

## THE ETHICS OF NATURE,

BY THE EDITOR.

SINCE the evolution theory has been accepted we look upon the world as one systematic whole and the laws of human development as but applications of the general laws of nature. Thus it has become recognized more and more that all life on earth is one consistent system, and human life is but a higher and nobler development of all animal life. Nevertheless we cannot yet forget that "nature" is a term which has been used exclusively for the lower manifestations of existence, and we reserve for the higher, properly human, humane, moral development, special terms such as "spiritual," "intellectual" or "divine." We look upon the two as contrasts, and certainly contrasts they are, although we have learned to understand that they are not contradictions. We still feel a kind of objection to the very term "nature" when speaking of the higher domain of human morality.

It is not strange, however, that in these days when the monistic conception is being recognized more and more, the naturalness of all life including its highest phases should be insisted on, and so we notice that in many different quarters this same theory is being developed in complete independence. We wish especially to mention a movement which has been founded in Paris and London among certain international circles under the title "Comité international de propagande pour la pratique de la morale fondée sur les lois de la nature." We have referred to the publication of this society repeatedly in our columns, and will only add that the movement has spread over a large part of the civilized world,—the British Empire, Continental Europe, the United States, South America, and even the Far East. Their representative work, *La morale fondée sur les lois de la nature*, will shortly appear in an English translation. The Secretary is Mr. M. Deshumbert whose address is Dewhurst, Dunheved Road West, Thornton Heath, England.

There have been other similar movements which have to some extent gone too far and have shown a hostility toward the recognition of the higher life and to religious traditions, indulging in misrepresentations of Christian dogmatism. But we must recognize that the Ethics of Nature movement has not been guilty of such crudities and excesses. It is based on the monistic idea that the higher develops from the lower and that the higher will always remain the higher and its distinguishing features will continue to remain just as important even though it does not stand in contradiction to the basis from which it has developed.

Goethe and Schiller say on this subject in their *Xenions* that the realm of reason builds above nature, nevertheless what reason constructs is but a higher period of nature. Their distich runs:

"Reason may build above nature,  
but findeth there emptiness only.  
Genius will nature increase;  
Nature, however, it adds."

It seems natural that while we recognize the monistic world-conception as firmly established the higher nature will retain its distinct character, just as a flower is different from the leaf, as the intellectual ranges above the animal and the human ideal above the appetite of the brute. It almost seems as if there is a tendency to emphasize the oneness of all life, of all nature, and the universal law that dominates the whole cosmos.

There is one point we have to learn. The highest in nature is not lowered to the level of its beginnings, but the entire character of the whole becomes distinguished by the heights which nature can attain.

Mr. Arthur J. Westermayr presents a conception of moral law in which he points out that the Bible contains three different moral standards representing three different stages of civilization. This is a truth fully recognized in modern theology by the critical school, and I would say it does not lessen the great significance of the Bible to have several successive phases represented, and it is quite natural that God should be made responsible in every phase for the ethical principles of the times.

The old conception of the literal theory of inspiration which represents God as the direct author of the whole book has been surrendered for the last half century, perhaps not in very narrow orthodox circles but at least among those trained in the modern conception of theology as a science.