THE NEW MORALITY.

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THE present day seems remarkable, among other things, for a silent revolution, undermining both character and conduct, which apparently attracts but little or no attention. We have, in short, a process of appreciation and depreciation affecting our new and old standards of morality. Not that we possess any new ethic expressly formulated. Yet obedience to the ancient rule or prescription stands condemned as out of fashion and inconvenient. That which used to be considered a virtue now finds itself smiled at or just sneered away. Appeal lies to the most untrustworthy of all guides—namely to public opinion, which perpetually veers or shifts with every shadow and each passing gust of popular belief or favor.

“Our oracle says,” Plato tells us, “that when a man of brass and iron guards the state it will be destroyed.” No longer do we meet with references to the ultimate tribunal, or the best and highest—or, to continue the metaphor, to the leaders of gold and silver, but to working methods or practical measures, to immediate profit or the present situation. Utilitarian principles govern us first and foremost, il faut vivre. Phocylides with his famous precept, “As soon as a man has a livelihood he should practise virtue,” should be in great esteem now. At any rate, his advice appears to be almost universally followed.

Morality, long divorced from religion, has become local and limited, temporary and formal, a mere hebdomadal confession. The working code, if code it can be called, ignores ethical sanctions and proceeds by accommodation and compromise. That which is expedient, not the right and the good, sways men’s minds and dictates their deeds. In actual business and the rough competitions of everyday life, nobody thinks of moral vindication or what hand put the clock of creation on and directs it now. The regulating power resides in the varying syntheses of society. Causes have been rele-
gated to the background, and we agree to take things as they are and facts as we find them.

Origins, when we come to positive action, do not trouble and do not even concern us. They belong to the playground of poets or the arena of metaphysical debate. Men of affairs forget that unmoral work has no meaning and no value and no vitality, and by its very shortcomings challenges some supreme authority and indeed thereby infers its existence. Just as there is no finality possible in the Buddhist Karma, it implies and virtually reposes on the presence of God behind and beyond, to give it any real contents. We want our labor of thought or act to be more and not less moralized, and to be baptized into the spirit of Christ. And the Buddhist, with his perpetual recombination of the five great elements or Skandhas does not, as he imagines, create individuality, he only states and re-states it in his particular terms. Force, such as he postulates, needs something more—namely, the informing fire of personification, to clothe it with substance and real significance. Nothing personal can come from the impersonal. We cannot get out of any thing more than that which is in it.

Commercial coarsening of estimates and standards retards and does not advance the progressive interests of mankind. On the forward march of civilization so called we drop at our peril the moral sanctions, in exchange for miserable substitutes and transitory expedients. If we revise our judgments, as we must from time to time, we dare not palter with the first principles and live from day to day by the aid of a vague and variable casuistry in a state of constant flux. The minor morals, if we may use the expression, of the customs and courtesies change and will change, but not the ultimate.

Plato, in the Republic, talks about “our present system of medicine which may be said to educate disease.” And when a society begins to grow corrupt, and despises the virile virtues and masculine morality, it draws perilously near to this fatal decline. The lower and more feminine excellences, the softnesses and sweetlenesses of life, the decadent dignities of false honor and fallacious philanthropy, which relieves itself from genuine service by words of calculated kindness and a sympathy weighed out in pecuniary scales, all these have usurped the throne of the hardier and more heroic morals. It seems so much easier and more effective to be charitable by proxy and to pay other persons to do our own work. We think here at any rate, but we think wrongly, *qui facit per alium facit per se.* This may be good law, but it is bad gospel. There are some charities which cannot be relegated to servants or intermediaries, in which
man should meet man and heart meet heart. There is only one kind of true love, but there are a thousand different copies of it.

In the Upanishads, we find wisdom gradually superseding goodness, and it was from the Upanishads that Buddhism with its sublime selfishness was directly derived. The doctrine of the mere "will to live" seems absolutely impotent to save a soul, for we want the far higher and more Christlike principle the "will to love." And this necessarily means the subordination of self to others. We at the present day seem to put Wisdom (of a squalid mercenary type) before Goodness, and often couple with it hedonistic (but not really Hellenic) form of physirolatry.

Lao-tsu, one of the very greatest philosophers who ever lived, said that propriety (or the mere varnish of virtue) was the beginning of moral decay. And we find that natural result and the truth of his words in the externalities of Confucianism. In the observance of mere social forms and conventions, as representations of morality, we have a forlorn attempt to crystallize the fleeting and a sort of cultivated corruption. It is the rebellion of the particular and impermanent against the law of the universal and permanent.

Socrates, as expounded by Plato, kept always protesting against this, in his search for general principles. Something like tropism, or the action of mere external causes, appears to determine much of our transient morality. The growth proceeds rather from without than from within—the true process of evolution. It possesses, so to speak, no median plane or plane of symmetry. We meet with analogies and makeshifts and desperate expedients and no sort of system. Haphazard provisions, asymmetrical departures confront us everywhere.

Conscience, or as some might prefer to express it, the racial memory or inheritance of organized instincts—the mind, that is to say, on its moral side—acts as a kind of receiver or sorting-house in which definite changes and exchanges and interchanges occur, as the good and evil are gradually sifted and separated from each other. Here we have nothing casual or speculative. The external distinctions of right and wrong adjust themselves and stand in eternal antagonism. We find ethical as well as chemical biogens. These seem to operate as enzymes, and by mere presence break up the complex materials introduced into the mind by the senses, and form fresh stable moral compounds. As against this natural growth, set the whims of a moment, a wave of mere impressionism, touching the surface alone of society and generating a superficial response in some artificial propriety, which has within it and behind it no real fundamental sanction. Morality, like musical instruments, requires occa-
sional retuning and keying up again to the concert pitch. From generation to generation we must consider our ways, take stock of our ethical state, and see exactly where we stand; because, in course of time, old standards become materialized by popular use, toned down, watered, alloyed, debased, sophisticated, and excised and explained away into bare consuetudinal arrangements, without any root in reality or the nature of things.

Now biologists seem pretty well agreed that a purely physical elucidation does not cover all the facts of all the movements in the simplest unicellular organisms. And so convenience or fashion, or passing moods, will never explain or construct the humblest ethic. We must go infinitely deeper and farther and reckon with the cosmic pulse of the Christ principle and the everlasting forces. When a society grows utterly effete and degraded, revolution comes to the aid of evolution and the moral biogens set to work and begin immediately to divide and re-adjust and recombine and organize the imperishable elements and the old facts with a new face.

The Keltic creed declares, “It ought to be, it must be, it is.” But we say, “It is, and therefore it ought to be and must be.” But the new morality makes the wish enough, and proceeds to clothe it with the authority and power of some brief and squalid reaction, while maintaining perhaps outward observances and a proper appearance. And what is this but an unconscious tribute to the eternal truths?

It may be questioned here if the Reformation, by proclaiming the principles of rationalism, did not effect more than a breach in visible unity. Dislocation of establishments suggests, if it does not create, dislocation of the sanctities. Anyhow, when we attempt to explain the whole by the part, we are launched at once on the shallows of a vulgar empiricism. The Reformation had to come in the inevitable course of things, but it possessed the defects of its qualities, and in the hands of imperfect instruments it achieved but imperfect results, and was associated with many evils and led to much loose thinking and worse living. Corruptio optimi pessima. And it may be now that, from this great event, rationalists and irrationalists of society alike imagine themselves competent no less than free to revise their religions and ethical standards at their pleasure.

The well-known mistake contained in the marriage service of an unhappy edition of the Prayer-Book—namely “so long as ye both shall like”—expresses a good deal of so-called morality in our days. The personal factor, the caprice of a fashionable community or indi-
vidual, make and break commandments as they choose. *Cela saute aux yeux.*

Some professors may and will, no doubt, still consider the ego but a convenient and compendious expression which cannot be accepted in any scientific sense. And yet consensus omnium resists. And that seems good enough to live by—the fact, that, whatever we say, we act on the universal belief, the existence of a responsible ego, or soul. As the French girl explained about ghosts, *Je ne les crois pas mais je les crains!*

We need not be so rude as Boyle, when he abused "the sooty Empirics having their eyes darkened and their brains troubled with the smoak of their own Furnaces." The soul never was or will be the mere reflex or culmination of certain physical stimuli and cerebral vibrations. The denial of the truth often proves stronger than any affirmation. For whence comes the negation and the ability to pronounce judgment? Can it conceivably arise from the most lightly organized result of purely physical factors? We want just now a modern Socrates. Eucken we have and honor. Bergson we know and value, but we need at the present day a more practical philosopher, to meet false science and bad morality on their own grounds and expose the underlying fallacies that can only pave the road to ruin and spiritual bankruptcy. For an unsound ethics means an unsound religion and an unsound life. We cannot separate the two, religion and ethics, they stand or fall together.

Our moral conceptions insensibly color all we say and do, affect our national conduct and influence our international relations. We find gaps in the elements which even the genius of Mendeljeff could not bridge. For instance, between "molybdenum" and "ruthenium," between "tungsten" and "osmium," and between "bismuth" and "radium." But woe to any nation that permits the least sort of discontinuity between its religion and morality, or its religion and its life. We are fast filling up the blanks left by the immortal Mendeljeff, just because we know exactly or at least approximately, what the missing element should be. It has been predicted that the gap between "molybdenum" and "ruthenium," for instance, will be supplied by a homologue of "manganese." But in the spiritual world of which we speak, there are no faults, no breaks, no lacunae. Here we find no periodic law, but the Eternal and the Absolute, on which the being of God himself lies. For the divine character and conduct can be nothing less than moral like ours in kind at any rate—if not in degree. Hence alone becomes possible the transformation of the human into the divine.
“Until philosophers are kings—cities will never have rest from their evils.” Plato always knew well what he was talking about and at that day he could not easily have said more, even in the light of that large teaching which made Socrates (essentially a Christo-
didact) a saviour of the human race. But when he declared, “Dia-
lectic and dialectic alone, goes directly to the first principle, and is the only science which does away with hypotheses in order to make her ground secure,” he spoke well and wisely of course but not so well or wisely. We now should be rather disposed to put it dif-
f erently. And we would maintain that the Christophoroi are the sole kings, and Christ himself is the First Principle and the Divine Dialectic, by which we reach it. Plato has priceless jewels of thought scattered about his writings, like the code of holiness in Lev. xvii. 26. And like the Old Testament, his philosophy offers us no literary unit, but simply the deeper unity of spirit. He fore-
saw other redeemers of the race, who would count all things but loss for the excellency of the epignosis or higher knowledge con-
summated in none but Christ—the knowledge that is life eternal.

The divorce between profession and practice obtained then as now—men (the very wisest) knew not of what spirit they were. All that is good or true or beautiful is ultimately some function or power of Christ. In Him morality and religion are one and the same. No yawning gulfs, no unlucid intervals, no unmapped country of debatable land divide the two. And that which He professed He practised. Whatever it was that He touched, so to express it, He transmuted and glorified under the spell of Love.

The "valency" of every one and everything was the capacity to combine, the ability for intimate association. Just as in the cos-
mos, the phenomena we observe, physical and mental, are but so many transformations of energy, in like manner Christ cared for nothing but the transvaluations of Love.

Clerk Maxwell called the universe an organized system of credit, or the transfer of energy from one body to another—the transfer or payment being work. Now, whatever protoplasm may be, in the soul or spiritual area we meet with ceaseless vital and moral exchanges. We have ethical action and reaction, and the process perpetually goes on which builds up the character or soul. But, unless the response of the ego to the environment be faithful and conscientious, unless the external conduct truly and adequately interprets the life within, spiritual decay commences. A house divided against itself cannot stand. When life passes from the unconscious to the con-
scious, from the automatic to the volitional and deliberate, any false
transmission of the heart's reports must be fatal. To get the desired moral result or the efficient balance there must be a correspondence between the two factors. We find ourselves given to ourselves and others for others, as moral agents and spiritual personalities with definite accountabilities. And we dare not betray our trust. If anything could kill the soul, surely it would be the refusal to respond truly to its divine solicitations.

Life of every kind, physical, mental, moral, consists of energy in action, energy bearing fruits—producing and reproducing for ever and ever—and the highest is the capacity for doing work, good work, Christly work. The afferent and efferent forces must cooperate harmoniously. It seems utterly unreasonable to think there may be schism in the ethical area, while we do all we can to prevent it in the body. Our congenital instincts, whether "fixed chains and impulsive acts," or "compound reflex actions," or "inherited motor responses," or "racial memories," forbid such suicidal conduct as regards our physical home. But we appear to consider ourselves at liberty to treat lightly and contradictorily our noblest faculties. Hence the present depreciation of the supreme moral currency as outgrown sentiment or something quite quixotic and impossible.

Nothing just now seems to be taken seriously, and perhaps least of all the sacred. Carlyle's gospel of earnestness and enthusiasm to the vast majority, whether they are pleasure-seekers or profit-seekers, remains a dead letter. Morality, if it deserves the name, has degenerated (so far as practice goes) to something rudimentary like the pseudopodia of the Rhizopods, whose nervous system commences externally, and not internally. It resembles rather a degraded surface adhesion, and looks like the anachronism of some lingering survival—a patch of egg shell on the agnostic chicken's back. It means little or nothing, and possesses no working value. In the organized hypocrisy of the fashionable world in which dress and deportment and scandal count most, truth and honor and purity too frequently are openly ridiculed as out of date, the property of prigs and the valuables of pedants, that may or may not include deans and dowagers, young children and servants. Look at the marriage tie, the bond of union not merely for the family but for the nation. It is often but a shield for vice, a respectable shadow for intrigue. Disunited couples, according full licence to each other, consent to deceive and be deceived. People want to be amused, and not to serve others or God, or to live. We read, that when Tetramiti become exhausted, two old and fruitful ones fuse into one strong organism. And so, it may be, society will be saved from
below, and regeneration will arise from a revolutionary democratic blending of the weak and robust elements.

Not only is the letter of Christ's teaching explicitly or implicitly ignored or denied or ridiculed, but also the spirit. He told us not to take offence—resist not evil. But the modern code resists everything except temptation. Joseph Hall has well put our attitude towards wrongs real or imaginary. "A small injury shall go as it comes; a great injury may dine or sup with me; but none at all shall lodge with me." Napoleon even who paid little homage to truth said, "En politique il ne faut pas être trop menteur." But in war and business nowadays the ordinary soldier or commercialist might fairly indorse the French girl's alleged invariable confession, "J'ai toujours menti." We seem returning to something immeasurably inferior to ethnic morality—truthfulness and honor when it is convenient or pays, and hard lying when straightforwardness seems inconvenient, or does not pay. Such an occasional or intermittent attack of rectitude has more to do with disease than ethics, and requires the assistance of the doctor and not the divine. It is easy to entertain conscientious scruples when profitable. Australian natives have no numerals above three, and modern ethics appears quite as limited, and gives the effect of being bounded by the Rule of Three, like the "physiological arc" of senses, brains, muscles.

One might almost conjecture, as an intelligent visitor from another inhabited planet would, modern morality and modern society had not yet traveled beyond the rudimentary stage of conscious matter—conscientious matter being yet to come. The danger seems to be, that practical ethics, or ethics of the gutter, in which the right yields precedence to the expedient, will eventually be the confessed creed of the world, and we shall then have a rediscoverer of the truth, as Watt and Stevenson rediscovered the value of steam power discovered by Hero in Egypt twenty-three centuries ago.

We must never forget that light conceals far more than it reveals, and knowledge obscures in the very act of unfolding. Till we have grown accustomed to a sudden influx of new light, we feel blinded and not benefited by the unexpected apocalypse. To see at first is not necessarily to understand, nor to reveal, to explain. And so the light of science just at present with its dazzling triumphs has darkened the mind, and tends to exalt the material above the moral. Spiritual powers, ethical excellencies, become soon thereby dwarfed and overshadowed. We must still fight the good fight of faith and lay hold upon eternal life. But we shall never be able to do so, by throwing overboard our old moral sanctions.
Mr. A. C. Benson, in his exquisite book *The Silent Isle*, says of Christ's teaching that he told us "to live like birds and flowers." Yes, no doubt, but he also and no less commands us to "agonize." What is worth having at all, is worth fighting for. If we once allow the foundations to be undermined and morality becomes a question of casuistry or a matter of opportunism to be decided by the immediate moment's gain, if we relegate chivalry and the higher choice to a limbo of dead or dying antiquities or to the Utopia of mere speculators or to materials for poetry and romance, and conduct our lives without any reference to Christ and heterotelic interests, we simply reject our safeguards and possess no longer the first and last defence of all. There are no securities like moral securities, and no bulwarks like simple faith. Reason and will are worthless unless moralized so that the ethical element predominates. And the eternal ἀμετά and αἰθός still form the cheap bulwarks of nations, better than a fleet of dreadnaughts or a million bayonets.