

MORAL LAW AND THE BIBLE.

BY ARTHUR J. WESTERMAYR.

WHAT is moral law? If we return to the ancients, the Greeks and the Romans, we find almost as much difference of opinion as among modern philosophers. Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and many others of the old school, and Bentham, Mill, Smith, Helvetius, Huxley, Spencer and others among modern writers have wrestled with the problem only to array themselves in opposing factions, and a universally satisfactory answer, like the philosophers stone, has not yet been found.

In all times and civilizations we find difference in moral perception, and however much philosophers disagree as to the origin of moral law, they find common ground in the proposition that moral law is not ultimate, static and immutable. Revelationists are not included in this category of philosophers, for these constitute a class by themselves for whom philosophy can have no more than an academic interest, since all view-points differing from their own are denominated heretical and that always concludes the argument. Those of this class who base their positions on the Bible may easily be confounded by the evidence it gives against their most fundamental convictions.

In the scriptures (of the Jew and Gentile) we find between Genesis and the Gospels at least three clearly defined concepts of moral law, and if these scriptures are what is claimed for them, the Word of God, divinely inspired and therefore infallible, then we are forced to the conclusion that Jehovah approved of three standards of moral conduct.

The epochal divisions in which these three standards appear are the ante-Mosaic, Mosaic, and Christian.

We will first address ourselves to the ante-Mosaic times. Here we find the following moral aberrations practiced by all the important personages of the times, and always with the approval of

God who as a token of favor showered on them the most highly prized blessings, large families, social power and wealth as then understood and appreciated. And it must be remembered none of the acts hereafter set forth were followed by consciousness of sin and consequent forgiveness by atonement. So the record stands that God approved for He found it nowhere necessary to reprehend and forgive.

1. Lying—Abraham and the Egyptians, Gen. xii. 12 to 13; Abraham, Sarah and Abimelech, Gen. xx. 2 to 5.
2. Incest—Lot and his unnamed daughters, Gen. xix. 19 to 36 incl.
3. Adultery—Abraham and Hagar, Gen. xvi. 2, 4; Jacob and Bilhah, Gen. xxix. 29; Jacob and Zilpah, Gen. xxx. 19.
4. Theft—Jacob and Esau, Gen. xxv. 30 to 34 incl.; Rachel, Gen. xxxi. 19.
5. Deceit—Rebekah and Jacob, Gen. xxvii. 6, 9, 10; Jacob and Laban with the flocks, Gen. xxx. 37 to 40 incl.
6. Conspiracy—Rebekah and Jacob, Gen. xxvii. 15 to 17 incl.
7. Fraud and lying—Jacob and Isaac, Gen. xxvii. 28 to 30 incl.
8. Concubinage—Abraham, Gen. xxv. 6.
9. Trickery—Laban and Jacob, Gen. xxix. 25.
10. Polygamy—Jacob, Rachel and Leah, Gen. xxix. 29 and 30; Esau, Adah, Aholibamah and Bashemath, Gen. xxxvi. 1 to 3 incl.
11. Cowardice—Jacob and Laban, Gen. xxxi. 31; Jacob and Esau, Gen. xxxii. 11.
12. Rape and a dirty bargain—Shechem, Jacob and his sons, Gen. xxxi. 2, 14 to 24 incl.
13. Wholesale murder—Simeon and Levi kill all the males, Gen. xxxix. 25.
14. Lechery—Onan and his brother's wife, Gen. xxxviii. 9.
15. Homicide—Moses and the Egyptian, Exod. ii. 11 and 12.
16. Swindling—Jews borrow jewels from Egyptians, Exod. ii. 2, 35 and 36.

It is not claimed that the list is complete but it is thought to be sufficiently extensive and variegated to establish the claim that the standard of morality (if there can be said to have been any morality at all) was exceedingly low.

It is probable that in the face of the above catalogue of offences the revelationist will want to abandon his claim that the acts described represent God's ultimate, static and immutable moral law, else he will find himself in no end of trouble. Will he answer that

the times were different from ours, the people semi-barbaric, their conduct necessary to show, by contrast, the need of a higher standard, which came later? Can God have one code for one civilization, another for a later and higher one? Will the semi-barbarism explain God's approval of the offenses? Was it necessary to approve these crimes in one period merely to show why in a later one they should be condemned and visited with severe punishment? In fact can the most enthusiastic revelationist offer any rational explanation? We have not yet heard or seen one.

How does the utilitarian explain the phenomenon? Thus:

The Jews were to become a great people and numerical strength was the first desideratum. The manner of the increase of the population was then of no importance. Go forth and multiply has no restrictions; how the multiplication was to be accomplished, whether according to the regulated order of family life, or by means of concubines and handmaidens, mattered not in the least. The greatest good to the people could only come, as they then thought, by rapid increase in numbers. No restrictive moral code existed because not yet needed.

In all the blessings of the Lord the bestowal of numerous progeny was always among the first, because most appreciated, items. Childlessness was an affliction, a mark of divine disfavor, and God repeatedly opened a barren womb either in answer to prayer or as a token of special favor. Thus Abraham at the age of ninety by miraculous intervention of God begot Isaac. This was sufficiently out of the run of common experiences to occasion comment, and to mark Abraham for a favorite of God.

That no moral restrictions existed is shown by the incident of Lot and his daughters already referred to, and that this was not regarded as an offense against either divine or human law is shown by the total absence of punishment and the honors that came to the offspring. The child of the one daughter founded the tribe of the Ammonites, the other the tribe of the Moabites.

Marriage must have been a mere form for it carried with it none of the inhibitions against sexual aberrations later imposed by the Mosaic law. It was needful to the racial ambition of attaining power in the land that the population of Israel should become as numerous as the stars in heaven and the sands of the sea. The advantages of a restrictive moral law were not known, and no public opinion against the scarlet sins had as yet been formed. The utility of safeguarding the purity of family life was not then appreciated. So the morality (or lack of it) was such as best

served to make the Israelites a numerous, and therefore powerful, people.

Following the accession of Moses, who had been reared and educated in the higher civilization of Egypt, to temporal and spiritual supremacy a new era of moral law set in. Immediately a higher (because more useful to the general good) standard was raised by the newly created public opinion (and the task of its creation was by no means an easy one), to which all the Jewish people must be made to yield obedience whether they would or no, for Moses, well knowing that his laws, however beneficent, if promulgated as coming from a mere individual would receive but scant, if any, courtesy; but as divine commands in the ever-recurring formula "the Lord spake unto Moses, say unto the children of Israel," the laws possessed the sanction of Israel's God, and stood some chance of being obeyed by the stiffnecked and rebellious people.

The Decalogue established a new standard of morality. By it Moses defined an epoch in utilitarianism. According to the Mosaic sociology it was deemed best for the greatest number and hence so for the Chosen People, that their social life should be regulated, so that the family might be maintained in purity, and the social intercourse of the people could go forward along lines of greatest convenience and security.

Moses, it seems to us, was the first among the Hebrew statesmen to appreciate the importance of that which in our time, and for hundreds of years ago, has been axiomatic, namely, that the family is the basis of the national structure. And so for the first time in the evolution of biblical moral law we read the definite injunction against sexual promiscuity in family life: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Much of the book of Leviticus is devoted to the interpretation and application of this law governing sexual morality.

Reference to the citations given above will show, we think conclusively, that in pre-Mosaic times the sex life of the people was allowed to run its course along natural lines, and conventional restrictions were either not known at all or were so generally ignored as to warrant the writer of the Pentateuch entirely to disregard them; for they do not appear until in the laws of Moses they take definite form.

In this same period preceding the Decalogue human life was of small importance, and the chronicler of Genesis and Exodus saw nothing incongruous in the narratives of the wholesale destruc-

tion of a world by a deluge, and the holocaust of cities for no better reason than that some had sinned against God. And that the innocent were made to share the punishment of the guilty seemed perfectly consistent with the Pentateuchal conception of a divine father.

But Moses had learned, during his involuntary expatriation in Egypt, the importance if not the sacredness of human life, and the need for its protection by sacro-legal enactment; and severe as were his penalties for infractions of the priestly code, the wanton taking of human life was prohibited by the commandment "thou shalt not kill." Moses knew that in the enforcement of this law was to be attained not only the growth and perpetuity of the Jewish race, but the greatest good to the largest number. While the taking of human life was forbidden to man, it did not restrain slaughter when commanded by the Lord to kill by massacre. In point is the following: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor. . . . Even every man his son."¹ The purpose of this saturnalia of bloodshed was: "that He (Jehovah) may bestow upon you a blessing this day."²

While it is difficult to reconcile this sanguinary performance by which three thousand men perished, with the humane law "thou shalt not kill," it is even more so to harmonize this with a parental God-conception. For after all the sin for which this stupendous tragedy was enacted was the making and worshipping of the famous golden calf, the casting of which is naively told by Aaron under whose supervision, if not direction, it was done. Moses reprimanded him for bringing the shame of idolatry upon the people, whereupon Aaron made this defense: "For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me; then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf."³

It is perhaps safe to say that never before or since was metal casting done by such a simple and satisfactory method. And the wonder is that Moses was satisfied with the explanation, but he was, for he immediately ordered the massacre and his brother Aaron does not come in for any serious condemnation for his part

¹ Exod. xxxii. 27 and 29.

² *Ibid.*, xxxii. 29

³ Exod. xxxii. 23 and 24.

in the idol-making. There is also in the above incident a suggestion of the waning of Moses's influence, since even Aaron could not stop the people's mischief in his absence. In such case drastic measures were deemed necessary.

Ethnology teaches us that in all primitive states of man, life counted for little as against the demands of religion and self-interest. Human life was of small importance when power of priesthoods was concerned; and in the pursuit of selfish ambition monarchs did not hesitate to sacrifice countless lives.

The feeding of infants to the Carthaginian god Moloch involved no infraction of moral law against infanticide, and in the performance of this act of devotion both the priests and people believed their highest religious aspirations were fulfilled. Self-slaughter, so strongly reprehended by Christianized morality, was deemed a matter of right among the ancient Greeks, while the Juggernaut in India was a means to a holy end, and until Christian England put it under the ban of prohibition its ponderous wheels periodically ground to death thousands of religious devotees. The Aztecs looked upon the murder of human sacrifices to the Sun-god as the expression of the loftiest of morality and regarded the red-handed priest with awe if not veneration. The right to kill a Sudra by the Brahmin priest was sanctioned by Manu,⁴ India's oldest law-giver, and consequently was looked upon and accepted as a perfectly reasonable caste prerogative against which nothing but the strong arm of England's might could successfully cope. So with English dominance in India came a new era of moral law which made human life, no matter what its station, a sacred possession. Sutti was another Hindu abomination whose abrogation is to England's eternal credit, and its one time prevalence in India is another proof of man's indifference to human life when either religious or personal motives came in conflict with it.

In this connection, and to show how slow and gradual was the evolution of the moral law against the taking of human life, we beg to refer to those later moral departures practiced in the name of the God of Christianity, and speciously for the salvation of the souls of heretics. The Inquisition in disregarding the Mosaic law against murder set up a moral code of its own, which in its time was made supreme and therefore above the injunction of the Decalogue. Murder in the name of God was a holy deed, divinely approved as were the monster crimes of the Old Testament, because needful to the better establishing of sacerdotal power. The

⁴ Still used in native provinces as the law of the land.

moral law that was designed to protect human life was subordinated to the later utilitarian concept which made the church of first, the life of man of only secondary importance. Nor need we quarrel with this phenomenon any more than with the holy murders scattered throughout the Old and New Testaments.

The burning of witches, a perversion of moral law through religious fanaticism, manifested itself as late as the eighteenth century in New England, and was based on no less an authority than the Bible which commands that no witch shall be suffered to live.⁵ In the light of this divinely inspired corrective John Wesley may be pardoned (by those who can) when he proclaimed his willingness to give up his faith in the Bible as readily as his belief in witchcraft.

Humanitarians who predicate their opposition to capital punishment on the revealed moral law of the Mosaic prohibition would be able to make out a presentable, if not conclusive, case against "judicial murder" were it not for the fact that they are damned by the evidence they offer.

The pulpits of the south in ante-bellum days could invoke Moses in justification of the claim that slavery was a God-appointed institution,⁶ and needless to say, the preachers of those troublous times lost no opportunity to avail themselves of the support "God's Word" afforded them. It took a mighty conflict to prove the immorality of an institution that in Mosaic times was not only permitted, but was safeguarded by carefully framed laws. By blood and iron was the moral standard lifted, and this festering sore of the body politic excised never to return. The question comes up in this connection, was it divine or revealed moral law, or the morality of utilitarianism that saw what was best for the largest numbers—best for a great nation—that crystallized the public opinion in a constitutional amendment? Let revelationists theorize and protest as they will, the hard facts of history will not yield to specious argument or to the authority of some alleged divine book of moral law.

Examination of the scriptures of the important world religions (for every one of which divine origin is asserted) shows that moral standards varied and changed from time to time, proving that no moral law is static, but instead all moral law is mutative because the intelligent understanding of human needs, upon which all moral law rests, cannot in the very nature of things remain fixed and final.

⁵ Ex. xxii. 18.

⁶ Lev. xxv. 44 to 46.

An exception which shall serve the proverbial purpose of proving the rule we have asserted, is the Pitakas or Buddhist scriptures. Here we find the taking of life in any form reprehended and punished by increase in the number of reincarnations, by the lowering of the Karma of a previous incarnation; and the indulgence in a meat diet and alcoholic beverages is strictly prohibited and violation of this monastic regulation might result in expulsion from the Sangha.⁷

Lying and drinking were not constrained in ante-Mosaic times either by law or custom, and so we find all the principal characters of whom the Pentateuch makes mention, practicing both without fear of public condemnation. The drunkenness of Noah is made the subject of an interesting narrative of a most intimate character; and Lot had an unusual experience as a result of looking upon the wine while it was red. To become drunken was no uncommon experience among the patriarchs who walked with God, and finds no serious denunciation, certainly no grave punishment, anywhere in the so-called books of Moses. Lying is not reprehended in the Decalogue and was uniformly practiced with divine approval (if we accept the Old Testament of divine inspiration), and nowhere is the slightest mention made in any of the narratives of the Pentateuch that the person indulging in this social vice felt the slightest moral compunctions. In fact it was by divine command the Israelites were told to get the jewels of the Egyptians by a flagrant falsehood, and although the jewels were only borrowed, there was no intention they should ever be returned. The purpose frankly was to "spoil the Egyptians."⁸

Moses was to deliver the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. It was not thought immoral to lie to the Pharaoh in order to get away and put a three days' journey between the Israelites and the Egyptian host. This is how it was to be managed. Moses told the Pharaoh: "The God of the Hebrews hath met us; let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the Lord our God; lest He fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword."⁹

The revelationist will say that Moses did intend to go into the desert and sacrifice unto the Lord, for that is exactly what was done when they finally made their escape; and too, Moses may have had some fear about the pestilence and sword. At the worst it was

⁷ Vinaya Pitaka.

⁸ Ex. iii. 21, 22; xi. 2; and again xii. 35.

⁹ Ex. v. 3

only an opinion expressed to terrify the Pharaoh. All this is true enough, but the lie lay in the subterfuge which if successful would mean the escape and non-return of the Jews. It was an attempted trick with a lie at bottom.

That the God of Israel did not scorn to prevaricate is shown by the following: "And the Lord said unto Samuel, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite for I have provided me a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? If Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take a heifer with thee, and say, I come to sacrifice to the Lord."¹⁰ In other words the Lord would not have Saul for king but instead would anoint one of Jesse's sons. Should Saul hear of it and threaten Samuel, he should lie about his mission, and by taking with him the sacrificial heifer he was to give color to the falsehood and so deceive the king.

The following is interesting on this subject:

"Ah Lord God! Surely thou hast greatly deceived this people."¹¹

And again:

"Shall there be evil in a city and the Lord hath not done it?"¹²

"I make peace and create evil . . . I, the Lord do all these things."¹³

"The Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all thy prophets."¹⁴

"And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived the prophet."¹⁵

"Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you."¹⁶

"And for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they shall believe a lie; that they all might be damned."¹⁷

It will be unpleasant for a revelationist to recall that the most heinous offenses, as we view such matters to-day, were commanded by the Lord, viz., rape and prostitution.¹⁸ In our day this would come under the penal statute of rape and abduction. In those days it was God's command against which there could be no higher law.¹⁹

There was abundant class legislation in Mosaic times. For the Chosen People there was one law, for the stranger within the gates another. Witness the following:

¹⁰ 1 Sam. xvi. 1, 2.

¹¹ Jer. xv. 18, and iv. 10.

¹² Amos iii. 6.

¹³ Is. lxxv. 7.

¹⁴ See for instance Deut. xxi. 10, 14.

¹⁵ To the same effect see also Num. xxxi. 18 and Hosea i. 2.

¹⁴ 1 Kings xxii. 23.

¹⁵ Ezek. xiv. 9.

¹⁶ Jer. xviii. 11,

¹⁷ 2 Thess. ii. 11 and 12.

"Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother. . . . unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury."²⁰

It is quite shocking to our present-day conception of fair play to contemplate a God of justice conferring sainthood on a cold-blooded murderess, and so the revelationist who points to the Bible for the origin of all moral law, will find the story of Jael and Sisera rather an embarrassing problem.²¹

The organized church that resulted from Paul's proselyting having sprung into being when people began to realize that these grave offenses were inimical to the best interests of the largest number, incorporated into its tenets inhibitions against them, and so a moral law is specially created to meet the demands of a progressing civilization.

Those who claim for the present agitation against drink and their labors for nation-wide prohibition the divine will, make a serious error. Here again the pseudo-moralist is condemned from the mouth of the witness he invokes. The patriarchs, prophets and reformers referred to in the Bible were all drinkers of wine and strong drink, and Jesus himself approved it by giving *yahyin* (fermented wine) to his disciples at the Last Supper; and by turning water into wine at the feast of Cana, and generally recognizing moderate drinking as among the proprieties of social life. The use of the Hebrew words *yahyin*, meaning fermented wine, and *torash*, referring to unfermented grape juice, is important in this connection to meet the puerile argument of some prohibitionists, who, to serve their purposes, try to torture into the Bible texts what is not there. In the instances referred to the word *yahyin* and not *torash* is used by the writers of the Synoptics and the books of the Old Testament.

If these propagandists wish to be logical and consistent they will place their claims on the purely utilitarian basis, that it is for the good of the greatest number that prohibition should be a national institution. When they succeed in making their claim felt and accepted by so great a number that these will form a consensus of public opinion, prohibitory laws will be enforceable; but until then they are a source of oppression and blackmail, police corruption and graft. When the people are ready to place drinking in the same category with perjury, cheating, burglary and murder, then prohibition laws will become effective, and until then such laws will merely be tyranny of the majority over the minority.

And until this time comes when the utilitarian virtue of ab-

²⁰ Deut. xxiii. 19, 20.

²¹ Judges iv. 9, 17, 23; v. 24, 31.

stinance shall be accepted as for the good of the greatest number, and it becomes a moral law approved by a sane public opinion, it will remain in the status of disputed questions, observed and favored by some, and disregarded and condemned by the many.

"Honor thy father and thy mother," was an appeal to the racial character of the Jew. To this day his filial love as it appears in its innumerable manifestations, is among the noblest virtues of this wonderful people. In the early days this moral excellence was not generally appreciated, as witness the conduct of Lot's daughters, Jacob's deception of Isaac, and the shame Jacob's sons brought upon their father by the murders they perpetrated to avenge the rape of their sister Dinah. Other equally cogent instances abound that before Moses's time this filial love was not a moral law. But Moses understood both its moral excellence and utilitarian value, and so, by promising "thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee," as a reward for obedience, he established a moral code whose utilitarian advantages are manifested in the racial cohesiveness that has done so much to sustain the Jews in their appalling vicissitudes.

God-fearing was essential to priestly control over the erring people. "And the Lord spake unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel" was a formula of very great importance to Moses and his brother Aaron and the priesthood they founded. In the anathema against idolatry and the severity of its punishment lay the beginnings of priestly authority. Whoring after false gods meant recognition of other divinities, and this lessened the priestly grip on the people's minds by fear. Hence practically one whole book of the Pentateuch and parts of others are devoted to the penalties for idolatry, indifference to or rebellion against priestly authority; and by placing into the mouth of Yahveh the things Moses wished to communicate to Israel he established the priest caste of Israel with Aaron and his sons as first incumbents of the offices.

Making God by the Abrahamic covenant the God of Israel, and at the same time proclaiming him a jealous God who visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him, Moses may have had in mind the sins of the Sodomites against whom he inveighs with such vehemence in Leviticus xviii. Some have tried to see in the statement that God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, Moses's insight into nature's mysterious law of heredity, especially in so far as this governs venereal diseases. While many of his sanitary regulations would

indicate no small knowledge of science, it is by no means certain that heredity, as now understood, was any part of his knowledge. If he knew the laws governing the transmission of disease then we must infer he placed that warning there as a powerful deterrent against sexual perversion since it made its most effective appeal to the strongest racial trait of the Jew, the love of progeny.

It was a new doctrine to the Israelites when Moses commanded "thou shalt not steal." Theft was one of the commonest of unpunished, if not divinely approved, offenses mentioned in the books of Genesis and Exodus. Certainly honesty was not then the virtue it is now regarded to be. When we find the founder of Israel, Jacob, guilty of three distinct thefts, each one more reprehensible than the other, and learn how he enjoyed divine favor and received all manner of blessings, including a new name and patent of nobility (the first ever recorded) without ever acknowledging or repenting of his sins, we need not wonder if Moses found larceny so common that he needed a divine commandment to put a stop to it.

The concepts of morality had surely made some progress when they condemned slander²² and disapproved perjury,²³ and when we think of earlier generations of Jews this is refreshing:

"Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay not; for I will not justify the wicked."²⁴

As we reflect on the morality of the above citation we call to mind how Moses escaping from Egypt took refuge with the Midianites who gave him asylum.²⁵ The king bestowed on him his daughter. Later Moses warred against these benefactors, and caused not only the slaughter of the kings, the men, women and children, but commanded the virgins to be saved to gratify the bestial lust of the Israelites. And this carnival of slaughter was by divine command.²⁶ Had the Assyrians, Egyptians, Babylonians and Persians acted toward the Jews with such ruthlessness, it is safe to say there would not now be a Jew living.

Taking then the biography of Jacob for an appraisalment of the moral law (or lack of it) in his time, and back to the beginning, we find this prince of Israel committing nearly every act later forbidden by Moses, and a few offenses for which he made no inhibitory provision at all.

Although the Ten Commandments may be taken as the beginning of a higher morality among the Children of Israel, it does not follow that the God-conception of Moses and his priestly suc-

²² Ex. xxiii. 1.

²³ Ex. xxiii. 2 and 3.

²⁴ Ex. xxiii. 17.

²⁵ Ex. ii. 15.

²⁶ Deut. xxxi. 17.

cessors was any more moral. The laws seem to have been made for the governance of the people, but neither God nor the priesthood was bound by them. For we find again and again the Lord commanding through a priest-mouthpiece the most appalling atrocities that make the blood run cold and the pulse leap with horror.²⁷

It is difficult to discover any moral progress in this. Certainly justice is not easily discoverable. Why should these older resident people, who we may suppose were also God's creatures since all are said to have descended from Adam, be deprived of their homes for which they toiled, in order that the Israelites, who had not earned by any special merit such remarkable consideration, might go in and take possession. It is not easy to reconcile this performance with the conduct of a brutal human king; with Jehovah and what He is supposed to stand for it is a sheer impossibility.

We now enter the third stage of development of the moral law as we find it in the revelationist's ultimate source of all morality, viz., the teachings of Christ, or the age of the Gospels.

In this day of war excitement much is said and written about the immorality of war, and the higher ethics of peace. But peace was not always, even in the Christ period, deemed a part of the moral law. For the Prince of Peace makes this pronouncement early in his career:

"Think not that I come to send peace on earth. I come not to send peace but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household."²⁸

The bitter wars that have been waged in the name and for the cause of Christianity are to this day extolled for their preeminent worthiness, nor are they regarded as indicating a lowered moral standard. There was, if we may believe pious historians, the highest moral exaltation in the hearts of the valorous crusaders when at the behest of religion and her holy rights the blood of innocent men, women and children was wantonly shed. Then shall we say the moral standard of religion is lowered by what is going forward among the Christian nations of Europe?

Let us compare the retributive laws of Moses, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe,"²⁹ with Christ's law of sub-

²⁷ The instance in Ex. xxiii. 28 to 30 is comparatively mild.

²⁸ Matt. x. 34 to 36; xxiv. 6 and 7. Cf. Luke xii. 51 and 53.

²⁹ Ex. xxi. 24 and 25.

mission and non-resistance, "but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."³⁰

In the Mosaic code we have a brutal law of compensation which takes no account whether the culprit has only one member or not, in which former instance the punishment would be double the offense; while in the Christ law of submission we lack the moral law of justice which punishes the offenses as a restraint upon evil doers, and as a deterrent against repetition, or like wrongs by others.

Neither is moral. The former because of its unjust cruelty, the latter for the encouragement it gives to the evil doer to persist in evil doing, and the temptation it puts before others to do the evil because devoid of all personal risk. Both rules of conduct are destructive, and their literal enforcement would cause more injury than good. Furthermore the Christian doctrine has never gained any ground in civilized communities where justice is administered according to law. And were this otherwise, the world would be for the wicked, and injustice would triumph because encouraged by non-resistance. Such teaching is neither utilitarian nor intuitive. It violates the fundamentals of the former which has the greatest good for the largest number for its basis; and contravenes the latter, for no man was ever born with a conscience so abnormal as to feel he is doing right by submitting to injury, or encouraging it by inducing either its repetition or aggravation.

The Christ idea of moral law is hardly the sanest and most practicable way of living in this world, whatever may be the effect on our chances of attaining the next. Between these two standards there is a wide difference, and whether the one is better than the other is not within the purview of our discussion. If such difference exists (and that it does is so obvious nothing further need be said to prove it) then there must be two standards of moral law on this subject; and as both emanate, according to the revelationist, from the same ultimate source, there must be at least two distinct aspects of divine moral law, and if we take in the conduct of the patriarchs before Moses we have still a third.

Can the revelationist afford to admit that God's law is not

³⁰ Matt. v. 38 to 42 incl.

ultimate, static and immutable? Dare he admit that the inspired word of God represents at least three distinct standards of moral law?

In both the Old and New Testament stress is laid upon the duty to love one's neighbor as one's self.³¹ That this is utilitarian and based on selfishness is at once apparent. Here the standard of one's relation to his neighbor is self-love. Those who strain for morality—for conscience as an immanent monitor—will find this admonition strangely inconsistent with their ideals of a higher law. For if we shall measure our love for our neighbor by our self-love with a view of doing well by him, we are assuming a very tender regard for ourselves else our neighbor would come in for much less than what this eminently utilitarian rule of conduct is expected to bestow. Surely no one will claim for this standard the ideal, the perfect. Its sole merit, if it has any, is in its practicability as a convenient guide to a limited kind of deportment, because it assumes our self-love to be so great that in bestowing our love accordingly we are going to the limit of human ability.

We see from this that both the ancient writer of the Pentateuch and the later reporters of Christ were utilitarians, and with Socrates preached a refined hedonism.

Now a word for the world-accepted Golden Rule. This same rule, because of its utilitarian value as a measure or standard of deportment, has been incorporated with slight variations in phrasing, into the seven great world religions. We do not for this reason praise it beyond its just deserts. Like the former expression it has self—the ego—as its basis, and is totally devoid of any lofty ideal. Like the other its world merit is its practicability. It recognizes all virtue to be at bottom mere selfishness, and so fixes the desire of the individual as the measure of conduct toward others. It is utilitarian and although its origin is regarded by revelationists as the highest moral law ever revealed to man, it does not, even assuming its source, change thereby its inherent character.

To take the Golden Rule out of the utilitarian and place it into the intuitive philosophy we must change the phrasing to something like this: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you if you were the other person. This would recognize the other's viewpoint, which after all should be, ethically at least, the measure of comparison. For what we might want the other person to do to us might not be what the other would want done to him. Therefore, in using the selfish standard, the other person might fall

³¹ Matt. v. 43-44.

far short of his idea of justice in the premises. Thus a low-minded person might be satisfied with a sort of treatment which would be atrocious to another of higher refinement. To illustrate by an exaggerated example:

A man is life-weary and ready to kiss the hand that ends his misery. Such cases are not uncommon in hospital annals. Seeing another in like case, the literal application would give warrant to the killing of the other person for in doing that to the other he would be doing as he would be done by. Now then if we applied the amended rule he would first find out whether the other person was as eager to die, and then act accordingly, assuming the law would permit.

Then again what might be moral action for one person in a given condition might be quite the reverse for another in the same condition. And when the proposition involves three, instead of two persons, and their interests conflict, the Golden Rule will not apply at all.

As we remember the total absence of moral law governing the sexes in the pre-Mosaic times, the strict enactments of Moses on this subject, we must consider the following from Christ's preaching, viz., "That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already with her in his heart."³² We are forced to the conclusion for which we have contended all along, that there were at least three standards of morality in the three epochs of the Bible, and this will not be a welcome thought for those who claim a God-given conscience and an ultimate, revealed moral law.

From the easy-going patriarchs to the severe repressive teaching of Christ is surely a far cry. By the comparative method here adopted it is possible to take every moral law that is to-day recognized as fundamental because calculated to produce the greatest good to the largest number, and beginning with the ante-Mosaic, passing to the Mosaic and ending with the Christ epoch, without any difficulty to establish at least three clearly defined aspects of so-called moral law. And this forces upon us the alternative: either God's law is not moral law, or the Bible is not in a literal sense the Word of God.

We leave it to the reader whether moral law is revealed, ingrained in conscience, or utilitarian, because it is the conforming of conduct to the standard of behavior observed by the best people of a given community in a certain time, since from such conduct will come the greatest good to the largest number.

³² Matt. v. 28.