

**Morals.**

[BY DR. LUDWIG BUCHNER.]

The only correct and tenable moral principle depends upon the relation of reciprocity. There is therefore no better guide to moral conduct than the old and well-known proverb: "What you would not have done to you, that to others never do." "If we complete this proverb with the addition: "Do to others as you would they should do to you," we have the entire code of virtue and morals in hand, and indeed in a better and simpler form than could be furnished us by the thickest manuals of ethics, or the quintessence of all the religious systems in the world.

All other moral instructions whether derived from the conscience, from religion, or from philosophy, are perfectly superfluous in the presence of these simple and practical rules. Of course these rules must become more and more efficacious the higher the condition of reciprocity is developed by the greater advance of social state, and the more the individual, by intelligence and culture, is rendered capable of comprehending the objects of society and his personal relation thereto, and of arranging his conduct accordingly. It is therefore a generally recognized fact, and moreover sufficiently proved by history, that the idea of morality in general as in particular cases becomes further and more strongly developed in proportion as culture, intelligence and knowledge of the necessary laws of the common weal increase, and that, in accordance with this, greater public order has always gone hand in hand with alleviation of the criminal laws.

As an individual, or as primitive man, man is entirely unacquainted with morals, and blindly follows the impulses of the passions, the hunger, the cruelty, etc., which he has in common with the animals. His moral properties are only developed by living together with others in a society regulated by certain principles of reciprocity, and by the knowledge of the laws which are necessary for the existence of such a community. The innate conscience or law of morals which so many regard as the true determining principle in the actions of men, is nothing more than a great superstition, an "Infant-school morality," as the philosopher Schopenhauer so significantly expresses it. For the conscience is formed and developed only with the progressive knowledge of the duties which the individual has to fulfill towards imaginary supernatural powers (such as Gods, Heroes, etc.), towards his fellow-men, towards society, the state and so forth. This belief, however, is entirely dependent on the grade of general culture or knowledge at which a peo-

ple or an individual may be at any given time, and is therefore variable according to time, place and circumstances. Moses, the greatest teacher and leader of the Jewish people, felt no stings of conscience when he allowed three thousand of his people to be cut to pieces as a propitiatory offering to the Lord, but only feared that they would not be sufficient, whilst nowadays such a proceeding would be regarded as inexpressibly horrible and brutal; and the honored David, the darling of all theologians, when he conquered the city of Rabbah (2 Sam. xii. 31) "brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon." The Phœnicians, Carthaginians, Persians etc., although belonging to the civilized nations of antiquity were not deterred by their conscience from burning their own children alive or burying living innocent men; and the Inquisitors of the Middle ages and their associates of earlier and later times believed that they were only fulfilling their duty in burning about nine millions of people as witches and magicians in the course of eleven centuries, and making so many other innocent people suffer under the most horrible tortures. When the Roman emperors visited the newly formed Christian communities with the bloodiest persecutions, they believed that they were doing good and that their consciences were clear, just as much as the later Christians themselves when, after their doctrine had become victorious, they revisited all these persecutions and outrages in the most ample measure upon those who thought differently from themselves. The murderous wars of modern times also, arising frequently from the most inconsiderable causes, are generally waged by people who win by them fame, honor and consideration, whilst in a future and happier time such proceedings will probably be regarded as the gravest moral crimes.

Conscience is therefore nothing established and innate, but rather something variable and acquired, or an expression of human knowledge itself. This advancing knowledge has caused the recognition of many things as innocent or permissible which formerly passed as grave sins or crimes which formerly were not so regarded; and hence also as is well known the ideas of good and evil present the most striking differences, nay even complete contradictions, at different times and among different peoples, all of which would be entirely impossible if the innate conscience of man were conferred upon him as an eternal prescription binding him for all times.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



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