evil necessarily inhering in the institutions, and pointed to a time when they should be entirely abrogated.

Thus the Law as a command worked wrath (Rom. iv. 15). By its works no flesh living could be justified. It was good in itself; but it could not speak the word "forgive-

<sup>1</sup> Mozley, *Lectures on Old Testament*, Lecture v. See also closing chapters of this volume.

ness," nor furnish inspiration like the expulsive power of love to Christ. Its multiform ordinances, the categorical form of its precepts, the prohibitive character of its injunctions and social restrictions, were all adapted to show man the weakness of his efforts to reach a standard of moral perfection. By this lengthy and tedious process, in which the Israelite became more dissatisfied with himself as sin became more hateful, God was educating His people to long for something more satisfactory to the conscience. He was preparing the heart of man, ever too fond of trusting to its own, to accept the righteousness which is of faith in Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LAW OF THE TEN WORDS

AT the head of the Book of the Covenant stood the Law of the Ten Words. That Law stands on a moral eminence of its own, unrivalled for its comprehensiveness, excellency, and simplicity. These fundamental rules of religious and ethical duty were the only portion of the legislation which was directly uttered by the voice of God in the hearing of the whole people. Thereafter they were graven on the tables of stone by the finger of God, as if to signify their abiding character, and to give to them the highest and most authoritative sanction. They sum up in a pregnant form the duties applicable to Israel's life as a people dedicated to God. While many of the enactments of the Book of the Covenant served but a temporary purpose, and passed away with the religion of Judaism, the Decalogue has been retained unchanged in the Christian Church. The divinity of its origin and the excellency of its contents still give it a foremost place in the theology of

every Christian community. There is nothing in it that is not valid for mankind. It is a universal code of morals. No compend of morality among ethnic religions can be compared with it. The ethical systems of Confucius, of Zoroaster, of Buddha, of the Greek moralists, are far behind it as a summary of human duty.

In the Book of Exodus, the Decalogue is called the Ten Words, a phrase which our Authorised Version renders "the Ten Commandments." Sometimes it is called "the Testimony," as bearing witness to the expression of the Divine Will. It is by pre-eminence also called "the Covenant," although the Book of the Covenant in Exodus embraces, in addition to it, chaps. xxi.—xxiii.

The question has been raised and much discussed, Does the Decalogue, together with the civil and ceremonial laws, constitute one whole legislative code for Israel? Or, do the Ten Words stand out by themselves in marked distinction from all the other precepts, so that these must be regarded as but subsidiary directions to secure its better observance? Is it one legislative code? or are there two codes here?

It has been urged<sup>1</sup> that these Ten Words had the "singular honour conferred upon them of being properly the terms of the Covenant founded at Sinai"; that they are expressly

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *Typology*, vol. ii. p. 89 ff.

called "the words of the Covenant," "the words of the Lord," while the additional enactments given through Moses are called "the judgments"; that the feast laws in particular, "so far from forming any proper addition to the terms of the Covenant, had respect primarily to the people's profession of adherence to it, and contained directions concerning the sacramental observances of the Jewish Church."

That the Law of the Ten Words had a peculiar pre-eminence assigned to it, we have already seen. It obtained such a position by the solemnity with which it was proclaimed by the lips of God; by its own subject matter—possibly, too, by the symbolical character of the number of its commands, and by the fact that its words were traced by God on stone, while the other parts were written by Moses on parchment. All these facts go to show—what has been universally recognised in both the Jewish and the Christian Church—that the Decalogue occupies an altogether unique position. But, admitting this, does the Law as given to Israel for a code of duty *make any distinction within itself* between its various parts, to indicate that the one part had an inherent dignity and perpetuity above another?

To this question it seems impossible to give anything but a negative answer. In the Law itself there is no division of commands and

enactments into permanent and transitory, into primary and secondary. They constitute one legal whole, and the obligation to obedience rests on one and the same principle, viz. regard for the authority of God. Some are moral, others ceremonial, others juristic. But within the Law, as given in the Pentateuch, no such formal division exists. The division has no doubt an old tradition to plead in its support; and it has its use in making reference to different enactments more easy. Nevertheless, the Law as promulgated by God, is represented as one, and its every portion is to Israel authoritative. "The whole Law," says one of the most conservative of Biblical theologians, "in all its parts has the same form of absolute, unconditional command. Before the closing of the Covenant the people had still the choice whether they would bind themselves by the Law that was to be given; but after they pledge themselves, all choice is taken away. Because of this strictly objective character of the Law, human judgment cannot be allowed to make distinctions between the individual precepts. Whether such distinctions are to be made can be decided only by the Lawgiver, who certainly appoints a punishment more severe than for other transgressions to follow on certain moral abominations and on the transgression of such precepts as stand in immediate relation to the Covenant idea (*e.g.*

circumcision, the Sabbath, etc.). But, so far as man is concerned, the most inconsiderable precepts fall to be viewed under the aspect of the obedience demanded for the whole Law: 'Cursed is he that fulfils not the words of this Law to do them' (Deut. xxvii. 26)."<sup>1</sup> We shall afterwards see how, in the time of Ezra, this fact of the Law, having the form of an unconditional commandment, became a stumbling-block to Israel, and contributed with other influences to an external legalism, becoming the exclusive form of the later Rabbinical religion.

Questions regarding the age of the Decalogue do not come within the scope of the ethics of the Old Testament. But all will admit that it is cast in an archaic mould; and the negative form in which its commandments are addressed is in keeping with its primitive character. In the infantile life of a nation, as in child life, the early part of its moral training must always consist of concrete precepts, expressed in a prohibitory form. In the first portion of a child's life it has to be kept from harm by continual prohibitions; and the formation at that early stage of the habit of obedience to these simple prohibitory commands is essential to moral wellbeing. Thus it is thoroughly consistent with the youthful stage of the Beni-Israel, a horde of slaves newly enfranchised and little better than children, that

<sup>1</sup> Oehler, *opus cit.* sect. 84.

this fundamental code of moral and religious duty should be one not of principles but of plain precepts. Children do not understand principles : they must at first receive simple, concrete directions as to what they shall do and not do. Truth must be accommodated to the measure of their mind ; and while they cannot comprehend the principles that lie at the basis of property, they understand the command, "Do not steal." The first stage of moral education will be full of restrictions. And the form of the Decalogue is in keeping with the stage of Israel's progress in morality.

In what dialect the Decalogue was first written we can only conjecture. At the commencement of their wilderness journey the Hebrew tongue, as we know it, could not be supposed to exist. But Moses, who was skilled in all the learning of Egypt, must have been acquainted with the hieroglyphic style of writing. And the clay tablets of Tel-el-Amarna have recently shown us how very freely a literary correspondence between Egypt, Babylon, and Syria was carried on in the Babylonian script. These tablets, covered with cuneiform characters, are in all probability as early as Moses' time, and they presuppose a wide acquaintance with the art of writing as well as the existence of scribes and of libraries.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The discovery of these cuneiform tablets in 1887 has proved that in Moses' time the races of Western Asia were as

Two forms of the Decalogue are given, the first in Exodus xx. and the other in Deut. v. 6 ff. The variations in the two passages are worthy of notice. In the former, the fourth commandment is enforced by a reference to God's resting at Creation from His work on the seventh day; while, in the latter, the reference is to the deliverance of the people from Egypt. The other difference is in the order of the clauses of the tenth commandment and in the verb that is used. In Deuteronomy the "wife" is put before the "house," and the change is marked by another verb: "Thou shalt not desire thy neighbour's wife nor covet thy neighbour's house."

These commandments are not numbered by Moses, and consequently different schemes of arrangement have been common. The most ancient of these is that found in Josephus and in the writings of Philo. It is accepted by the Greek Church and by the Reformed Churches, and is that most commonly known among English-speaking communities. In it the preface is not made a commandment or part of one: but the first commandment simply forbids the worship of false deities, and the second prohibits the use of idols; while all the prohibitions of covetousness are included under the last command. Among

fond of literature as the Romans of the Augustan age. Cf. Sayce, *The Higher Criticism*, ch. ii.

the Fathers this division is supported by Origen. The Jews, on grounds that do not appear to be very trustworthy, regard the first commandment as containing only Ex. xx. 2: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt." This they interpret as a command to believe in Jehovah as their God, because of His gracious deliverance of their forefathers from bondage. Then, to preserve the number ten, they include in one our first and second commandments; and they justify this by regarding the prohibition of images as an extension of the idea of the unity of God. On the other hand, the Roman and the Lutheran Churches reverse this order and include the first and second commandments in one; while to preserve the number ten, they divide the last commandment into two, thus combining two separate and dividing two similar things.

According to the narrative in Exodus the commandments were written on two tables, but we can only conjecture, since we are not told, what each table contained. The first is usually supposed to contain the laws respecting our duty to God, and the second the laws respecting our duty to man. Josephus divides the Decalogue into five commandments of piety (*præcepta pietatis*) and five of probity (*præcepta probitatis*).<sup>1</sup> Philo makes a similar division,

<sup>1</sup> Josephus, *Antiq.* iii. 6.

justifying the place of the fifth under the category of *pietas*, on the ground that parents are regarded as the representatives of God, and deserve honour as ὄργανα γεννήσεως.<sup>1</sup> To look on parents as clothed with some portion of the authority over children which belongs to God is a view thoroughly in keeping with all that Scripture teaches regarding them. The Roman Catholic Church refers three commandments to the first table and seven to the second; while the Reformed Church adopts another division, in which one table contains four and the other six commandments. The first of these arrangements has most in its favour, and the system of classification would then be:—

*First Table.*

1. No other gods.
2. No image of God.
3. No dishonouring of God's name.
4. No desecration of God's day.
5. No dishonouring of God's representatives (parents).

*Second Table.*

1. No taking away of a neighbour's life.
2. No taking away of his wife—his home  
—his dearest good.
3. No taking away of his goods.

<sup>1</sup> *Philo*, ii. 188.

4. No taking away of his good name.
5. Nor even coveting of his good or his goods.<sup>1</sup>

In these commands there is apparent a gradation or order, which we may express thus :

I. Let Jehovah be revered and honoured in respect of—

- (a) His Person,
- (b) His Worship,
- (c) His Name,
- (d) His Day,
- (e) His representatives.

II. Let the neighbour be protected in respect of—

- (a) his life,
- (b) his family,
- (c) his property,
- (d) his character ;
- (e) and this in thought and intent as well as act.

So that the first table has reference to the worship of God, the second to the service of man.

It will be perceived that this analysis shows a beautiful orderly progress. In the second table it advances inwardly, through deed and

<sup>1</sup> Luthardt, *opus cit.* p. 47 ; Stade, *Gesch. d. Volkes Israel*, p. 510.

through word, to the very inmost motive; while in the first table it proceeds outwardly, from the worship of the heart (second), to the reverent speech (third), and the reverent and respectful deed (fourth and fifth). Others, again, make the order proceed upon the Old Testament trilogy, and shape it thus :

First Table—Heart, Mouth, Work.

Second Table—Work, Word, Heart.<sup>1</sup>

The relation of these tables to one another has an important ethical significance. The duties which man owes to God take precedence of those which he owes to his fellow-creatures. Therefore the Decalogue cannot be spoken of merely as a criminal code. It is much more than a system of jurisprudence. It is a code that rests on fundamental ethical principles, and seeks to root all morality in the soil of piety. The Israelite who lived in due reverence and obedience towards God could not be without regard to the welfare of his kinsmen after the flesh. Faith in God makes possible faith in man. This is shown by our Lord's redaction of the Ten Words into the two pregnant commands, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neigh-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Dekalog" in Herzog's *Real Encyc.* vol. iii. Note also in this connection, Ps. xxiv. 3, 4.

bour as thyself. On these two commandments hangeth the whole Law and the Prophets" (Revised Version).

The Decalogue is prefaced by the words, "I am Jehovah, thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." These words contain both a doctrine for belief and a motive to obedience. That doctrine is the personality and the existence of God. Whether God is a person, or only a force devoid of all personality, is even still a subject of dispute in the schools of philosophy. Apart from such a revelation as this, the question can never be satisfactorily answered. We can hardly estimate the enormous gain that it was to Israel to have, in the very opening language of its legal code, the categorical affirmation of the personality of Jehovah. That Great Power, making for righteousness, is no mere cosmic force, a historical trend, but is Jehovah, who with outstretched arms brought them salvation from bitter bondage and terrible death. He is more than even the God of their fathers, and His worship is far above ancestral worship. He has come into personal relations with them, has intervened in the course of their own history, and thus they both know His nature and His relations towards themselves. Therefore the doctrine of God's character declared in this prologue has a high ethical value. It is so connected with their

preceding history and with the subsequent commands of the Decalogue that they cannot but feel that mercy and goodness lie at the basis of their statute law. The Giver of the Decalogue is One who rules all the forces of history for His people's good.

It was most necessary, before the people of Israel were called upon in the first commandment to worship, that they should know the Being to whom worship was to be rendered, and in what relation He stood to them. That is the meaning that lies beneath the declaration of the preface. We know our friends, not as metaphysical entities or abstract personalities, but by their kind deeds and comforting presence in our hours of sorrow and of pain. So Israel knew God; and as yet they could hardly be said to know Him in any way but this. Jehovah, therefore, does not begin by ordering them to humble themselves before His Majesty, or to bring sacrifices to His shrine, or to cleanse themselves from all pollutions and abominations of Egypt. He opens His Law by reminding them that He is their Saviour, and by making an appeal to their generous nature to give Him obedience because of that loving relationship. Here the code of Hebrew ethics and the code of Christian ethics radically meet and touch each other. For it is from the same force of generous love to a Redeemer who has first loved us that Jesus

Christ looks for the power that shall be the mainspring of all Christian activity. The central and essential principle of the obedience required in both Old and New Testaments is one.

## CHAPTER VII

### FIRST TABLE

IN discussing, under the Ethics of the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments, it is obvious that our concern is with their original meaning and purport. It is the task of others to translate them in terms of a Christian's duty, and shew their practical bearing on the errors and offences that may have crept into the Church of to-day. Our aim will be to point out what the Decalogue meant for that people to whom it was originally given, how it summed up their moral duty, and how each commandment embodied principles which had for them innumerable applications, and which still abide.

Assuming that the ancient method of dividing these commandments, adopted by Josephus and Philo, is the correct one, and that the commandment prohibiting the use of idols should be separated from the first, which forbids the worship of other gods, we proceed to consider them *seriatim*.

*The First Commandment*

The first commandment is "Thou shalt have none other gods before Me." These words are a simple and distinct prohibition of the worship of any other deity but Jehovah. No rival gods shall usurp the place of the God who has been the Redeemer of Israel. With the man that bows to Baalpeor, or sacrifices to Chemosh, He will have nothing to do. He has sought only Israel's good; He commands nothing but what is for their moral well-being. He has set them free from a galling bondage, that they may have liberty to serve Him with a full surrender of their being; and He can accept nothing less than the sole and undivided homage of their hearts.

It is impossible to find monotheism explicitly taught in the words of this commandment. There can be little doubt that what the Israelites would gather from them would simply be that the worship of deities such as they knew in Egypt was forbidden to them. The words "before Me" are equivalent in meaning to "beside Me" (margin of Revised Version), and explicitly prohibit sacrifice or honour being offered to any but Jehovah.

But, upon the other hand, such worship, continued year after year, would be certain to ensure the ultimate reception of monotheism.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wellhausen in his *History of Israel* (p. 439 ff.) admits the universal character of the ethics of the Decalogue. But he

The prohibition of the public worship of any other deity among a rude people, and their practice of the public worship of one God, will soon result in their belief that He whom they alone worship is the true God. Besides, Israel had seen such exhibitions of Jehovah's power and such miraculous interventions of grace in their behalf, that any superstitious dread of other deities gradually vanished, and the confident conviction grew that Jehovah alone reigned in heaven and in earth. The overthrow of the Egyptians in the Red Sea was virtually the disproof of the power of the deities which the chosen people had seen worshipped in Egypt. They had heard Jehovah's voice thundering from Horeb's peaks; His own finger wrote down these Ten Words; they knew their heavenly origin and divine sanction. And thus, through their experience as a nation, the great spiritual truths of God's existence and oneness were rooted in their heart, before they came to be received as part of their creed. Their conviction of the truth of monotheism arose from their own history of God's loving dealings with them. Therefore to worship other gods would not only be to run counter to the teaching, as we

cannot believe that the religion of Israel was of such an ethical character before Samuel's time, because he finds such acts as Jael's murder of Sisera and David's cruelty to prisoners of war commended. For an excellent reply to this sort of criticism, see Prof. Bruce's *Apologetics*, p. 214 ff.

have seen, of the introductory part of the Decalogue, but it would be treason against Him who had been their personal Redeemer. It was in the great school of experience that the Israelites became such intense monotheists. "We shall miss the key-note of the whole moral history of Israel if we fail to observe this constant reference to the historical fact with which the table of the Law begins."<sup>1</sup>

It is in keeping also with this knowledge of God, and of His gracious relationship to His people, that in Leviticus xix. the commandments, embraced within what is known as "the Law of Holiness" are each connected with the assertion of this truth, "I am Jehovah, your God." That chapter includes a number of miscellaneous laws, regulating the moral and religious life of the nation, and arranged in pentads, each of which closes with this doctrine like a refrain. It would seem, therefore, that the whole Law is to be received as based upon this precept, in which Israel is to regard Jehovah as their God, their only God and Redeemer.

Here, then, obedience is rested on faith in Jehovah, the one true God. Morality is based upon religion. Placed as they were among the idolatrous races of Western Asia, and but lately delivered from a land filled with the worship of a gross polytheism, Israel was to maintain a standing protest against the

<sup>1</sup> Smyth, *Old Testament Morality*, p. 21.

universal tendency to worship many gods. We may deem it strange that such a command should have the position of pre-eminence in the Decalogue. But if we reflect upon the awe with which every unusual phenomenon of Nature was then regarded, and the custom among the Semite peoples, even when giving their own deity a supreme place, of permitting other deities to occupy a secondary position in their homage, we shall understand the seductive character of the practice against which this commandment binds Israel to take a stand.

The recognition of Jehovah as their God carried with it to Israel the plain duty of serving Him. This command lies at the root of all righteous conduct. When God is regarded with idolatrous dread as a fetish, or with irreligious scepticism as a cosmic force, it will be found impossible to gain for the Moral Law a position of supremacy over the conscience. A system of ethics grounded on self-interest also rests on an insecure foundation. If the moral worth of life be reduced to terms of pleasure, the obligation to do justly and love mercy has been deprived of its binding power. Religious life is genuine only when it is moral; and moral life is healthy and strong only when it is rooted in religion. Obedience to the first commandment would secure in Israel the total exclusion of all the evils of polytheism. It would make the people

shape their whole life according to the will of a righteous Governor. It would drive out the superstitious dread of nature powers, and render it impossible for them to run to magicians for help. Witchcraft, too, so common still in Africa and Asia, would cease; for where God alone is revered, the fear of the evil eye is gone. And God would become the One Object of their worship and adoration, in whom their faith and devotion would centre. We shall afterwards see how, by the internalising of the Law in Deuteronomy and the prophetic teaching, the claims of this first commandment are brought home to the personal life and conscience of the people, and it is shown how central is the position which this duty should occupy in a devout life.

### *The Second Commandment*

The first and second commandments, though forbidding offences as different in their character as polytheism and idolatry, are not always in the popular mind kept apart. Yet when the language is examined, their difference is easily perceived. The first commandment forbids the worship of any god but One; the second forbids the making of any image or symbol of that One God. The former prohibits the adoration of false deities, the latter prohibits the adoration of Jehovah by means of any form that would convey false impressions

of Him.<sup>1</sup> The first proclaims His unity, the second His spirituality. As a Spirit, Jehovah cannot have a visible representation; and the worship offered at His shrine must be in accordance with His spiritual character. To represent Him by an image, whether in statuary or in painting, would be derogatory to His nature as a Spirit. Not that we believe this commandment condemns all products of the plastic art, as Philo maintained, but only such images as are meant to be aids or inducements to worship.<sup>2</sup> To make a carved image of Him the object of religious reverence is to transfer to senseless things the allegiance due to the Creator and Preserver of all; it is to derogate from His honour and to lower Jehovah to the level of the nature-gods of Moab and Ammon. No doubt the visible representation gives body and reality to the invisible deity; no doubt men will persist in forming some mental image of God, and will always speak, when they pray, to that. It might be deemed but a condescension to human infirmity to permit some such representation of the Creator as an aid to man's more easy apprehension of His presence in prayer. But the danger is too great; and the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Speaker's Commentary in loco*.

<sup>2</sup> In the first temple, honoured of God, there were many exquisite carvings on the wall of trees and flowers, besides the Cherubim and the "Molten Sea" standing on pillars of oxen (1 Kings vi. 27-29).

help thus obtained is purchased, as experience soon showed to Israel, at too terrible a risk. Within a few hours of the giving of the Law from Sinai, the people were found heaping their jewels at Aaron's feet, and crying, "Up, make us a God which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, we know not what has become of him." And the temptation had to be met by the fearful punishment that followed it. Nothing was too severe to counteract the craving of their hearts for a sensuous worship.

Israel had but recently left a land of which the cultus exhibited an essentially grovelling tendency, and where the gods were worshipped under the debasing representation of the lower creation. Clement of Alexandria says that "the holy places of the Egyptian temples are overhung with gilded tapestry; but let the priest lift the corner of the gorgeous curtain, and there appears a cat, or a crocodile, or a serpent. The god of the Egyptians appears: and it is a beast tumbling about on a carpet of purple." It would seem from the hieroglyphic records that the priests of Egypt had some glimmerings of the doctrine of monotheism, if the interpretation of Egyptologists be correct; but these glimmerings did not reach the mass of the people. We know that at Thebes the ram was worshipped, and the god Amon had a ram's head. In Goshen, where the Israelites dwelt, it was a god represented with a goat's head and feet that received divine honours,

and his shrine was the centre of the foulest orgies. At Memphis the sacred bull was the incarnation of divinity, suggesting to Aaron most probably the idea of the golden calf.<sup>1</sup> Many of the religious festivals in honour of these idols were marked by debauchery and impure revels.

It was not to be wondered at that Israel, emerging from immediate contact with such gross forms of idolatry, should carry with them a very material conception of deity. It could not be that such an ignorant multitude would understand those subtle distinctions made by some devotees of art between the external symbol and the homage which is induced by it.<sup>2</sup> It was not merely a thing of art that Aaron led Israel to worship. It was a symbol of nature's prolific power; and its very sensuousness was its attraction to the dancing promiscuous multitude.

What is specifically forbidden in this command is the adoration of images. This was the interpretation put upon the words by the Jews and by the early Christian Church up to the time when, under Constantine, heathen customs began to intrude into the Church. The sin is clearly not that of worshipping other deities (which is forbidden by the first

<sup>1</sup> Ebers, *Durch Gosen*, pp. 483, 528; Brugsch, *Records of the Past*, vol. ii.; Herzog's *Real Encyc.*, art. "Ægypten," by Lepsius.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Prof. Milligan's *Elijah, on Jeroboam's Institution of Idolatry*.

commandment), but that of worshipping any visible image of the true God who is a Spirit. It is not said that the worshippers of Baal believed that Baal was the sun. Yet there is no doubt they did believe that some connection existed betwixt the idol and the central source of all natural life and light; and by the law of association they came to pay to the image the homage they felt they owed to the power that rules the day. Hence it is that in the Old Testament the worship of images and of false gods is regarded as the same thing. For the image and the god get identified, so that it becomes unmitigated idolatry.

In addition to this, it is always found that no man can limit his conceptions of God the Spirit to an image, however lovely be the lines of the statuary, without dwarfing his thoughts of the Infinite One. He ties them down to that material model, and beyond it they will not expand. Whereas the dimmest spiritual idea of God in a man's heart has the power of an infinite expansiveness, and will grow with the advance of his mind and heart in spiritual experience.<sup>1</sup>

They were not to "make any image, nor bow down to it, nor serve it." This last word refers to carrying offerings and incense to the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dean Chadwick on *Exodus*, p. 296. He illustrates the point by a fine comparison between Gothic and Grecian architecture.

altar of the idol, or the giving of money to maintain a priestly service at its shrine. Either act constituted idolatry, and was denounced and punished in Israel as an act of apostasy from God. The recourse to such methods renders men less willing, and also doubtless less fit to receive spiritual revelations of God's character which come through His word or servants. Religious fervour can be stimulated from beneath much more easily than from above. It is more akin to the weakness of human nature to lean upon the priest than to listen to the inspiring call of the prophet. The danger of all ritualistic excess is that it tends to exaggerate the need of itself. Imagery ever leads to deterioration in worship. It is stepping on to an inclined plane which slopes down to all the grossness and sensuousness of a superstitious heathenism. The one certain result of it all is that the spiritual revelation of the unseen God to the heart and conscience becomes insipid and actually distasteful.

This commandment, in prohibiting idol worship, prohibited also human sacrifices to such idols. By this inhibition it lifted Israel immeasurably above their neighbours in a moral point of view. The idea of a holy and righteous God could not long hold possession of a people where human sacrifice was considered agreeable to his will. The celebrated Roman author, in his *De rerum Natura*, is an

advocate of atheism and impiety, because he felt that in his day religion crushed out human life with inexorable cruelty. When man thought of God as a monster who could be satisfied with the offerings of innocent babes, there was little in him that a true Roman could admire. Euripides in his "Iphigenia in Aulis" tells how a father determined to sacrifice his daughter to appease those gods that kept the Greeks by contrary winds from reaching Troy. But the tragic poet felt that there was in this act such a transgression of justice that he affirms it woke up the utmost ire of the dread Furies to seek immediate vengeance. What debasing ideas must have associated in the mind of Agamemnon with his conception of God before he yielded to the demands of the Greek generals to immolate his daughter! Yet the worship of the Phœnician religions, with which Israel came in contact, was frequently polluted by such sacrifices, in which men "offered the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul." And it would seem from its later history that it required a long course of moral education to make God's people morally superior to this same degrading superstition. We know how they fell back into the worship of Moloch, and how the prophets have repeatedly to denounce this offence. The reform of Josiah is marked by his "having defiled Tophet that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the

fire" to this idol. But this second commandment proved to them that Jehovah has no delight in human sacrifice at any shrine. He will have no child immolated at his altar. Abraham was tested in this respect; and that object-lesson once for all taught his descendants that the Lord does not desire to see the father slay the child, but will Himself provide the lamb for the sacrifice. This commandment brings out the moral grandeur of the Old Testament conception of Jehovah.

There is a reason attached to the commandment. God declares "He is a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them (or 'a thousand generations,' margin of Revised Version) that love Me and keep My Commandments." There are those who will say that to speak of God as moved with jealousy is to use language so anthropomorphic that His deity is practically sacrificed to His passion. There is no doubt that in the Old Testament the person of God is sometimes presented with a vividness and a sensuousness of imagination that appear to humanise the Deity. Breaches of His law arouse His "wrath" and "indignation." Lying lips are an "abomination" to Him. Besides, jealousy is a quality so universally disliked, so belittling to the man who is guilty of it, so ugly and ill-favoured, that to

call a man jealous is to ruin his reputation for generosity and goodness. How then can the term be used of God without detraction? And how can He use it of Himself? Does it not reduce Him to the level of an Achilles? or to that of one of the deities of the heathen Semites?

The answer will be best understood by considering the exciting cause. What God above all desires is His people's trust and love. He compares Himself to a husband, and says, "O Israel, I am married unto thee." Could a husband see a wife's affection alienated from him by some unworthy lover without experiencing the most acute agony, without feeling the most just indignation? Would it not be wrong in him if he were not in such circumstances jealous of another withdrawing her love? We need not be afraid of transferring this word to God to illustrate the severe displeasure with which He regards idolatry. Jealousy, without due cause, is ungenerous and detestable; and that is how we condemn it. But Jehovah's jealousy is not such. It is that same jealousy which rightly springs up in the bosom of every honest man whose love has been wronged. In Him there is nothing of sin mingling with the strong feeling of indignation at a love transferred to such an unworthy object as an idol. But the strong anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament, pulsing, as they do, with life and force, are

more correct than "the pale, dead, epithets of metaphysical theologians, who seem afraid to suggest that God is alive."<sup>1</sup>

God is jealous of man's affection, just because He has loved him with an everlasting love. He will not permit an enemy to come between His people and Himself. He cannot endure that their affections be given away to anything they would make an idol of. The ethical force of the commandment here becomes doubly strong.

But the evil consequences of idolatry do not fall only on the offenders. They descend to later generations, even to the third and fourth. They are not to be regarded merely as part of life's natural trials, for they are the reaping of a harvest of which the poisonous seed has been sown. They are inherent in the order of things, and are to be regarded therefore as ordained of God. In short they are His judgments on the actual sins of transgressors. Sins of profligacy and intemperance are so taken into the physical system that the principle of heredity works out in a natural way God's punishment, often in terrible disease, lifelong and defaming. And moral transgressions, violations of the laws of honour and truth, as surely poison the better springs of man's nature, and descend in weakened spiritual stamina and perverted moral sense. Can we suppose it would be otherwise with so

<sup>1</sup> Dale, *The Ten Commandments*, p. 62.

degrading a sin as idolatry? We have but to look at China and at Africa to see how this violation of God's law has injured these races socially and mentally as well as spiritually.

But, on the whole, the balance of benefit is upon the side of the race, and the upward force of the law of heredity is stronger than its downward attraction. The transmission of good has outbalanced that of evil, and the poorest beggar's child of to-day is the heir to a heritage of accumulated mental and spiritual wealth that lifts him high above his forefathers. For while God visits the iniquities of fathers "to four generations," His mercy descends "to a thousand generations<sup>1</sup> of them that love Him and keep His commandments" (margin Revised Version). God's mercies are far wider and more lasting than His judgments. Good is more potent and persistent than evil. The children of righteous parents inherit the best of legacies. If honours and riches be not theirs, God's mercy is promised to them and to their children's children. Surely this should lead to a high moral endeavour, and to a lofty example of faithful righteous conduct.

This commandment is one that reveals much of the heart of Jehovah. It is a proof that above all things else He yearns for the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Deut. vii. 9, in support of this reading. The object is to contrast the long duration of mercy with the brief period of chastisement.

love and the confidence of His children. To many in Israel it may have been a matter of small concern whether or not their hearts were given to God. His claim on their allegiance and trust they might treat very lightly. This second commandment showed them that God publishes His law from no fear regarding His dignity, from no jealousy as to His honour. It is because He longs for Israel's communion, and because His love is pained most deeply by lack of responsive affection. Love must have love in return. Divine love longs for human love. The heart of the great Father is not at rest till it draw to itself the love of all His children.

### *The Third Commandment*

“Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.”

This commandment has usually been supposed to be directed against the sin of profanity. But there is considerable doubt among scholars as to what is the true rendering of the Hebrew words. There is an ambiguity in the term “vain,” so that the verse may be translated in two ways. “Thou shalt not use the name of God irreverently (vainly),” or “Thou shalt not use the name of God falsely,” *i.e.* to a falsehood. Hence the commandment may be held to

prohibit either an irreverent use of God's name, or a use of it for the purpose of propagating falsehood; or it may be held as covering both offences, the sin of profanity and the crime of perjury. The Authorised Version follows the Septuagint (with which also the Vulgate agrees) in adopting the former. Several modern commentators are in favour of the latter and quote our Lord's words in support of their contention: "Ye have heard that it hath been said by them (or 'to them') of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all" (Matt. v. 33, 34). It is, however, very doubtful whether our Lord is here quoting the words of the commandment, or is simply drawing a contrast between His own prohibition of unnecessary oaths and the forbidding of false oaths found elsewhere in the Pentateuch.

There is one objection to the second rendering of the commandment which may at first seem to have considerable weight. In dividing the Decalogue into two tables, we spoke of the first five as having to do with our duties to God, and of the second five as concerned with our obligations to man. Would not this later interpretation of the third commandment militate against the above division in so far as perjury is more a crime against our neighbour than a sin against God? Besides, does not the ninth commandment

cover the crime of perjury. But on due consideration of the character of that dire offence it will be seen that its awfulness consists in its being a fearful abnegation of the will and of the very existence of God. The man that can solemnly swear by God's name to an untruth practically denies the existence of the God of truth; while, on the other hand, there is a wide difference between perjury and the detraction or simple falsehood that is condemned in the ninth commandment.

Even if the latter commandment be held to cover the bearing of false witness in a court of justice no less than slander, still the third commandment looks at the sin in the light of an offence against God, while the other regards it in its manward aspect.

It seems right for the expositor of Scripture to regard the command as one that has both a general and a specific application; as a general prohibition of all blasphemy, and as forbidding in particular the offence of perjury. Under the Mosaic Law both these offences were visited with capital punishment, since they alike insulted the character of Jehovah and disrupted the bonds that held society together in Israel. Both sins are found to cut the roots of that mutual confidence and religious obligation without which there is no proper security for the administration of justice, and no stable foundation for the authority of government.

This commandment was given at a time not

long subsequent to the proclamation of the name of Jehovah. That name, as we have shown, conveyed to Israel the true conception of the personality and eternity of God. It joined together the past and the future of the nation's history; for He that was the God of Abraham would also be the Guide of the chosen people till he had accomplished His great purpose of salvation through them.

This name was given on Sinai amid such awe-inspiring circumstances that it is not to be wondered at that associations of a dreadful kind gathered round it. It was very rarely used by the Israelites. According to an ancient tradition it was uttered but once a year, and that only by the high priest on the occasion of the great day of atonement. This may be an apocryphal story; but it is certain that, induced by a superstitious awe, the Jewish readers of the Torah never pronounced the word, but substituted for it another of the names of God, which had less august associations investing it. Even still in our Hebrew Bibles the vowels of the word Jehovah are not written, but those of Adonai are attached to it.

But true reverence for the name of God cannot thus be shown. Such miserable trifling with a word might keep the letter, yet break the spirit of the command; and it partakes more of the art of necromancy than of the reverence of faith. Possibly it induced a

certain kind of fear in the minds of the Israelites to know that the dreaded name was to be pronounced by the priest upon the great day. But such a feeling is not the reverence of that love and fear which Jehovah desires. His name is equivalent to Himself, and includes all by which He reveals Himself. The command, therefore, forbids all indecorous conduct in those solemn acts of worship in which God promises to be specially present with His people; all acts of sacrilege; the irreverent use of God's names and attributes; the colloquial employment, without due cause, of God's name in conversation, by way of adjuration or of strengthening a statement, or giving force to an asseveration. For all such acts of irreverence spring from a spirit of unbelief in a holy God, in whom we live and move and on whom we daily depend. Faith in God ever produces a reverential fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom; and when this fear is absent true faith is not there.

The surest method of escaping profanity is to labour to attain a true and lofty conception of God's character, and to live in unbroken communion with Him. He that has learned the habit of "praying without ceasing" has learned the secret of a holy life. He will not use God's name profanely; yet it may often be upon his lips, since what is in the heart will find vent in the speech. Between such sincere language of the heart and the fluent

talk of the shallow religionist, there is a difference of whole diameters. When the heart is filled with God's love the mouth will reverently show forth His praise. Of such genuinely pious souls the prophet speaks: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one with another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day wherein I do make a peculiar treasure" (Malachi iii. 16, 17, Rev. Ver.).

#### *The Fourth Commandment*

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

The *annexe* to this commandment carries us at once back to the order of creation. It bids God's people commemorate that order and keep the seventh day a holy day, because

in it the Creator rested after the six days of creative activity. That in some sense the Sabbath was then instituted seems clear from what is said in the opening chapters of Genesis. It is true that we do not find any mention of the Sabbath as being kept by Abraham or Jacob; but it would be unsafe to draw any large inference from such omission. There is no doubt that the institution was, if not unknown to the Egyptians, at least not observed among them during Israel's captivity in Goshen. There these slaves had toiled for centuries without knowing that sweet remission of hard labour which the day of rest brings to tired body and jaded mind. If the day was known to them, then it is certain the observance of it had during their bondage fallen into desuetude.

Yet the commandment speaks of it as of something which had been in existence. If the word "remember" is to be construed as a simple injunction not to forget to keep this day, one would have expected that the day should first have been constituted holy, and that the injunction to "remember" would have followed upon its institution. But when the commandment opens with the words, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," it seems to us a perversion of the evident sense of the words to say that they were to remember that which they had previously never heard of as existing. It is of course possible that the

word may have been designed to carry their minds back to what took place in Exodus xvi., when God seized the occasion of the gift of manna to mark, in the most emphatic manner, His approval of their keeping the seventh day as a day of perfect rest. But the words there employed again convey to the mind that it was rather a re-institution of the day that took place, and that at the beginning of this journey to Canaan they were thus encouraged to return to a faithful observance of what had been a custom of the patriarchs.<sup>1</sup>

Those who argue that the Sabbath was for the first time instituted in the Decalogue forget that nothing seems to be there instituted for the first time. It is not necessary that legislation should be origination. In early and rude times it never is so. The name of God had been used and abused before the third commandment made the irreverent or false use of it a crime. Worship was certainly as old as Adam's age; and the second commandment seeks to regulate only what was in existence. A man's gear and a man's good name were valued and protected long before the eighth and ninth commandments were written down. And there is every probability that the Sabbath existed before it was enacted at Sinai. The Decalogue did not create the day. It simply said, "This day, already kept

<sup>1</sup> For the evidence of the cuneiform tablets as to the Sabbath in Assyria, see *Records of the Past*, vol. iii. p. 143.

by your fathers, shall be kept holy unto the Lord, and no kind of work shall be done therein. It shall be observed in such manner as God rested after the work of Creation."

In the Book of Deuteronomy, the reason assigned for the keeping of the day is different from that which is given in Exodus. There the reference to work is absent, and the command is connected with the gracious deliverance of Israel from Egypt's bondage. This would create a sentiment of gratitude for their freedom and quiet after a period of servile toil. Both reasons would connect the Sabbath in their mind with the thought of restfulness, and make it prefigure the eternal rest and happiness of heaven.

This law is a twofold one, commanding labour as well as enjoining rest. "Six days shalt thou labour" is regarded by some as a prohibition of more than six days' toil rather than an injunction. But it seems to us that this first part is no less imperative than the second. They who spend the week in idleness cannot know, as the worker does, the restful calm of the Sabbath day. Work is the law of God for mankind. But because the love of gain and the stress of many necessities are continually making inexorable demands that drive men into overwork, till the body becomes a mere machine; and in order that the back may not be broken nor the body deformed with exhaustive toil, that the hours

may not be wholly given up to the service of mammon, but some portion of them may be reserved for the needs of the spirit, and for the claims of God, therefore it is enacted that the seventh day shall be a day of rest. The Lord makes the Sabbath a perpetual witness that, though inevitable hardships may be the lot of the labourer, yet it is not His pleasure that all our time should be consumed in exhaustive toil. The day was instituted for this highly beneficent end.

This law of rest was to extend to the whole family; and indolent or cruel parents were strictly prohibited from exacting work from their sons and daughters on the Sabbath. The domestic servants or slaves were also to enjoy a period of respite from toil. So were the cattle, about whose welfare the Old Testament Law was extremely careful.<sup>1</sup> No other religion of that time contained any such merciful provision for the beasts of burden.

But though the primary purpose of this law was to ensure bodily rest, it is no less certain that it was intended that this period of quiet repose should contribute to a higher religious end. Man is a complex being, and his spirit needs rest as well as his body. The day was therefore one for mental and moral improvement; it was not given for the purpose only of being spent in ignoble sloth and physical

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Döllinger, *Jew and Gentile*, vol. ii. p. 346.

inaction; the dedication of one day out of seven to rest was naturally followed by the institution of religious services, in which all the people were free to join. The separation of the day as a holy day soon came to be conjoined with the institution of public worship. For the conditions of man's life require that he should not only have time to rest but also time to pray and meditate on higher things. And the nightly rest is not sufficient for this duty, since it is needed to refresh the exhausted system and to give it back tone and vigour. There is need of a weekly day of rest to recuperate the jaded spirit, and lift up the soul above the worry and drudgery imposed by the conditions of a life of toil. But for the institution of the Sabbath and its rigid enforcement in those times subsequent to Moses' day, the worship of Jehovah might have perished out of the land. The synagogues, with their weekly instruction and reading of the Torah, were not then built. And the worship of God might have ceased altogether in Israel but for the strict observance of this day. The Sabbath, therefore, was a bulwark of piety and a protest against all worldliness and secularism.

That such a bulwark was not unnecessary, we learn from many pages of the Prophets. There were employers of labour in those times who, if they had been permitted, would have wrung seven days' work instead of six out

of their poor bondsmen. They would "have bought the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes." And others were so given over to the greed of gain, that in their impatience to increase their store of wealth, they asked, "When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell our corn, and the Sabbath that we may set forth wheat?" Had not the day been enforced by the strictest sanctions, it is clear that such men would soon have combined to procure its abrogation. And how do these spiritual prophets speak of the day? Hating ceremonialism as they did, when it was divorced from the religion of the spirit, they reckon the keeping of the Sabbath as the mark of a spiritual man, and they tax the resources of language in enumerating the blessings that shall be his who honours it. "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord honourable; and shalt honour it, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will make thee ride upon the high places of the earth; and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father" (Isa. lviii. 13, 14). It seems perfectly clear from the language used by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, as well as the other prophets, that they stood forth in defence of the day, not merely as a ceremonial

institution and a day of physical rest, but because the rest was for man's spirit also, and because if the holiday was not also made a holy day, the spiritual rest which should be found in it would be wanting. The rest-day is profaned when no rest comes to mind and soul, as well as to wearied body.

It is here that we come to understand how a formal precept, merely prescribing a certain proportion of time between rest and labour, comes to occupy a position in the heart of an ethical and religious code. It seems at first so far below the sublime principles that lie behind the other nine commandments, that many, and among these some of the foremost Reformers of the Protestant Church, have affirmed that the Sabbath belongs to the Mosaic economy, and that it passed away with the ceremonial ritual of Judaism. It is said that it is an institution promulgated for a temporary purpose, a mere arbitrary rule for Israel, and not an ethical law binding on all men.

Were this the fact, the position of the commandment in the Decalogue would seem utterly inexplicable. The presence of such an arbitrary rule would be felt to be out of place in that grand code of moral duty. But the very fact of its being put immediately after three commands that deal with duties valid for all men in all ages, might assure us that the Reformers who drew up the Augs-

burg Confession, were mistaken in affirming that "Scripture hath abolished the Sabbath." It has been well said that "the position of the commandment amid a number of moral and universal duties cannot but weigh heavily in its favour. It prompts us to ask whether our duty to God is purely negative, to be fulfilled by a policy of non-intervention, not worshipping idols, not blaspheming. Something more was already intimated in God's promise of mercy to them "that love Me." For love is chiefly the source of active obedience? While fear is satisfied by the absence of provocation, love wants not only to abstain from evil but to do good. . . . Do we say, the spirit has abolished the letter; love is the rescinding of the Law? St. Paul said the very opposite: love is the fulfilling of the Law, not its destruction. And thus he echoed the words of Jesus, "I am not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfil." <sup>1</sup>

It may be said that the Jewish Sabbath was primarily and emphatically a day of rest, but that the Lord's day is a day of holy activity. But the physiological laws of our being have not changed with the change of economies. And it is a fact that where men or nations have despised the law of the Sabbath they have invariably suffered in physical deterioration. Even Christian people may, in the excess of their zeal for God, still break the day of

<sup>1</sup> Dean Chadwick, *The Book of Exodus*, p. 307.

rest. And if the good work done by them on that day is so exhaustive as to deprive the day of its essential character, it is a question whether they are not doing harm for the sake of accomplishing good. God is best honoured when we use the day as He meant it to be used. The banishment of the cares and worries of business, and the turning of the mind away from the secularities of the world to the holy thoughts, meditation, prayer, and worship which befit the day, are in themselves a means of rest. We shall do most effective work for God when we so use the day as to conjoin the maximum of physical rest with the maximum of holy thought and Christian fellowship. The day was made to be the festival day of God's children: "This is the day the Lord hath made, we will be glad and rejoice in it." If we turn it into a day of pure inaction or of Puritanic gloom, we mistake the true principle of Sabbath-keeping, and impose a yoke where we ought to speak of a rich heritage.

By what authority has the change from the seventh day to the first day of the week been made? Our Lord Himself gave no command about this matter. Neither did the apostles, singly or in council. It seems to have been introduced by the universal consent of the early Christian Church. In the Epistles of St. Paul we have reference made to the discontinuance of the Jewish Sabbath, and the

practice of keeping it would very probably die quite a natural death, as the Christians ceased to attend the temple service. There is no doubt, however, that on this point there was not at first consentient practice. But slowly, as was the case with the growth of the Canon of the New Testament, the Christian Church ceased to make the seventh day a day of rest, and introduced instead thereof the observance of the first day of the week. Naturally that day, the memorial day of Christ's resurrection and of the descent of the Holy Ghost, became the day on which those early Christians met for communion and worship. They then celebrated the Lord's Supper, and instruction was given from some Gospel or Epistle. As the Church grew in numbers and zeal, they sought to increase their means of fellowship; and in the weekly rest-day of the Old Testament, they had a divine authority for fixing this proportion of rest to labour. "In the history of the Jewish Sabbath the rest came first and the worship followed; in the history of the Christian Sunday, the worship came first and the rest followed." And in establishing this first day of the week as the day of rest and worship, there is no doubt the early Church was guided by a true spiritual instinct, just as much as she was in determining the books that now compose the New Testament Canon.

*The Fifth Commandment*

“Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

This commandment we include in the first table, following the classification of Josephus and Philo. This is done, as has been previously said, on the ground that parents are to be regarded as representatives of God, and the respect due to Him must first of all be paid by children to their fathers and mothers. And thus it forms a link of connection between the two tables, uniting our religious and our social life.

This is the only commandment that is expressed in a positive form. “Thou shalt not” here gives place to the positive precept, “Honour thy father and thy mother.” It is also the only commandment to which a promise is annexed; and it is one to which every Jew attached special importance.

The obligation to filial obedience and reverence is one so universally acknowledged that it is clear the parental relationship has its ultimate basis in the nature of God. Parental authority cannot be destroyed, without injuring the roots of our religious life, as well as endangering the stability of the state.

Among the Israelites this commandment was held to lie at the foundation of all true piety. They recognised the fact that the fear

of God could not exist in the heart of the young, without a certain temper of obedience; and that God has so ordained it, that men should cultivate this disposition—first, as children under parents, then as servants under masters, and then as subjects under state control. They perceived very clearly that the training of the young in filial duty and parental respect was the best guarantee of social order.

It is worthy of note that the command includes the honouring of the mother as well as of the father. In this respect the Law was far in advance of the morality of the time. Among the nations contemporary with Israel, as we can learn from the Bible itself, women were habitually regarded as occupying a position very inferior to the other sex; whereas, in Israel, the highest regard was always manifested for the wife and the mother. This is seen in the history of the patriarchs, where the mother has the greatest respect shown to her. The beautiful pastoral story of Ruth exhibits traits of fine ethical feeling and deep regard for woman. And, in the Book of Proverbs, the picture of the virtuous woman presented in chapter xxxi., drawn in the richest colours by King Lemuel, is said to be “the oracle which his mother taught him.”

In Israel the family had a position which it does not occupy in modern times. Not the

individual, but the household, was regarded as the unit in Old Testament legislation. As a man was honoured or disgraced, so was his family. The dreadful calamity with which God visited Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, consumed their wives and their little ones as well as themselves. The modern conception of individualism, so strongly embodied and embedded in our legislation, had not then become a ruling idea. Indeed, the modern assertion of the liberty and rights of children, would not have been understood amongst the Hebrews. All government in the household was centred in the parent. He had even the powers of life and death in his hand. He was of necessity in early times patriarch, priest, and magistrate in one. Many of these patriarchal prerogatives still obtained in the period of the Exodus, and until the settlement of the tribes in Canaan, when the nomadic life gave place to more stable conditions. This explains the apparently severe law found in Exodus, "He that smiteth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death" (Ex. xxi. 15). The same penalty was attached to the cursing of father or mother. During that transition time, it was necessary for good order and government that such extreme powers should rest in the hands of the parent. It is a part of the circumstantial evidence in favour of the antiquity of the Decalogue, that it does not enjoin obedience to magistrates,

but only speaks of the law of subordination to parental authority. The bonds of social order could not have held together, had the authority of the parent been weakened. It was through the father that all those traditions came down, that were for a long time the social and religious literature of Israel. He was teacher, preacher, and governor in the family ; and if he should forget his duty in this respect, the education of the children in divine truth would be seriously neglected. His authority, therefore, had at all costs to be maintained. One may see in this consideration a good reason for attaching to the commandment the special promise of prolonged life in the land of their inheritance.

The promise attached to this precept is not personal but national. It must be construed as addressed to the nation in its collective capacity. Filial obedience would tend to make Israel's days "long upon the land," just because that virtue tends to strengthen the whole structure of society and to secure civil order. Where the love of home is strong, men will eagerly shed their blood for their fathers' hearths. The fires of patriotism are always kindled at the family altar. It would be difficult for a foreign foe to take its land from a people whose homes are centres of happy family life, and where parents possess the esteem and the love of their offspring.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians St. Paul

gives the promise in a modified form, "that it may be well with thee, that thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. vi. 3). This individualising of the promise is quite in agreement with the purpose of his Epistle. It is stated by him as being consistent with God's providence that an obedient child shall have long life. As a general rule, regard for parents, the desire for their commendation, and loving attention to their wants, are associated with a kindly disposition and an honest heart; and such a character naturally draws to itself the respect of society, and leads to a beautiful and an honoured old age; whereas the social instincts of man and the moral order of the universe are against the man "who mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SECOND TABLE

#### *The Sixth Commandment*

“THOU shalt not kill.”

The second table, at the head of which this commandment stands, deals with our duties to our fellow-creatures, and gives to social ethics the sanction of religion. The first table concerns itself with the existence, the worship, the name, the day, and the representatives of God. Duty to God comes first, for religion must lie at the root of morality. This second table concerns itself with our neighbour, and forbids injury to his life, his family, his property, his reputation, and that even by a covetous thought no less than by an overt act.

The most valuable possession which a man owns is his life, and the most appalling crime is the taking of it away. At the head of the second table, therefore, stands the commandment that guards the sanctity of God's best gift, and makes murder the greatest crime that man can perpetrate against his fellow.

The fundamental principle of this law rests upon the inherent nature of man as made in the image of God. That image stamped on man at creation is defaced and destroyed by the murderer. The Almighty is injured in the person of His creature. The life which He gave for worthy ends is suddenly cut short by violence, and God's plan is thwarted by man's perversity. It is an act of rebellion against the divine government of the world. It is no less an act of indignity against our fellowmen. God has "made of one blood all nations to dwell on the face of the earth," and taught men their oneness in a community of nature and of need. That being so, love and esteem are moral duties towards brethren. Hatred, which is the passion that incites to murder, is the breaking of the bonds of brotherhood. Love alone unites. The malicious intent that precedes the taking of life constitutes the one offence that must be visited with the severest penalty that the law can inflict.

The murderer in Israel was adjudged worthy of death. Only if it could be proved that intent and malice were absent might the capital punishment be converted into a penalty of less degree. But in the Book of Genesis it is explicitly stated, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." It is clear, therefore, that the general prohibition of the commandment cannot be held as excluding the infliction of the last penalty of the

law. For besides the enunciation of that general principle in Genesis, the same injunction is frequently repeated in the legislation of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. A man who has committed the crime of murder has therefore forfeited his right to live. No less was it held that self-defence might justify an Israelite in killing the man who attacked him with murderous intent. And when such defence of self required the defence of one's own hearth and household against a public enemy, the exception was extended to the case of war. At the same time, the law which prohibits murder no less condemns every unjust war of revenge or aggression. That bloodshed alone is justifiable which is in defence of a nation's existence and liberties. The despotism that is built up in blood stands upon a very unstable foundation. And it must not be forgotten that the attempt to extend the kingdom of God by the sword frustrates the very end of that kingdom and ensures the condemnation of Christ, "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

In the Mosaic legislation the punishment of death was much more widely inflicted than it is in modern times. Capital punishment was the penalty not only for murder but for man-stealing, adultery, witchcraft, idolatry, and such crimes as were contrary to nature.<sup>1</sup> In respect of such offences justice was administered with

<sup>1</sup> Lev. xx. ; Deut. xiii.

the strictest impartiality and with unrelenting severity.

But, in the event of accidental death, a merciful provision of a very peculiar kind was made by Moses. This is known as the law of the Goel. It is clearly an adaptation of a previously existing custom which Moses already found in existence and was content to modify. Among primitive nations it had probably long been the custom for their nearest male relation to avenge the death of a murdered man. In that primitive state of society there were no public prosecutors charged with this duty; and crime might have stalked abroad through the whole land if kinsmen had not taken it upon themselves to punish it. Moses prudently did not abolish this custom, but he so fenced it round with restrictions as to make it satisfy the rough instinct of justice that possessed the people. He appointed six cities of refuge, three on the east side of Jordan and three on the west, "that the manslayer might flee thither which should kill his neighbour unawares and hated him not in times past; and that fleeing into one of these cities he might live." These cities, however, were to give no protection to the murderer who smote his neighbour with malice, but only to such as could urge the plea of accidental homicide. "If he was not an enemy nor sought his harm, then the congregation should judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood." For

the crime of murder no redress by compensation can under any circumstances be accepted. According to the Mosaic Law the land would thereby be held guilty of conniving at the crime. Nothing but the shed blood of the murderer can take away the pollution.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the death of the high priest would seem to have made satisfaction for every accidental death happening during his lifetime.

To modern minds this law of the Goel seems very primitive, and far behind the more impartial forms under which justice in these days prosecutes with slow but sure footsteps her victims. But the law was in accordance with the ideas of the age; and there is little doubt that our slower methods would not have satisfied the sense of justice that then prevailed. The Mosaic legislation wisely accepted what was the best possible criminal law for the time, and adapted it to existing circumstances. The penalties which we frequently substitute for capital punishment would have seemed to the Israelites, accustomed to the operation of the *jus talionis*, to err by clemency; they would have appeared a miscarriage of justice, and would have operated injuriously on the moral sense of the nation. The Mosaic code allowed no money fine to be

<sup>1</sup> Numbers xxxv. 11 ff. The vengeance of the Goel must not extend beyond the manslayer to his relatives (Deut. xxiv. 16).

substituted; it did not even permit the altar to be a sanctuary for the murderer. There is no doubt, therefore, that the law of the Goel was the best that could be adopted at that stage of the nation's moral progress.

That the injury to human life was regarded not only in the light of a crime, but also from the ethical and religious side, is proved by the singular ceremonial enacted when a man was found slain without the murderer being discovered. The crime was counted a defilement of God's holy land, and only a religious ceremony could cleanse the soil polluted with the stain of human blood. The elders of the city found to be nearest to the scene of the tragedy had to bring a young heifer that had not known the yoke into a valley, "neither eared nor sown," and there break its neck. Then the elders and next of kin were to wash their hands over the animal, and, affirming their innocence, were to say: "Be merciful, O Lord, unto Thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto Thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them. So shalt thou put away the guilt of the innocent from among you." Whatever may have been signified by the "valley neither eared nor sown," the act of washing the hands by the elders of the people clearly meant that they repudiated the crime and denied all participation in the guilt

of it. There seems to have been nothing in the ceremony of the nature of a sacrifice or sin-offering. The priests who are present act only as witnesses to accredit what is done by the elders. Probably the transaction was intended to impress the divine command given to Noah, "Surely your blood, the blood of your lives, will I require: at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. ix. 5, 6). The Rabbinists affirm, however, that notwithstanding this ceremonial cleansing, the murderer, if apprehended, would suffer capital punishment, according to the terms of the Law.<sup>1</sup>

The primitive character of the Decalogue is shown in nothing more clearly than in the fact that under each prohibitive commandment it specifies only the highest form of each crime. No other kind of assault on the person is here mentioned but that which deprives of life. In Leviticus and Deuteronomy other degrees of violence are condemned, and to each specific punishment is adjudged; while in the New Testament that defect of brotherly love which is found in many a respectable member of society, the evil malice, the bitter spite, the secret thought of revenge, are all spoken of as breaches of this sixth

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Holy Bible, with Commentary by Bishops, etc., on Deut. xxi.; see also Schultz, *opus cit.* vol. ii. p. 50.

commandment. According to Christ, they contain the essential germ of murder. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." It did not escape the keen mind of John, the apostle of love, that unless the first resentful motions within our heart are sternly repressed, they will ultimately issue in the direful deed of blood. For "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."<sup>1</sup> Only a love like God's can enable a man perfectly to keep this commandment.

### *The Seventh Commandment*

"Thou shalt not commit adultery."

After the law that makes life safe comes the law that protects the sanctity of the home. The sixth prohibits injury to the life of the individual; the seventh prohibits injury to the life of the family.

Throughout the Mosaic legislation the marriage relationship is mainly regarded from the standpoint of property.<sup>2</sup> A man's wife is, next to his own life, his most valued possession.

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> It is so regarded in the parable of Nathan, 2 Sam. xii. See Schultz, *opus cit.* vol. ii. p. 51, Note at foot.

Nothing can be more dear to him than the peace and happiness of his home. The law that protects the sanctity of marriage protects the most precious of his earthly goods. It is not to be wondered at that in Israel the breach of the law of marriage was looked upon as a derogation from a husband's honour, and as a deed of violence which demanded nothing less than the stern punishment of death. Adultery ruined the peace of the home, and could not fail to reflect its sinister influence upon the family circle. No man could rule his household well whose wife was guilty of infidelity. Her influence would poison the springs of home-life, and contaminate the morals of the children. Parental authority would cease, and the stability of the nation would be endangered. It would become impossible for the children to obey the fifth commandment. Disorder, confusion, misery, a life of wretchedness, a home disrupted into atoms,—all these surely followed on the sin which is here forbidden.

In the Book of Genesis marriage is held to be an indissoluble tie that cannot be broken. The woman is made to be an helpmeet for man, and is regarded as having all the rights and privileges of a free personality. Gen. i. 27 and ii. 21-23 are the *loci classici* of the sexual relations, and there we find that marriage is no result of mere sensual feeling, but a God-given institution. Eve is taken from the side

of Adam, and husband and wife stand to each other in the nearest relations. One woman is given to one man, and polygamy is not recognised. In man's ideal state monogamy is the rule. It is true that afterwards, among the Patriarchs, polygamy is permitted, and even Moses had a second wife, a Cushite woman, to the great dissatisfaction of his relations. But the concubine seems generally to have been a slave of the house. The action of Sarah, of Rachel, and Leah, goes to show that this was looked upon in a very different light from adultery. It did no violation, in their eyes, to the law of honour; nor did it even violate the law of property, in which relationship the institution, as we have seen, is very much regarded. Under the Law, polygamy is not condemned, but its evil consequences are mitigated to a large degree by several enactments. The beautiful description in the Book of Proverbs of a good wife seems to imply that monogamy increasingly prevailed in the later days of Judaism, and the New Testament everywhere presupposes it. There is no doubt that in Israel the wife occupied a position far superior to that which she had among primitive races in the East. At the same time, woman did not then hold the exalted place which is now given to her in Christian lands, but one essentially dependent. Yet children born in wedlock are always regarded as a blessing from the Lord, and "the fruit of the womb is

His reward." And the custom, so common among the heathen, of parents doing away with the weaklings, is totally unknown to the Hebrews.<sup>1</sup>

Marriage is looked upon as the normal condition, and every effort was made by a father to get a wife for his son. Celibacy is spoken of as unnatural, and is to be avoided. The enforced virginity of Jephthah's daughter is bewailed. No greater punishment can fall on the land than that the young men should be consumed by the sword and the maidens "should not be given to marriage." Virginity is "a reproach to be taken away." From the time of the first promise of a Messiah to Eve it was the ambition of every woman in Israel to be a wife and a mother of sons, who might bring about the fulfilment of the hope of Israel.

The sin here prohibited is one that was regarded with peculiar abhorrence among the Hebrews, not only because it violated the Law of God, but because it tended to undermine the institution of the family. In the Old Testament the family has a peculiar weight and worth attached to it, which we who live in an age of excessive individualism can scarcely understand. Morality was based, not on the individual conscience, but on that of the family. It was through it that the Messianic hope was to be realised. This gave sanctity to motherhood, and gradually tended

Philo, *De Spec. Leg.* ii. 318 ; Tacitus, *Hist.* v. 5.

to giving the children of the wife a preference over those of the concubine or handmaid. In course of time the lax ideas of divorce that at first prevailed were cast aside, and the inestimable worth of the family was recognised. Upon its wellbeing depended the moral welfare of the nation. Were the homes pure, then the nation was strong. Were they honeycombed with vice, then the strength of the nation was gone, and Israel would flee before their enemies. Hence adultery is regarded as a crime of such heinousness that both offenders were put to death. No punishment was too severe to guard the sanctity of the home and the continuity of the family line.

Under the ethics of marriage it is necessary that we should here refer to the custom of divorce as permitted in the Mosaic code, and also to the singular law of Levirate marriage. The former is found in Deut. xxiv., where, however, the language of the Authorised Version has led to a misunderstanding of the passage. The first three verses of the chapter are all conditional, and the apodosis is in ver. 4. Read thus, it is clear that divorce is not instituted nor enjoined in this chapter, though the right of divorce is presupposed. All that is said is that if a man give his wife, for some reason or other, a bill of divorcement, and if she go and get married to another husband, and he also hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, then the first husband shall not

marry her again, for "that would be an abomination before the Lord." The Law simply regulates a custom that had long been in vogue in the East, and strives to soften its harshness. An arbitrary repudiation was prevented by the necessity of making out a legal instrument, showing that the grounds of it were not the mere pleasure or spite of the husband, but that they were founded on fact and reason. What the offences were that were considered justifiable grounds of separation is not stated; but the Rabbis mention very trivial faults, and Josephus seems to have exceedingly lax ideas of the marriage tie.<sup>1</sup> But the whole proceeding evidently is in glaring inconsistency with the Old Testament conception of marriage, which admits ethically of no dissolution. Adultery works divorce indeed; but it was one that was to be brought about summarily by death. But all divorce is in its essence adultery; and our Lord affirms its moral impossibility. He gives us the correct spirit of the passage in Deut. xxiv., when he says that Moses suffered the Jews to put away their wives "*πρὸς τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν.*" His words in Mark x. 12 give us reason to believe that though the right of divorce in the Old Testament is spoken of as belonging only to the husband, yet in later Judaism the wife might also exer-

<sup>1</sup> *Antiq.* iv. 8. 23. For certain reasons see Ex. xxi. 10, but these hold only in the case of a bondwoman.

cise the right. And it has been the invariable custom among the Jews to permit reunion, if the divorced wife did not marry again. In one instance, recorded in 2 Sam. iii. 14, there is an apparent breach of this law. But though the spirit of it is broken, David might plead he did not violate the letter of the command, since Michal had not been dismissed, but forcibly taken from him and given to another.

If the husband entertained a suspicion of his wife's infidelity, she was bound to remove his spirit of jealousy by one of the most severe ordeals contained in the Old Testament. In Num. v. this painful rite is described in detail. As in the case of the purification of the soil from the suspicion of blood-guiltiness, so here there is nothing of the nature of atonement for the supposed offence. The offering is, of set purpose, of the poorest kind—symbol of the sad condition to which the unfortunate woman has been brought.<sup>1</sup> The priest pronounced the curses appropriate to the crime, wrote them down on paper, and blotted them out with the bitter water, which he made the woman drink. If she was guilty, the potion took effect upon her limbs by a supernatural cause; if innocent, she remained unharmed, and was restored to her family and to her husband's confidence.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Keil, *Com.*, *in loc.*

<sup>2</sup> A custom similar to this has been shown by Brugsch, in his *Romance of Setnan*, to have existed in Egypt.

In the teaching of the Prophets and in the Wisdom Literature, the marriage bond is purified and lifted to a higher level. In the Song of Songs a chaste conjugal love is praised, while polygamy is satirised. According to the writer of Proverbs, the gift of a good wife is a token of the divine favour. "A prudent wife is from the Lord," which means, in modern phrase, that marriages are made in heaven.<sup>1</sup> In the New Testament marriage attains to its moral completeness, and becomes a type of the mystical union which subsists between Christ and His Church. Every taint of sensuousness is removed from it; and the unity of the sexes is complete when the loves of earth are lifted up and purified in the higher love of God.

Under this rule only the most grave offence is specified, while every other degree of sensual impurity is left to be covered by the word "Adultery." But in this case we are not left in doubt as to the mind of God. Christ enables us, in the opening discourse of His ministry, to understand its true ethical contents. Not only fornication, but every impurity, whether of thought, word, or deed, is forbidden. The commandment is already violated by the lustful look.<sup>2</sup> If the libidinous desire is harboured, the guilt of the sin has been contracted. The doctrine of Christ is developed by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians, where

<sup>1</sup> Oehler, *Old Testament Theology*, sec. 244, quoting Hitzig.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxv. 27-32.

he teaches that the human body is to be regarded as a temple of the Holy Ghost which no unholy impulse should be permitted to defile. It is not his own, but is set apart, devoted and consecrated to the service of God.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout Scripture marriage is invariably spoken of as of divine institution. And it is very significant that in all civilised nations it is regarded not merely as a civil contract, constituted by the consent of the contracting parties, but as a most solemn engagement, requiring to be confirmed by a religious ceremony. This is a proof of the universal conviction of its moral and religious worth. And the value which is put by a community upon this hallowing of the marriage bond by a religious service is a sure measure of the progress it has made in social ethics.

### *The Eighth Commandment*

“Thou shalt not steal” (Ex. xx. 15).

Following the commandments that deal with a man's two most precious possessions, his life and his home, comes the eighth commandment, which concerns his property. Property is the reward of moral labour and a legitimate end of moral effort, though it becomes sinful when it is exalted to the

<sup>1</sup> “A temple” from *τέμνω*—something cut off by the augurs and separated for another use.

position of the *summum bonum*. It is one of the things that distinguish man from the animal creation; it is all but unknown to him in his savage condition. The brute is without it because he does not work; and the savage is without it because he will not work. Property is, when ethically viewed, the externalising and enlargement of a man's own personality. To its enjoyment he has accordingly an ethical right, but not to its exclusive enjoyment, since the law of love comes in to modify it.

This right is anterior to any occupancy or use of the thing possessed. It is similar to a man's right to his liberty, without which he cannot make a proper moral use of his powers. It is not derived from any agreement with society; but its foundation is in the constitution of things and of man's own moral nature. Were a man deprived of that which belongs by right to himself, he could neither develop his own personality nor fulfil his duties to God and to his fellow-men.<sup>1</sup> In short, without his own he could not discharge his functions as a moral being, nor fill the place which God means him to occupy in the world. Therefore, though the right to property has been spoken of as an acquired right,<sup>2</sup> it is grounded in nature, and in the order of things.

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Cicero De Rep.* iii. 22; Blackstone's *Com.* vol. ii.

<sup>2</sup> Paley, *Moral Philosophy*, part i.

The law of inheritance in Israel was probably a continuation of an old traditional custom. By that law the first-born son got a double portion; although probably, along with that share, there went the care of and provision for his mother and sisters (Deut. xxi. 17). There seems to have been no *jus relictæ* for the widow. The other sons got an equal dividend; so that, were there three sons left, the estate was divided into four portions, one-half thus going to the eldest.

When the tribes reached Canaan, the land was equitably divided by Joshua among the families of each tribe. Here, again, the importance of the continuance of the family is attested by the fact that as far as possible the land belonging to it was to be kept entire. The head of the household was not permitted to alienate the possession. The sons inherited; but if only daughters were left, the inheritance passed to them. If there were neither sons nor daughters, the brother inherited, and next to him the father's brother. The land belonging to the family was an inalienable holding given to it by God, in accordance with the theocratic principle, "The land is Mine, for ye are strangers and foreigners with Me" (Lev. xxv. 23).

If the land of a family had to be sold for debt, the sale held good only for a limited time. As soon as the original owner was able to repurchase it, it was in his option to do so.

But should the year of jubilee occur before that time, the possession returned to its owner free. There took place in that year "a new birth of the state," in which all alienated property was restored, without compensation, to the family to whom it was originally given at the partition of the land. This law did not extend to estates which had devolved on a different family through the marriage of an heiress (Num. xxxvi. 4-8). Hence the law, that an heiress could marry only within her own tribe, in order to prevent the land of one tribe passing into the possession of another. The statement made by Josephus<sup>1</sup> that in the year of jubilee debts also were remitted, is not borne out by anything in the Mosaic Law. But it seems to have been the practice in the Sabbatic year.<sup>2</sup>

All these limitations were for the purpose of carrying out the ends of the theocracy. It was the design of Jehovah that there should be no destitution in the land of Israel. The Hebrews were commanded to exercise such kindness to their poorer brethren that the temptations to theft, springing from want, should cease (Deut. xv. 7-ff.). This divine ideal was not actually realised when they entered Canaan, because of Israel's disobedience to God's injunctions. But that it was the divine intention that want should be unknown

<sup>1</sup> *Antiq.* xiii. 12. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Oehler, *Old Testament Theology*, § 151.

in that land appears clear from Deut. xv. 4: "There shall be no poor with thee, (for the Lord shall surely bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it,) if only thou diligently hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God to do all His commandments" (Revised Version).<sup>1</sup>

This ideal condition of Israel in Canaan, where every man was possessed of his own freehold and surrounded by kind brethren, sure to help him if reduced to straits, has been pointed to by many socialistic writers. It led M. Proudhon to express his high admiration of the Mosaic property laws. Yet the law clearly assumes the existence of proprietary rights in the land descending by inheritance, and lends to them religious and ethical sanctions; while it is, both in spirit and letter, opposed to the revolutionary creed of the famous French socialist, "Property is theft."<sup>2</sup> But the Old Testament is full of warnings of the dangers of wealth, and faithfully reminds the owners of it that it comes from God and has its duties no less than its rights. If it does not favour socialism, it teaches truths which would make the cry for a compulsory division of property die out. It denounces the greed of the covetous man; it affirms that he that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord; it warns the successful man, if riches

<sup>1</sup> Keil and Lange translate the first clause as an imperative.

<sup>2</sup> "La propriété c'est le vol."

increase, not to set his heart upon them. And the voice that uttered the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," inspired also the words of the man who said—

"Give me neither poverty nor riches ;  
Feed me with food needful for me :  
Lest I be full, and deny Thee and say, Who is the Lord ?  
Or lest I be poor, and steal" (Prov. xxx. 8, 9).

### *The Ninth Commandment*

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Ex. xx. 16).

We have seen how the previous commandments of this second table of the Law are based upon those indestructible rights which all government and society are pledged to protect—a man's right to his life, to the purity of his home, and to his goods. Now we come to the law that protects what is not less dear to him than his goods, what is indeed much dearer to every honest man than any outward possession—his good name. Our great English poet affirms that the man who steals his purse steals only "trash"; but

"Who steals my good name  
Steals that which makes me poor indeed."

And the Psalmist asks, "Lord, who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly

and speaketh truth in his heart, he that slandereth not with his tongue."

The ninth commandment is but an amplification of the ethical principle of the eighth. The law of truth is very intimately connected with the law of honesty. He that is dishonest in deed is untrue in heart and thought. And he that breaks the ninth, also, in the sense of the poet's words, breaks the eighth commandment. That truth-speaking and just dealing are but two manifestations of one principle, is everywhere implied in Scripture. The ideal saint of the Old Testament, as we have seen, is the man that "walketh uprightly and speaketh truth." In a previous chapter we remarked that the "righteous man" in Israel was one who might carry his appeal to God with the words, "Judge me, O God, according to my righteousness and mine integrity"; "Examine me and prove me, for I have walked in Thy truth." Truthfulness of heart is essential to righteousness of conduct. The one is to the other what the seed is to the harvest, and the flower to the fruit.

The laws of property, though all founded on the immutable law of right, may vary in different nations, and in fact do vary very much. But truth is of absolute obligation. It is one of the attributes of God; and man, made in God's image, is made to reflect this same quality of goodness. An essential element in it is self-respect, a deep regard for

one's own spiritual worth as a creature of God, and made for moral communion with Him. Kant never said a finer thing than when he affirmed, in his *Metaphysics of Ethics*, that falsehood was simply a forfeiture of a man's personal worth, a destruction of his ethical integrity. "The original right of man," says Dorner in his Christian ethics, "the true fundamental right (*Grundrecht*) which follows from duty, is the right to be a moral being," which right he cannot exercise apart from truthfulness. It is not a question of consequences and of practical utilities; it is an absolute obligation to be inwardly sincere, to be faithful to the law of our mind, constant to the facts of our nature, and consistent in all our conduct. Without it character loses all its beauty and strength, the fine delicate edge of conscience is blunted, and the soul's powers of perception get so impaired that a man comes to believe himself truthful when his whole life is a self-deception.

But truth is a duty that one owes to others not less than to oneself. It lies at the basis of all government and commerce. Without it society would soon be disintegrated into atoms; for universal distrust has ever been the premonitory sign of a nation's decay.

The statute law of the land does not affix a penalty to every violation of veracity; but there are certain forms of falsehood so prejudicial to the interests of society and of

individuals, that they have in all civilised nations been visited with condign punishment.

It is a proof of the archaic structure of the Decalogue that it does not pretend to cover the whole wide sphere of ethical obligation. It lays its finger on outstanding specific sins and forbids them. Bearing false witness against a neighbour, though not necessarily the most injurious form of falsehood, was probably a very common one among the Hebrews. Loyalty to the truth has never been a prominent virtue among Asiatic races. In Israel, where the people were every day accustomed to see the elders sitting in judgment and settling matters of dispute, the form of falsehood here prohibited was likely that which was most salient. Even to the present day in Syria, the sheyk of the tribe frequently is seen sitting in public in judgment. He is continually deciding disputes in which he has to listen to the evidence of witnesses who are neighbours.<sup>1</sup> In the calm and not too busy life which Easterns live, it is always possible, and it is the usual custom, for a crowd to assemble and listen with open ears to the whole evidence for the prosecution and the defence.

In the wilderness of Sinai the work of deciding between litigants became too heavy for Moses. "Moses sat to judge the people :

<sup>1</sup> In 1886, the author was present while such disputes were being decided by a sheyk in one of the villages of the Druses on the slopes of Hermon.

and the people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening." Jethro, his father-in-law, was puzzled to understand this tedious work, and asked its meaning. The reply of Moses shows that he not only decided the matter in dispute after careful evidence and in accordance with divine laws, but that he also took the trouble of instructing the people in these laws. "I make them know the statutes of God and His laws" (Ex. xviii. 16). By the advice of Jethro, Moses resolved to hear only the weightier and more difficult cases: and "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness," were appointed to settle and decide every small matter. We may accordingly be sure that the work of judgment was well known to the Israelites, and that the bearing of false witness in a court was probably the most prominent form that lying assumed among them.

These courts of justice, or judgment-seats (for probably many of them were held in the open air and at the gate of encampment), were numerous. They were so arranged that there should be easy access at all times to the leaders of the people for counsel and judgment. The judges were discharging duties which fell to them as administrators of justice; they were there in order to fulfil a function instituted by God. These courts (like all courts of judgment still) were presided over by God's servants. To state what is false in such a court, or to

withhold the truth necessary to convict the breaker of the Law, is to conspire to defeat the ends of government and to encourage vice. Such conduct is not only inimical to human justice, but is treason against the divine Ruler.

That perjury was not an uncommon sin in Caanan, there are many grounds for believing. St. Paul affirms that the Law was made, among other ends, "for liars and perjured persons." The trial of our Lord and of Stephen the proto-martyr are memorable instances in which the suborned witness helped the persecutors to carry out their nefarious schemes. The crime was severely punishable under the Mosaic code. "Thine eye shalt not pity: life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deut. xix. 21). The evidence of one witness could not procure a conviction (ver. 15).

The commandment forbids not only perjury, but also slander, which, though a sin not committed in a court of justice, may not be less hurtful to a neighbour's character. It is a vice to which society is peculiarly liable. The Hebrews, pursuing as they mainly did rural occupations, may not have been so guilty of this sin as those that live in large communities. But wherever committed, in cities or in lonely rural districts, the sin was equally malignant, deadly in intention, and hateful in the sight of God. It is a sin

peculiarly devilish, peculiarly kindred to him whose name agrees with his nature, *διάβολος* "the slanderer." That it is a sin too common in all countries is proved by the wealth of words in which, in every language, the various shades of malice and falsehood find expression. It is a world-wide practice; for everywhere envy and hatred love to batten upon this foul garbage.

Calumny assumes many forms, including a large range of personal talk. Nothing is more pleasant to some natures than to spice their speech with a flavour of malice, "to hint a fault, and hesitate dislike." They rejoice to mix a little malignity with their witticisms to give them point,

"Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,  
And, without sneering, teach the rest to sneer."

Or they detract from a neighbour's character by relating stories about him, as to the truth of which they have no certainty, and have not troubled themselves to make inquiry. And so reputations are blasted, and many a good name is covered with infamy. King David suffered in this way from the stabs of evil tongues, more keen than "the piercings of swords," "they flattered with their tongue, but there was no faithfulness in their mouth";<sup>1</sup> "whose mouth was smooth as butter, but their heart was war; whose words were softer

<sup>1</sup> Ps. v. 9.

than oil, yet were they drawn swords.”<sup>1</sup> It was this same sin that made good Jeremiah long for a lodging-place in the wilderness, that he might escape from a society where “every brother utterly supplanted, and every neighbour went about with slanders.”<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew Chokmah literature, with its faculty of acute observation of the foibles as well as the vices of society, is full of wise maxims warning against defamation and slander. It was impossible, in a book well termed “The Philosophy of the Hebrews,” to pass by the prevalent sins of tale-bearing and scandal, that bred such universal mischief. The virtuous man must learn to control his words, for “death and life are in the power of the tongue.”<sup>3</sup> Even his gestures must be watched, since an insinuation may be conveyed and a reputation ruined by a wink as well as a word. “He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow, but a prating fool shall fall.”<sup>3</sup> And the wise man touches the secret of all this leprous vice when he says, he would rather have a dinner of herbs where *love* is than abundance of goods and hatred with it. In every one of its pages the Word of God endeavours to shift the centre of gravity of man’s nature from selfishness to love. The wisdom literature was but anticipating the apostle of the New Testament, who, in the larger light of the Christian revelation, pre-

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lv. 21.<sup>2</sup> Jer. ix. 4, 5.<sup>3</sup> Pro. x. 10 and xviii. 21.

sented to the Galatians, the only remedy for this hateful sin, "All the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another."<sup>1</sup> A man is not perfect in the virtue of truthfulness who simply abstains from flagrant violations of the ninth commandment; for virtue does not consist of negations. The New Testament expands the negative prohibition of this rule into a positive principle when it says, "Love worketh no ill to its neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law."

### *The Tenth Commandment*

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's (Ex. xx. 17).

This commandment appears in different forms in Exodus and Deuteronomy. We saw how these two additions annex different reasons to the fourth commandment; the Deuteronomist, in accordance with his predominant subjective purpose, not adducing the rest of the Creator, but the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery. Here, too,

<sup>1</sup> Gal. v. 15.

there seems to be some such intention dictating the change. Not the house, as in Exodus, but the wife is first mentioned; while a different verb is used with regard to her as if to accentuate the variation. "Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant," etc.

It may be remarked that the Septuagint translators differ, in the reading of Ex. xx. 17, from the Massoretic text, but without sufficient justification. The authorised reading is supported by the Samaritan Pentateuch, and by Josephus.

We can easily see how the systematic plan of the Decalogue should end with such a commandment as this. The second table, containing the precepts of probity, is intended to define a man's duties to his neighbour, and in accordance with the Old Testament trilogy of hand, mouth, and heart, it proceeds from the outward to the inward. There is manifest in it an ethical progress, which, beginning in the prohibition of murder, advances through the laws that forbid illicit passion, theft, and slander, to this concluding command which enters the inward province of desire and motive. Thus it becomes clear that the Ten Commandments are not merely a criminal code for the purpose of protecting life and property. The criminal laws of a nation take cognisance only of overt actions. Covetous-

ness is a motive within the breast which could only be guessed at by the law; its precedence to an act of theft could hardly be proved in the witness-box. The tenth commandment is altogether outside the boundaries of civil jurisprudence. Its presence in the Decalogue is a manifest proof of the spiritual intention and ethical character of the Sinaitic code. It reminds us that Israel was to be not only a commonwealth but the people of Jehovah's possession. The Decalogue does more than lay down the duties of a citizen. It embraces within its purview more than the crimes which it desires to repress. It looks ultimately to the cultivation of a better temper and a right spirit. Like the other parts of the Mosaic Law it aims at developing the consciousness of sin. Unless the Law had said "Thou shalt not covet," Paul affirms that he would not have known what sin meant.

The Decalogue, as we have said before, was content to prohibit crime, without commanding positive duty, being addressed to men at a primitive stage of moral education. We can therefore understand how the Apostle of the Gentiles could honestly affirm that "as touching the righteousness which is in the law," he was found blameless (Phil. ii. 5). As a Pharisee, trained to the strictest observance of every external rule and precept, his life had been irreproachable, from the point of

view of a Hebrew citizen. But when conscience awaked within him, and he looked away from the decorous moralities of his outward life to the condition of his heart, then this tenth commandment sounded the knell of all trust in self. The great searcher of hearts had found him out.

“He put his finger on the spot,  
And said, Thou ailest here, and here.”

And Paul fled from all trust in Pharisaic righteousness to the righteousness which is in Christ Jesus. This closing commandment teaches that it is the inward relation of the heart to God which constitutes the substance of true obedience; and that, while a feeling of discontent or envy is lodged in the breast, there is no true keeping of the Moral Law.

Behind and beneath almost every sin lies the vice of covetousness. The man who steals begins by coveting his neighbour's purse; and then to gain his end takes away his neighbour's life. Or, he covets his prosperous business, and to secure a share of it spreads slanderous reports injurious to his character. Every vice has some one of its roots in covetousness. From such an evil soil who could expect a harvest of good fruit? A covetous heart will breed nothing but evil thoughts and intents. Covetous thoughts are the invariable forerunners of guilty deeds.

In the Sermon on the Mount, in which our

Lord laid down the laws of the new kingdom of grace, He withdrew all limits of time and place from the commandments, and summed them all up in love to God and to our neighbour. Just as love is the fulfilling of all the Law, so is covetousness a breach of every commandment in the Decalogue. The covetous man is the godless man, for "covetousness is idolatry." His god is self, and to that idol all his worship is given; so that all the commandments in the first table are broken by him. And the covetous man is the neighbourless man; for love makes neighbourhood, and weaves the delicate silken cords that bind society together. But covetousness tends to cut every one of these bonds, to disrupt society into fragments, or to turn it into a den of ravening wild beasts. It sets a man in an attitude of hostility to every one of his fellowmen. And so it violates every precept in the second table of the Law. "The truth is that illicit conduct always has its root in illicit desire. It is one and the same moral (or immoral) state, which begins with the secret suggestion of evil, burns on through the stage of indulged imagination, of longing and dalliance with opportunity, till it consummates itself in the criminal deed. As St. James traces for us in a sentence the genealogy of evil when he says: "The lust when it hath conceived, beareth sin; and the sin, when it is full grown, bringeth forth death," so does St.

James' Lord trace a continuity of development betwixt the angry temper and the murderous stroke; betwixt the lascivious glance and the broken vow of wedlock; betwixt the deceit that palters with a phrase and the perjurer's oath. What is this but the teaching of the tenth commandment 'writ large'?"<sup>1</sup>

Both by the preface that introduces the Decalogue and by the commandment that ends it, the Law shows that, while it has an external form and naturalness, it has also an internal meaning and reference. The words of the prologue are an appeal to love and not to fear; the relation in which God there presents Himself to Israel is not that of lawgiver but of saviour. Because He had redeemed them from Egypt's bondage and revealed to them His holy character, therefore they were to give Him their devoted service. In the very prologue the Decalogue bases morality upon religion. And in this commandment that closes it, again the Law enters the region of character and motive. The will of God must be done from the heart. This is more fully set forth afterwards in the Book of Deuteronomy and in the Prophets, where it is contrasted with that spirit that trusts for salvation to the external order and the *opus operatum*. It is on the basis of this religious sanction that the whole Decalogue rests. Without a heart of love there can be no

<sup>1</sup> Dr. O. Dykes, *The Law of the Ten Words*, p. 201.

keeping of the Law. Love a man, and you will not covet any of his goods ; for love likes to give more than to get. A true father will never covet his son's good name, his goods, or his business ; rather is he proud of them, and rejoices in every accession of fame or wealth that may come to his child. Where love reigns, hatred and malice cannot dwell. The Law of the Ten Commandments can therefore be fulfilled only by the renewal and sanctification of the inner man. This is proved by its opening and its closing words.

#### THE PROHIBITORY FORM OF THE LAW

It has been often urged, by way of objection to the perfection of the Decalogue, that the most of its requirements are expressed in a prohibitory form. With the exception of the fifth commandment, all the others take the shape of a prohibition, not of an injunction. The fourth begins with enjoining the remembrance of the Sabbath day, but the rest of its clauses are prohibitory of work ; and on the whole it rather forbids than enjoins. Have those negative precepts, then, any contents of a positive character ? And may those specific commands, that are elsewhere given by Jehovah, be comprehended under some one or other of the Ten Words ?

There is no doubt that there were many things that were obligatory on the Israelites

that are not mentioned in the Decalogue, and which, had they not been elsewhere commanded by God, would not have been observed by them. But we have seen that the Decalogue, in its closing command, had clearly a pedagogic purpose, and through a particular form it led on to a law of universal love. Every Israelite, who regarded those Ten Words in the spirit of love, would find them comprehensive enough for him. His experience would lead him to discover fuller contents in each of them. And the ethical interpretation given of them in Deuteronomy would prove to him that really they covered all the complex relations of life, including his duties both to God and to his fellow-men.

There could be nothing of a moral nature in a commandment that had not something positive in itself. In inaction *per se*, in not-doing, there is nothing that we can call ethical. Ethics concerns itself with human actions and relations. A stone statue sustains moral relations to no one. And if it were possible for a living being to occupy a position of pure inactivity, it might be said that then he was beyond the sphere in which duty could lay an obligation upon him, and claim him as her servant. But such a state of unethical being would be nothing better than moral and spiritual death. There is no break in the continuity of the ethical existence of a living man, and there is every probability that

death brings no interruption to that existence.

It seems, therefore, reasonable to conclude that, as every moral good implies an opposite, every precept of virtue implies the prohibition of contrasted vice. But does every forbidding imply a command? Does the prohibition of murder require the taking care of a neighbour's life, or merely inaction and indifference with regard to a neighbour? Clearly, it could not be so. For me to remain inactive and effortless while I beheld a neighbour drowning would be positively wicked: the inaction would be evil action. Statute law might not recognise it, but morally it would be homicide. Indifference to my neighbour's property or good name becomes on my part, as an ethical being, positively sinful. Such non-action in fact becomes, through my self-determination, an act having a moral character of its own. It would constitute an essential breach of any of the commandments. The framers of the Westminster Shorter Catechism were therefore justified in expounding each commandment as containing a "requiring" no less than a "forbidding." Obedience to God's Moral Law is something more than abstention from wrong. It involves the doing rightly. The Decalogue, in its compressed brevity, contains but the headings of ten chapters on duty; and under each of them, as interpreted afterwards in the word of God, may be

gathered the whole wide range of our obligations both to God and to man.

A further explanation of the negative form in which the Decalogue is expressed, is to be found in the relative standard by which God was at first content to measure the duty of Israel. We are told that Jehovah took Israel "by the hand,"<sup>1</sup> guiding him as a nurse guides a child; and it is in accordance with this code, as designed at first for the nation in its infancy, that it should be expressed in prohibitions. The nurse is continually saying to the child, "You shall not." That is the first or rudimentary stage of its moral training. The education of every child begins in its being restricted from whatever is hurtful to it. The Decalogue is mainly prohibitory, because Israel had not yet reached his adolescence. But that rudimentary morality did not end in a series of negations. As given, it was part of a divine order of ethical development. As such it had a fitness for the time, and became a tutor to what was higher and better. For men as yet far off from moral maturity, the negative form was the best that could be given, being the more simple and easily understood. It brought more clearly into his consciousness the wrongdoing of the transgressor, and was a preparatory training in the moral necessity for a time of better things.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. viii. 9, quoting Jer. xxxi. 32.

Such as it was, the Decalogue far surpassed any ancient code of morals. No doubt in pagan systems, some of its individual commands have been found; but they are found with limitations that narrow their scope and lessen their value. But in no heathen system do we meet with such a complete collection of religious and moral precepts. Not even in Greece can we find a Plato or an Aristotle presenting anything that is so complete, that rules both the external and the internal life of man, and covers all the essential ethical wants of the people. Rudimentary as it was in form, the Decalogue was the first religious code that gave the world the idea of an ethical Deity—holy, just, and good, full of mercy as of equity; high, stern in His righteousness; loving and aiding all that is good, hating and opposing all that is evil. It stood in opposition to many of the prejudices, the passions, and the early associations of the Hebrews. It put severe restraint upon that undisciplined mob of slaves, just rescued from a galling tyranny, not more unfit for freedom than impatient of the conditions that necessarily guard it. Yet, in contradiction to every prejudice and association, they are found believing that nothing can be acceptable to God that is impure, that no service is pleasant to Him except the service of a righteous life.

Now, that which is essentially opposed to a people's disposition cannot be supposed to be

the natural outcome of such a disposition. The good fruit comes from the good tree ; and the evil tree cannot produce anything but evil fruit. Therefore, the natural genius of Israel did not devise the Decalogue. It is not an evolution of Hebrew thought. It came from God, by whose finger it was written down on two stony tables, and given to Moses for preservation to all time. It brought to Israel the deep conviction of failure ; it gave them the knowledge of sin, and thus it prepared the way for Jesus Christ.

It cannot be denied that it was by the education which this code gave that the moral consciousness of the Hebrew nation advanced to a clearness and an excellence which that of the nations with whom they came in contact never reached. It first of all gave the world a true conception of God, and a correct notion of man as a free, responsible agent, with duties which no neighbour could perform for him, and with rights that no one should filch from him. Lying as it did at the foundation of the whole Mosaic legislation, which was but an expansion of it, it is at once social, religious, and moral, yielding an ethical basis for individual and national life, as well as for that of the Church. It is without peer or parallel, as a summary of man's duty to God and to his fellowman.

## CHAPTER IX

### I. OLD TESTAMENT LEGISLATION IN RELATION TO NATURE

AMONG the wider aspects of the Law is its relation to the external world of nature. The compass of Israel's obligations includes those duties which have regard to animate and inanimate creation, to the animals that feed on the soil, and to the soil itself. Over the land, the living and life-giving Spirit of God broods. It is His land, and His word has called into being each individual form. The earth at creation brings forth the living creature at God's command, and continues to obey His will, and fulfil it in her annual course. The order of nature is in the Old Testament recognised as being at one with the order and will of God. In accordance with this view, the Mosaic legislation is full of a grand conception of the good of nature and of the world. It loves nature, and shows that love in its laws regarding the culture of the fields, and the care of the vineyards and oliveyards. The impoverishment of the soil

is forbidden. The institution of the Sabbath year is intended to be an effectual prevention of it (Ex. xxiii. 11). The more explicit law of Leviticus designates the purpose of this ordinance by saying: "The land shall keep a Sabbath unto the Lord: in the seventh year shall be a Sabbath of rest unto the land, a Sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard . . . for it is a year of rest unto the land" (Lev. xxv. 4, 5). The seventh of these Sabbathic years was to be followed by the year of jubilee, when for two consecutive seasons the land lay fallow, and the fertility of the soil became very much increased. Thus the soil was regarded with a kindly feeling, and was looked at as possessing, no less than the beasts of burden, a divine right to a certain amount of forbearance and of rest. For six years might the farmer tax its utmost capacity to bring forth fruit for him, but in the seventh he must not make any such demand.

This is a very ethical view of man's relations to the soil, and it is borne out by many parts of the Old Testament. In the poem of Job, this feeling is felicitously voiced in dramatic language. "If my land cry against me, and the furrows thereof weep together; if I have eaten the fruits thereof without money, . . . let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle

instead of barley" (Job xxxi. 39); which is as much as to say that, if he had deprived the true owner of the land of his inheritance, the very furrows would find a voice to accuse him, and the thistles would proclaim his guilt. If this were so with a stranger, how much more was it the duty of the owner of the land to treat it with leniency. He had a right to expect that the land should pay the debt due to him for the labour he had expended on it: that were but a fair return for his pains. But, on the other hand, just as the law of the jubilee year looked with mercy on the human debtor, and demanded that the creditor should think of the unfortunate man's rights, and restore them, so has the land its rights, and every seventh year its owner is to be merciful to it by ceasing to exact a tribute from it. "Nature is to be set free, as it were, from the service which mankind exacts from her, and to be left entirely to herself."<sup>1</sup> So that between every owner and his land there exists this legal and moral relation.

There is little doubt that the fundamental law of the Sabbath reappears in the institution of the Sabbatic year. In fact this year of rest is to be symbolically a bringing back of the sinless age of paradise before the terrible curse was pronounced, "In sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" (Gen. iii. 17); while at the same time it points forward to the happier time, spoken of by the apostle,

<sup>1</sup> Schultz, *opus cit.*, vol. i. p. 363.

when the creation, now travailing in pain, "shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

In all this it is clear that the law regarding the land proceeds upon an ethical view of man's relations to it. The purpose of an Israelite's life was not the incessant gathering of fruits and storing of goods for many years, that he might eat, drink, and be merry. Lest the continuous cultivation of the soil might lead to some such thought, he was reminded of God's promise that His people should be well provided for in His land. They should not be ground down with labour, but the unusual fertility of the sixth year should render them independent of a harvest in the seventh. And their very soil should have its Sabbatic rest also; for nature, too, requires her seasons of rest in order to recuperate her exhausted energies. In point of fact, however, this ordinance was not kept by the Israelites. Greed got the better of gratitude. And not till the Babylonian captivity did "the land enjoy her Sabbaths" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 21).

Nor did this law overlook the animals that tilled the soil for man's benefit. It would not permit the dumb creatures to be subjected to cruelty, or unnecessary harassment. They belonged to Jehovah no less than their owners, and were to receive humane treatment. The nest of the bird must not be robbed while the

mother is sitting on the eggs, or rearing the brood (Deut. xxii. 6). A similar merciful provision is made with respect to the young of the domestic animals that were offered in sacrifice (Lev. xxii. 28). The ox must not be muzzled as he treads the corn, but is to have his bite as he paces his weary round beneath the broiling sun (Deut. xxv. 4). The ox or ass of an enemy, if found after he had strayed, must be led home to his stall (Ex. xxiii. 4); and an ass discovered lying helpless beneath his load is to be relieved by the passer-by. His enmity to the owner must not lead him to forbear help to the beast. Similarly, it is enacted that, for three years after planting, the young fruit-trees are to be kindly spared, and not made to yield a tribute of fruit (Lev. xix. 23). This was not a mere sanctification of the tree, but had undoubtedly a moral meaning, and illustrates the spirit of the whole Law.

The same moral considerations led to the enactment that the human form should not be disfigured by any markings or cuttings in token of grief for the dead.<sup>1</sup> These wild demonstrations of grief were very common among emotional Orientals, and in one instance in the Book of Kings the priests of Baal are found seeking to propitiate their god by so maiming themselves. But Jehovah's children are not to disfigure their bodies. The heathen, who have no hope in death,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jer. xvi. 6 and xlvi. 37.

may do so, but such disfigurement is unworthy of Israel's privileges; and Jehovah takes no pleasure in actions which are an outrage on His own handiwork.<sup>1</sup> He desires His people to be, like His priests, without deformity or bodily blemish.

Even the bodies of the animals offered in sacrifice must be perfect to be accepted. Any blemish marred the offering. The Mosaic law would not permit the ugly and deformed to be brought near the altar. But, on the other hand, for all such in their loss and suffering it had only pity and protection. It breathes a spirit of love and kindness for the dumb creatures, a spirit of delight in the beauty of all the animal forms God has made. And it seeks to encourage the same spirit of tenderness among the people who belong to Jehovah.

There is one brief enactment, bearing on man's moral relation to the animal creation, of such a peculiar character as to deserve more than passing notice. It is that which says: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk." The "Book of the Covenant" ends with this prohibition, and it is three times repeated in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. Of the many explanations given, the only satisfactory one is that which pro-

<sup>1</sup> The tattooings referred to in Lev. xix. 28, were probably an Egyptian custom. See Lane's *Egyptians*, ch. i. The Roman Law of the Ten Tables had very similar prohibitions.

ceeds upon the ethical view of the passage, namely, that "it is a protest against cruelty and outraging the order of nature." Natural feeling revolts against the idea of using that which ought to be the young creature's food for mere culinary purposes, and of making the mother, so to speak, an "accomplice to the death of her progeny, which men were induced to kill on account of the flavour which her milk gave it." The precept is clearly moral and not ceremonial. It forbids men to harden their heart against the natural instinct of pity, on the plea that it is of no consequence how their food is prepared, and that the dumb mother has no perception of the inhumanity of the act. The practice was in all probability a common one, on account of the very palatable character of the flesh so cooked. And this frequent injunction is intended to make men refrain from what is unfeeling and inhuman, since such action springs out of selfishness, and marks a spirit unworthy of the children of a just and merciful God.

## II. OLD TESTAMENT LEGISLATION IN RESPECT OF MAN

Jehovah is the Redeemer and Governor of Israel, and the legislation of the Old Testament proceeds upon the personal and loving relation existing between Him and them. They

are His ransomed children, and the rights of man are recognised without any distinction of class. Before Jehovah every man is a free personality, free to obey or disobey, to love Him with heart and soul and mind, or to exalt himself in opposition to the divine will.<sup>1</sup>

To this conception of man, as possessing inalienable and equal rights, the Mosaic legislation corresponds. Yet there are apparent exceptions to the rule, which mark this stage of the Law as still primitive and rudimentary. Slavery, for one thing, is permitted, and some conquered races who join Israel seem to have been held in a state of subjection that is a denial of the equality of rights. How can slavery find a place in a nation where the law of brotherhood and kindness is meant to prevail?

The answer to this is that, though slavery is permitted, it is yet so limited by the restrictions of the Mosaic code that its worst features are removed; and what remains comes under the principle of adjustment to the existing conditions of the nation, which we shall afterwards see is the only explanation of other defects of the legislative code of Mosaism. Slavery existed; but in course of time it was dropped off as an archaism that belonged to the earlier times of Israel. Such as it was, it is yet to be observed that it never

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Schultz, *opus cit.* vol. ii. p. 11.

was regarded as natural or unarbitrary, as we find it regarded in other countries.

Take, for example, the not far distant land of Greece. In the *Politics* of Aristotle, there is actually formulated a theory of slavery, in which it is argued that a household without goods and serving tools or instruments is not conceivable; and therefore, in like manner, every Greek house must have slaves, which are nothing else than necessary living instruments for the doing of the household work. In the mind of this famous teacher of ethics, slaves and barbarians are of an imperfect grade, incapable of moral emancipation, being utterly destitute of the power of deliberation, and therefore of the virtues of wisdom and prudence. Consequently, they should have no political rights in Greece.<sup>1</sup>

Such views of man and of his relations to society, are contrary to the whole spirit of the Mosaic code. It recognises slavery, as all the world then did, but it is of that kind that is least hurtful to the bondman. It would not be too much to say that it is there radically changed, and is not slavery but rather "a service-relation,"<sup>2</sup> Even in the time of the patriarchs, a slave in Abraham's household is such a trusted friend that he is sent all the way to Haran to find a wife for his master's son (Gen. xxiv.). And when Abraham receives

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, i. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Wuttke, *Christian Ethics* (T. & T. Clark), vol. i. p. 165.

the sacrament of circumcision, the whole of his slaves participate in this covenant privilege. Further, it is to be noticed that it is only of the mass of prisoners captured in war, or of heathen who join themselves to Israel, that slavery can be predicated. The freeborn sons of Israel might become bondmen either by poverty or by a judicial sentence on account of theft. But they could not be sold to strangers as slaves. Though it was perfectly legal to hold war captives as bondmen, yet all cruelty towards them is prohibited by the Mosaic Law; kindness is indeed specially enjoined. The injunction also is coupled with a reference to Israel's own pathetic memories of the cruel lash of the Egyptian taskmaster (Deut. v. 14, 15).

There were certain slaves employed by the priests about the sanctuary to perform the menial duties connected with the tabernacle. In Ezra ii. 43, they are called the Nethinims, or "given ones," and are there clearly distinguished from the Levites. They must have been temple slaves, and were probably captives taken in war. They were virtually adopted into the Levite families, and their names are given, both in Ezra and Nehemiah, in the register of the genealogies of those who came out of Babylon. Though they were a servile class, this shows that they were cherished with real respect and affection by their masters.

For the Israelites themselves, bondage was entirely abolished. Though they might fall into slavery through poverty, or endure it as a punishment, yet their servitude was very carefully hedged and guarded. In Ex. xxi. 7, a father may sell his daughter to be a maid-servant; but she is not to go out to the field as the menservants do, and the clause seems to contemplate her betrothment to the purchaser or to his son. Any man or woman who was compelled to sell themselves because of poverty, could be held in bondage only until the Sabbatic year came round. The period at the longest could be only six years. If he were a married man, at the time of his being sold, his wife received her freedom along with her husband; but if he married during bondage, his wife and children remained slaves. If he loved his master's service so well that, when the year of emancipation came, he preferred to remain, then a very suggestive ceremony was gone through (Ex. xxi. 5, 6). His master is to bring him before the judges to declare his wish in public. Then he is to take him to his doorpost (or probably, according to Ewald, to the door of the sanctuary), and there he is to bore his ear through with an awl in token of his vow of perpetual service.<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that

<sup>1</sup> Theologians have differed about the interpretation of this ceremony. Its spiritual counterpart may be found in Rom. xii. 1, 2.

this proceeding was brought about by affection for his master, and perhaps even more by unwillingness on the part of the slave to leave the wife and children he had got during his servitude. But the worst result of slavery is when a man ceases to feel its degradation, and no more desires his liberty. In this light the Rabbis have always viewed this unique ceremony.

Another ordinance, which very much mitigated any severity or cruelty attaching to the slavery permitted in Israel, was the law of the jubilee year. It provides for the return of the Israelite, who may have sold himself to some one after giving up his freehold estate, to his tribe and his legal inheritance. The value of any land that was alienated or pledged was estimated by the number of years intervening betwixt the sale and the jubilee year, beyond which no contract of sale was valid. So that, when this year came round, every Israelite who had sold himself regained at once both his freedom and his land. It was likewise provided that he might redeem himself at any time during the currency of the period before the jubilee by payment of redemption money. Nor was he to serve as a slave, but "as an hired servant, and as a sojourner he shall be with thee" (Lev. xxv. 40).

With regard to a slave got in war, or bought of an alien, the Mosaic Law provides that he

should have the privilege of partaking of the passover after being circumcised. He might, in the event of his master having no male issue, become his son-in-law, and be adopted into the family and continue it (1 Chron. ii. 34, 35). Punishment by death was entirely prohibited; while the ordinances regarding female captives taken in war and sought after for their beauty, are very characteristic of the merciful spirit of Old Testament legislation.

In discussing these laws regarding slavery, from an ethical point of view, it must be remembered that the question we have to face is not, Are they abstractly just and equitable?—for to a Christian conscience slavery is abhorrent, and all enactments for its regulation unjust. The Christian world has entirely passed beyond the rudimentary stage, in which these laws were justifiable. But the fact is that Mosaism adopted the best course that was then possible. If slavery could not be abolished, the next best thing to abolition was modification. These laws bear traces of existing heathen customs; yet they restrict and reform these customs. While reformatory, they at the same time show signs of being progressive. Under the spiritual impulse of prophetic teaching there are evidences of advancement to more correct ethical views regarding bondmen. In the later times of Judaism the Essenes entirely abolished slavery and asserted the innate equality of man; as

did also the Therapeutæ.<sup>1</sup> Though these Old Testament practices came short of the perfect law of liberty, yet they were stages, ethically necessary moments, on the way to perfection. It is probable that the Hebrews would have at first been unable to understand the purpose of an entire prohibition of slavery. But the increasing stringency of the regulations guarding the well-being of the slaves proceeded *pari passu* with the moral training of Israel, until at last the institution was cast aside under the influence of the teaching of Christ. But while our moral instincts are offended at slavery, it is perfectly clear that the Israelites did not so regard it.<sup>2</sup>

### III. THE MOSAIC LAW IN REFERENCE TO SANITATION

The morality of the Old Testament was *par excellence* a sanitary morality. No legal code ever looked so well to cleanliness, or placed it nearer to godliness. In this respect it exercised a most healthful influence on Jewish social life.

The laws regarding uncleanness spring out of the conception of divine holiness in Israel.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sirach, xxx. 33. Aristotle, *Nic. Ethics*, viii. 13. In Athens the proportion of slaves to citizens was as high as four to one; in Israel it was not more than one to six (Neh. vii. 66, 67).

<sup>2</sup> See art. in Herzog's *Real Encyc.*, "Sklaverei bei den Hebräern."

The natural life of the people is deemed too impure for immediate communion with a holy God. The flesh of man needs purification ere he can present himself acceptably at the altar. This fact is declared by the mother being regarded as unclean at childbirth. Everything relating to generation, birth, decomposition, corruption, and especially death, causes defilement; and stringent rules of purification for such uncleannesses are enjoined.

The primary purpose of these enactments was to bring to the worshipper's memory the defiling character of sin. The fellowship with God which is here contemplated is an external one, maintained through a national life set apart for this end, and is not that spiritual life of communion required in the New Testament. It is effected through the sanctuary service, by means of sin-offerings and purifications. Only by attending to these conditions of cleanliness can the individual Israelite share in the moral and social life of the nation, which, as a whole, had to purify itself annually on the great day of atonement.

The laws of purification embrace everything of the nature of food, and are designed for sanitary no less than for spiritual uses. They seem to be based on popular customs which had decided for their forefathers what was healthful and what was hurtful. All animals living on any kind of carrion are to be con-

sidered unclean, both for dietetic reasons and because, through contact with the carcase, they have contracted uncleanness. Any beast that is torn in pieces, or dies a natural death, must not be eaten (Deut. xiv. 21). And the general instruction given is, "Thou shalt not eat of any abominable thing" (Deut. xiv. 3).

The disease against which the most careful and stringent provisions are made is leprosy. It is regarded as a slow creeping death, attacking organ after organ of the body, and so rendering the miserable sufferer a constant centre of infection and uncleanness. With what frightful horror it was looked upon may be seen in the restrictions enforced, as well as in the terrible sense of isolation and banishment with which a victim such as Miriam received her chastisement from God.<sup>1</sup> The regulations both for the purpose of discovering its presence and of preventing its spread are given in Lev. xiii. and xiv. The duty and power of sanitary inspection lay with the priest; he must pronounce upon the nature of the disease; and, if it were discovered, must order the garments to be disinfected, and in certain events burned. After recovery, the patient had to go through the ritual of purification described in Lev. xiv., and to undergo separation from the camp for seven days.

<sup>1</sup> Num. xii. 12, "as one dead." So in Josephus, *Ant.* iii. 11, "In no way different from the dead."

In this healthy sanitary legislation Israel was far ahead of contemporary nations. In Greece lepers were spoken of as the victims of the wrath of Phoebus, and most of them withdrew from all social life, and were left to perish in solitude. Among the Chinese they were regarded with natural aversion, were left to themselves, and frequently committed suicide. Egypt was the centre of this elephantiasis in ancient times, and it is very likely that the Hebrews contracted the disease on the banks of the Nile. Egyptologists have not been able to find any law enforcing the segregation of the sufferers. On the other hand, hospitals for their residence and cure have existed for many centuries in Syria, and we may reasonably suppose that these are a result of the wise regulations of the Mosaic Law.

## CHAPTER X

### I. LAWS REGARDING THE POOR IN ISRAEL

NOWHERE is the humanity of the Mosaic legislation more clearly visible than in its treatment of the distressed. Care for the poor and the bereaved is made a duty of the highest importance. At the same time, it is very noticeable that it does not seem to contemplate any settled class of poor in the land, but only such as are reduced by loss or accident to sudden impoverishment. Provision is made for every head of a family having his allotment of ground, and the means of earning an independent and honest livelihood ; while at the same time the claims of kinship among relatives are not neglected. Provision, too, is made for continuing the family, in the case of a widow having no child, by what is known as the Levirate marriage law. So that, in point of fact, no pauper class existed, or could exist, among the Israelites. A "submerged tenth" was not possible in the Land of Promise ; and the Law has no regulations of the nature of our Poor Laws.

Yet the poor will always be in the land, so long as death strikes down the wage-earner and father. The Law, accordingly, provides for widows and orphans in the most effective way. It is to be remembered that in Israel the soil, no less than its cultivators, is the property of Jehovah, and the poor are to get some share of its produce. This idea underlies all legislation about fatherless children. In accordance with it, the law of the harvest ordains that such shall get the gleaning of the fields. Whatever grew on the land during the seventh year of rest—and in Palestine the wheat and oat crops sow themselves to a considerable extent—is to belong exclusively to the poor. Theirs too, in that Sabbatic year, is the entire fruit-crop of vine and olive (Ex. xxiii. 11). Nor are the husbandmen in any harvest season to beat their olive trees a second time, nor to glean the grapes left at the first gathering. All this is to be for "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow" (Deut. xxiv. 20, 21). If a poor man shall pledge his outer garment—the garment of goat's hair in which he slept at night—for a loan, the pledge is not to be kept overnight,<sup>1</sup> lest he shall have nothing to cover him during sleep. The hired servant, if in poverty, must be paid his wage at sundown, lest he be in need of food. Similarly, no creditor is per-

<sup>1</sup> Amos ii. 8, contains a strong condemnation of this unkind practice.

mitted to take the upper or nether millstone with which the women grind the household meal, "for he taketh a man's life to pledge" (Deut. xxiv. 6). The needy and defenceless are to have special attention and kindly care; and bondmen in particular are never to be maltreated in such a way as to endanger their power to work. The poor stranger who has conformed to Hebrew customs is strongly commended to the charitable, and is to be loved as much as their own kindred, "for ye were once strangers in the land of Egypt." He, too, is to have a share in the gleanings of the harvest.

The tithes, or tenth of the fruits, which were devoted to the Levites in compensation for their loss of tribal land, are at the end of every third year to be laid up at home, and a great feast to be given therewith to the Levites, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow (Deut. xiv. 28). This offering seems, from Deut. xxvi. 13 ff., to be regarded as less a tithe to the priest than a freewill offering of gratitude to God for his goodness in bringing them to Canaan. It would appear, also, from the way in which Amos sarcastically refers to it, that it was regularly paid by the people to the poor, however much in other respects they ceased to honour God.

In all these diverse ways, the exercise of benevolence to the poor is encouraged. Fully carried out, these regulations would

entirely prevent the growth of a pauper class in the land. They may not have been always observed; and doubtless they were by many selfish people neglected. But they are thoroughly ethical in their scope and intention. They formed part of the morality of Israel, and derived all their authority from God. Not in Egypt, nor in Assyria, nor in later days in Rome, could we find such a noble moral sentiment as that of Prov. xiv. 21: "He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he. He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker; but he that honoureth Him hath mercy on the poor." This humane kindness constitutes an ethical feature of the Old Testament that is frequently referred to for imitation in the Gospels and Epistles.

Yet, with all this charity towards the poor and the stranger, we cannot fail to notice the relative limitations. The exercise of these kindnesses does not go beyond the nation of Israel. For the stranger that has not become a citizen, that has not complied with the religious customs of the people, no such humane treatment is enjoined. He remains outside all covenant privileges and neighbourly acts of charity. The ancient inhabitants of Canaan are to be utterly exterminated, and towards them no humanity is ever to be shown. To the Ammonite and the Moabite the hatred of Israel is to extend to

the tenth generation. This is the particularism of the ethical code of Moses. Ideally, it falls far short of perfection, and is a long way behind the ethics of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. But this is a limitation that tends to pass away. In the Book of Ruth a Moabite woman is taken into a Hebrew family, and becomes famous as an ancestress of King David. The beautiful prayer of Solomon at the feast of the dedication of the Temple does not fail to include "the stranger that cometh out of a far country."<sup>1</sup> 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, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance. In that day Israel shall be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth" (Isa. xix. 24, 25).

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. It casts off its particularism, and rises into an ever wider and higher law, that embraces in its sweep the whole human race. A law with such inherent

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Schultz, *opus cit.* vol. ii. p. 62.

power of working out to wider accomplishment, and with such force of self-purification, was the product of no mere human legislator. A divine hand was all the time guiding its evolution.

## II. LAWS AS TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The way in which the relations of the sexes are viewed is always an excellent test of the legislation of any era or nation. Are the rights of the women and children carefully conserved? Or does state absolutism swallow them up? Is the individual looked at morally? Is he regarded as a member of a household or only as a citizen and soldier? If the latter be the light in which individuals are viewed, the logical result is that, since women and children cannot go to war, they must be placed upon a much lower ethical platform than the male citizen who is able to undertake military duties. Accordingly, we find it so in ancient Greece. Outside of the state there is no proper morality. In the mind of Plato, the state includes only three classes—the men of thought who rule, the soldiers who fight, and the labourers who produce. For these classes it must provide wives, whose children are to be reared in common, being the property of the state rather than of the family. There the woman could not be the loved mother at the head of

the home, but only one whose function it was to beget children and do house work, and, if need be, go to the battlefield among the tent-bearers. Of a morality, valid for all, men and women alike, Plato is entirely ignorant.

In the Old Testament we find no specific rules as to the treatment of women laid down. But in the history of the chosen people many occasions happen in which God manifests His regard for the wife, and treats her as having an equal interest with the husband in the well-being of the family, and an important share in carrying out the divine purpose. Thereby it is shown what value woman has in the economy of grace. The descendants of Abraham could not read the story of Sarah without perceiving that her life and safety and moral well-being were regarded by God as of the utmost importance. Abraham's love for her is beautifully manifested. The story of Rebecca's wooing and marriage is an Old Testament idyll. Isaac is to get a wife from the monotheistic people of Mesopotamia, not from the heathen around. In the history of Jacob and Rachel we have a touching story of true affection, and of the honour put upon a departed mother, a tale that went to the heart of Israel. Deborah is an instance of a woman who, in a time of shameful national degeneracy and faithless fears, stepped to the forefront of a great revolutionary movement, and inspired even laggard tribes to come to the help of

God's cause. The history of her doings was a very inspiration to patriotism; she became a nurse of heroes. The beautiful idyll of the Book of Ruth exhibits traits of pure feeling and nobleness that could not but elevate woman in the eyes of the Hebrews. The fact that Huldah the prophetess had gained such a position of eminence in the eyes of the leading men of Josiah's time that she was taken into the deliberations of his privy council, is a proof of the growing appreciation of the worth of woman in the times of the later kings.<sup>1</sup>

In the Book of Proverbs the picture of the virtuous woman (ch. xxxi.) is drawn in the richest colours. It sets forth an ideal of womanhood far superior to anything found in contemporary writings of pagan ethical teachers. The wife is one who possesses the full confidence of her husband; she is not the favourite of his harem, but is conceived of as the beloved single companion of his life, and the partaker of all his thoughts and cares. Her attraction does not lie in form and feature, but in moral and spiritual worth. She is a woman that fears the Lord; her praise is in every mouth; she is admired and esteemed for her general capacity, for her motherly and wifely goodness. All this indicates a conception of woman as far above that found in Plato's *Republic* as the heavens are above the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Schultz, *opus cit.* vol. i. p. 216.

earth. A good wife — and this is the root-thought of it all—is from the Lord: she is a divine gift, and whoever gets her, gets a treasure straight from heaven.

But here again, because of the hardness of man's heart, customs are permitted which are contrary to the better spirit of the Old Testament. Though at creation one woman is given to one man, and monogamy is clearly established, yet we soon find polygamy in practice. The concubine, however, seems to have been a slave of the house; and the evil results of the custom are to a considerable extent lessened by various injunctions.<sup>1</sup> Children are always regarded as a blessing from the Lord; and the custom, so common among the heathen, of doing away with weaklings,<sup>2</sup> is totally unknown to the Hebrew nation.

Connected with its assertion of woman's worth is the care which the legislation of Moses took of the children. It honours the mother, and carefully guards the child. The Hebrew father is invested with no such absolute power over his family and household as the Roman father has. Although the legal code of Rome was regarded as the richest product of the Latin genius, and virtually gave laws to all Europe, yet under it children and mothers could scarcely be said to possess

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Exposition of the Seventh Commandment, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Philo, *De Spec. Leg.* ii. 318; Tacitus, *Hist.* v. 5.

any inherent rights. But in the Pentateuchal code, a father must provide for his family; the widow is not to be treated as a burden upon the estate, but as the mother of a line of descent that God cares for, and to which He has given an inheritance. In the prophetic writings, and in the wisdom literature, children are regarded as the heritage of the Lord, and their youth is to be blessed with God's grace, if they seek to find Him. The fields of the unprotected fatherless are to be the special care of the righteous citizen, and their landmarks are to be very carefully guarded; for, it is added, "their Redeemer is mighty, He shall plead their cause with thee" (Prov. xxiii. 10). While the wicked lie in wait to ensnare them, God is the helper of the fatherless (Ps. x. 14), and will requite any evil done to them. The greater their need and helplessness the more claim have they on the good man. He whom God most approves is he who pleads the cause of the widow and judges the orphan.

The education of children in the knowledge of God's Law, and in the principles of right conduct, receives much attention in the Book of Proverbs. The author is never weary of emphasising the blessing of sons and daughters who are wise and walk in the fear of God.<sup>1</sup> It is remarkable that in Prov. vi. and xxiii., the mother is put upon a level of authority with

<sup>1</sup> Prov. iv. 3; x. 1; xvii. 21; xxiii. 22, 25 ff.

the father as the child's teacher; she has an equal share in the duty of giving moral and religious instruction to the family. Parents are counselled to train their children to a high ethical standard, so that their manhood and womanhood may be in accordance with God's Law. Though girls are not mentioned, it is implied that they also receive instruction in the legal precepts, no less than in the virtues that beautify a woman's character. Their adorning is to be modesty and kindness; and the fear of the Lord in the heart of the young is better than worldly favour or riches (Prov. xxxi.).

From the foregoing observations it will be seen that, in relation to man, in all the various spheres of his activity, domestic and civil, industrial and social, the Law of the Old Testament presents a moral ideal that is the highest and purest known to the ancient world. Everywhere it approves virtue, honesty, love of our neighbour, and justice as between man and man. It exhorts to truth and kindness; it inculcates the love of the poor; it tells of the rights of the weak, the needy, and the fatherless; it denounces all insanitary customs, immoral practices, and inhuman rites, however widely these may be countenanced. In a word, it upholds an ideal of ethical duty of the highest type; and it desires to make that ideal a universal rule, valid for all time and for all peoples.

## III. LAWS RELATING TO WORSHIP

These laws we shall consider only on their ethical side. The religious aspect of the subject belongs to Old Testament theology.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most degrading customs of pagan religions was the offering of human sacrifices. There seems to be little doubt that the Israelites became acquainted in Egypt, or soon after leaving it, with the cruel rites connected with the worship of the fire-god Moloch.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it has been maintained by not a few eminent scholars that the original worship of Israel was this Moloch cultus, and that the purer worship of Jehovah was a development of it. That the offering of children to this fire-god was of very ancient origin cannot be denied. It belonged to a time prior to the call of Abraham; and, after disappearing for many centuries, it reappears about the time of Amos. The offering by parents of their offspring to this deity is rigidly prohibited in Leviticus, and with such a reiteration of emphasis as to show Jehovah's detestation of the practice. Yet the custom of expiating sin in this unnatural manner had such a hold of the people that it was found a very difficult matter to extirpate it, and to educate them to a more ethical worship. To the nations surrounding Israel it seems to have been the most natural thing to ask,

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Robertson's *Early History of Israel*, p. 241. ff.

“How shall I come before the Lord? Shall I give the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” The sentiment voiced in these words is a very common one amongst pagans. Some of the most pathetic Greek tragedies are founded upon the story of a father offering up a child, that he might win the favour of the gods; so dismal were the ideas of the character of deity that prevailed even in cultured Greece.

On this point the Law of Moses spoke out in clear tones. It unsparingly condemned these cruel Moloch rites. Human sacrifice is denounced in every form. To offer human life to Jehovah is “an abomination which He hateth” (Deut. xii. 31). Man has no right to take away life unless in the execution of judgment conformable to God’s Law. The prohibition of the Moloch cultus is an evidence of the ethical character of the God revealed in the Pentateuch, and of the nature of the worship which His people are to offer. It proves Him to be a deity, abhorring every offering of cruelty, every holocaust of innocent children, but delighting in the service and the praise of the young. He did not wish the fruit of the body to be offered for the sin of the soul. The reply which the prophet gives to the question quoted above, is very instructive, “What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah vi. 8).

God desires from man no worship save that which is moral and spiritual.

During the reigns of Manasseh and Amon, both of whom endeavoured to overthrow the worship of Jehovah and to establish the undisputed supremacy of idolatry, Moloch worship seems to have been again introduced. On this occasion it was brought from the northern parts of Asia Minor. Its chief seat was Tophet, in the valley of Hinnom, close to Jerusalem, where Manasseh actually sacrificed to the fire-god his own offspring (2 Chron. xxxiii. 6). For some time the priests seem to have participated in the universal moral degeneracy: but the prophets are found raising their voices with defiant note against the crimes of Manasseh (2 Kings xxi. 10), and doubtless won the martyr crown for so doing (v. 16), being among the innocent blood so plenteously shed by that king in his wild youth, ere yet the grace of God had changed his heart.

There is an old tradition that Isaiah suffered martyrdom at the hands of Manasseh, probably for his courage in denouncing this sin. Josiah, the grandson of Manasseh, endeavoured to cleanse Judah of this disgusting cultus, which afterwards gave the valley of Hinnom the significant name of Gehenna, the terrible symbol of hell. He ordered the places of Moloch-worship to be razed to the ground. Under his beneficent rule, the Prophet

Jeremiah exercised his office ; and he also invokes God's wrath on those that send their children through fire to win the divine favour. Still they were ruthlessly offered up on the burning shrine ; and the keynote of Jeremiah's prophecy regarding the future becomes a very dolorous one. "There will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness" (Jer. vii. 34). It required no little courage to denounce a practice so deeply rooted in the heart of the people ; and we do not wonder at Jeremiah's subsequent imprisonment. The persistent prevalence of the custom shows us how the natural heart conceives of God, and tries to appease His wrath. It thinks of Him as One whose favour is to be won by excruciating agonies, and by the surrendering of what it most loves to the God it abhors.

When we remember the fundamental maxim of comparative religion, that "as is the god, so is the religion," we perceive that the Law of Israel was ethically pure, because the idea of God was ethically lofty. Its baser elements had been eliminated, and Israel was taught to think of God as the highest and purest goodness. And this conception was realised, not as the result of mental effort directed to the subject, but as a fact historically accomplished. Ultimately this ideal triumphed over all degraded conceptions to which the

nation was tempted to return ; and it utterly abolished human sacrifices among the Hebrews.

#### IV. LAWS RELATING TO SACRIFICE

The dwelling of God in the midst of His people does not remove the yawning gulf that divides a holy God from sinful men. Jehovah dwells within the tabernacle ; yet fellowship with Him can be maintained only through sacrifice and priestly intercession. The people cannot immediately approach the place of the Most High. Even the priests are not fit to enter into full communion with Him ; for the Holy of Holies, where Jehovah is throned,—revealed yet concealed, among His people and yet separate from them,—may be entered only by the high priest, “not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the errors of the people.” Even he who carries on the service of reconciliation must know his own separateness, and must cleanse his own acts by sacrifice. And that separateness is still more emphasised by the regulations enforcing purity on the part of the offerer.

It is outside our province to discuss the ritual of these sacrifices, the presentation of the animal at the altar, the laying on of the offerer's hands, the slaying, and the sprinkling of blood. It concerns us simply to point out that the offerer meant the victim to be a

means of atonement, a symbol of thanksgiving and of supplication. The meaning of the laying on of hands on the victim's head is rightly set forth when, as Ewald says, "the offerer himself laid down all the feelings, which must now rush upon him in full fervour, on the head of the creature, the blood of which was presently to flow for him, and as it were to appear before God for him." The fellowship between God and him, broken by sin, was to be restored; the soul of the clean and innocent animal was, in the blood of the offering, presented in the place of the impure soul of the offerer, so that God might see at His altar only a pure life, by means of which the evil life of the offerer was covered, and atonement was made for him. Whatever might be the special significance of the trespass-offerings, the thank-offerings, drink-offerings, and burnt-offerings, the general purpose of them all was to remind the people that they had entered into covenant relationship with a holy God who dwelt among them, and who was willing, if they thus approached Him, to maintain a loving fellowship with them.

To the ritual of sacrifice was added a number of rules regarding purification. They were intended to deepen the conviction of sinful uncleanness, and to remind Israel that they must, as God's people, be free from all sinful impurity. (The laws regarding leprosy, etc., have been already discussed.) The

object of these ordinances was both sanitary and religious. They promoted health and they fostered piety. They tended, in this latter aspect, to deepen a sense of shortcoming; and they pointed beyond themselves to that perfect Atonement, which was on Calvary to effect a truly inward and abiding communion between God and man.

A great moral and religious idea lay at the root of the Old Testament sacrifices. That idea was one of the formative influences in the ethical education of Israel. It mingled with the deepest currents of the nation's life. In the Prophets and Psalmists it advances with the spiritual apprehension of the writers, and awakens an agonising cry for a time when the inward cleansing should correspond with the outward symbol. Ceremonial cleanness was not to remain a negative and fruitless idea, a mere religious dress for the holy nation. It was to result in "clean hands and a pure heart," in a conduct characterised by separation from sin, and devotion to the cause of righteousness. The law of sacrifice became thoroughly ethicised in the doctrine of the Cross: it no longer remains a cold and hard requirement, but becomes filled with the fire of a self-sacrificing zeal in the work of the kingdom of God.

## CHAPTER XI

### OLD TESTAMENT VIEW OF A FUTURE LIFE

ONE of the most striking features of the Old Testament is the almost entire absence from it of reference to a future state. It does seem surprising that a doctrine found so full of ethical value in the New Testament should be so seldom met with in the teachings of the Law and the Prophets. So far from coming into the foreground, it is barely mentioned in the earlier part of these writings. There is no religion of antiquity that lays less stress on the rewards and punishments of the next world. So much is this the case, that it has been by many denied that the truth of a personal immortality is taught at all in the Old Testament. (Indeed, Bishop Warburton, in his *Divine Legation of Moses*, goes the length of endeavouring to show that the absence of any appeal to the solemn sanctions of the other world is a proof of the divine origin of Old Testament Revelation. He argues that since the other religions sought to strengthen themselves by appeals to a

hereafter, Judaism did not do so, because thoroughly conscious of its supernatural origin and miraculous mission. Whether or not that argument be valid, it is clear that the absence of "other-worldliness" is an outstanding feature of the Old Testament. Had Moses borrowed his ideas of God from the religion of Egypt, with which by means of his early training he must have been thoroughly acquainted, he would certainly have been found invoking the sanctions of a future judgment. The Egyptologists tell us how prominent is the position given to the worship of Osiris in the religion of the Egyptians, and how frequently the mosaics of the tombs of Luxor and Thebes reproduced for us the scenes of the great Judgment Day, which so overawed and impressed the mind of the Egyptian worshipper. It is probable that this may have been a reason why the doctrine of a personal immortality was kept by Moses so much in the background, lest it might have connections in the minds of the Israelites with Egyptian superstitions. Or it may have been that, since a theocratic kingdom was to be established and consolidated in Canaan, the emphasis was to be laid upon the present and not upon the future. A city of God, a society on earth governed by moral laws, and ruled by the fear of God, had to be founded and organised as a basis for all subsequent extension of pure religion. It was probably needful

that the motives deduced from a future life should be kept out of sight, if the ethical forces that go to the making of a righteous and powerful nation were freely to operate. In this way the moral life of Israel would be pervaded by a vital energy which would separate it, *longo intervallo*, from that of Egypt, where religion concerned itself much more about a future world and its doings than about the terrible injustice and inequalities of the present.<sup>1</sup>

Besides, all this longing after immortality, this hope of a hereafter of pure bliss and continuous life, is a doctrine that is rooted in other beliefs that must precede it. To those whose mind is of the earth earthy, this feeling is one that is weak and ineffective. The thought of death is so dismal that they will not allow it to enter and take possession of their mind. It is in the breast of such as have, Enoch-like, found out the joy of walking with God, or who have with Job discovered the vanity of evanescent things, that the strong desire for an immortal life beyond the present roots itself and springs into life and power. When a man's whole life is shaped by the ethics of a selfish prudence, and his aim is to steer safely in the *viâ media* of moderation, recommended in the Wisdom Literature, he may be quite content to realise the good of life in this world alone,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Naville's, *Das Ägyptische Todtenbuch*, and Professor Maspero's *Le Livre des Morts*.

and at the end of it vanish into Sheol, the realm of shades. But when, as in the fine passage in Prov. xxx., a man affirms that he prizes prosperity only in proportion as it is sanctified by righteousness and enriched with the blessing of God, and is thus a token and pledge of the divine complacency, he cannot contemplate with pleasure a cessation of that divine favour. Deeper thoughts will come to him, and he will not rest content with the outlook of a sensuous eudæmonism. The communion with God which the good man enjoys (Ps. lxxiii. 23-26) comes to assert itself with such force in his soul, that he rises above the fear of Sheol and becomes confident that, though flesh and heart fail, God will be the strength of his heart and his portion for ever.

The mature faith in an eternal life after death, it is true, came only when Jesus Christ brought life and immortality to light in the gospel. But the foundation of this hope was laid in the institution here of a fellowship of man with God, the ever-living One. And they who enjoy it in the present come to be convinced that it must be unending, just because God's eternity secures the immortality of His servants (Ps. cii. 24-28).

But what is perfectly clear to every student of the Old Testament, is that the lower hope was the firstborn. The desire of every patriotic and righteous Israelite for the preservation of

the chosen nation under the protection of Jehovah, the longing for a family name, and a family inheritance in Israel, for children and children's children,—on these was grafted the higher hope of the coming Messianic time, which was to the Israelite what the hope of heaven is to the Christian.

It is in accordance with this fact of experience that we find the hope of a future life is a growing one in the prophets of Israel. Those men were consumed with a passion for righteousness; they were men of unparalleled moral zeal, the noblest and best of their time. They saw, what others were blind to, a moral order in the world working for righteousness. They believed in a living and true God, who cared more for goodness than for ritual and rubrics. And with their splendid spirit of optimism they beheld a golden age lying beyond the gloom of the present, of which they presented the most glowing pictures. As the environment of Israel grew darker in the Exilic age, and the collapse of the nation at the Captivity seemed complete, the yearning for a future and unending salvation, extending beyond the horizons of Palestine, and even of earth, was intensified and purified.

With this doctrine of immortality is closely connected the question of future rewards and punishments. Piety and probity bring with them, in the Old Testament, prosperity;

while wickedness is surely followed by adversity. The men who built up the commonwealth of Israel were not called to do so by any view of rewards and punishments in a future existence. They were to do right, because God had so commanded; and He would bless them in so doing. If they turn to God with their heart, and serve Him, He will turn to them, will fill their houses with abundance, and will give them long life and peaceable possession of their inheritance.

In the Pentateuch, the theocratic scheme does not look beyond the limits of Israel, nor beyond the natural life of the individual and of the nation. Life, long and healthy; plenty in basket and store; a full house and a lasting posterity, these are the gifts and rewards certified to the man that walks uprightly. This has been challenged as unmitigated eudæmonism, as teaching that the service of God is but the sure and direct means to the attainment of worldly prosperity, the best and shortest road to riches. We admit that, until we look closely into it, it does seem so. But we find that even in Lev. xxvi., where the doctrine of divine rewards is plainly laid down, and righteousness is to be rewarded with riches and peace in the land, the blessings culminate in the spiritual one of communion with God, who will dwell continually among them. It is not, therefore, prosperity

*per se* that is to be sought by the Israelite, but prosperity along with and because of God's blessing; for that is the meaning of His presence with them. Riches are undoubtedly a pledge of God's goodwill, and are to be sought as such. A family and a name are similar pledges. And the patriarchs who received these gifts are patterns of what every Israelite should strive to be. Faithfulness to God's covenant will ensure all these good things; and these, together with God's promised protection and presence, will form the rich reward of the godly man's life.

On the other hand, if the nation turn away from Jehovah to serve other gods, and fall back into paganism, their infidelity shall certainly forfeit the blessings of a sure inheritance and a lasting posterity. Famine shall invade their land; their crops shall be mildewed, their cattle shall be barren, and their fruit trees shall cast their fruit. The heathen will be found making irruptions into their fields, and will bring sword and rapine to their homes; and they will be carried off into captivity. All this shall be done, that they may know that the source of all their blessing is in God, and that their best possession is Jehovah Himself.

This doctrine of retribution has been much misunderstood. It is not a morality based upon motives alone of temporal rewards and punishments. Rather it is full of ethical

encouragement to live so as to ensure God's presence in Israel, and with it all these pledges of His favour. Its aim is to get men to co-operate with the great moral order of the world, to bring about a reign of righteousness. There are in it, doubtless, many appeals which would have little weight with a mind enlightened by the Christian's hope. But the Old Testament is not a treatise of perfect morals. God was content to accomplish one thing at a time. Revelation just kept ahead of the age, and in this way it was able to give the nation constant moral guiding. There was in it, as Canon Mozley says, a divine principle of adjustment, by which it took the child by the hand and taught him one step at a time. It brought certain truths, that were easily within the grasp of the people's mind, to bear upon them, and to keep them moving onwards. For a nation of emancipated slaves, rising out of the lowest plane of ignorance into the first rudimentary stage of morality, these truths were of inestimable service. It was as yet with them the age of the primer; and so the word "conscience" is not made use of, but they are simply told to obey. Law must precede love; and external rules must go before inward principles.

So it comes about that the first blessing promised to the patriarch is not the heavenly life; it is the very substantial blessing of a

son, and a seed numerous as the sand, with a far-off inheritance in Canaan. For generations after Abraham's time the righteous lives of the patriarchs were similarly rewarded, God thus working on the instinctive love of men for a family name and inheritance. Then, when Canaan was reached, the family's inheritance in the tribe was secured to it, and again on this the law of retributive justice seized and wrought for moral ends. A man owning his father's land was not to be sold as a slave; and so slavery was slowly undermined, and a conception of individual rights was developed. In this manner a way was prepared for teaching the higher truth of the moral worth of every soul in God's sight. Through all this teaching of the individual's worth and value, the doctrine of a personal immortality was working its way upward and outward into clearer light. "That was not first which was spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual." First came the earthy, and then came the heavenly; first the love of family, and the tribal inheritance, and a lasting name and place in Israel; then out of this germ blossomed the psalmist's hope of life unending in the light of Jehovah's face. From a fixed inheritance in the land which God owned and blessed and defended to a belief in a life of unending communion with this same gracious God, was but a step, the final

and important step in Israel's moral education. To seers and saints there came fore-gleams of it as they stood upon the mountain-tops of Revelation and caught the first rays. But the full-orbed truth that Jesus Christ came to teach regarding the future life and its rewards was not yet reached amid the shadows of the Old Testament dispensation.

There can be little doubt that this obscuration of the truth of a future life lay at the bottom of those doubts that so often invaded the minds of Old Testament saints. Such men could not perceive the enemies of God triumphant without being sadly perplexed at such a condition of apparent moral disorder. The actualities of the present life, in which vice walked in purple and virtue was often dressed in rags, did not seem to harmonise with the government of a righteous ruler. We shall afterwards see how the prophets were able to rise above such doubts through their faith in an objective moral order, a power-not-themselves making for righteousness, and taught Israel to believe that the world after all is ruled impartially by the just will of Jehovah.

## CHAPTER XII

### ADVANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

WE have seen that there is a progress of Revelation in the Old Testament, and one that was supernaturally conducted. There can be no doubt that in like manner, along with the historic advancement in the knowledge of God, there is, *pari passu*, an historic progress in Old Testament morality. At the centre of the Law lay a great pedagogic intent, of which the purpose was to evolve a higher type of character in man, in keeping with a truer knowledge of God. A vital and self-purifying principle was at the root of this onward movement; and so unbroken and continuous is it that it is clear the evolution was determined by divine wisdom.

It is in respect of this continuous progress that the morality of the Old Testament is distinguished from all other moralities, and is seen, like the Bible, to be no mere product of the Semitic genius working itself out amid its actual environment. The pagan moralities are never found to grow more elevated and

pure with age. With the growth of centuries, the fruit on their trees, so far from improving, degenerates. In his *Ruling Ideas*, Mozley points out how among other nations than Israel "the ideas of justice, benevolence, purity, stay at an incipient stage, and never become more than half ideas." The Roman Moralists did not advance beyond a passive morality to a positive ethical influence. Seneca sought to build up a universal Humanism out of the ancient Particularism; but it got only to theoretical propositions, and never possessed power and vitality. Natural selfhood was the true root principle of the ethics of both Greece and Rome. The ancient World is the realm of selfishness, however much the pill may be sugared and gilded with philosophical terms and fine names. It is a wise saying of the author of *Ecce Homo*, "The selfishness of modern times exists in defiance of morality; in ancient times it was approved and even in part enjoined by morality."

In contrast with this we find that in the Old Testament ethical principles are always receiving new developments, and, under the guidance of God's Spirit, are being wrought out into larger and richer results. While those races to which Israel was kindred remained at the lowest levels of morality, Israel rose to higher and higher platforms of ethical religion. There is no rational interpretation of this unique fact but that which recognises a divine

mind educating the Jewish conscience. For the evolution was not in the line of the natural disposition of the people. Often indeed it ran counter to their strongest prejudices. Yet it triumphed over every opposition, proving that a higher Power counteracted the natural stream of tendency, and caused it to make for righteousness.

The life that was lived under the Mosaic rule was a life of restraint and of obedience to an external law. Under such a government there was no little danger that Israel might fall into a mechanical formalism without any depth of moral or spiritual contents. The Law accomplished its end by bringing about and maintaining a theocratic union between God and the nation. That was its primary purpose. But it had also another purpose, by virtue of which "the Law entered that the offence might abound." In that early stage of training these rules formed the immediate ethical environment of Israel. Round about the life of the people they drew a containing line of ceremonial regulations which galled and irritated. But of itself the Law could not work out fulfilment nor make the people perfect. Its standpoint was one of external authority. Jehovah was the theocratic ruler, and His Law must be complied with in the whole external form and life of the nation.

It was not therefore enough that the Law should manifest the special relationship in

which God stood to the favoured nation, and in correspondence with this regulate the external life of the community. It must also be realised in an inner harmony between the heart of the worshipper and Jehovah; it must be accepted, not as a curb or rein, but as the rule of the inner life. Only thus can the heart and the life correspond, and the outward observance be the true index of the inward moral reality. The Law graven on tables of stone is to be written by the Spirit on the fleshly tablets of the heart.

Now, the Law does contain a prophecy of something better. It points beyond itself to a time when it shall cease to be but an external form, and shall become part of the inward disposition. This aim is clearly set forth in Deuteronomy and in the prophetic writings, in which the observance of the ceremonial law is declared to be absolutely worthless, unless so far as it is the resultant of a life surrendered to the will of God.

That this highly ethical end was the *raison d'être* of prophecy is proved by the terms of its institution. In Deut. xviii. 15-22, the nature of the office is described. It was to begin with Moses, and was to be a continuous testimony, on the part of those specially called and fitted by God, to the truth of His word. The people were assured that all needful instruction and guidance in their difficulties would be vouchsafed to them by God's accredited

ited messengers. The prophets were to be endowed by the "Spirit of Jehovah," and enabled to interpret His law in a living and practical manner, with all the moral force of a message coming straight from the heart. They were from time to time to reveal new counsels of God, and to make the people thoroughly acquainted with new developments of His purpose. They were essentially the spiritual men of the day, the men who saw the deeper meaning of God's Law, and brought it into living touch with the circumstances of the nation (Ex. vii. 1).

Of these spiritually-minded men, there arose none greater in Israel than Moses himself. For if the "prophet, as such, knows himself to be the organ of divine revelation," there can be little doubt that this knowledge belonged to Moses in a pre-eminent degree. None received a more clear vocation to the office. God Himself desired him to be the exponent of His will, and richly endowed him with the gifts of the Divine Spirit. Besides, was he not taken up into the very audience-chamber of God for forty days, and received there direct communications from the divine lips? There can therefore be no question as to his prophetic inspiration.

Whatever view may be taken of the authorship of several parts of the Pentateuch, it cannot be denied that they contain the presentation of a very ethically conceived Deity.

This we have already seen. The spirituality and the moral character of Jehovah cannot be eradicated from the laws we have been considering; and however much they may have had to contend for recognition with the less spiritual ideas of the times of the Judges, yet these truths were held by all the best and purest minds in Israel after the death of Moses.

In the Book of Deuteronomy these truths are prominently set forth. The name of the Book declares it to be a repetition of the Law, and its design is clearly to bring the Law home to the heart and life of the people. It would set before the Israelites the divine meaning of their wonderful history, would show them its real tendency, and present it in its moral completeness. There is no discovering of new truth, but a very earnest accentuation of the ethical character of God's Revelation and of the need of a corresponding conduct on the part of His people. Indeed we may say it is so intelligently expounded, and is re-affirmed with such breadth of treatment, that it practically amounts to a new revelation. And the same thing is true of all the other prophets as well as of Moses.

The teaching of Hosea and Amos, though presenting some different features, agrees with that of Deuteronomy in demanding an obedience of the heart to the Law of the Lord. They denounce a worship which is content with ritual and rubrics, and insist on the fact

that morality is far above ceremonialism. Micah and Isaiah follow in the same line of teaching, manifesting a like "passion for righteousness," and broadening out the conception of Jehovah as the God of all the nations of the earth. Micah affirms the Ceremonial Law to be absolutely worthless unless in so far as it is the resultant and outcome of a life surrendered to the will of God. "Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord? . . . He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. vi. 8).

In the succeeding prophets, and especially in Jeremiah, the ethical teaching of the Law is developed in a similar manner. They place obedience above sacrifice, and prefer the performance of duty to hecatombs of bullocks and rams.

If we combine with the teaching of the prophets that of the psalmists, both pre-Exilic and post-Exilic, we shall find the same characteristics prevailing. Righteousness is praised without any reference to the value of Levitical ordinances. So strongly is the contrast put between the comparative worth of ritual and of righteous conduct, that the psalmist even goes the length of accentuating one side to the apparent disparagement of the other. "Thou delightest not in sacrifice, else would I give it; Thou hast no pleasure in burnt-

offering" (Ps. li. 16). And he does not hesitate to affirm that the sacrifice which is most pleasing to God, is the offering of gratitude, springing from a broken and contrite heart. At the same time, every sacrifice of the offerer who is contrite and faithful, is "a sweet-smelling savour unto Jehovah."

But while there is maintained a continuous polemic against the externality of Levitical rites, and while prophets and psalmists do not hesitate to speak of them with disparagement, yet it is clear all the time that it is not because they despise these ordinances, but rather because they had observed that the people rested in the outward act without rendering it valid by inward devotion. Samuel, the founder of the school of the prophets, first of all sounds this note of objurgation, when to the impatient king he says: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Yet all the while we know that Samuel himself regularly offered sacrifices at the appointed place. Even in Ps. li., where God at first is spoken of as not delighting in sacrifice, it is afterwards affirmed that when devoted hands have built the walls of Jerusalem, "Then shalt Thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness." And the same Isaiah who affirms that the defiled multitude of exiles should not build a temple to Jehovah (Isa. lxvi. 1, 3), and who speaks of their offerings as detestable, yet

predicts in the same chapter (ver. 20) that a new and better sacrificial service shall be instituted in the New Jerusalem. None of the prophets denounces with more unsparing vigour the utter worthlessness of the *opus operatum* than the Prophet Hosea, who declares that God "desires mercy and not sacrifice," expressing the relative contrast in terms that are absolute. Yet Hosea clearly shows (ix. 4) the importance attributed to genuine sacrifice, when it is the expression of a spirit that mourns its misdoings.

It has been said that Ezekiel and Daniel are exceptions, and that they encourage a legal externalism. There is no doubt that Ezekiel describes in highly coloured terms the restoration of the Levitical ceremonial, and that this is consistent with the priestly character of his teaching.<sup>1</sup> But it must be remembered that during the captivity it was all the more needful to keep the people as separate as possible from their heathen surroundings, inasmuch as the Levitical worship could not be carried out on heathen soil. The only offering possible was that of prayer, and in the view of Ezekiel it was all the more necessary, in order to prevent a total falling away, strictly to observe those regulations that were not connected with the Temple service in Jerusalem. But that Ezekiel did not regard

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Driver, *Introduction to Old Testament Literature*, p. 273, ff.

this external worship as having value apart from a truly religious spirit, is clear from the fact that the outpouring of the Divine Spirit was to be the preparation for Israel's restoration to Canaan, "And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments and do them."

The one-sided Levitism, charged against the Book of Daniel, arises from a misunderstanding of the pedagogic element. Daniel's strict abstinence from unclean meats at the royal table is simply a proof that he remained a true and faithful servant of Jehovah, though dwelling among a heathen people, and that to him the ritual ordinance was not a matter of place and time, but of heart and conscience. His legal strictness sprang from faith in the divine guidance and promise. To speak of his custom of praying thrice a day, with his face turned towards Jerusalem, as an instance of the bondage of legalism, is to ignore the methods and helps that never hinder but rather aid the spiritual mind in its approaches to God. Method in prayer must be of a kind that shall never override the individual speciality and freedom of petition. If it hinder the "boldness" with which a man comes to the throne of grace, or confine his spirit in its confession, adoration, or thanksgiving, then such method is a carnal ordinance hurtful to outspokenness, and tending to

cramp free personal communion. But to dedicate certain hours of the day to private prayer, to give it the measured allotment of the morning, midday, and evening hours, is to do what all the noblest saints in all ages have done, a method which they have found brings them a manifest spiritual gain. It is only a proof of the critics' unspirituality when this pious custom of Daniel is regarded as a mark of an extravagant ceremonialism. Daniel is at one with the other prophets on this point of the comparative importance of morality and ritual. In this respect they were all true to the spirit of Moses and of the Decalogue, in which, as has often been said, ritual finds no place at all.

When in the Assyrian, the Babylonian, and the Persian periods, the most critical stage of the history of Old Testament religion, it seemed probable that worship would sink to the level of common Semitic heathenism and perish with the political extinction of the nation that had maintained it, it was the faithful preaching of the prophets that averted such a catastrophe. They stated with ever growing clearness the moral and spiritual truth that had been all but lost amid the grossness of a dead externalism. Jehovah is a God of righteousness; Israel's religion is an ethical religion; and God's dealings with His people follow an ethical standard. He will have no worship but that of the heart. A worship of

outward ceremonies alone, however gorgeous and seemly, is devoid of the essential elements of religion, and in fact is not religion at all.

By their passion for righteousness, as well as by their unhesitating obedience to the voice of God, the prophets are witnesses to the moral government of God in the world. Above all, they bear testimony to the fact that a righteous Ruler presides over and judges with equity the actions of men. The moral ideal which they present before their contemporaries is always a lofty one. They are the champions of the poor against the rich, and are full of sympathy and compassion for the needy and distressed; while their view of life is thoroughly healthy and humane. They are possessed by a splendid hopefulness, and, in spite of distresses and captivities, paint glorious pictures of a golden age that lies in the future. They have visions of a time when God's purpose with Israel will be eventually fulfilled, and the elect nation will be the medium of conveying to the whole world the saving revelation of truth, of which it had so long been the conservator. Pagan poets write of a golden age that existed in the past, in the early prime of their nation's history; but it is down the vista of the future that the Old Testament prophets behold that age, and rejoice and are glad.

Our purpose does not permit us to fill in the details of this picture of the prophetic

golden age. They will be found in books on the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. Isaiah gives prominence to the political side, but Jeremiah and Ezekiel emphasise the ethical forces of it. Then the Law will be written upon the heart; the righteous King will execute justice in the earth; the stony heart will be taken away, and a new spirit put within them. There will be a great national regeneration; and righteousness will flow down the streets like streams of water. The historic realisation of it all is to be found in Jesus Christ. It could not be accomplished by the Law; but the Law was the pedagogue to lead to Christ.

Before that consummation was accomplished, however, the nation had to go through the dark night of legalism, and learn what the Law could and could not do. Sad it is to think that in the Judaism of the closing era of Old Testament religion the teaching of those spiritual prophets receded before the advance of an external Leviticalism, in which outward works took the place of heart repentance, and the heroic "Protestants and Reformers of Israel" were displaced by a set of Casuists, who utterly divorced ritual from righteousness, and were children of the bondwoman and not of the free.

## THE WISDOM LITERATURE

The teaching of the prophets was not the only gate by which the conscience of Israel found an escape from restraints of the Law into a wider sphere of moral ideals. In the *Chokhmah* literature the Hebrew mind took up and discovered the personal relations of man. That literature has been termed the Philosophy of the Old Testament. It endeavoured, through the knowledge of God's revealed will, at once to understand the divine ways, and to determine human duties.

It includes the three Books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, as well as some of the Psalms. It differs from prophecy, with its "word of the Lord," its "burden," and its "visions"; nor were the authors of it orators or preachers. Rather was it the product of much mental reflection on the world in which man's duty lay, and which it believed was ruled by the divine agency.

The wisdom literature presents some striking contrasts with the writings of the Pentateuch and of the prophets. It looks more to the social sphere than to the individual life for the realisation of ethical ends. Its point of view is a universal, not a particular one; it surveys the whole world of humanity, and declares that "there is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not" (Eccles. vii. 20). In the

books of the Law the main object is to secure obedience to the moral and ceremonial injunctions. But in the *Chokmah* books not obedience but wisdom is enjoined : and for all that is said of the priesthood and sacrifice, the Tabernacle service and Temple of Solomon might never have existed. In the Pentateuch, wisdom is never mentioned. Nor is the reason far to seek. The Hebrews had to go through the pedagogy of a legal training before they could arrive at the freedom of the principle of wisdom, and feel the power of moral truth. Indeed the rise of this wisdom literature is a proof that the school stage of moral education was now passed, and that Israel had progressed to that manhood where they could cast aside the bondage of rule, and step out into the large and wide field of ethical principles.

The contrast presented between the wisdom literature and the writings of the prophets is not less striking. It found, outside the sphere of the Law, a divine teleology at work in the world, an omniscient mind guiding and ruling all things in conformity with its purpose, and maintaining not only the stars in their places, but also the moral order of the world. This wisdom both "instructs" and "reproves" (Prov. iv. 11, 18). He who will not receive instruction, who will have none of the reproof of wisdom, is a fool rushing on to his deathful doom. But he who has in him

“the fear of the Lord,” will turn from the paths of evil and choose the way of righteousness.

This fear of the Lord, which is the subjective principle of Old Testament wisdom, is not the fear of divine vengeance, such as is denounced against the sinner in the ordinances of the Law. Nor is it a gloomy, unintelligent dread of Deity, as of an iron fate. But it is the fear of disobeying the word of a holy and wise Ruler, whose will is His people's highest good, and in whose favour is true life. If it gives less heed to the Law as issuing directly from God Himself, it is more distinctly ethical in its endeavour to renounce pride, arrogancy, and the evil way, and to recognise the great maxims of life which wisdom utters at the opening of the gates and in the market-place.

From this source, the fear of God, spring all the virtues. Out of this fountain will flow a stream of conduct that shall enrich the life, and bring both honour and long days to its possessor. Among the first graces shall be humility and kindness. “Before honour goeth humility” (Prov. xviii. 12). “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord” (Prov. xix. 17). Along with kindness shall go justice: for nothing is so hateful to God as “divers weights and a false balance” (Prov. xx. 23). The love of one's enemy is inculcated, and coals of fire are to be heaped upon his head by deeds of unexpected kind-

ness. Anger is to be restrained, and to a wrathful man stirring up contention the best reply is the "soft answer" of a patient and gentle spirit. Mercy to the lower creation is enforced, and harshness and cruelty are vigorously condemned. Above all, the righteous man will never oppress the poor, nor enter the fields of the fatherless to rob them. He will not sit among winebibbers and gluttons, nor spend his means in riotous living. The "strange woman" he will not look at, and the gossips who stir up strife he will shun. Wealth is a great blessing, but only if it be got by righteous methods. Much is said on the right use of the tongue; discreet speech is highly valued, but lip-talk only impoverishes, and tale-bearing breeds strife. Respect for parents is throughout commended; as are also liberality and benevolence. The sin of pride is denounced in unsparing language, and the purse-proud man is well warned of the fall that awaits him. A virtuous woman is spoken of as the crown of her husband, while much sarcasm is cast on the brawl. In several places the sluggard is held up to well-merited contempt, while industry receives unusual commendation. The book ends with a glowing description of the ideal woman of wisdom, whose portrait is drawn in the finest ethical colouring.

In all this there is a total disregard of any Israelitish standpoint in characterising men's

virtues and vices. Society is looked at in the broadest light, and with a thorough practical end in view. The wise man regards mainly the consequences of actions, and from a wide observation gathers up his conclusions and rests them on grounds common to all men. He is not a philosopher of the hard utilitarian school of morals : but “ he is philanthropic in the literal sense : every way of man, and every expression of his mind or nature has a charm for him.”<sup>1</sup> It is because of this tendency to look at human nature in its broadest aspects that these writers have been fitly called the humanists of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

It was through these two gateways of prophetism and the wisdom literature that the moral life of Israel, long cramped by the restriction of legal codes, opened out into a wider region of ethical power. They indicate the high-water mark in the ethics of the Old Testament. In passing from them into the next period, introduced by Ezra the Scribe, we enter upon an era of decline and retrogression.

<sup>1</sup> Professor Davidson in *Expositor*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Cheyne, *Job and Solomon*, p. 119.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ETHICS OF THE LATER JUDAISM

AFTER the brilliant period of prophecy in the Babylonian age, we come to a stage in the moral development of God's people, where we must speak not of progress so much as of reaction. Prophecy had laid emphasis on the obligation of a righteous life, and had never failed to affirm that morality must be at the basis of national prosperity. But after the return of the captives from Babylon, there takes place a deterioration in religion, and Levitical ceremonialism is elevated to a place beside morality. The Mosaic Law is regarded in all its parts as equally necessary to salvation. The religious life of the people gathers round the Temple service and the Torah, the exposition of the latter of which falls into the hands of the scribes.

This result was brought about by causes that began to operate during the Captivity in Babylon. Away from Jerusalem, and in a heathen land, it was impossible to carry out the Levitical worship. But all the more

rigidly were such religious customs observed as were not dependent upon the Temple service. The Sabbath was carefully remembered, and the Books of the Law were earnestly studied. Captives far away from a loved land are much given to meditation; and there is no doubt that the Jews in Babylon found great consolation in the study of the sacred writings and in literary activity.

These exiles seem to have become thoroughly acquainted with the whole scheme of Levitical worship. Their loving and continuous study of the Torah made it as well known to them as to the priests, who trusted more to traditional usage handed down by their forefathers than to a minute acquaintance with the Scriptures. This knowledge awakened in the hearts of those laymen an ardent desire for a sweeping religious reform. Accordingly we find that when Ezra returned to Jerusalem, "he was a ready scribe in the Law of Moses, . . . . and the Law of his God was in his hand." He went to the capital with the resolution of carrying out a thorough reformation of morals, and of establishing the worship of God upon the basis of the Book of the Law which he carried with him. In this resolute effort he was afterwards seconded by Nehemiah. These leaders by their energy and courage soon accomplished their object. The people were roused to enthusiasm in

favour of Levitical worship; the priests were sharply reprimanded for their perfunctory service; and the restored nation entered upon a new career.

The change represents a real watershed in the history of Israel. It marks the termination of the governing power of the priesthood, and the commencement of the work of the scribes. Hitherto the priests had supported a free foreign policy, and permitted inter-marriage with the Samaritans. Now, through the influence of men like Ezra and Nehemiah, this policy came to an end. The principle of separation from the heathen was relentlessly enforced, and all mixed marriages were forbidden.

Very soon the scribes, owing to differences of interpretation, found it necessary to form themselves into a society or college, the origin of which was the desire to bring their decisions into harmony. Here is the beginning of that vast accumulation of oral tradition which in course of time came to be recognised as possessing a religious and moral value equivalent to that of the sacred writings. This body of tradition we can now study in the Talmud, "the vast pyramid in which Judaism lies entombed."

Probably the scribes alone would not have been able to popularise the new legalism, if they had not been aided by the establishment throughout the land of the service of the

Synagogue, in which service the reading of the Law soon became a prominent feature. Any member of the community, more especially a scribe, might give an exposition of the portion that was read, a custom that prevailed down to the time of our Lord (Luke iv. 16). This practice in course of time effected a thorough acquaintance on the part of the people with the teaching of the Torah, the influence of which was soon felt on their whole moral and religious life.

This reforming movement had a worthy object. The leaders were men of high character and moral insight, and in their teachings principles of great ethical importance were enunciated. They desired to preserve society in Judea from falling into heathen ways. They acted upon the conviction that, at the restoration, the Jews would relapse into idolatry, unless their worship were fenced round by the most minute legal restrictions. Therefore they threw themselves into the multiplication of religious rites with an ardour inspired by zeal for God's honour, and for the moral well-being of their nation.

Yet amid these hopeful features the seeds of religious decay were being sown, and before the end of the Persian period they had produced pernicious fruit. Worthy and noble as was the aim of leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah, yet it was found impossible to prevent the

development of the movement towards an externalism that was ultimately inimical both to morality and piety. Good men struggled against the current, but in vain. On the one hand, the rites of the Temple worship increased, and the people made Nehushtans of their former privileges. The conscience of the worshipper was burdened with a load of ceremonial observances, and spiritual worship was apt to vanish amid the pageantry of ritualism. On the other hand the Book of the Law, in the hands of the scribes, became a fetish; and the conscience, burdened with ritual, was also injured by a system of casuistry that took off its fine edge, and obscured the eternal distinctions between sin and holiness, between right and wrong. Gradually the Jewish people lapsed into legalism; and the glad freedom of the time of the prophets was entirely superseded by the bondage of a self-imposed formalism. It was the age of the Hagiocracy, and the government of the people fell entirely into the hands of the priests and scribes.<sup>1</sup> The prophetic writings were neglected, for the ideals of the nation had changed. Legalism had to work out its natural results, and show the world that on the basis of the Law a holy Church could not be raised by the scribes any more than a holy nation could be created by the prophets. "The result was rabbinism

<sup>1</sup> Ewald, *History of Israel*, vol. v. p. 165.

and pharisaism; a people technically and outwardly holy, really and inwardly altogether unholy. By a prophet this might have been foreseen from the first. But the foresight of the wise does not render superfluous the age-long requirements whereby truth is made patent to all the world. Rabbinism had to be evolved before men could perceive the full significance of Jeremiah's oracle of the law written on the heart."<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the Persian period these reactionary tendencies of scribism increased, and the germs of a pharisaic self-righteousness rapidly developed. A more rigorous observance of Levitical ritual was enforced; personal righteousness was seldom spoken of; and the scribe instructed his scholars or amused the synagogue with his *midrash* of hair-splitting puerilities. The religious life came to be surrounded with a network of petty rules that cramped its liberty. Questions of a childish character were handled in public assemblies and regarded as vital to godliness. Threadbare precedents were counted of more weight than God's eternal law of righteousness; and the Great Synagogue could actually issue, as its three cardinal rules or tenets, the following: "Be circumspect in judgment," "Raise up many scholars," and "Make a hedge around the Law" (*Pirke Aboth*, i. 1). And a leading scribe, discussing the chief command-

<sup>1</sup> Professor Bruce, *Apologetics*, p. 277.

ment of the Law, declared that the Law concerning fringes excelled all others in importance. The result of all this, as regards moral and religious life, was that the people were kept in leading-strings, and that those who looked beneath for reality began to exhibit signs of scepticism. The whole service of religion seemed to them to be stamped with littleness and unprofitableness. The echoes of such a spirit may be seen in Ecclesiastes, a book that exhibits many signs of belonging to the closing period of the Persian age. When men have been offended in their conscience by an empty ritual, the feeling of indifference to religion cannot fail to follow.

These phenomena lead us to conclude that it was in this period that were sown the germs of that pharisaism which afterwards developed into a morality of external works, and led to lamentable declension from the lofty ethical standard of prophetism. In fact, two divergent tendencies at this time sprang up, the result of which was the rise of two opposing parties in the Judaism of the decline. On the one side were the scribes, the popular expounders of the Law to the people in their village synagogues, meeting with them every Sabbath day and bringing home to their everyday life the precepts of the Law. On the other side were the priests, proud of their official position, rulers as well as temple officials, opposed to all reformations in religious matters, and

very susceptible to influences proceeding from foreign princes and heathen courts.

The distance between these parties widened in the periods known as the Greek and the Asmonean. The priesthood developed stronger aristocratic affinities, while their religious indifference and lukewarmness increased. The head of the Greek party in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes was the brother of the very high priest, and within the walls of the Temple he encouraged pastimes of such a kind as to shock the feelings of the Jews. On the other hand the more pious party, the Chasidim, sought, even at the risk of their lives, to maintain the integrity of the Law and the distinctive features of the faith of Israel. Rather than break the letter of the fourth commandment, they allowed themselves, when surprised by a body of hostile soldiers, to be slain in cold blood without raising a weapon in self-defence (1 Maccabees ii.). Educated by the scribes in all their traditions as well as in the Law of Moses, they held that the traditional interpretation of the Law was absolutely binding—a doctrine that became the parent of many subsequent errors.

In the Asmonean period the lines of cleavage between the two parties were somewhat different; but the opposing tendencies were at root the same. The Chasidim were succeeded by the Pharisees, while the party of the priests drew to those known in the New Testa-

ment as the Sadducees. Of the latter the greater portion belonged to old aristocratic families closely allied to the high priests, and they gave their attention mainly to the secular side of politics. They aimed at shaping the policy of the nation by arts of statecraft, and withstood the extortionate demands which the Pharisees made on life and manners. In opposition to this the Pharisees aspired at making the Law supreme in every department of public and private life. With the scribes they inculcated an extreme devotion to all the requirements of the Mosaic ritual; they insisted on avoiding contact with Gentiles and the inhabitants of the land as being utterly defiling. They were the *Perushim*, "the separated ones," and separation from all causes of external defilement was of the essence of their creed.<sup>1</sup> Whether the name connotes praise or censure it is now difficult to say, but there is no doubt it was given or assumed because of their stringent observance of the laws respecting uncleanness.

The strife betwixt these two parties became very bitter in the time of the Maccabees. The priests and their friends the Sadducees strove to acquire the political power in Judea, and to use it for maintaining the nation's independence. The Pharisees consequently opposed the high-priestly family of the Maccabees, and made it their chief aim to win the people

<sup>1</sup> Wellhausen, *Pharisäer und Sadducäer*, p. 76.

over to the observance of the Law. They insisted on their followers attending to the most minute details and rubrics of the scribe-made code no less than of the ancient Torah. In the keeping of these rules alone would salvation be found.

It is evident that here the relationship of grace gives place to a righteousness of works. The Law is torn away from its connection with the salvation of the individual, and is regarded only as the legal order of the elect nation. Consequently, the commonwealth of Israel is looked upon as the alone medium of salvation, to the entire exclusion of the Samaritan and the heathen. The universal salvation proclaimed by the prophets as contained in the purpose of God is now limited to a particularism that bears its death-warrant in its own bosom. The ethics of the period becomes utilitarian; evil is to be shunned because of its results, and good is to be done because it pays. The Messianic hope disappears, or at least has but little influence on the minds of men. The splendid testimony of the prophets against the *opus operatum* is no longer heard. Faith in God gives place to legality. And by means of this pharisaic spirit the way is prepared for other errors which were not long in developing within the early Christian Church.

## CHAPTER XIV

### MORAL DIFFICULTIES

IN the introductory chapter of this book we referred to the desirability of postponing consideration of the moral difficulties that are connected with the Old Testament dispensation until first we had understood the principle that underlay the ethical and religious education of Israel. The conviction was expressed that it is only in connection with a general presentation of Old Testament ethics that those difficult passages that perplex many a tender Christian conscience can be explained. As soon as we have come to a right understanding of the disciplinary method of revelation, and perceive the pedagogical purport of the Law, we shall find that many of those problems will have solved themselves, and that the character of Jehovah has, at least in some measure, been vindicated.

It is easy for the popular critic to scan the history of Israel, and, by selecting this and the other act or this and the other law, to impeach the divine benevolence and prove the

Bible unfit to maintain the moral leadership of mankind. There are in it men employed by God who, measured by modern standards, cannot well pass muster. There are acts performed by them that seem to conflict with our modern wisdom, and are out of harmony with our ideas of right. If the Old Testament is to be studied and judged only from the polemical platform of the nineteenth century, then it is not easy to defend its ethics. But the student of the Bible, who has gained the broader view of revelation and the larger faith in God's purpose of grace, will not make this mistake. He will remember that he must *think himself back* into the period of Israel's moral education and the particular circumstances under which it took place. Then he will find that while the Law is one, being of the very substance of the divine nature, yet there are needful adaptations and adjustments of it to the stage of Israel's growth, methods of addressing the national life to unusual or transient conditions, which have their due place in the onward moral progress of the kingdom of God. There have always been those who have been impatient with Jehovah, because he did not push on quickly enough to His ends. But He is long-suffering and patient; and centuries are needed for the fulfilment of His beneficent purposes. The Old Testament adopts the moral order of the God of creation and of history, who is seen through slow cycles

of times to be maturing His ends and working out His wise designs for the good of his creatures. A criticism that forgets to keep its eye on the moral environment of ancient Israel measures the ethics of the Old Testament by a false standard. But when studied in the light of the evolution of the purpose of grace, the Old Testament is seen to be pervaded by a divine intention that moulded the history of Israel and wrought itself out into final form in the teaching of Jesus Christ.

We are confident that if our readers have followed the line of thought traced out in the preceding chapters they will be prepared to admit that laws of the highest utility may be given by God which yet are not absolutely perfect. Relatively, however, they are so, for they are thoroughly adapted to the circumstances and to the stage of Israel's progress. Had they been given independently of these, they would not have accomplished the good ends that Jehovah had in view. Or had such rudimentary laws permitted the people to remain at the stage of moral childhood instead of educating them through it to something better and higher, we might justly question their place in the plan of the divine order. But however defective they seem to us, with the illumination of Christian doctrine to aid us, yet if there were immanent in them the promise and potency of ethical improvement,

they served a wise and good purpose. A nation in its growth, it is now generally admitted, goes through a course of training very similar to that of a child. Now, it is the mark of a judicious teacher that he shall not set before his pupils impracticable rules, but shall make use of such as *fit their age*, and such as are, for their stage of progress, the best possible. And Jehovah, with His great patience and enduring love, condescended to train Israel in accordance with the laws of education, till, when the fit time came, He could reveal the completed code of morality, and they could leave the stage of external restraints for that of inward principles. The course of training was long, but it was steadily onward and upward; and rudimentary precepts were laid aside when the principles that underlay them had been clearly evolved.

In the foregoing chapters we have seen that the ethics of the Old Testament is an organic structure, and we have sought to find out the principle of its growth. Through Mosaism, prophetism, and wisdom literature, it progressed, each of those furnishing its own instalment. It is a necessary corollary from this fact to say that before any intelligent judgment can be passed upon it, it must be viewed as an *organic whole*, and not regarded only in its separate parts. Consequently, when the popular critic points to some penal law or some barbarous custom as proving that this

morality is inconsistent with the character of God, let us not forget that, in a historical process like the education of Israel, such laws may have their place and use. They may be but moments in the disciplinary process. They may be but the scaffolding, temporarily useful, yet requiring to be laid aside when the structure stands complete. Such critics would judge the sculptor from a broken fragment of his marble, chipped off in the process of workmanship. Once admit that the Revelation of God is progressive, and that as a result Israel's education is progressive, and such difficulties disappear. "The law made nothing perfect" (Heb. vii. 19); but it awaited the advent of the perfect One. In studying the ethics of Israel we are not gazing at a stagnant pool, but we are tracing a flowing stream, whose current bears us onward to the perfect teaching of the Son of God. Just because the Revelation is progressive is incompleteness written on the very face of it. But one by one, in the course of its progress, these marks of imperfection are cast aside; and the underlying principles are taken up and set in their right place in the ethics of Christianity.

The one important feature on which emphasis ought to be laid is, not the imperfection of the rudimentary stages, but the indubitable fact that there is continuous progress onward towards an ethical ideal, which is at last realised. That there should at first be im-

perfection is only what is to be expected. The analogy of the individual Christian's growth in grace would lead us to expect this. But when we see the spirit of the movement tending steadily in one upward direction, and that too in opposition to the natural downward drag of the nation on whom it wrought, we may be assured the principle of that progress is of God.

It is much to be regretted that some defenders of the Scriptures, in their pardonable fear lest any part should exhibit signs of defect, have refused to see these traces of growth in the ethics of the Old Testament. They do not forget that the New Testament is latent in the Old, just as the fruit lies in the seed. But they do not seem to see that this implies that what is seed cannot at the same time possess the perfect and ripened qualities of fruit. The seminal principles of Christianity are all found in the Old Testament; but they cannot present the developed form which they have in the New. And what is this but to say that the Old Testament gives a necessarily incomplete presentation of full-orbed moral truth? This fact is strikingly exemplified in the moral sentiments and religious temper of Old Testament saints. Yet such minds as I refer to will not permit these saints to exhibit any defects of character, but will justify every act of Abraham, and apologise for Jacob, and excuse the Judges,

from a feeling that to do otherwise is to dishonour God or detract from the value of the inspired record. But should we not expect to find deficiencies in men who "were kept in ward under the Law," and were under a system of "tutors and governors," like a minor who has to be thus subject till his majority arrive? (Gal. iv. 2). Not to do so is to dishonour and even deny the statements of the New Testament, and can only hinder and not help one's faith. It is to assert that the inspired writer was under error who spoke of the Old Testament as a rudimentary dispensation. It is to forget that it is the New Testament which has created the difficulties of the earlier Covenant, and which compels us to criticise its ethics.

We frankly admit that there are many and serious moral difficulties in the Old Testament, and that they have created embarrassment and doubt in many minds. Further, we acknowledge that they are not mere accidents in the record, which can be explained away without doing any injury to the organic structure of Revelation; they are woven into its texture, and form an integral part of it. The singular combination in the imprecatory psalms of devout trust in God, along with the desire for vengeance on His enemies, is startling to a Christian conscience; yet it is clearly the truthful expression of the conscience and heart of the ancient Church. Due consideration

will at once show us that the entire system of Old Testament morality is homogeneous, and that an attempt to attenuate the difficulty, by regarding these things as accidental, is an unworthy makeshift.

Having said so much by way of presenting the general principles that underlie the ethics of the Old Testament, we shall now specifically consider some of the difficulties from which arguments have been drawn against its inspiration and authority. We shall begin by looking at objections that have been urged against the ethics of the Old Testament, because of some general imperfections.

(*a*) It has been said that Old Testament ethics is marred by the absence of systematic form and of scientific development. Now, this objection we frankly acknowledge to be founded in fact. These are the necessary defects of a system that did not spring Minerva-like, in full stature, from the mind of God, but which was connected with a great historical redemption movement. We have already pointed out that any other method would have failed to accomplish the same disciplinary ends, since Israel would have been unable to comprehend a morality revealed from heaven in full-orbed completeness. Taught as a part of a historical process, it necessarily partakes of the characteristics of every organic movement, and passes through the several stages of growth. Had it been given in

purely scientific form, it would probably have remained inoperative and practically useless. What was wanted at the earliest stage was, not to discover the grounds of moral consciousness, but to get simple rules of moral conduct and a powerful motive to obey them. Therefore the sole ground of morality set forth before Israel was the will of a loving Jehovah, who had led them out of a land of bondage, and now set before them a great moral end. But the purpose of this pedagogic process was not fully revealed until Jesus Christ came. And until He furnished the key to the meaning of the movement, it was impossible that the ethics of the Bible could have scientific form. Up till that time, simple gladsome obedience must be the sum and essence of all moral activity. For the Old Testament saint, duty was summed up in the words, "Observe and hear all these words which I command thee, that it may go well with thee and with thy children after thee for ever."

(b) Another objection urged against the ethics of the Old Testament as a whole, is that it is marred by a narrow particularism, which engendered in Israel a spirit of exclusiveness. It must be admitted that in the Greek and Hasmonean periods this national feature assumed an ugly form that cannot be defended, and in fact is condemned by the whole spirit of the Bible. But this latter was a retrograde step of the Judaism of the decline, and the Old

Testament is not responsible for it. But in the time of the prophets this particularism was not the evil thing which it is represented to have been. Though in connection with it Israel may have given way to a spirit of pride, yet it was belief in the nation's election by God that lay at the root of their monotheistic faith, and inspired them with the patient endurance of persecution. The people were in continual danger of being entirely dissolved among their heathen neighbours; and this danger could be averted only by the most rigid maintenance of their national religious order. This in itself was a good end; it was a particularism that carried in its bosom the future salvation of the whole world. The election of Israel was just God's way of preparing the one nation to be a means of blessing to all nations. It was an election to service and not to privilege, a service that included the ultimate benefit of the whole race. And so it came about that when it had served its purpose this earlier exclusiveness was cast aside, the scaffolding was taken down, and the door of the temple of salvation was thrown open to all nations.

Passing from these objections to the general scope of the ethics of the Old Testament, we shall consider the difficulties presented by particular passages of the historic narrative. These may be reduced to three different classes :—

1. Difficulties connected with the manner in which the character or the action of God is presented. 2. Difficulties arising from traces of an irreligious spirit in Old Testament saints. 3. Difficulties arising from moral defects in some of the laws of Moses.

1. Difficulties have arisen in many minds from the mode in which God has been represented as permitting or enjoining acts that seem to be of doubtful morality. It is not only in our day that those instances of severity have offended the moral instincts of believers. Augustine tells us how the Manichæans stumbled at them, and affirmed that they represented Jehovah in such a strange character that the God of the Old Testament could not be the loving and redeeming God of the New Testament. Even the Jews have felt as if the command to destroy the Canaanites compromised the gracious character of Jehovah, and they have a tradition, intended to soften the crude features of the case, to the effect that Joshua sent messengers to warn the inhabitants of the coming vengeance, and to request them either to escape by flight, or to enter into treaty relations. This, however, is mere rabbinical tradition, and the word of God knows nothing of it. There can be no doubt that these exterminating wars were not only permitted but commanded by God.

Various methods of defence have been adopted. Some have held that the Israelites

were simply expelling clans who had intruded into and seized lands that were promised to Abraham's seed, and which had originally belonged to his descendants. But this apology is contradicted by the very terms of Scripture, that Palestine was a free gift, and that the gift was to be held on condition of the complete extermination of the corrupt tribes then settled in the land. A possession that had fallen into abeyance for over four hundred years, even if the original title-deeds had existed, was not one that could have been claimed by any moral right. The eighth or ninth generation was now in possession of the fields, and to excuse the wholesale slaughter of these persons on the ground of such an antiquated claim is to set up a line of defence which cannot be honestly supported.

The first question to be answered is, Could a righteous God be a party to such extreme and relentless cruelty? Is not such a command utterly inconsistent with the character of a moral governor? Was it just to visit upon the innocent the sins of the guilty?

It must be remembered that these Canaanite tribes are throughout the Pentateuch spoken of as having reached a state of fearful moral degeneracy. They had gone from bad to worse, until now they were hopelessly corrupt. Yet vengeance was not taken on them summarily. In Genesis xv. God informed Abraham that the iniquity of the Amorite was not

yet full, and that four generations (equivalent to the four hundred years previously spoken of in the same chapter) would pass ere his descendants should possess the Promised Land. The same forbearing God who was moved by Abraham's intercession to declare that He would spare degenerate Sodom if ten righteous men were found therein, gave four centuries to the Canaanites to repent of their evil deeds. But when, instead of repenting, they were found to have become thoroughly and hopelessly infamous, then it was clearly for the moral interests of the rest of mankind, that they should be swept off the face of the earth. A moral governor must think of the well-being of the righteous, no less than of the sparing of the abandoned. The land had become so utterly defiled with the festering mass of moral putridity upon it, that it is represented as loathing the presence of such races on its surface; in the graphic words of Scripture, "it vomited forth its inhabitants." Was it not right that God should vindicate His government in the interests of justice and righteousness, and that, to prevent the spread of this moral infection, the seething mass of putrefaction should be utterly extinguished? Was not such action the work of a Power making for morality and opposing vice?

Some critics represent this command of God to exterminate these tribes as exhibiting the favouritism of a merely national deity, who, without any regard to justice, would sacrifice

the lives of other tribes in the interests of those who worshipped at his shrine. But the narrative of Scripture is inconsistent with any such view. Jehovah was loath to remove these offenders from the earth, and gave them ample time for repentance. He is a God who, while He visits the iniquities of fathers "to four generations," makes His mercy descend "to a thousand generations of them that love Him" [margin of Revised Version]. He is slow to wrath, and judgment is His strange work, provoking by His forbearing patience the spirit of many a psalmist and of a prophet like Jonah, who desired speedy vengeance upon His enemies. Yet such a value does He set on righteousness and holiness, that He will maintain them at any cost. And when evil has reached its climax He will prove himself severe and relentless in His swift destruction of it, sweeping away effete and corrupt tribes to make way for purer and stronger races. The God of the Old Testament is the God of to-day, who by the milder methods of civilisation is exterminating races that have fallen below hope of national redemption.

It must be carefully noted that Joshua himself could not with justice have inflicted such punishment upon the tribes of Canaan. The sentence was a judicial one of God's pronouncing, and Joshua was but the agent and executioner of it. The knowledge that the Israelites were here obeying the command of a holy God,

and were simply the ministers of divine judgment, saved them from the brutalising influences of a war of conquest. That they might not be tempted to imagine that they were simply doing their own will, their course of conquest was frequently checked, and they were recalled to exact obedience to the injunctions of Heaven. Other nations might carry on war for their own glory, or for the prize of extended territory; but Israel was to be simply the instrument of the righteous Lord against those who had polluted His land with unspeakable defilement. Nothing was more fitted to develop in them a deep sense of the heinousness of the sin of a sensual idolatry and to perpetuate the abhorrence of it among their descendants.

Whatever view be taken of this perplexing question, it is to be said with all reverence that there was here but a choice of two evils. Either the Canaanites were to be spared to contaminate Israel with their abominations, until the latter became wholly unfit to be the instruments of revelation, or they must be swept off the face of the earth. To spare them would have been to imperil the hope of the world's salvation. It was a drastic process, but it was the only method by which the world could be saved from such poison. When the taint has got into the blood, there is no other remedy open to Providence but moral surgery.

We cannot but admit that this action to a

certain extent obscured the gracious character of God. It was one of those hard necessities to which the God of redemption condescended. He desired through one nation to bless all mankind; and yet He had to exterminate whole tribes that the elect people might be saved from idolatry, and that through them all mankind might be blessed. It was a burden, we may be sure, to God to have His gracious character overshadowed by such terrible destruction of human life. But this consideration has to be borne in mind, that the action was something special and extraordinary. As Canon Mozley says, it was extra-legal, outside the ordinary mode of justice, and was a necessity of the world-historical mission of Israel, which demanded that it should be such an exhibition of severity and righteous judgment as would take a strong hold on the mind of men, and teach them once and for ever God's abhorrence of sensuous idolatry and unnatural crime.<sup>1</sup>

If the objection be made that such a war of extermination could not now be permitted or commanded by God, we readily assent. We are not now under the peculiar discipline of the Old Testament dispensation. Christianity has become one of the moral forces of the world, entering into its politics, commerce, and literature. After our wars with heathen tribes we endeavour to spare all the com-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dr. Arnold's *Sermons*, vi. 35-36.

batants, and never dream of involving the innocent with the guilty. We want them to live on their lands and trade with us; and instead of exterminating the idolaters, we try to exterminate the idolatry. We feel ourselves morally stronger than they, and do not contemplate the possibility of their converting us to their degrading superstitions. We send them missionaries, and labour to convert them into good Christians; for we have learned that moral suasion is better than force, and prayer and love more potent to destroy than the sword. Besides this, Christian society is now penetrated with the sense of human individuality, and recognises that every soul has its personal rights even as against the welfare of a family or nation, rights which God will not overlook or override. But under the legal dispensation no such idea of justice existed among the Israelites. Indeed, it is possible that, had not the children and the women of Korah, of the Amalekites, and the Canaanites perished with their husbands and fathers, there would have been a feeling on the part of Israel that justice had miscarried, and that full punishment had not been meted out. Our sense of the relation of events to historic setting assures us that in these wars of extermination Jehovah, while vindicating his righteous law against an ungodly and immoral nation, had also another necessity in view, and, by methods of punishment

apparently rough yet really moral, He removed degenerate tribes, in order to make room for a race which had the moral fibre and genius that fitted them to be the teachers of pure religion to mankind.

Turning from those acts, which were commanded by God, let us now examine a difficulty of another kind, connected with the manner in which His action is presented in the Old Testament. We are sure that evil can never be attributed to Him. And yet there are passages that represent evil spirits as so acting under the immediate command of God, that it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that the responsibility of the evil done lies with Him. He is described as sending an evil spirit on the men of Shechem (Jud. ix. 23); as troubling Saul with an evil spirit; as having, through Micaiah, "put a lying spirit in the mouth of all the prophets" (1 Kings xxii. 23). Is God here conceived of as the author of evil? and does He directly use evil emissaries to tempt men to sin?

We believe that if those passages are construed according to the legitimate canons of biblical interpretation no moral difficulty will be found. The question is one of exegesis; yet it is of great importance in estimating the morality of the Old Testament. It must not be forgotten that the genius of the Hebrew is as different from that of an Indo-European

language as the genius of the Orient is from that of the Occident. Anthropomorphic forms natural to the one are unnatural to the other. Semitic figures of speech are carried to an extreme that transgresses our classic rules of style. It was not an age of reasoning but of simple perception. Hebrew thought seldom rose to the abstract; it delighted to revel in the concrete. And it is well it is so; for its faithful portrayal of the concrete is one of the secrets of the power of the Bible over the common people, who feel its immediate influence though they may not be able to analyse it.

This continual coming into touch with facts and realities in external nature was connected with the habit which the Hebrew mind had of associating the whole world with God. To the Jew all nature was animate with His presence. It ministered to His pleasure; it declared His will; it took part in all Old Testament theophanies. The wind was His breath, the lightning was a flash of His anger. "The Lord marched out of Seir, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped water."<sup>1</sup> There is no tracing of effects through immediately antecedent causes; all is God's action, and that is the end of it.

Now these are not the literary methods of

<sup>1</sup> The Song of Deborah, which bears every mark of belonging to the early age of the Judges, is full of these anthropomorphisms.

our western mind. It is difficult for us to enter sympathetically into the spirit of such language. It is a real difficulty that has to be transcended, and one that has given rise to a misunderstanding of the divine action in the Old Testament. Construed aright, such passages as those above quoted do not impeach the goodness or truth of God. The writer never intended to lay on Him the responsibility of the evil. When Amos asks, "Shall evil befall a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" we must not forget that he wrote as an Oriental poet, and ascribes to God's efficient agency what came to pass only by His permission. God permits evil to enter and work havoc "that His justice may be known in its punishment, and His grace in its forgiveness." But of evil He could never be the author. A correct exegesis will remove the apparent moral difficulty connected with these passages.<sup>1</sup>

It is perfectly in accordance with the anthropomorphism of the Old Testament to speak of Jehovah as doing evil by means of His messengers and again repenting of the evil He meant to do (2 Sam. xxiv. 16), and saying to the destroying angel, "It is enough, stay thy hand." The lying spirit in the mouth of the prophets was not himself an evil or Satanic spirit. All that is meant is that, in carrying out God's decree of condemnation,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Art. "Heb. Poetry," *Herzog's Encykl.* II. Aufl. v.

he becomes a means of leading the king on to his doom through the fawning guile of these false prophets. In Ps. lxxviii. 49 the hail and frogs of Egypt are spoken of as "a band of angels of evil" (Revised Version), cast by the Lord on the Egyptians. Such emissaries are not bad angels. "In such cases the moral standard is quite as inapplicable to those kings as, in the case of human relationships, to those State officials who have to discharge a disagreeable but just and necessary function. In fact it can be clearly proved that in the narratives belonging to the original Book of Kings this class of baleful, morally or materially pernicious acts, which a later age was fond of transferring from God to the evil Satanic being, are still quite frankly ascribed to the direct agency of God."<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, it was in thorough accordance with the genius of the eastern mind to speak of God as "hardening Pharaoh's heart," a phrase that has caused much perplexity in Christian minds. In Exodus viii. 15 it is said, "Pharaoh hardened his heart," and in ver. 19 "Pharaoh's heart was hardened." After five different plagues had visited him in vain, it is at last said: "The Lord made strong the heart of Pharaoh, and he hearkened not unto them" (margin of Revised Version, ix. 12). Clearly, then, this hardening was a disciplinary, not a penal process. To the Hebrew

<sup>1</sup> Schultz, *opus cit.* vol. ii. p. 270.

mind it simply meant that the man who resists so many warnings and penalties subjects himself to the inevitable law of the searing of conscience. That terrible result arises from his own moral constitution; it is a law that is every day in operation. Rightly interpreted, the words contain no impeachment of God's justice. Behind every law of our moral nature there is One who loveth righteousness. And it is quite in consonance with the genius of the East to express this induration of conscience as directly caused by God. The Bible was written in the Orient, and we must not create ethical problems out of Orientalisms. Yet how often has this been forgotten! How often has the hard and rationalistic mind of the West entered the enclosure of the Bible, and tramped through it like an elephant through a garden of flowers. There are critics who, having first missed all the teaching of historical perspective, have then applied to God's word the canons of criticism that belong alone to the literature of the Saxons. Need we wonder, when the Bible is so unhistorically apprehended and so unscientifically studied, that moral difficulties crop up in every page? *Bonus textuarius, bonus theologus.*

NOTE.—The Authorised Version has to some extent caused the perplexity alluded to. Three different expressions in Exodus are translated by the word "harden." The Revised Version has made most useful changes here. The whole discussion affords another proof of the urgent necessity of

studying the synonyms of the Hebrew language; though it may be doubtful if they can ever be reduced to order when we learn that some one hundred and eighty words are used to express the ideas of "destroy," "take," and "break." See Girdlestone's *Synonyms of the O. T.*, and Sayce's *Principles of Comp. Philology*.

## CHAPTER XV

### MORAL DIFFICULTIES—CONTINUED

WE shall now consider a second class of difficulties arising from the imperfect character of some of those who are numbered among the saints of the Old Testament. Much perplexity has been caused by the apparent approbation bestowed by God upon men whose lives, while in many respects noble, were yet tainted with serious faults and even with great crimes. Noah, a grand figure in the dawn of history, after being spared from the deluge, yielded to the wine cup. Abraham forgot his manhood in the presence of Pharaoh, and betrayed a vein of cowardice or duplicity that startles one in such a splendid character. Jacob was guilty of an unworthy trickiness in his treatment of his dull but generous brother. Aaron had some weaknesses that we do not admire in one chosen to be God's high priest. And David stained his life's maturity with a sin so heinous that many a Christian conscience has found it difficult to understand how one whose char-

acter was so blurred could be "the man after God's own heart," and the inspired singer of Israel.

It is clear that the Scriptures never represent their heroes as models of impeccable virtue. There is not the slightest attempt to justify any one of their actions, nor even to throw a veil over their many failings. Their weakness and their strength, their evil and their good, are alike set forth; their charity and their want of it are plainly written down; their virtues and vices are impartially recorded. Some of them are evidently held up to view rather as beacons than as examples; and their history is recorded more for the admonition than for the admiration of later times.

Therefore, in forming a judgment of such men as agents of Jehovah, what we have to ask ourselves is whether they possessed the qualities necessary for the end for which they were chosen. Their failings are patent to all; but are they of a kind to render them unfit for their work, however much they may have injured their moral character in our estimation? Does God require and demand nothing but perfect instruments to effect His purpose? or is He in His great love and patience not willing to condescend to use very imperfect agents? Had not these men some virtues which could be made to serve the divine purpose at that time? If so, God simply did

the best that could be done by human agencies for His people, when He made use of these fallible men, that by their means He might guide His people on to the goal of a perfect morality.

At the same time, it may be shown that in the course of their lives their virtues were developed in the service of Jehovah ; while, on the other hand, either their vices were overcome by the divine training, or they were shown by the result to be serious impediments to the purpose of grace, and a moral lesson was given of the highest value. Jacob's vice of worldliness was eradicated by the terrible discipline through which he passed ; and in the furnace of affliction were burnt in and made permanent the colours that beautify his old age. The fiery zeal of the young Moses, that led him to shed blood at the beginning of his life, was toned down by divine dealings into a patient meekness that renders him one of the grandest figures in the early prime of history. While, on the other hand, Saul is evidently meant to be a beacon light to warn men off the rocks of proud self-will, on which he made sad shipwreck. The fall and the penitence of David brought him such a knowledge of his own heart, and such an experience of forgiving grace, as fitted him to voice for all time the finest of our penitential hymns. In his case sin was manifestly a parenthesis, and the thread of grace was gathered up again.

But the law of the spiritual harvest was written in large letters in the sins of his family, and the truth was taught that the cancelling of the guilt of the sin was not the removal of these other temporal penalties that necessarily attach to such breaches of the Moral Law.

Thus it is clear that in the working out of the divine purpose through the Old Testament history the choice of these men proved their own judgment, and their very errors contributed to the ethical teaching of the elect nation. Were there any condoning of their faults, it would be manifest that their employment as divine agents could not be justified. But so far is this from being the case that the chastisements they endured form part of the great purpose of grace, and contributed to the end which God had in view in the election of Israel. They who were to be the teachers of after ages had to be made fit for their work through many sufferings.

Probably in connection with nothing have more difficulties arisen than with the very imperfect character of those known as "Judges." The general purport of the Book of Judges is quite clear. It is written to show that national sin would never be permitted to go without punishment, but that the punishment was educational, and the moment that true repentance awoke retribution ceased. The historical lessons it contains lift up the book

to the level of an ethical treatise, and show that there is a righteous God ruling in the earth. But when we turn from the book and study the character of the men whose agency God makes use of, we are surprised to discover instances of terrible revenge, of treachery and cruelty of the darkest kind. Of them all Othniel alone is spoken of as without fault. One of the most shocking deeds of blood recorded is the story of Ehud slaying Eglon. The act is one that cannot be justified at the bar of a Christian conscience. To quote it in defence of the assassination of tyrannical kings is a perversion of Scripture. What gives Ehud a claim to be called a Judge is simply this that, at a time when they had been for eighteen years under the galling tyranny of the Moabite king, he was raised up to do a deed of daring that should give the Israelites heart to strike again for freedom. This readiness to sacrifice his own life, if need be, was inspiring to the down-trodden people, however unjustifiable the act. And it must not be forgotten that in those days men did not estimate this deed by our ethical standards. Such acts were quite common in Ehud's day, and we must not apply to the Judges criteria that are, in relation to them, anachronisms. History tells us that when the tyranny of the Peisistratidæ at Athens had become insufferable, two of the young men of the city did not hesitate to assassinate Hipparchus at the

Panathenaic festival (B.C. 514). So highly did the Athenians estimate the deed that they built statues and decreed immortal honours to the young heroes. Even in times much later, and in Rome where the conception of law prevailed, and civilisation had reached a high pitch of excellence, Brutus felt little compunction in assassinating an old friend whom he had come to regard as a menace to the commonwealth. If in Rome in the century before Christ this was done, we may be assured that in Ehud's time the general standard of honour and of regard for life was not nearly so high; and he must be judged on this point by the standard of his age. Ehud partook of the defective notions of his time. His hatred of such tyranny was moral, though blind and dim as to the means to be employed. The act probably offended no sense of justice in Israel or in the nations around. And it spoke to them of a law of righteous judgment that reached even the tyrant on the throne, though by a very rough and ready method of justice, which by Christian standards cannot be justified. And so it spoke in a language which Ehud's contemporaries could understand.

At the same time, it would be an error to infer that the attribution of the deliverance of Israel to God who "raised them up a Saviour" in the person of Ehud involves the least approval of the treacherous elements in the deed of regicide. God overruled the act to

the fulfilment of his own ends. But the language does not mean that He approved of such criminal acts any more than the words, "He strengthened Eglon, king of Moab, against them," indicate approval of Eglon's tyranny. The fact is, that God had either to educate the chosen people to be "a nation of teachers" by a constant supranatural interference with the usual methods of training, or else He had to suffer a certain eclipsing of His gracious character. The latter, we know, was the method employed. Jehovah might have lifted Israel at once to the lofty moral platform which was reached after the exile, by the aid of the prophet's teaching. But he was content to work by the slower method of a moral Providence, which is patient with evils, and makes use of early forms of rudimentary justice, while all the time it works steadily on to the accomplishment of high moral ends.

The treacherous assassination of Sisera by Jael has been the subject of much criticism, and the entire silence of the Scriptural narrative as to the cruel and unwarrantable nature of the deed has been construed into a divine approval of Jael's conduct. Critics are apt to forget that ancient, unlike modern, literature seldom introduces moral reflections into the story. Many a cruel and barbarous deed is graphically told by Homer and Virgil, down to its most minute and gross details, without a single exculpatory phrase. But it would be

wrong to infer that the approval of the poet was given to every single detail related. The fact is that Jael acted from a very inadequate conception of the value of individual life. But it is only fair to judge her in this respect by the moral standard of her time. Deborah sings the praises of Jael, for to her and her contemporaries it seemed a splendid instance of the dauntlessness of religious zeal, and did not offend the then existing sense of justice.

But let us not class Jael in this deed among those whose acts were prompted by nothing better than a burning lust for vengeance against a personal enemy. She has been so compared, to the injury of the morality of the Old Testament. It would be more to the purpose to liken her to Judith, who went out of Bethulia "because she feared God greatly," and by her daring succeeded in bringing back the head of Holofernes, the Assyrian general. The words of Ozias to Judith very closely resemble the praise bestowed by Deborah on Jael. "O daughter, blessed art thou of the Most High God: and blessed be the Lord God which hath directed thee to the cutting off of the head of the chief of our enemies. For this thy confidence shall not depart from the heart of men, which remember the power of God for ever" (Judith xiii. 18). This lofty tribute of respect was perfectly in accordance with the spirit of the age, though an age much later than that of Jael. What we must consider in

all these instances is not whether they come up to the criterion of an educated Christian conscience, but this—Were they offences against the conscience, in a land where the sense of justice resembled the passion of a child, and where the individual was never regarded as separate from his tribe or family? It is clear that these acts were in accordance with the moral instincts of Israel, and were counted proofs of intense devotion to the nation's holy cause. The rulers of the city being judges, Judith's conduct was praiseworthy; and their judgment fairly represents the sentiment of that age, the ruling ideal of which is referred to by our Lord when He quotes the saying of the old times, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy" (Matt. v. 43).

There is no doubt that the story of Jael would be often quoted by mothers to their children as one of indomitable courage and patriotic ardour. And so, for the times of which it was a part, it wrought for righteousness. Jael's name was a synonym for the championship of the cause of Israel against their enemies, and it helped to rid the land of those inveterate idolaters. But the true and final justification of it is to be found in God's great moral purpose in commanding the destruction of the Canaanite tribes. Their destruction was the price which had to be paid for the value of a pure and monotheistic religion. That act was right, being commanded

by God, and the justification of the whole covers the part which Jael took in it.<sup>1</sup>

When we turn to the following Judges and read of the blood-vengeance taken by Gideon against Zeba and Zalmunna, of the wild revenge inflicted by Samson upon the Philistines, and of the indiscriminate massacre of the offending tribe of Benjamin by their own brethren of Israel, it is clear that the historian is treating of a time when deeds were done that have been well called extra-judicial, and are opposed to the true spirit of the Old Testament. Gideon and Samson were the children of their times, and many superstitions no doubt mingled with their ideas of God. They were men at a lower stage of moral attainment than those we find employed as agents of Jehovah, either before or after their day. Superstition, cruelty, and licence can never be wellpleasing in His sight, who, whether in old or new dispensation, hates sin and loves righteousness.

But, acknowledging all this, we must not forget in what times these men lived. When we remember that in Christian England, only three centuries ago, leaders of religion in this country—men of undoubted zeal for God, as they conceived of Him and His kingdom—could burn their fellow-Christians at the stake, or drown them in the rushing flood, or torture them with thumbscrews for the good of their

<sup>1</sup> Mozley's *Ruling Ideas*, Lecture vi.

souls—when we remember these things, and see how the accepted standards of those times are now rejected by the nineteenth century, we may get help in understanding at how low a stage God had to commence the moral education of a people like Israel. The moral defects of those judges are not to be charged upon the teaching of Revelation at the time. The children of Israel fell fearfully away from the law of God, as revealed through Moses. Terrible degeneracies of morals followed their settlement in Palestine. And it was during this time of reaction that the Judges were raised up to deliver the people. They served God, in so far as they delivered His people from the oppression of cruel tyrants; and they must be judged by the standards of their own time. In adopting this line of judgment we follow the example of Jesus Christ, who affirmed that because of the hardness of Israel's heart many things were permitted which "from the beginning were not so" (Matt. xix. 8). Though these men partook of the shortcomings of their day, yet their courage and hardihood were needed; and we recognise their virtues, while we guard against any condonation of their vices. In the day of its greatest peril Israel was preserved by them from utter extinction. The national foundations were laid of rough and unhewn stones; and we may allow the uncouth blocks in the foundation, which we should not like

to see in the perfect finish of the superstructure.

Besides, in making a just and fair estimate of the morality of such agents, we must observe that the endurance of some evils was accompanied by remedial measures for their final eradication. If there was patience on God's part, there was also severity. Jephthah's terrible loss was an object-lesson, ever afterwards warning men against rash vows. Samson's sin found him out; and Delilah has ever since been a name to point this moral, and emphasise the ethical law of nexus betwixt evil and its necessary punishment. Even his rough witticisms, not less than his individual prowess, helped to prepare the nation for throwing off the bondage of Philistia by keeping them in a spirit of hopeful buoyancy. As Ewald says: "The nation felt unsubdued in mind and body, while its sons could flow out in such health and vivacity." To drive away despondency and give heart to a downtrodden people was no small benefit. And at the end of his sad life, Samson, blind and crushed, turned to God for the help that never is sought in vain, and by an act of splendid self-sacrifice sought to make what atonement he could for the one rash deed that blighted his manhood. In the lifelong struggle between the flesh and the spirit, the spirit ultimately won the victory. We may believe that, just as Israel's perception of their duty as execu-

tioners of the sentence pronounced by God upon the Canaanites, preserved them from the brutalising effects that the invasion of the land might have had upon them, these brave men of a later time were also purified by the service to which they were called; and the divine patience that endured these vices did not fail to work for their final eradication.

Besides difficulties arising from the character of those employed as agents, difficulties of a cognate character have arisen regarding some personal characteristics of Old Testament saints in general. A spirit of narrowness and hatred is exhibited by them, especially in some of the compositions of psalmists, that are believed to belong to the post-exilic period. One cannot fail to perceive that the spirit of loving forgiveness, so characteristic of the New Testament, had not yet in all its fulness taken possession of the writers of these psalms. There can be little doubt that the operation of the law of retaliation, demanding eye for eye and tooth for tooth, tended to engender this spirit of vindictiveness. The criminal code in Lev. xxiv. fully recognises the principle of equivalent retaliation; and in the later recension of it in Deuteronomy the principle is extended. This law, however, was not one of private revenge, but of public justice, and it demanded the *quid pro quo* solely in vindication of the law, and not for the advantage of the prosecutor.

Let us honestly acknowledge that Old Testament saints exhibit not a little of this spirit of vengeance. It jars upon our better feelings in many a beautiful psalm, and it has made many ask the question whether such songs should be embraced in the portions of the psalter sung in the Christian Church. We shall not enter upon the thorny subject of the imprecatory psalms further than to say that it is only upon such enemies as exhibit downright wickedness that the psalmists ask God's vengeance, and that in every case the motive seems to spring from a sense of duty and desire for God's honour. These sacred odes are not the outcome of private passion, but the psalmist identifies himself with God, and believes that God's majesty and glory are bound up with the overwhelming of His foes.

Yet when all these considerations have been taken into account, we have to admit that this fiery hatred towards enemies could find no place in a code of Christian ethics. "They express a stage of feeling far beneath the Christian, and the attempt to slur over the contrast is in danger of hiding the glory of midday, for fear of not doing justice to the beauty of morning twilight."<sup>1</sup> It was impossible to live under the pedagogic training of the Law without receiving some of its harshness into one's blood; but it was the only possible way by which in those times

<sup>1</sup> Dr. A. Maclaren, *Book of Psalms*, i. p. 336.

God could train men to be heroes and saints. Yet the desire for revenge upon enemies was but one of the accompaniments of the system under which they lived, and did not belong to its true end. The difference between the two Testaments lies in this that the saints of the Old would extinguish the idolater; the saint of the New would destroy the idolatry. How difficult it was to eradicate the old vindictive spirit is shown in the desire expressed by the apostle of love himself, that Christ should call down fire from heaven and annihilate those that opposed His mission. The faults of the Old Testament saints, as Herder says, were the faults of the pupil, not of the teacher. They were the inevitable accompaniments of a partial and progressive revelation.

In this connection also, it must not be forgotten that the doctrine of immortality was only then a germinant hope, and that in the mind of these psalmists divine retribution was mainly confined to the present life. To them it seemed that unless justice inflicted an adequate sentence upon the wicked now and here, wickedness would entirely escape its proper punishment. The narrower outlook of the psalmist made him more eager to execute vengeance speedily. The wider horizons of Christianity, comprehending the next life as well as the present, afford far more scope for the exercise of both the love and the justice of God.

The effect of the legal discipline of the Old Testament is also manifest in a certain spirit of eudæmonism, which seems to make earthly prosperity the true object of life. We have already pointed out in Chap. XII. how the wisdom literature represents riches and honour as the sure reward of righteousness, and how to the wise man shall assuredly come quietness and security in his possessions. One cannot fail to observe the outwardness of all this, as contrasted with the extreme subjectivity of the beatitudes of Jesus Christ.

At the same time, it is fully recognised that there can be no earthly prosperity apart from communion with God. Earthly goods are the pledges of His friendship, apart from whom they cannot bring happiness. Thus all earthly goods bear to the righteous man a spiritual character, and honour and wealth are never to be counted as the end of life. They are to be sought and received only as pledges of His love, who has joined together righteousness and its rewards by as close a nexus as that which unites cause and effect.

III. We shall now consider the third class of difficulties arising from apparent defects in some of the Mosaic laws. Having discussed the character of these laws generally in previous chapters, we here refer to them only in so far as they have been challenged as belonging to a stage of imperfect morality. Some of them, such as the law of the Goel, were

doubtless old legal customs incorporated into the criminal law of Israel because of their fitness to the existing communal and national conditions. The age was a period of war and violence, when the people were fighting their way into the promised inheritance. Pastoral life and primitive wants furnish the explanation of laws which otherwise could not be historically accounted for. They were simply a survival of archaic justice; and, being suitable to the time and the needs of the nation, a wise Providence made use of them as educational helps to the moral training of Israel.

The law of the Goel belonged to a time when the rights and the perpetuity of the family were more thought of than the rights of the individual. In the absence of an impartial civil justice, protecting life and property, it was absolutely necessary that the cause of the murdered man should be taken up by his relatives. Such laws were to be found a century ago amongst nomadic tribes, living apart from any established political government. It was one of those pioneer laws necessary for such a time of social disorder as that of Israel's entrance into Canaan. The law afforded protection in the city of refuge only for the man who by accident killed his neighbour. As Canon Mozley says, it served as a basis and commencement of a regular civil justice, since it

roused the relatives of the deceased from their natural lethargy and unwillingness to investigate fully the circumstances of the homicide. No doubt this law was but a blind way of groping after impartial justice; but it was quite in accordance with the ideas of righteous vengeance, which then had possession of men's minds, and it was the best that could be adopted at that rudimentary stage of the nation's career. An imperfect conception of justice lay at the root of it; but if the conception was not highly moral, still it cannot be charged with immorality. It was simply a case of justice struggling through adverse circumstances to reach a moral end—an end which ultimately was attained when Israel became a kingdom under the Davidic line.

In the early stages of Old Testament history captives taken in war were frequently reduced to a state of slavery. Such bondage was a denial of the first principles of the rights of man, as laid down in the Book of Genesis, where men are represented as being of one blood, and slavery is spoken of as a curse. Yet slaves are mentioned in connection with Abraham's household, and the Mosaic Law makes provisions regarding their treatment. It took care that the service should be of a kind as little hurtful to the slave as possible. By restrictions of the most humane nature it protected him from all arbitrary or cruel

oppression. His rights as a fellow-worshipper were recognised, and provision was made for his introduction into the covenant of Israel. Such as were Israelites by birth might become bondmen only through poverty, or by sentence passed upon them for the crime of theft. But, as we have before pointed out, the time of servitude could last only six years, and the seventh year brought freedom. In the course of time the organisation of society in the Old Testament was so perfected that slavery seems to have all but ceased. In the age of the prophets the sense of man's individual rights was much more keenly realised, and this detestable institution, common to all surrounding nations, ceased to exist in the land of Israel. Slowly but surely the legislation of the Old Testament wrought for liberty and equality. And in our judgment of a progressive revelation we must estimate its morality, not by its starting point, but by its conclusion.

In the foregoing pages we have sought to apply to the ethics of the Old Testament only such tests as are historically applicable. Any judgment formed upon different criteria must be worthless. And our whole discussion may now be summed up in the conclusion that one grand moral purpose has ever presided over its development. That purpose we have traced in Mosaic legislation, in prophetic inculcation of justice and righteousness, in

the wise man's enforcement of prudence and the fear of God. The divineness of the course is apparent in its results. Other nations ended as they began; but throughout Israel's history there was a dynamic energy, constructively working for a purer morality. And its most conspicuous triumph is to be seen in the heroic courage and moral fervour of its saints and seers, which led them to contend against every wrong, to denounce vice and thwart tyranny, and expose the falsities and hypocrisies that satisfied the somnolent shepherds of their day. It is their fervid passion for righteousness, their splendid courage of conviction, their inextinguishable spirit of hope amid direst calamity, their grand visions of a coming kingdom of God, in which every wrong shall be righted, and all shall know God from the least to the greatest, that form the wealth of ethical teaching which is the glory of the Old Testament.

Recognising as we have done its limitations and restrictions, we cannot fail to perceive that Hebrew ethics rises far above the standards of its age, and presents a direct contrast to pagan morality. It looks evil in the face, and vigorously combats it; it knows sin and speaks in plainest language of its soul-destroying power; it draws a clear line of division between the righteous and the wicked, says to the one it shall be well with

him, and to the other it shall be ill with him. Instead of lingering in the sphere of the ideal, its antagonism to wickedness is fundamental and strenuous. Leaving no room for compromise, it calls evil evil and good good, and loudly utters its categoric imperatives, "Thou shalt," "Thou shalt not." Up to the extent of its revealed truth, and the possibilities of its stage of knowledge, it wrought earnestly for righteousness; and it left a heritage of moral truth that has entered fruitfully into the morality and the legislative codes of every civilised nation, and has enriched the life of the Christian Church. Looked at in the light of its end, it is seen to be a worthy product of Him from whom it came. Such portions as were but educational and preparatory fell away when the Fulfiller appeared. But its central elements all abide in Christian ethics. And every broken light of truth that shone through decalogue or vision, through proverb or psalm, has been gathered up and made vital by Jesus Christ. He has drawn forth to light the far-reaching principles that underlay the ancient forms, has shown us where their true ethical value lies, and has summed them all up in the law of love to God and to our neighbour.







