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ORDINARY MEETING.*

THE PRESIDENT, SIR G. GABRIEL STOKES, BART., M.P., P.R.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed.

The following paper was then read by the Author :—

THE SCIENCE OF RECTITUDE AS DISTINCT FROM EXPEDIENCE. By the Rev. H. J. CLARKE, Vicar of Great Barr, Birmingham.†

HOWEVER fruitless may be the attempt to imagine a system of Ethics in which it shall be found possible to dispense with the categories severally represented by the terms Right and Wrong, yet, if it can be shown that the question, "What is right?" ultimately resolves itself into "What is expedient?" and that, except as meaning this, it has no meaning at all relatively to fundamental principles, then of course there can be no Science of Rectitude as distinct from expedience. Practically, the supposition I am making is that, so long as we remain on the low level of a vulgar and conventional morality, we are liable to be troubled with reasonings in which we seem to hear a still small voice within, and are conscious of the presence of a monitor who persists in preaching about duty, but that having once succeeded in reaching in our emotions the standpoint of science, we find ourselves free to determine our

* April 21, 1890.
† Author of *The Fundamental Science*, etc.

actions by considerations which simply take account of profit and loss. On this supposition, if the discovery that our conscience had mistaken advice administered by ourselves for authoritative commands from the highest source conceivable should give a shock to our minds, and if the effort to substitute for the future in our searchings of heart the hope of pleasure or the fear of pain for the sense of duty should cost us a struggle, we could assign no better reason for our lingering reluctance to endeavour to bring our sentiments into conformity with truth and fact than the strangeness of the repellent doctrine, obviously an indefensible reason for fondly clinging to detected error, and virtually ascribing reality to a species of obligation which has been discovered to have no existence, save in the imagination of the inadequately cultured and informed.

But before we can assure ourselves that we are actually applying the elementary principles of the Science of Expedience to such a concept as *right* or *duty*, and may thereby expect to discover whether it be true that in their presence every such concept undergoes decomposition and disappears, we have to ascertain what that science is. Expedience presupposes an end in view, for the attainment of which means or instruments are used, or methods adopted. Whatsoever conduces (*συμφέρει*) to the desired end is in respect to it expedient, and, simply regarded as having this tendency, may be termed useful or profitable. Illustrations of expedience may thus be found in the contriving of means for the destruction of life and property, as in the application of scientific skill and mechanical ingenuity to the construction of rifled cannon and armour-plated ships, and the invention of explosive compounds, and the improvement of weapons of precision. Those persons who even make it their business to break into houses and safes take care to provide themselves with implements scientifically adapted to effect their purpose, and it would be difficult to imagine what further advance could be made, relatively to this one object, in doing what is expedient. A word then, which, it is plain, has no distinctively ethical significance, is obviously without meaning if employed for the purpose of characterising a system of ethics, thus forbidding us, indeed, to look for any recognition of a fundamental difference between right and wrong, but in all other respects leaving us in the dark as to the fundamental principles of the system. Neither alone, nor in connection with the word Science, does Expedience shed upon them the faintest gleam of light.

If an ethical Science of Expedience is to be constructed, it is obviously necessary that some universal and ultimate object of human action should be found on which the science may be based; for unless the foundation can thus be laid, nothing is more certain than that any attempt to design the superstructure will be a waste of time. Now, of course, no arbitrary assumption could be for a moment admitted: the object must be one that is determined exclusively and unmistakably by the nature of things, and yet we must hold ourselves strictly forbidden to affirm that we are under any moral obligation to aim at it. This is the problem, and utilitarian moralists believe that they have found the solution. They start with the assumption that everyone desires *happiness*. Well, so much may be readily conceded, if by happiness is meant a feeling of complete satisfaction. But satisfaction arises just in so far as desires are fulfilled. In the event of a conflict among them, this feeling will be experienced in the fulfilment of the desire that dominates over the rest, whether an animal appetite or a spiritual aspiration. But in such a case, until those others are either appeased or extinguished, whatever be the degree of happiness enjoyed, it will be qualified by the sense that something is wanting to make it perfect. We are expected then, it appears, to assent to a proposition that may be briefly stated thus: everyone desires that his desires may be fulfilled, namely, his dominant desire, and all others which it suffers him to entertain; or, somewhat to simplify the wording of this incontrovertible axiom, everyone desires those things which he does desire.

Well, seeing that no science can have for its basis a proposition in which nothing is affirmed, the would-be founders of the Science of Expedience must abandon their undertaking, or they must find some object of aspiration which may be fitly substituted for happiness. Will they, then, assert that what everyone desires is his *well-being?* We may presume they will not, if by a man's well-being we are to understand that which it is really good for him to be; for they would be making an assertion at variance with notorious facts. It is true, this is what everyone ought to aim at. But if "ought" be understood to point, not to a duty constituted by human enactment, but to a fundamental obligation, how could they accept the proposition thus amended? This little word, which so naturally suggests itself, and is so difficult to dispense with in the expression of ethical thought, would annihilate the entire system of their utilitarian notions, would pulverise it, so to speak, as effectually and completely as

toughened glass is reduced to powder when disintegrated by the slightest crack. But we have yet to be informed what constitutes man's well-being; and, as must now be apparent, no clue to the meaning of the word is to be found in prevalent desires.

On the supposition, however, that it is allowable to put out of view all volitional aiming at ends, so far as the immediate question is concerned, would it be relevant to observe that the development of every organism in nature strives towards the full expression of some type, or the outcome of a fusion of types, and gives evidence of an innate tendency to make the best of the circumstances by which development is in part conditioned? Undoubtedly, if it may be assumed possible to construct on utilitarian principles a science that shall determine the conditions under which the eventual appearance of the highest attainable type of man, as regards moral sentiments and conduct, may be hoped for. But in the first place, even granting the possibility of such a science, how are its doctrines to be utilised for the purpose of forcing ethical development? How is it to be made apparent that, in respect to sentiments and tastes and manners and customs, the evolutional acquisition of new characteristics would more than compensate for the surrender of those which inherited disposition, strengthened by habit and prevalent example, struggles hard, even when plied with threats and penalties, to retain? If among any race of men the infirm and helpless are left to perish, or if population is kept within manageable limits by infanticide, the motives to which these practices may be traced are unquestionably utilitarian. Cannibalism may be similarly accounted for, and those who are addicted to it are as far from seeing any reason why it would be better for them to have their appetites and sentiments conformed to the appetites and sentiments of any type of human nature to which it is abhorrent, as an ape is from conceiving the thought that it would be desirable to become a man. How is the advantage of moral evolution to be proved to the satisfaction of those human beings who, however certain it may be that they are in no respect hopelessly deficient in human attributes, yet experience, in the gratification of brutish lusts and savage passions, the highest kind of happiness which their comparatively undeveloped humanity permits them to imagine, and who are devoid of taste for the decencies, the proprieties, the amenities, the salutary restrictions, and the multifarious requirements of civilised life? And from the utilitarian point

of view what reason can be perceived, in the nature of things, why the brutality which, as it would seem, is proper to such creatures at the stage of development where they still linger, should excite in us any other feeling than that with which we contemplate the disgusting habits and the ferocity which characterise gorillas? Further, it must be taken into consideration that the conditions of well-being are not the same for every genus or species in animated nature, but are determined in some measure by the degree which has been reached in the scale of sentient existence. Very narrow limits in respect to both perceptivity and activity are, in such creatures as an oyster or a snail may be taken to typify, consistent with well-being. On the contrary, in mammals of the higher ranks below the human, and not least in those animals whose forms most nearly resemble that of man, well-being presupposes in association with the more advanced morphological development the exercise of superior intelligence duly matched with all needful facility in adapting volitional action to varying conditions. But at the same time characteristics which are repulsive, both to our senses and to our sentiments, are far from being necessarily unfavourable to well-being; indeed, the subjugation of truculent instincts and the supremacy of such propensities as are congenial with our best feelings would prove destructive to many races of undomesticated animals.

Whether on the whole, and in the average of cases, the experiences of an animal in which natural ferocity has been subdued or mitigated by taming, are more pleasurable than those which were incident to its former mode of life, may be a question. No moralist, at any rate, advocates the taming of wild beasts with a view to their well-being. What reason, then, can the utilitarian assign why savages should be, if possible, civilised, except that whatever trouble and expense are thereby incurred by their civilised neighbours will prove ultimately to have been a profitable investment? I am not taking for granted that he accepts the theory of Evolution, although he cannot do so and at the same time deny the pertinency of the illustrations I have just been using; but in either case I fail to perceive that a further and a nobler reason is producible from his necessarily indeterminate conception of a state of existence which is at all times and under all circumstances to be desired for all sorts and conditions of men, that is to say, for every human being in whom it has not yet begun, or, if begun, still falls short of perfection.

Before, however, we can proceed further in testing the assumption that the science in question is possible, if for "Expedience" "Well-being" be virtually substituted in the title, we must be at once distinctly informed whether the latter of these two words is to be understood as pointing to the interest of the individual, or to that of the race, in the event of its being discovered that in some particular or other their respective interests do not coincide. A necessary or invariable coincidence it would be very rash for a utilitarian to take for granted. Throughout organic creation those individuals which contribute most largely to perpetuate a race are, in so far as it undergoes change, obviously such as chiefly determine its characteristics. But the most prolific of sentient creatures are not, as a matter of course, best qualified to derive enjoyment from their surroundings, to search out and explore its sources, to discover the flowers, as it were, which yield it, and to sip the nectar. Moreover, although the races which nature chiefly favours in the process of selection are to be seen in swarming multitudes, the time allotted for enjoyment to each unit in the countless totals which the environment of a fleeting life contains may be but momentary. Indeed, if regard be had to duration of life among the lower animals, there are noteworthy phenomena, not a little suggestive, in which it may be seen that the interest of spreading communities and the interest of the individuals of which they severally consist, considered respectively as such, bear to each other an inverse ratio. Certainly nature is restrained by no sympathetic attention to individual requirements from abridging life within the shortest available periods, if only she can thereby the more effectually multiply and diffuse the race. For the race of mortal men, in all probability, so long as the globe affords room for their multiplication, it must in the long run be most advantageous that every individual should adopt such practices and acquire such habits as are most favourable to longevity; but it by no means follows that the various sacrifices which the larger interest demands will, from the utilitarian point of view, be in every case the surest guarantee of private happiness and personal well-being. Circumstances may easily be conceived under which many persons must perish, unless there be one in whom the wish to save them overcomes the dread of certain death, is strong enough to impel him to make himself, in fact, a vicarious offering. Such circumstances do sometimes occur. Let it be granted, then, that inexorable Fate will accept no lower price for the safety

of the many than the life of some individual whom she has pointed out as the atoning victim; is it advantageous to him that he should die? To this question I find as yet no answer in the Science of Expedience.

Nor is it possible even to attempt an answer until it has been settled whether the existence of individual men is to be regarded as limited to that of their mortal bodies, or as prolonged under conditions involving at least the persistence of personal consciousness. Yet, it is quietly taken for granted that we can determine what constitutes man's well-being, while leaving open the question, whether in giving up the ghost he becomes extinct, or does but start upon a new career, and one perhaps which is to have no end. In the name of Science, we may ask, how comes it to have been overlooked that in this assumption scientific caution is conspicuous by its absence, and nothing, in fact, is so glaringly evident and undeniable as a rashness that amounts to audacity? How could an architect be expected to prepare a plan for a building, if we suppose him to have been left in ignorance whether he were required to design a temporary framework of poles and boards, or a stable and enduring structure? Is it only considered as a mortal that man may be likened to a building in the erection of which science and skill are available, or, being encompassed with a mortal nature, has he therein but just the scaffolding which is to be utilised in the construction of a permanent edifice? So long as this question remains unanswered, the would-be builders, the framers of precepts for the formation of character and the regulation of conduct, cannot even make a plausible pretence of knowing what they are about.

A person, let us suppose, who has been upholding what he believes to be the true interests of his fellow men, is at length made aware that, unless he desists, he will suffer death; and yet he neither accounts the good he might do by showing a martyr's courage and constancy of equal value with his own life, nor looks for any life to come. Will the professors of the Science of Expedience tell us how they would advise him to act, and with what arguments they would support their counsel and their exhortations? On the supposition that they are at one with him as regards the truth and the importance of the doctrine he has been maintaining, they might of course dilate upon the impetus it is likely to receive from the steadfast courage of prominent advocates, and upon the demoralising effect of a suspicion that the acts and speeches of such men are not the fruit of deep convictions.

But urged from the standpoint of expedience, of what avail would these considerations be? I am putting the case of a man who will ask, not "What is expedient for my neighbour?" but "What is expedient for myself?" If his friends, declining to allow precedence to this question, should insist that it is his duty to consider the benefit he may confer upon society by an act of self-sacrifice, they would be resorting to the application of a species of moral pressure absolutely disallowed by the Science of Expedience, in which, as we are given to understand, the discharge of duties means nothing more than prudential conformity to the laws of the land, good or bad, and to such additional rules as social opinion may have established. Indeed, unless they can deny the legality of the penalty with which he is threatened, they must either disavow their science altogether, or admit that his duty, strictly speaking, coincides with what he conceives to be his interest. If, however, duty is to be kept out of sight, and he is, if possible, to be prevailed upon to become a martyr, it must needs be made apparent to him that he will thereby be a gainer. How is this to be done? Their doctrine is that "the virtue of self-denial is one that receives the commendation of society, and stands high in the morality of reward," that it is nevertheless "a means to an end."* But on the supposition that he is expected to purchase the commendation of admiring disciples at the cost of ceasing to exist, and that, were he thus to become ever so famous, the revolutions of ages must at length efface from creation all memory of his name and his deed, his friends would have no cause for surprise if they should fail to satisfy him that the end was worth the means. They would find no ground whatever on which their argument could rest in any attempt they might make to convince him that he was mistaken, any serious endeavour to meet his objections with such reasoning as an intelligent and candid utilitarian must allow to be conclusive.

Their reasoning hitherto having thus, as we assume, glanced aside from his self-love, there is just one more arrow left in their quiver, a last inducement with which it is open to them, as utilitarians, to experiment upon him, if they should think it worth their while. They may suggest that he will indemnify himself for the sacrifice of his existence by the previous gratification of certain altruistic sentiments, which, as being of higher dignity than all merely self-regarding

* *Mental and Moral Science*, by A. Bain, "Ethics," Part 1, ch. i, § 11.

instincts, seeing that individual happiness largely depends upon social solidarity, have a prior claim to consideration. But let it be granted that, having balanced this gratification against the sacrifice it necessitates, and being of opinion that it has turned the scale, he chooses to throw away the remainder of his life for the sake of the pleasure he hopes to experience during the few days in which he will be awaiting death; on the extravagant supposition that this is the motive which overcomes his reluctance to die, who would respect it? Who would be able to recognise in it a testimony to the truth he had been maintaining? No advocate of the religion of expedience, whose practice consistently illustrates his teaching, can seal his testimony with his blood; by no possibility can the doctrine have a noble army of martyrs; none of its preachers could be enrolled in such a company without betraying their cause and becoming renegades.

We are still, then, waiting to be informed what that science is which resolves moral obligation into expedience, and having assumed this to be the fundamental principle of human action, expects us to ascertain it from the standpoint of Agnosticism relatively to a life to come. A speculation which, as thus appears to be the case, must of necessity be hazy, a theory about something which does not admit of being brought to the focus of a definite and certain meaning, is surely misnamed a Science. If the term is to be fitly applied, we must find for expedience an ultimate and stable foundation, and to this the title must be transferred. The principle we have to look for is seemingly not far to seek, for the human conscience, unless labouring under some radical misconception in persistently assigning to one or the other of the two categories, Right and Wrong, every morally significant action, evidently points it out. What we have now to ascertain is, whether the phenomena in which this kind of discrimination appears, are such as render possible a Science of Rectitude.

Now, seeing that it is in something which had no origin that every originated form of being subsists, it is manifest the latter can nowhere find a standpoint whence, nor ever exercise intelligence wherewith, it could possibly discover in the attributes or operations of the former anything that might be pronounced faulty, anything that might be held to warrant the reflection "this ought not to be." In the judgment of every thoughtful person of sound mind, these attributes and operations are of necessity above criticism; he

classes them as a matter of course among the things which are right.

It will thus appear that any being capable of deviating from rectitude must needs have an originated and therefore dependent existence, yet that its attributes must include a will, that it must be able to make a choice that is real, and not determined absolutely by the exercise of supreme control. If therefore the result of an investigation of that which is necessarily right relatively to such things as may possibly be wrong be the discovery of principles in respect to which it may be affirmed that the will of man is under an obligation to conform to them, the ascertainment of these principles constitutes a Science of Rectitude.

But if power be conceived as being non-volitional, and therefore unintelligent, no obligation to it can be rationally acknowledged. In point of fact, no human imagination ever has invested it with claims upon any creature. A fetish worshipper instinctively associates with the object of his adoration mysterious properties of a volitional kind; otherwise what could he hope to gain by treating it with reverence? No idolatry, however gross, is in this respect absolutely irrational; matter must be somehow spiritualized in imagination before the contemplation of any attributes it may seem to possess can excite the sense of moral obligation; a thorough-going and philosophically consistent materialist is of necessity a utilitarian pure and simple. With him fundamental duty can signify nothing more than what a man is at liberty to conceive, if such be his fancy, that he owes to himself. On the other hand, the notion that the opposition of self-will to the order of the universe is resistance to a rightful claim, and is for that reason reprehensible and merits punishment, postulates a fundamental Will.

How has this notion arisen? We may, I think, freely admit that religious conceptions of the sort which characterises early and immature speculations concerning the government of the universe are polytheistic, and show that the human mind is far from having any innate tendency to an immediate intuition of the necessary existence of a Supreme Ruler. How that light is to be accounted for which has been rolling away the old world darkness, I need not stay to inquire; it may suffice if I call attention to the indisputable historical fact that in the recognition of a unifying principle underlying all phenomena, scientific observation has been anticipated by religious belief. But what we have to ascertain is the nature of the unmistakably reverential sentiment in

which duty, if truly discerned as such, is conscientiously acknowledged, and which constitutes an essential distinction, of profound moral import, between looking upon anything as right, and merely perceiving that it is expedient. The doctrine which substitutes expedience for rectitude assumes the sentiment in question to be nothing but a habit of mind induced by experiences that generate a dread of interminably disastrous consequences in the event of persistent disobedience. Conscientious scrupulousness, it is conceived, may be a somewhat complex feeling; but the reverential regard for what is right which it yields when analysed, turns out to be an acquiescent sense of helplessness in relation to superior might. Each member of a community, learning by experience that the social order in which he finds himself is too strong to be successfully resisted by his individual will, acquires a sober fear of testing its strength by violating any of the rules of conduct to which it has subjected him, and of thus incurring the disapprobation of his fellow men, or, it may be, the entire forfeiture of respectability, and, if he should render himself liable to prosecution as a law breaker, judicially inflicted punishment.

Let it, then, be for a moment assumed that rectitude never receives any other reverential recognition than that which has its root in the fear of such penalties as men have it in their power to inflict. What better outgrowth, we may ask, is to be expected from this kind of fear than the endeavour to avoid such penalties? Its evidently proper fruits are cautious behaviour, diplomatically guarded language, plausible representations, studious care in the outward observance of all conventional proprieties, and, indeed, if it becomes the dominant principle of action, unremitting efforts to obtain by any means the credit of doing the right thing. The most successful students of the wisdom and knowledge which have their beginning in the fear of men must needs be in this species of performance the most accomplished actors, or, to use a very significant word in its strictly accurate sense, the most consummate hypocrites. But does the theory which identifies a conscientious regard for rectitude with the dread of arraignment before one or another of those tribunals at which society passes sentence on delinquents adequately account for all the phenomena of the human conscience? Can we perceive in it the cause of that feeling of compunction with which an honest man is visited, if in any business transaction he finds that he has, through failing to exercise due care and caution, defrauded his neighbour?

The latter, let us suppose, unless informed of his loss, is sure to remain in ignorance of it; and the amount is insignificant. Still, if the other's conscience should forbid him to leave the error unrectified, the scruple by which his action is determined will be perfectly intelligible to upright minds, and not at all abnormal or extraordinary. Perhaps he discovers that he has received from a person of great wealth some payment slightly in excess of the amount he was entitled to. In this case it cannot be pretended that his scruple has sprung from sympathy; the circumstances are such as to preclude all anxiety lest he should be abridging, be it ever so little, the comforts or the pleasures of a fellow-creature; yet so long as he remains conscious of leaving unsatisfied a claim that might justly be made upon him, he is not quite at his ease. Is it conceivable that a feeling of uneasiness which the possession of a secret impenetrably close and secure, so far from stifling, only aggravates, is after all the mere development of a fear generated by coercive measures which society has thought it expedient to adopt with a view to its own preservation? Let the teacher in whose eyes whatever anxiety or terror may be experienced in the recollection of wicked deeds originates in awe inspired by outward and visible authority, and is traceable to this source alone, find, if he can, a name for the motive which now and then urges an unsuspected criminal to give himself up to justice; and let him explain how it comes to pass that in a variety of cases, in which prudential considerations might seem to counsel the strictest silence, troubled consciences seek relief in confession, and only in this way succeed in ridding themselves of burdens too heavy for them to bear. Human life abounds in concurrent proofs that perturbation, horror, and remorse are liable to arise from the mere consciousness of a deviation from rectitude, and, moreover, that the mental distress thus experienced is by no means proportioned in each case to the dread of incurring such penalties as human tribunals have power to inflict, that timidity as regards these deterrents from crime may coexist with moral insensibility, and on the other hand courage with conscientiousness. Human nature, in so far as earthward tendencies allow its distinctive features to appear, shows itself to have been stamped with no equivocal testimony to the truth that the ultimate ground of all admissible authority is not Might but Right, and that to make this an adversary is to be overthrown and crushed.

Deeds which outrage righteousness and presuppose deep wounds inflicted on the sense of moral fitness are apt to pro-

duce upon the evildoer's imagination such effects as the operation of human laws signally fails to account for. Certain well known characters and scenes which, although in some measure dramatic fictions, are universally allowed to be distinct reflections from a mirror held up to nature, may serve to illustrate this remark. A King of Scotland pays a visit to the castle of an ambitious noble. The host, tempted by the opportunity, and at the same time urged and aided by his still more ambitious wife, treacherously assassinates his confiding guest, and afterwards causes an intimate companion, whose prospects render him formidable, to be put to death. He lives in an age when human life is counted cheap, and when the administration of criminal laws is not such as to infuse into the souls of mighty warriors a spirit of salutary caution; he is now exalted above all earthly tribunals; and he is a man of daring personal courage. But, having done exceptional violence to his moral sense by the perpetration of atrocious deeds, he has become subject to a terrifying impression of guilt, from which he can find no escape, and he quails before a corpse-like spectre which his torturing conscience persists in conjuring up. The partner of his guilt is more resolutely wicked than himself, and her unhallowed aspirations have smothered in her breast whatever affections of a sympathetic nature might otherwise have held her impatience in check, and hindered it from overstepping the bounds within which worldly scheming is ordinarily confined. But she too becomes eventually a terror to herself, and in the breaking down of physical strength under the incessant pressure of a restless spirit she is hypnotised by the all-absorbing impression that the bloody deed has left upon her hand a stain which nothing can ever wash out. She has fearfully lacerated, so to speak, her moral sense, and not knowing where to find or how to apply an effectual remedy, she dies of the wound.

But, as regards the possibility of horror arising from the mere consciousness of having deviated from rectitude, fiction never created or embellished any illustration more instructive or more pertinent than may be found in one of the most memorable of historical facts. It would be difficult to imagine circumstances less favourable to the development of a sense of guilt through awe-inspiring experiences of the majesty of outward and visible authority than those under which Judas Iscariot committed the crime that has rendered his name a by-word. An authority which piety and patriotism alike were accustomed to honour with submissive rever-

ence, and whose powers were formidable, had pronounced the victim of his treachery to be worthy of death. In his former associates he could see nothing which might have made him apprehensive of their vengeance, and in forfeiting their good opinion he had laid under a heavy obligation the magnates of his people, and might now hope for large rewards, if in continuing to place his services at their disposal he were to show intelligent zeal. But no sooner does he become aware that his deed is certain to have a tragical issue and cannot be undone, than he wakes up from pleasing anticipations to the reflection that he has betrayed innocent blood. The possession of the blood-money now fills him with unendurable disquietude. Finding that the persons from whom he received it decline to take it back from his hands, he flings it away. Yet he cannot rest: existence itself has become a burden which he can no longer bear. A desperate effort to get rid of it with suicidal hands is the last recorded testimony he bears to that horror of himself which is the consequence of his abominable deed. By this act of self-murder he makes it evident that what he dreads most is no future penalty, not even punishment in another state of existence; for if he were trembling at the prospect of an account to be rendered in a judgment after death, why should he precipitate the issue of the summons to appear? Are not all the efforts of shrinking fear in such a case determined by the longing for a respite, and is there not ever present the readiness to catch at any seeming warrant for the faintest hope of eventual escape from the impending doom? How, then, is that state of mind to be accounted for which makes the continuance of conscious existence insupportably horrible? Will it suffice to reply, "Any action that is hostile to our interest excites a form of disapprobation, such as belongs to wounded self-interest?" or, "Any action that puts another to pain may so affect our natural sympathy as to be disapproved and resented on that ground?"* What if a murderer believes that he has sent a Lazarus to Abraham's bosom? Now that the pain he inflicted is at an end, what is there which, from an altruistic point of view, should cause him to feel otherwise than gratified? As to the moral character of the deed, he can have no sufficient reason for feeling uneasy, if we are to accept the doctrine that "a moral act is . . . . an act prescribed by the social authority, and rendered obligatory upon every citizen," and

* *Mental and Moral Science*, by A. Bain, "Ethics," Part 1, ch. iii, § 11.

that "its morality is constituted by its authoritative prescription, and not by its fulfilling the primary ends of the social institution." * For surely we are not expected to assume that a person may reasonably account himself wicked who presumes to act or think or feel in any matter or in any respect otherwise than in accordance with laws and rules which owe their authority to civil government or to prevalent custom. If in the court of his conscience he pleads guilty, if he acknowledges that he has acted, not only without due regard to his own interest, but blamably, he recognizes in so doing an essentially deeper obligation than can possibly have for its basis a fluctuating aggregate of more or less conflicting wills. The question at issue leaves it unnecessary to ascertain his religious creed, before we attempt to determine the import of his acknowledgment that he has acted wickedly. He has, it may be, no religious creed at all, but he still proves himself to have deviated from rectitude, and thus bears witness, although unconsciously, to the fact that his will has come into collision with a Will to which are due absolute submission and unlimited reverence. His conscience, in pleading guilty, assuredly recognizes the authority of a Judge whose jurisdiction is the universe, and from whose tribunal there can be no appeal. Of this we suppose him to be unaware: we are not concerned, however, to inquire how he interprets his sense of guilt, but simply to point out that it necessitates a distinction between remorseful acquiescence in the claims of rectitude, and the sort of perturbation which is experienced when recollected acts are discovered, in view of consequences, to have been inexpedient.

Yet, how are the claims of rectitude to be ascertained? For any attempt to expound them systematically, and with the precision which a science presupposes, must of course await the answer to this question. Objectors, as might have been expected, call attention to the undeniable fact that the different nations and races of men have never been of one mind as to what constitutes right and wrong, and that in this matter wide diversities of opinion prevail. We are reminded, among other things, that "polygamy is regarded as right in Turkey, India, and China, and as wrong in England," that "marriages we pronounce incestuous were legitimate in ancient times," that "the views entertained by Plato and Aristotle as to the intercourse of the sexes are now

* *Mental and Moral Science*, by A. Bain, "Ethics," Part 1, chap. iii, § 10.

looked upon with abhorrence."* But what does all this prove? Not that there are no stable principles on which a Science of Rectitude may be established, but that such principles need for their discovery, and with a view to their specific applications, more reliable criteria than are to be found in men's creeds and their notions respecting the ground of social order and social relations—that the science in question, if there be such a science, comprehends more truths than are necessarily perceived in the way of simple intuition, that the acquisition of it presupposes the culture of that faculty of moral discrimination from the exercise of which have sprung the terms *right* and *wrong*, and that it is acquired conformably to the character, and proportionably to the degree, of the culture which the faculty receives.

It is an undeniable fact that some people have a better eye for perspective than others, and some a better ear for music. There is doubtless many a person who, when he looks at a picture in which some of the lines supposed to recede from the spectator in the same direction do not converge towards precisely the same point, fails to detect the error, and to whom, if he were making a drawing of his own, it would never occur even to choose a point of sight and regulate with due regard to its position the course of every line. But who would infer from non-agreement in critical remarks, thus easily accounted for, or from a similarly explicable absence of universally known and accepted rules, that there can be no Science of Perspective? Relatively to diversity in the appreciation of musical sounds, a question of like import may be asked. There are persons whose feelings never vibrate in response to elaborate harmonies. There are ears more easily attracted by a husky pothouse rendering of any of the dullest and heaviest of street airs, and by the feeblest of stridulous instrumental performances, than they would be by the faultless execution of some wonderful masterpiece of a composer of world-wide fame. Indeed, to not a few has been denied the power of so discriminating definite relations in degrees of pitch as to be just capable of distinguishing clearly one tune from another; and to such people music can be little more than a succession of rhythmical variations in certain kinds of sonorous noise. Yet, notwithstanding all the gradations and varieties of shortcoming which may be assumed to exist, if perfect sensibility of ear be taken as the standard, and in spite of the consequent diversities of taste

* *Mental and Moral Science*, by A. Bain, "Ethics," Part 1, ch. iii, § 6.

and opinion, which must needs be innumerable, what person, who could pretend to any knowledge of the subject, would refuse to accord to Harmony the rank of a legitimate science? Its title to this position is of course indisputable; for its laws are no arbitrary aggregate of compromises, no systematised outgrowth from idiosyncrasies in respect to musical taste; they have for their basis complexities of arithmetical ratio between successions, simple and consonant, of sound-producing waves of different lengths, and are therefore grounded upon relations in which the intellect, independently of any aid it may receive from the ear, is able to perceive significance. It is beyond all human power to frame the laws to which musical composition, whether as regards successive or simultaneous sounds, should conform, but the ideally proper function of what is called an ear for music is to be sensitive in exact correspondence with laws which have been determined by the constitution of nature. Germane to this duty is the proper function of the artist's eye; and, in the discharge of both, the acquisition of technical accuracy is facilitated by practice and education. Hence it must be evident that facts of large and profound analogical import warrant the expectation of finding laws into full accord with which it should be our aim to bring the responsive susceptibilities of that innermost sense, that spiritual eye or ear, which indeed cannot act at all without at least discriminating between Right and Wrong, considered respectively as such, yet does not of necessity discriminate correctly, but for the due discharge of its functions needs a healthy development, and therefore the aid of such influences as tend to strengthen the reverential and sympathetic affections, and of such illumination as may ensure a sound judgment, in so far as the co-operation of the intellect is requisite.

Now, in the first place, it will easily be perceived that a certain duty which is commonly held to underlie and determine all other conceivable obligations, virtually receives scientific recognition, on the assumption that Will is an attribute of the First Cause. The original and absolute Will of necessity claims unlimited obedience, and its title is a self-evident fitness, which the human intellect is so constituted as to be able to discern, independently of any impulse it may receive from emotion, and which, therefore, in this respect may be ranked with mathematical axioms. On the same ground, it is of course no less apparent that whatever responsive affection and desire the originated being is

capable of, are due to its Author. Here, then, we have a scientifically sure foundation for the first and great commandment. But for the fulfilment of this, and of the numberless subordinate commandments which it comprehends, a spirit of reverential faith and love is obviously indispensable, and, in proportion as the requisite sentiment is developed and educated, the manifold intimations from which religious duties may be inferred are observed and correctly interpreted.

In the next place, it may be made manifest that we have not far to seek, if we inquire after some fundamental principle of scientific value, available for determining each man's duty towards his neighbour. Whosoever wishes to arrive at it has only to imagine himself in his neighbour's place, and from the standpoint to which he has thus transferred his intellect and sentiments to reflect what sort of treatment he would now deem reasonable and considerate. In doing this he is plainly not adopting an arbitrary method of getting at the truth he is in search of: a self-evident propriety, an unmistakable analogy to conditions of all sorts and kinds under which a naturally expected balance or symmetrical arrangement is brought about declares it at once to be the right method. On the supposition that he puts it in practice, then, to use a Scripture phrase, his way is *equal*. He can claim no praise, as for a work of supererogation; he has done no more than he was bound to do. True, he has rendered himself lovable, yet certainly not by any word, or other token, from which it might be gathered that he expected to be credited with an act of gratuitous favour and laudable generosity, but merely because his sympathies proved equal to the occasion. For, as befits a nature in which heart and intellect are intended to work together, the recognition of the duty was their united act, and accordingly, being emotional, as well as rational, it was effectual.

For the fulfilment of the second commandment, however, no less than of the first, the necessity of moral culture and education is apparent. But by what process of reasoning are the seeming evidences of this necessity, whether as regards the first or the second commandment, held to warrant the conclusion that those evidences are illusory, from which it is commonly inferred that man has been endowed with *a capacity* for moral discrimination? Surely, it would be transparent folly to argue that, because children could not be profitably consulted with a view to the modification of the laws regulating marriage and divorce and the framing

of a new table of degrees of kindred and affinity, and could not be expected to point out under what circumstances one nation may legitimately take up arms against another, and whether or not judicial oaths should be deemed unlawful, they are therefore merely distinguishing the expedient from the inexpedient when they seem to show themselves sensible of an essential difference between right and wrong. What if "the Turkish woman exposing her face is no less conscience-smitten than if she had murdered her child?"* Such facts as this illustrate the influence which prevalent opinion, especially in the absence of large and liberal culture, commonly exercises in determining the formation of individual minds, and the extent to which the moral sentiment may become distorted in its growth under the unhealthy pressure of a social tyranny. But, if adduced by way of proof that no determinate criteria of right and wrong actions are to be found in the voices of individual consciences, they are beside the purpose; for the Science of Rectitude presupposes that the moral sense is not an originative, but a receptive faculty, and can attain no healthy and robust development apart from the vigorous exercise of the intellectual powers, and from habits of mind acquired by resolute suppression of sensual and selfish impulses in conformity with the requirements of the highest reason. The education which has for its end and aim the regeneration of the human race, brings more and more distinctly into view the principles and applications of the science which teaches man his Duty; but whatever further development they are destined to receive in ages to come in the operation of reforming laws, customs, sentiments, and modes of thought, and through the revolutions wherein the survivals of all barbarism will at length become wholly extinct, they will still be, as now, the exposition of those Two Commandments on which hang all the Law and the Prophets.

The President (Sir G. Gabriel Stokes, Bart., P.R.S.).—I will ask you to return your thanks to the author of this paper, who has travelled from a distant part of the country in the present somewhat inclement weather to lay it before us. He has treated his subject very fully and exhaustively, and I may say for myself that I have listened to him with great pleasure, and think that the sentiments he has given utterance to will find wide acceptance.

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* *Mental and Moral Science*, by A. Bain, "Ethics," Part 1, ch. iii, § 11.

One or two remarks having been made:—

The AUTHOR said:—A few additional words from me seem called for in relation to a science, or what professes to be a science, which it has been proposed to substitute for the utilitarian science of Expedience—I allude to that science which is to be found in Herbert Spencer's *Data of Ethics*. There he virtually insists that there is a science of Rectitude in opposition to that science which the utilitarians have attempted to construct; but that it is not any truly scientific substitute for the utilitarian scheme I think will be apparent to those persons who have followed my remarks, and who have found in my paper a sufficient refutation of the utilitarian doctrine. Mr. Herbert Spencer, starting from the assumption that such actions as are conformable to the nature and requirements of any form of sentient life are necessarily productive of pleasure, and finding that the motives they presuppose are thereby determined, argues that the process of evolution, regarded from a psychic point of view, is the pursuit of pleasure. It is thus that man is progressing towards that ideally perfect state which, as Mr. Herbert Spencer seems to think, he will eventually reach; egoism, it is assumed, being of necessity man's ultimate and fundamental principle of action, but an increasing tendency to subordinate immediate pleasures to those which are more remote, yet comparatively large and diffused, insuring in due measure the culture and the satisfaction of altruistic sentiments, thereby profiting the individual, and at the same time bringing about more and more the better fulfilment of the conditions on which the well-being of the race depends But what is to be the outcome of human evolution? Is it to be a complete assimilation of all individuals in respect of fortune and personal endowments? Is it to be the entire obliteration of all those differences which may cause preference for one or another? Is it to be the impossibility of anything like invidious distinctions? If so, then perhaps Mr. Herbert Spencer's millennium may be approaching; but if diversities, such as now prevail, are still to exist in some measure, then I shall be glad to be informed by those who hold that doctrine in what way they think that the extinction of envy and jealousy, and of such anti-altruistic sentiments as are thereby engendered, viz.: "hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness," is to be brought about. To me it seems marvellous that anyone who knows what men are, who has any knowledge whatever of human nature, can see in egoistic altruism a fence that

shall keep out of the paradise which Mr. Herbert Spencer's imagination has so glowingly depicted the enemy of all happiness and peace.

The principal weakness of this system is seen in this—that it makes no provision whatever for the suppression of pride and self-will, and all those naturally anti-altruistic sentiments which these are liable to generate. The necessity for self-purification within is altogether ignored. As a matter of course, all religious hopes and fears, as being relatively to this science superfluous, are discarded —they are to be regarded as superstitions, the survival of antiquated cults that had their origin in what is called the "ghost theory," and it is calmly and complacently taken for granted that when men have altogether ceased to look up, in aspiration after holiness, to an invisible searcher of hearts, when God is no longer in any of their thoughts, then there will be a Heaven upon Earth. And, in accordance with this view, no essential distinction is recognised between mere animal characteristics and high moral qualities, or between enfeeblement of animal energy and the sort of injury that is sustained when an unconscientious act is done, or an opportunity of doing good is selfishly neglected. Even a good action, if it should cause pain to the doer, is regarded by Mr. Herbert Spencer as being, not absolutely right, but the least wrong possible under the circumstances. The good effect which is wrought upon character by faith and hope when, engaged in noble undertakings, they persevere through painful and disheartening experiences, is simply overlooked—no notice whatever is taken of the scores which virtue thereby makes; and as regards the life to come, and the voluntary surrender of the present life for righteousness' sake, not a word is said. Such questions as "Whither are we going?" and "What is to become of us?" are altogether ignored; and thus, although in a certain respect the system of Mr. Herbert Spencer is an improvement upon the ethical system of Mr. Bain, although it is certainly a little more scientific, yet it is no true substitute for the science of Rectitude. It professes to be a science of Rectitude; but, after all, it is the science of an indeterminate experience and, therefore, as I maintain, it is no science at all.

The meeting was then adjourned.