

MR. LECKY'S FIRST CHAPTER.

"Persons even of considerable mental endowments often give themselves so little trouble to understand the bearings of any opinion against which they entertain a prejudice, and men are in general so little conscious of this voluntary ignorance as a defect, that the vulgarest misunderstandings of ethical doctrines are continually met with in the deliberate writings of persons of the greatest pretensions both to high principles and to philosophy."

WHAT are the main features of difference that mark the division between the two great schools into which from a very remote time ethical speculation has been distributed? On what points, and why, do moral philosophers fall away in two hostile and apparently irreconcilable groups? Where do the inductive and the intuitive moralists clash? On what sides of the moral system—its standards, its sanctions, the foundation of ethical ideas and faculties? What does the intuitionist affirm which the experiential moralist denies, and what does the utilitarian deny which the transcendentalist asserts? If Mr. Lecky had placed these tolerably elementary questions before himself with scientific precision, and sought an accurate and authentic answer in an unprejudiced examination of the doctrines actually taught by the rival sects, he would probably have escaped one of the most lamentable and mischievous confusions of thought in the history of literature; lamentable, because every scholar must admire Mr. Lecky's diligence, research, and power of graceful expression, and must therefore regret in proportion the unfortunate devotion of such gifts to a subject in which, without speculative accuracy, they are mere dust in the balance; and mischievous, because the many hundreds of readers who prize dearly "the unlimited right of private haziness," and are thus drawn by instinctive affinity to all works which unite a gently soothing sentimentalism to a gently exciting rationalism, will never find out that Mr. Lecky's account of the arch-controversy of morals is as full of misunderstandings and misrepresentations as if it had been written by one of themselves. We are, it is true, most unhappily accustomed to confusions, similar in kind if seldom equal in degree. Still, it is very desirable that all who take an interest in moral philosophy should protest against this spirit whenever it breaks out, whether it be in the lectures of university professors of casuistry, or in light works of historical philosophy especially adapted for the use of circulating libraries. One charmingly significant sentence explains much of Mr. Lecky's eccentricity. He sat down

to write a history of morals, including a criticism of contending systems of moral philosophy, with the remarkable conviction that "it is probable that the American inventor of the first anæsthetic has done more for the real happiness of mankind than all the moral philosophers from Socrates to Mill" (i. 91). We may perhaps return presently to this delicate and profound apophthegm. Meanwhile we can very well see how a writer thinking thus of moral philosophers should feel it wholly beneath him to take any pains accurately to realise and reproduce what from Socrates to Mill this class have been inculcating upon their various sets of disciples. We may be quite sure, at all events, that a writer whose conception of "real happiness" is such as to give a higher place among its agents to chloroform than to the lesson, for example, that we ought to love our neighbours as ourselves, is not very likely, whatever else he may do, to prove a competent expositor, much less an effective critic, of utilitarianism. And we may be quite sure, too, that a writer who habitually and without qualification ranks Butler and Hume among intuitionists, is equally unfit to expound or criticise the tenets of the school to which the experientialists are opposed.

Every youth who has read enough moral philosophy to get him fifty marks in a civil service examination is aware that there are two leading issues which divide ethical theorists; that these two issues are quite distinct from one another in thought, and have been treated as distinct in fact by all authors, propagators, and historians of moral systems. The first question turns upon the standard or criterion of right and wrong; why is any given line of conduct, habit, practice, or institution, virtuous and not vicious? The second question lies in the region of what is called ethical psychology; what is the origin and root of that faculty by which a man, discriminating between right and wrong, is impelled towards the one and away from the other? The first question is about the reasons which make a practice right; the second is about the reasons which make men incline to a practice because it is right. The first, What is Duty? The second, What is Conscience? In other words, what is the test of the rightness or wrongness of a set of objective prescriptions or prohibitions? and what is the origin of a certain subjective impulse? Keeping these two questions apart, let us see the conflicting answers which have been given to each of them by the two schools of moralists with whom Mr. Lecky chiefly concerns himself.

First, what is the standard of right and wrong? According to one doctrine, this standard is found in the moral sentiment, or instinctive moral judgment of men, a settled determination of the soul to approve or disapprove, a mysterious consciousness of immediate excellence in one set of affections or acts, and of defect or mis-

chievousness in their opposites. According to another doctrine, the standard is to be sought in the pleasurable or painful consequences of actions to all the persons who are affected by them; if these consequences are favourable to the happiness of the persons affected, then the actions are right; if they are unfavourable, then the actions are wrong. The criterion in the one case is Utility; in the other a fundamental Moral Instinct.

Second, what is the genesis of Conscience? According to one theory, it is an ultimate and original fact or quality of our mental constitution; and those who solve the question of the standard by the doctrine of instinctive Moral Sense will of course take this view of its origin. According to another theory, the conscientious feelings of men are the complex product of a number of simple first properties of mind, blended in certain proportion and coloured in a certain way by education, tradition, and various other circumstances. Nobody denies the existence of such feelings, nor impugns their efficacy as internal sanctions. The sense of moral obligation is universally allowed, quite as fully by utilitarians as by those who differ from them in the matter of the standard. Only, the persons who adopt the standard of utility commonly hold this peculiar sense to be acquired and not innate.

All this is the alphabet of the history of ethical theory. It is familiar to lads who are examined for competitive examinations, and is well-known to the upper class in every enlightened ladies' school. Let us see how Mr. Lecky ventures to present these elements of his subject. Within the first half-dozen pages we find at least as many instances of the most marvellous misunderstanding and confusion—a confusion so intricate that one hardly knows where to begin. First, we have a sufficiently equivocal account of the leading difference between the intuitive and utilitarian schools, in which the writer appears to be thinking partly of the standard, and partly of the psychological question, under a single notion. We then come to the following:—

“If men, who believe that virtuous actions are those which experience shows to be useful to society, believe also that they are under a natural obligation to seek the happiness of others rather than their own when the two interests conflict, they have certainly no claim to the title of inductive moralists. They recognise a moral faculty, a natural sense of moral obligation or duty, as truly as Butler or Cudworth”—(i. 4).

Now with the partial exception of Bentham no inductive moralist of repute ever omitted to recognise the existence of a moral faculty, or consciousness of obligation. The inductive school deny that it is innate, or natural in Mr. Lecky's sense; they differ from the intuitionists as to the genesis of conscience, and they differ among themselves as to its analysis and composition, but not at all either from

the intuitionists or from one another as to its existence as a derivative faculty. Mr. Lecky does justice to Mr. James Mill's memorable chapter on Association, and he has probably read the chapter on Moral Sense, and therefore must know that he too admits the existence of the moral faculty on whose growth he sheds so much light. Mr. J. S. Mill asserts that the conscientious feelings "exist, a fact in human nature, the reality of which, and the great power with which they are capable of acting on those by whom they have been cultivated, are proved by experience; no reason has ever been shown why they may not be cultivated to as great intensity in connection with the utilitarian as with any other rule of morals."¹ And Mr. Mill has shown, moreover, that those who deny the sense of obligation to be simple and innate, are not precluded from calling the obligation natural, for, even if acquired, it has a natural basis in the social affections. Mr. Bain, speaking of "the Psychological nature of Conscience, the Moral Sense, or by whatever name we designate the faculty of distinguishing right and wrong," says expressly, "That such a faculty exists is admitted."² To take James Mill, Mr. J. S. Mill, and Mr. Bain out of the list of inductive moralists, is rather bold; yet that is what Mr. Lecky's dictum comes to. Of course he did not mean this. Only, like a great many other people he had never thought clearly out nor realised what it is that the experiential moralists do actually hold about the moral sense. What they say is that it is derivative, that its principles are the varying products of accumulated experience, and so forth: what they deny is that it is innate, and its perceptions intuitive. To refuse to believe in the divine right of kings, or that royal stocks have, as De Maistre contended, a peculiar and mysterious quality of blood, is a very different thing from saying that the government of the country either is not or ought not to be monarchic. Again, people no longer hold the primitive faith that laws are the special and direct inspirations of the god; but to have given up the notion of *Themistes* is not to impugn either the existence or the authority of acts of parliament. If Mr. Lecky ever comes to write a history of political philosophy he may be expected to classify Sidney and Harrington as followers of Sir Robert Filmer, simply because, though differing from him about the origin and nature of royal power, they talk about it as existing. And he will perhaps, to use another illustration, assume in his tranquil manner that all those who hold Mind to be a function of Matter do therefore deny that there is such a thing as Mind or mental manifestations at all.

But we are not at the end of this quaint piece. After the passage quoted above, in which anybody believing in utility as the standard of virtue, and yet admitting a moral faculty, is for-

(1) *Utilitarianism*, p. 43.

(2) *Mental and Moral Science*, p. 431.

bidden to call himself an inductive moralist, Mr. Lecky says, with a simplicity that has a touching side—"Indeed a position very similar to this has been adopted by several intuitive moralists," which is quite true if you define an intuitive moralist as one who does take up such a position; and then as a decisive specimen of the intuitive moralist adopting this position he cites, after Hutcheson, whom of all men that have ever lived but David Hume—

"Hume in like manner pronounced utility to be the criterion and essential element of all virtue; but he asserted that our pursuit of virtue is unselfish, and that it springs from a natural feeling of approbation or disapprobation distinct from reason, and produced by a peculiar sense or taste, which rises up within us at the contemplation of virtue or of vice"—(i. 4).

To this passage—with the questionable quality of which as a presentation of Hume's opinions we are not here concerned—there is appended a long foot-note with quotations from Hume to show "how far he was from denying the existence of a moral sense," and how grossly that great man is misrepresented when his opinions on moral questions are identified with those of Bentham. Now, if Hume was an intuitive moralist, what is an utilitarian? Mr. Lecky admits that he pronounced utility to be the criterion of all virtue; and it has usually been supposed that this doctrine constitutes utilitarianism. It is notorious, too, that with reference to the standard there is no gross misrepresentation, but entire accuracy, in identifying Hume's view with Bentham's. There is material difference between them as to the nature of the moral faculty. But this is another question, and Mr. Lecky has fallen into a confusion, at first deeply perplexing to persons who began his book with respect for their author, but at last laughable or provoking according to the reader's temperament, simply because he never separated these two questions; because, to speak plainly, he never found out what an intuitive moralist means, or that it is a name for two kinds of persons, or for the same person in two points of view, one ethical, and the other psychological. Not even on the second or psychological side of morals was Hume an intuitionist. He never proclaimed the doctrine of an intuitive moral sense, enabling or helping us to discover the difference between right and wrong, in terms which even go near to justify Mr. Lecky in placing him as the type of intuitive moralist directly alongside of Hutcheson. Utility is the foundation of the objective distinction between right and wrong, said Hume; while the foundation of the distinction in the mind is first reason, which teaches us the consequences of our acts, and second humane sentiment, in virtue of which we desire what is useful and beneficial to others. This analysis is abundantly open to criticism, and was perhaps inconsistent with other doctrines maintained along with it, but at any rate it is not of a kind to constitute its inventor

an intuitive moralist, or to entitle the historian of ethical theory to place him as one of a company (i. 77, 78) containing Cudworth, who held right and wrong to be purely intuitions of the reason, and Clarke, who denied the possibility of referring moral good to external things, and hardly included feeling at all, even disinterested feeling. The intuitive moralist, says Mr. Lecky, "believes that chastity and truth have an independent value distinct from their influence upon happiness" (i. 40). Now Hume expressly declares that the sole foundation of our approval of veracity, and so on, is the welfare or happiness of society. Is there no difference between this and the opinion fixed upon by Mr. Lecky as the note of the intuitive moralist? Surely all the difference that there is between any proposition and its contrary. Mr. Lecky might just as well tell us of the unfortunate man that though he perhaps did not exactly subscribe to the Articles or the Westminster Confession, still in all the essential verities of the faith David Hume was a most sound Christian. Such a statement would not be one whit more misleading.

All this uncomfortable novelty, however, in the region of scientific classification, incredible and amazing as it is, sinks into something like insignificance beside the caricature which Mr. Lecky offers to his readers, and evidently holds in his own mind, as a picture of Utilitarianism. It is true that in a writer like Mandeville, and in a much less degree in Paley, this theory of the standard of morals has been presented in phrases and with a spirit which invest it with an air of very marked coarseness and meanness. But Mr. Lecky was not writing a history of the speculative literature of the last hundred years. He is instructing his readers in the respective merits of the two chief theories which divide the allegiance of moral philosophers. In performing this task he was bound, and I presume he would fully admit the obligation, to examine the meaning of the contending systems apart from the eccentricities of their early teachers, and to criticise the principles which he was controverting in their best and most fully developed stage. This was not always the rule in controversy, when the Christian clergy used to be the most active disputants. Now, happily, most of the subjects in which lay persons take an interest have advanced to a stage whither the clergy, in England at any rate, are precluded by subscriptions, articles, and other professional considerations, from following, and with their gradual disappearance from the scene, the pious habit or duty of misrepresenting an adversary is disappearing also. Every writer of Mr. Lecky's rank now feels bound to deal as honestly as he can with a hostile doctrine. Unfortunately, men measure differently the amount of pains which honesty requires them to take in order to understand the doctrine, and to do it decent justice.

Perhaps it will be most convenient to begin by considering Mr.

Lecky's objections to the Utilitarian school. They will throw some light upon his notions of what that is, which he is objecting to.

His first objection is drawn from the common language and feelings of mankind. The whole vocabulary of moral terms and distinctions, we are told, will be rendered absolutely unmeaning, if the utilitarian explanation should be accepted. To start with, even if such a revolution were as inevitable as Mr. Lecky supposes, he must be aware that it has no more force as a scientific objection than the corresponding argument had long ago in the mouth of an opponent of the doctrine of the rotation of the earth round the sun. It was objected to this doctrine that it made nonsense of the famous miracle of Joshua in the valley of Ajalon; to this day the almanacks talk of the sun rising and setting, and poets habitually make the sun dip in the waters of the sea. Yet we know how much such an objection is worth. Common language—"our habitual and un-studied language," as Mr. Lecky affectionately calls it in another place,—is only the expression of current notions and unanalysed impressions of sense; and as these are brought to greater correctness and precision, the old phrases are either modified, or, in some cases, where they conveniently reproduce the appearance of facts, are retained in popular use with full recognition of their shorn significance. But, apart from the language, there are the feelings of mankind. The Utilitarian philosophy "seeks by the light of consciousness to decipher the laws of our moral being," and in doing this comes to conclusions diametrically opposed to those arrived at by the great mass of mankind, who "simply follow their consciousness, without endeavouring to frame systems of philosophy." Now the question is one of the interpretation of experience. The utilitarian seeks the standard of morality *by* the light of consciousness, of course, in a sense, but *in* the other facts of human experience; he does not look inward only, but without as well. He takes all the phenomena connected with the distinction between right and wrong; examines them, analyses them, arranges them, considers them in connection with the general laws of the mental operations of mankind, and finally arrives at a certain idea of the one principle, quality, law, or essential condition, that regulates the distinction about which he has been busy. What is the invariable condition of right? That it conduces to the happiness of the human community. Why are actions virtuous? why, for example, is self-sacrifice virtuous? Because it is, directly or indirectly, conducive to happiness. These conclusions, whether true or false, are reached by a methodical and reasoned investigation of experience. What sort of scientific spirit can a writer have who supposes that he is overthrowing conclusions thus gained, by merely confronting them with the simply followed consciousness of mankind? As if the simple consciousness of man-

kind were anything but a reflection of the mental state belonging to the particular stage of their development in which it happens to be found; as if this simple consciousness had not revealed to men in one stage that every object they see is animate and endowed with a will like their own, and in another, that the world is ruled by many gods and classes of gods; and as if it was anything but simple consciousness which once convinced men that the sun goes round the earth, that it is a vast plain, that, if it is spherical, then people on the other side must walk on their heads. A historian of rationalism might of all men have been expected to acknowledge that the whole course of the progress of science has consisted in reclaiming these waste lands of simple consciousness, and in substituting, in an ever increasing number of cases, for a vague, unascertained, hardly articulate superstition, a verifiable and precise theory, corresponding with the order of observed facts. Who would appeal to the simple consciousness of mankind as a standard of the truth of a theory in chemistry and in physiology; and why should it be otherwise in morals? At any rate the burden of proving that it should be otherwise lies upon Mr. Lecky. A writer of philosophic pretensions has no right to take for granted that morals are not susceptible of scientific treatment; and if they are so, such an appeal as this is plainly spurious and evasive.

The second objection is that it is impossible for virtue to bring us that pleasure of which Utilitarians talk, if practised only with that end—the satisfaction of performed virtue. There are two misappreciations here, both of them passably flagrant. First, the happiness which is the utilitarian standard of virtuous action is not merely the happiness of the agent, but of everybody affected by an action. This Mr. Lecky admits in some places, and then, for reasons best known to himself, wholly ignores elsewhere. The other blunder is nearly as curious. The utilitarian principle involves no narrowing of the immediate motives of the agent to the single one of his own pleasure. The number and variety of these is as great, whether you say that the sanction of moral conduct is general utility or a mystic, moral sense. The question 'is of the end, not of the immediate impulse apart from the end. A man subscribes to a hospital, or chastises his son, or solemnly rebukes an erring friend, or divorces his wife; he does, what we assume to be rendered by circumstances a virtuous act, out of charity, or public spirit, or regard to the welfare of a friend or a child, or a just and righteous resentment. It may be a virtuous act, and yet done without any thought of the prospective satisfaction of performed virtue. The force that carries a man along the road, whether a steam-engine, or a horse, or his own muscles, is a sufficiently different thing from the finger-post which marks the direction in which the road runs. Lord Byron went to

assist the Greeks, not because he was anxious for the pleasure of performed virtue, but because he wanted the Greeks to be liberated from an oppressive government. Utilitarian principles lay down nothing as to the reasons for which a man pursues a line of action; they only supply a criterion for testing the morality of such action, and it is true that they find this criterion in pleasure, though not merely in the pleasure of the agent.

“A feeling of satisfaction follows the accomplishment of duty for itself, but if the duty be performed solely through the expectation of a mental pleasure, conscience refuses to ratify the bargain.” *Quis negavit?* We might mark, in passing, how this pattern intuitionist concedes here and elsewhere the prime utilitarian demand—“*a feeling of satisfaction follows the accomplishment of duty.*” As if it were not to this feeling of satisfaction that the utilitarian moralist appeals; though, under its simpler name of pleasure, it is an ogre that drives Mr. Lecky out of his usual self-possession and his usual fairness. Another passage just before this is worth quoting, not only because it admits with equal fullness the same thing, but for some other reasons as well:—

“Certain political economists have contended that to give money in charity is worse than useless, that it is positively noxious to society, but they have added that the gratification of our benevolent affections is pleasing to ourselves, and that the pleasure we derive from this source may be so much greater than the evil resulting from our gift, that we may justly, according to the ‘greatest happiness principle,’ purchase this large amount of gratification to ourselves by a slight injury to our neighbours. *The political economy involved in this very characteristic specimen of utilitarian ethics I shall hereafter examine.* At present it is sufficient to observe that no one who consciously practised benevolence solely from this motive could obtain the pleasure in question. We receive enjoyment from the thought that we have done good. We never could receive that enjoyment if our motive were selfish, or if we believed and realised that we were doing harm”—(i. 37).

Who these political economists may be, and how many there are of them, I am ignorant; but we may be quite sure that in this particular instance they understand utilitarianism no better than Mr. Lecky; and to call a precept which outrages the whole spirit and letter of utilitarian ethics a “characteristic specimen of them,” is to show that the mystic moral sense, in historians at all events, is as liable to derangement as more intelligible functions in less intelligent persons. Utility, or the Happiness Principle, means, if it means anything at all, the happiness of the greatest number; it expressly reprehends the gratification of the individual to the injury of his neighbours; it pronounces an act of unwise charity, such as is here said to be recommended, to be immoral and wrong, just because, though it might give pleasure to the stupid philanthropist, it would in the long run more than balance such pleasure by the inconvenience entailed by acts of that kind on society. A statement of this sort is

really an enormity in controversy. And, above all, it is too bad in a writer who in the next sentence surrenders so much of what he is fighting for, when he lays it down that we receive enjoyment from the thought that we are doing good. Only, we suppose, this enjoyment is a fact which belongs to the shameful parts of nature, and is not to be mentioned, exposed, or allowed to appear in moral systems. We may notice, in passing, the transparent absurdity, as bare statement of fact, of the proposition that we never could receive that enjoyment if our motive were selfish. Does Mr. Lecky really mean to say that a fastidious person, who relieves distress simply because the sight of it is painful or disgusting, and from no wider motive, has no enjoyment in the act which rids him of this pain?

Mr. Lecky's third objection is not at all easy to grasp, but it seems to come to something of this kind; that there is recognised a generic difference between the moral and the other parts of our nature, between selfish and virtuous motives and actions, and that on utilitarian principles this distinction is unaccountable. On these principles, how can you account for the pre-eminent position mankind have assigned to virtue? As if it were not the simple end of utilitarianism to point out in a certain way the lines of this difference, to mark the principle which defines a virtuous motive and a virtuous rule of conduct, distinguishes them from vicious motives and rules, and tells you what *is* selfish and what *is* virtuous. Besides, this appeal of Mr. Lecky begs half the question in dispute, because utilitarians, or as they will perhaps one day be called, the Beneficial school, claim that in making the happiness conferred by virtue its cardinal distinction and recommendation, they are doing a great deal more, considering the experienced facts of human nature, to account for the pre-eminence assigned to virtue, than has been done by any other system. But whether they are right or wrong in these pretensions, it is impossible that they can be disposed of by the mere re-assertion of the very point in dispute, which is what Mr. Lecky's so-called objection comes to.

But the couple of pages devoted to this objection are a great deal too remarkable not to deserve a little further notice. After saying that utilitarian principles are inadequate to account for the distinction between the moral and other parts of our nature, Mr. Lecky shoots what is indeed a deadly bolt at his adversaries:—

“If the excellence of virtue consists solely in its utility or tendency to promote the happiness of men, a machine, a fertile field, or a navigable river, would all possess in a very high degree the element of virtue”—(i. 38).

Mr. Lecky reminds one here—what cannot always be said of him—of Socrates. Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic* says that justice is the interest of the stronger. Well then, urges Socrates; to eat plenty

of food is the interest of the stronger; so, if justice be the interest of the stronger, a piece of meat must be called just. It is to be said, however, that Socrates was confessedly joking, while the new Socrates sincerely believes that he is finally overwhelming such unhappy Thrasymachuses as an Austin, a Mill, or a Grote.¹ Mr. Lecky seems to mean that if utility be the standard of virtue, then whatever is useful must deserve to be called virtuous. Let us admire his exquisite notion of equipollent propositions:—

- All virtuous *actions* are useful.
 ∴ All useful *things* are virtuous.
 Now a fertile field is a useful thing,
 ∴ A fertile field is virtuous.

Rather worse than one who should argue:—

- All men are mortal beings.
 ∴ All mortal beings are men.
 Now a dog is mortal,
 ∴ A dog is a man.

What would the shade of Aldrich say, if he could only know that a writer ventures to compose philosophical histories, who is capable of arguing that if all A is B, then all B must be A? As if every noun of which a given property is predicable, should be declared to possess in a very high degree the elements of every other noun with the same given property. Suppose we substitute Welsh rabbit for "virtue" in Mr. Lecky's proposition; this will be the argument:—

If the excellency of Welsh rabbit consists solely in its tendency to promote the happiness of men, a machine, or a fertile field, or a navigable river, would all possess in a very high degree the elements of a Welsh rabbit.

In the next sentence Mr. Lecky bethought him that virtue is by a convention of language given to a particular attribute of human conduct, but falls into a new confusion:—

"If we restrict the term [*i.e.* virtue] to human actions which are useful to society, we should still be compelled to canonise a crowd of acts which are utterly remote from all our ordinary notions of morality."

Why? There are plenty of honest, worthy, virtuous people, whom still no church would think of canonising, and there may be a crowd of homely every-day acts which nobody would dream of calling saintly, nor even of going out of his way expressly to panegyrisse as moral, because their virtuousness is not the most striking thing about them. But the principle of a system of morals is designed to classify

(1) Somewhere Mr. Lecky speaks of Mr. Grote's "great work on Plato." He must be presumed to be referring to its bulk, because if he has read it sufficiently carefully to warrant him in pronouncing it great in any other respect; if he has read, for example, among many equally decisive passages, Mr. Grote's criticism on the *Protagoras* (*Grote's Plato*, ii., pp. 81-83), or on the imperfect ethical basis of the *Republic* (*ib.* iii., p. 132, p. 155, and elsewhere); then his constant assertion that utilitarians only consider the happiness of the agent must rank as something much worse than the exceeding misappreciation which one is willing to think it.

all kinds of human conduct, insignificant or portentous. Every act falls into one class or another, and we can if occasion should require, which is not the case with the bulk of acts, bring it up to the standard, whether utility or moral sense, to be tested. The height of a puppy that is three days old is not particularly worth measuring; its inches are "remote from our ordinary notions" of height; but for all that you may measure it if you think fit. In the same way, every act is legal or illegal, but the legality of taking horse exercise, for instance, is not the aspect of the process which most strikes one. Whatever is not illegal is legal. And so with the thousand acts which are "utterly remote from our ordinary notions of morality," just because their morality is not the most important thing about them; they are capable of being regarded as moral, or else immoral, for all that.

The next sentence is veritably prodigious:—

"The whole tendency of political economy and philosophical history which reveal the physiology of societies, is to show that the happiness and welfare of mankind are evolved much more from our selfish than from what are termed our virtuous acts."

Now political economy, as it happens, does not profess to disclose with reference to society laws analogous to those which physiology discloses with reference to the animal organism. Physiology is concerned with the laws of all the functions of the organism. Political economy, on the contrary, is only concerned with a single special set of facts in a society—those which correspond, as M. Littré has suggested, to the facts of nutrition in the animal. Again, political economy, in a spirit of entire neutrality towards the wider moral question as to the proper sphere and limits of self-interest, simply postulates self-interest as a condition of the matter with which the science is conversant. Its professors simply say on this subject that so far as self-interest may be assumed in the various questions relating to the facts of the production and distribution of wealth, in so far will such and such conclusions prove sound. These conclusions can tend to show nothing at all, therefore, about the comparative effect upon human happiness of selfish acts, because *all* the acts which they treat are of a kind that is assumed from the outset to be selfish. Thirdly, is it true that philosophical history shows that the happiness of mankind is evolved much less from our virtuous acts than from our selfish, *i.e.* non-virtuous, acts? If this be so, then Mandeville's proposition about private vices being public benefits, instead of being the displeasing and monstrous paradox which it has usually been considered, is neither more nor less than an exact statement of a great historic law. And, if this be so, what does Mr. Lecky mean a little further on (p. 71) by acknowledging, or at any rate confessing, that the intuitive moralists, and I presume he is one of them, acknow-

ledge, "that there is at least a general coincidence between the paths of virtue and of prosperity"? Is it possible that, in the case of each individual, virtue should be the condition of prosperity, and yet that when you sum up the fortunes of all these individuals together, the law suddenly changes, and gives the total of prosperity as the result of non-virtuous acts? Fourthly, as against the Beneficial school, nothing could be so blunt and misdirected as this thrust. Have not all intuitive moralists, like everybody else, admitted that Prudence, for example, is a virtue, and that prudent acts are virtuous acts, even when they are exclusively self-regarding? And is not Fortitude, even if narrowed to the courageous endurance of bodily pain, a virtue, though that, too, may be self-regarding? "The prosperity of nations and the progress of civilisation," says Mr. Lecky, in the next sentence, "are mainly due to the exertions of men who, while pursuing strictly their own interests, were unconsciously promoting the interests of the community." Yes; and how will Mr. Lecky classify such exertions? Or will he deny that they can be classed ethically at all? Hardly, considering that the most indifferent of human acts is either right or wrong, though the rightness and wrongness may, as we have already seen, in many minor sorts and spheres of conduct be their least impressive side. So then these exertions are either moral or immoral. If they are moral, they are virtuous, because a virtuous act and a moral act are one and the same thing. But Mr. Lecky is here expressly distinguishing such exertions from our virtuous acts. Therefore, in spite of their services to civilisation, these interested exertions of the colonist, for example, or the tradesman, or the banker, are immoral exertions,—surely as charming an *impasse* as ever philosopher strayed into. "The selfish instinct," he goes on to say in the sentence following that last quoted, "that leads men to accumulate, confers ultimately more advantage on the world than the generous instinct that leads men to give." Yet the former is immoral or non-virtuous, and the latter is moral or virtuous, however ruinous its consequences either to the generous persons or to the community which they demoralise. Or if not, what is it that makes just prudence a virtue, and reckless generosity a vice? Simply their consequences upon the happiness of the greatest number, and to admit this is to refer conduct to the beneficial standard.

It is always well to ascertain how and why a man rambles into a path that ends in an absurdity, and the key to the maze just traversed may perhaps be found in some unconscious assumption on Mr. Lecky's part, that only the self-sacrificing actions are entitled to be called virtuous,—a point not worth discussing just now; though it may at any rate be said that, whatever people may have done under the influence of baleful religions, no mere moralist before ever deliberately excluded all self-regarding acts from the rank of virtue. We may,

if we think fit, place self-regarding virtues among the lower or secondary utilities; but to thrust them bodily out of the field of moral action altogether, is a feat that no sentimentalist, unhappily straying into the domain of science, had previously attempted. "The conception of pure disinterestedness," we learn, "is pre-supposed in all our estimates of virtue" (p. 72). As if virtue were independent of all the virtues; and as if we do not include among virtues Temperance, Fortitude, Self-respect, whether the person who practises them be interested or not, simply because the habits denoted by these terms have been found by experience to conduce to the happiness both of the agent and of the rest of the community, whatever may have been the agent's motive in a given instance.

The last line recalls an objection urged by Mr. Lecky in this connection, that, according to utilitarian principles, the motive of the agent has absolutely no influence on the morality of the act; and it is true that Mr. Mill has expressly said that "the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much to do with the worth of the agent." Now, might it not be said—with all deference to the thinker who has done so much to reconstruct and perfect the utilitarian system—that as the morality of an action depends upon its effect on the happiness of all persons affected by it, there can be no reason for excluding the agent from the number of these persons; that his motive reacts with full power upon his character, strengthening or weakening this or that disposition or habit; and therefore that the effects of the motive ought to be taken into account in computing the total of the consequences of the act? Perhaps the proper answer to this is, that, to the casuist deciding on the morality of specific pieces of conduct and their permissibility or compatibility with virtuous character, the motive of the agent is a consideration; but that the scientific moralist is one who classifies acts into two leading divisions, and is therefore, in performing such a task, obviously unable to take into account the impulse of the actor, though there is no reason why he should not classify these impulses, on the same principle, in a table of their own. Thus, jurisprudence arranges acts of which law takes cognisance into various classes and divisions, but the legislator constructs subordinate classes under them, and in these he will, in many details, be led by the peculiar circumstances of his society to make a distinction in the motive of the agent the base for a distinction in the degree of criminality of the act. But it is needless to enter into this digression, because to expose the hollowness of Mr. Lecky's complaint nothing more is necessary than to remind him that, whatever the motive of the agent may have to do with the morality of the act, at any rate there is nothing to hinder us, on utilitarian principles, from praising and blaming motives. We may judge motive and act apart, but the motive is judged equally.

We shall call these virtuous or vicious according as they generally tend to promote or diminish the happiness of mankind, or as the character which they are likely to spring from is of a beneficent or a maleficent type.

Yet, will it be believed that Mr. Lecky actually contends that utilitarian principles, consistently followed out, can put no effectual restraint upon such sins as sins of the imagination? "If remorse be absent," he says, "the indulgence of the most vicious imagination is a pleasure, and if this indulgence does not lead to action, it is a clear gain, and therefore to be applauded" (p. 46). But why is the particular imagination vicious? Because it tends to produce a type of character, indolent, selfish, sensual, or whatever else it ought to be called, which is injurious to society, as well as to the true happiness of the individual who indulges in it. What can be clearer therefore than that to foster such imaginations is condemned on rigorously utilitarian grounds? Nay, more, these are the only grounds on which you could restrain such a person as Mr. Lecky has drawn; for, supposing the creature to take his stand on an intuitive moral sense, and to vow that his moral sense disclosed no harm in imaginations vulgarly called vicious, the high-flying intuitionist will be much more puzzled for an answer than the low-minded utilitarian.

A similar astounding perplexity is Mr. Lecky's discovery that the utilitarian who adheres strictly to his own principle will hardly be able to repress cruelty to animals (pp. 47—50). To this there are two answers, of which Mr. Lecky quotes the first in his own pages; namely, that the utility proposed as the standard may be extended beyond man to all sentient beings; and in this case all action will be wrong in this order which causes more pain to animals than it gives enjoyment to men. But we might well lay more stress on another consideration—that even confining the happiness which measures virtue to the happiness of men and women, we find ample grounds for execrating cruelty to lower creatures in the effects which such practices have in brutalising character. Mr. Lecky himself points out elsewhere, as had often been done before in fewer words, the pestilent influence which the gladiatorial combats had upon the Roman nature. Has not cruelty to the animals that are lower than some men an influence of the same kind, an influence therefore to be stringently condemned by the utilitarian? In the case of those animals which are the ministers and servants of men, it is particularly clear that, on utilitarian grounds, kindness to them is a moral duty, because gratitude enters into the circumstances of the case, and any act, or motive, or practice which weakens this most valuable temper, even indirectly, must be injurious to society. The more extensive the range of merciful and humane sentiment, the more likely will be the merciful and humane type to spread, and the beneficial moralist

esteems this a particularly virtuous type, because it is particularly conducive to the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

After denying the possibility of vindicating a virtuous imagination, a humane temper towards brutes, the desirableness of avoiding secret sins, and most other good things, upon utilitarian grounds, Mr. Lecky reaches a climax by saying that it is more than doubtful whether upon these grounds a love for speculative truth and a hatred for superstition can be justified (pp. 52—54). I have not space for the fine things with which he decks his central proposition that "we owe more to our illusions than our knowledge." On a sounder principle than that he who drives fat oxen should himself be fat, a historian of rationalism should himself be rational; but if he chooses to talk about the delights of ignorance and faith, and the curses which scepticism and philosophy bring in their train, just as the Pope or Mgr. Dupanloup do, there are in these days plenty of worthy and simple-hearted people who will love him dearly for it, even though he does admit that "a credulous and superstitious nature may be degraded." But it is a little hard to bear when a writer of repute says that "degradation, apart from unhappiness, can have no place in utilitarian ethics" (p. 53). As if the utilitarian did not define the happiness which he maintains as the standard of virtue to be the highest happiness of which our nature is capable, and as if, therefore, he would not strongly insist that there can be no such thing as "degradation apart from unhappiness," because unhappiness is relative or comparative, and the man who is content with degradation *is* unhappy, compared with the man who has exchanged his illusions for knowledge. The only adequate reason, Mr. Lecky goes on, which can always justify men in critically reviewing what they have been taught, "is the conviction that opinions should not be regarded as mere mental luxuries, *that truth should be deemed an end distinct from and superior to utility*, and that it is a moral duty to pursue it whether it leads to pleasure or whether it leads to pain." Now unless Mr. Lecky has fallen into the thoroughly vulgar error of supposing that when Hume and Mill and Bain talk of utility, they mean what is useful for the moment, or useful in the gross sense in which kitchen vessels are useful, what he has said in the words I have underlined is not a bit less absurd than if he had said that sugar is very distinct from and superior to sweetness. Utility is, according to the utilitarian, the most decisive property or attribute of truth. That truth has this property of conducing to the highest happiness of human nature in a supreme degree is the reason why he places the passion for it highest among virtuous qualities, and pursues, as Mr. Lecky candidly admits to have been the case, all superstition or indifference to truth with the most extraordinarily unflinching hostility. It would be tolerably

easy to write two pages about the happiness which the passion for truth has brought both to the man whom it possesses, and to the civilised world, quite as rapturous and full of beautiful things as Mr. Lecky's two pages about the rude charm which the savage clasps confidently to his breast, and the sacred picture shedding a hallowing influence over the poor man's cottage. Rhetoric is in general an underrated art in England, but if there is one artifice in philosophic literature more doubtful than another, it is the substitution of a cheap picturesqueness for sound and accurate reasoning. Later in this chapter Mr. Lecky says, with a serenity that is delightful after one hundred and forty-five pages of continuous misrepresentation and inaccuracy towards opponents, that philosophic veracity is "one of the latest flowers of virtue that bloom in the human heart," which sounds, by the way, if one may say so without irreverence, very like a reminiscence of Tom Moore. Perhaps one day Mr. Lecky will perceive in that highly figurative manner in which truth loves to present herself to him, that philosophic veracity is less a flower of virtue blooming in the heart, than a homely vegetable of competency thriving in the kitchen-garden of the head.

It should be mentioned that in describing the happiness stated by utilitarians to be the standard of virtue as the highest happiness of which human nature is susceptible, we are running some risk of being classed, willing or not, among intuitionists. Mr. Mill has, as is well known, pointed out the existence of differences in kind among pleasures, and that some kinds are superior to others, apart from computation of amount or intensity. This position, which it was "a matter of surprise as well as gratification to most intuitive moralists" to find Mr. Mill taking up, is, according to Mr. Lecky, "incompatible with the utilitarian theory" (p. 92). Now the utilitarian theory is simply that the virtue of conduct is to be measured by its tendency to promote the pleasures of the greatest number. To promote the pleasures of hogs or the pleasures of men? Clearly the pleasures of men. But men are capable of a great variety of pleasures, from those which are nearly hoggish to those which are so broad and elevated as to be nearly divine; and by which of these two sorts of pleasure is virtue to be measured and towards which does it tend? Clearly to the highest sort. And how do you know which is the highest sort? By this, says Mr. Mill, that in all human experience nobody who has remained equally susceptible to both classes of pleasures ever knowingly and calmly preferred the lower. Whatever may be the force of this, it is perfectly clear, as Mr. Mill himself is careful to say, that to accept this distinction among kinds of pleasure is by no means an indispensable condition of the acceptance of the utilitarian standard, "for that standard is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of

happiness altogether, and if it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier, and that the world in general is an universal gainer." ¹ One is at a loss how to deal with a philosopher who can say that to hold one sort of happiness to be superior to another, is inconsistent with holding happiness of any sort to be the standard of morals. The explanation, perhaps, of Mr. Lecky's confusion is that he has chosen to conceive all happiness in such a way as enables him to state that the lower animals probably are happier than man (p. 89). And of course he may define happiness as he will, but he has no right to assume that persons from whom he differs accept his fantastic definition, especially when many among them have been at great pains expressly to repudiate all such accounts of what they mean.

But Mr. Lecky outdoes himself in confusion in the rest of the passage which we have just been examining.

"Mr. Mill elsewhere admits that every human action has 'its æsthetic aspect or that of its beauty,' which addresses itself to the imagination. It will probably appear to many of my readers that these two concessions—that we have the power of recognising a distinction of kind in our pleasures, and that we have a perception of beauty in our actions—make the difference between Mr. Mill and intuitive moralists not very much more than verbal"—(p. 92).

If Mr. Lecky now and then stirs in us something like impatience, any such feeling is transformed into sheer incredulous wonder by this. The standard of morals, say Mr. Mill and modern utilitarians, is what experience has shown to be the highest sort of pleasure. Not at all, replies the intuitive moralist, the principles of right and wrong are disclosed to you by intuitive perceptions, quite apart from pleasure. Surely Mr. Lecky must see that the difference between these two propositions is much more than verbal. If it be not so, five-sixths of his first chapter are gross superfluity. But we have just examined this point. Let us go on to the next. Every act, says Mr. Mill, has three sides: its sympathetic side, with which we are not concerned here; its *æsthetic* side, which appeals to the imagination; and its *moral* side, which appeals to the reason and conscience. It is right or wrong. It is beautiful or repulsive. The spheres of the beautiful and the virtuous in action are not co-extensive; not every moral action is beautiful, not every beautiful action is moral. When Æneas sailed away from Carthage to fulfil the purpose of the gods, and left Dido to throw herself upon the pyre, his act was right morally, but most repulsive æsthetically; her act in refusing to live after his desertion was wrong, but beautiful. Fiction abounds with characters who are unimpeachably moral, but who never appeal to our sense of what is æsthetically noble. The distinction is one of great importance,

* *Utilitarianism*, p. 16.

but how can the fact of recognising it in any way or by any logical sleight transform a utilitarian into an intuitionist? Is not a utilitarian one who says that viewed from the moral side an action is right or wrong for such and such reasons? This surely is no hindrance to an admission that an action has others besides its moral side. May one, then, not pronounce upon the height of a man without being understood to deny that he has any complexion or age? Apart from this, to recognise that, quite independently of their moral aspect, actions have an æsthetic aspect as well, involves no necessary concession that our perception of the beautiful and its opposite is intuitive; yet this is what Mr. Lecky's inference rests upon. Mr. Mill no more holds that imagination, to which the æsthetic side of an action appeals, to be a primitive and simple faculty, than he holds conscience, to which their moral side addresses itself, to be a simple and primitive faculty. Seldom has a critic of moral systems tried to leap across a chasm so lightly as Mr. Lecky does in this off-hand foot-note. Luckily, in book-writing such feats do not break the performer's neck, whatever analogous fate may overtake him.

It is not at all surprising that Mr. Lecky should have fallen into confusion over this division of the three sides of an act; for if he had only been so fortunate as to grasp its full significance, he must inevitably have seen, first, that most of his complaints against utilitarian principles rest on the assumption that the moral aspect could not be separated from the sympathetic and æsthetic aspects; next, that the latter sides do not affect the moral question, What makes right and wrong? and that the controversy as to the standard of right and wrong has nothing to do either with the beauty or the loveableness of conduct. In other words, Mr. Lecky has never realised that the utilitarian as such does not profess to pronounce complete judgments upon acts, but is only concerned with one single quality or attribute among the many which they possess—their morality or immorality.

Space, rather than matter, fails for a further examination. It will have been observed that no attempt has been made to enter into the substance of the controversy, nor to inquire how many of Mr. Lecky's objections to one scheme would tell with equal or greater force against its rival, to which he inclines. The charge against Mr. Lecky is not that he is an intuitionist—perhaps he is not one, if he could only know what he is—but, first, that he has manifested an excessive incompetence in seizing the true issues of the controversy which he is writing about; and, second, that he has presented a most ludicrous caricature of the utilitarian scheme of ethics as a true picture, distorting its definitions, mistaking its pretensions, valiantly carrying citadels that have been abandoned for half a century, and discreetly

passing by on the other side of all strong places; thus showing himself not precise as a critic, and not trustworthy as an expositor.

Such a failure is particularly to be regretted, because the development of the utilitarian or beneficial ethics is more and more evidently the next advance in moral philosophy. Of this development Mr. Mill's treatise marked the true beginning. Mr. Spencer, in a remarkable piece which Mr. Lecky is perhaps unacquainted with,¹ has thrown out a most pregnant hint for a further movement of thought in the same direction—a movement which will unite the positive elements of both schools. Utilitarianism, either in its grosser form, or, with better minds, in its form as a highly rationalised kind of Christianity, may be described as practically the dominant creed of the time; and there are many reasons for believing that it fits in more naturally and closely with ruling tendencies of other kinds, than any other substitute that offers for the creeds that are falling. If the true answer to a question now so often put be that mankind cannot live without a religion, it is certain that that religion, whether it be the Religion of Humanity, or some regenerate form of Christianity, or mere morality highly spiritualised and elevated, will assimilate for its central principle what is the central principle of the utilitarian or beneficial ethics—that he is the best man who finds his own highest happiness in promoting the happiness of as many other people as possible. This is a principle drawn from the experience of men, and it rests on an intelligible basis. While it kindles, and expands, and elevates all the affections as powerfully as older creeds, it has the advantage, daily growing more and more important, of offering no shock nor disgust to the understanding. These things, however, may be more conveniently said on some other occasion than in connection with so regrettable a performance as the one we have been considering, which ingeniously combines the double demerit of doing the greatest possible injustice to the utilitarian school, and the least possible justice to the intuitive school.

EDITOR.

(1) A letter to Mr. Mill, given in Mr. Bain's compendium, *Mental and Moral Science*, pp. 721-2.