

MORALS.

[BY DR. LUDWIG BUCHNER.]
(Continued.)

Conscience is also quite independent of the belief in God and of religious conceptions in general; it changes little, if at all, in accordance with particular creeds, but merely accommodates itself to the knowledge or degree of culture of each individual. Hence also all apprehension that conscience may be lost with some determinate form of faith is entirely unfounded; on the contrary, it may become sharpened and refined the more the general conscience of mankind is elevated by the advance of culture, and the more independent mankind becomes in thought and being of all merely external rules and dogmas. Indeed the men of the present day, although their attachment to definite rules of faith is far inferior to that of men of former times, are in general much less inclined than formerly to crimes and acts of violence!—and tolerance, pity, sense of the public good, respect for law, philanthropy, etc., have increased in the same proportion with knowledge, culture and prosperity! Next to culture, unhappiness and prosperity are the main sources of morality and virtue. Man must be happy in his general condition if he is to be virtuous, and all sins and crimes go hand in hand with starvation, misery, disease or idleness. If we add to this that moral qualities or tendencies are heritable, just as much as corporeal and intellectual tendencies in general, it must become clear that the whole moral progress of mankind is founded upon its constant social and intellectual change and advance, and that sin and crime will disappear from the world as soon as the springs of ignorance, want of culture and material misery, which still flow so abundantly, shall be stopped.

Morality may therefore be defined as the law of mutual respect for the general and private equal rights of men, for the purpose of securing general human happiness. Every thing that injures or undermines this happiness and this respect is evil,—every thing that advances them is good. In accordance with this definition, evil consists only in degeneracy or the encroachment of human and private egotism upon this general happiness and the interests of the fellow man. What is beneficial to the community or to the fellow man is in general good; and the notion of good only becomes converted into its opposite by the individual improperly placing the notion of that which is beneficial or advantageous to himself above the notion of which is beneficial to the community or to another person of equal rights with himself. The greatest sinners therefore are egotists or those who place their own I higher than the interests and laws of the common weal, and endeavor

to satisfy it at the cost and to the injury of those possessing equal rights. This egotism in itself is indeed not objectionable, and really forms the final and highest spring of all our actions whether bad or good. Moreover we shall never be able to get rid of the egotism of human nature, and therefore all that we have to do is to turn it into the right paths or to render it rational and humane, by seeking to bring its satisfaction into accordance with the good of all and the interest of the community. And for this purpose there can be no better means than reform of human society in the interests of the common weal proposed by us. For as soon as, by a proper organization of society, things have been brought to such a pass that the satisfaction of the personal I at the same time satisfies the interests of the community, and that vice versa, the satisfaction of the general interests at the same time implies the satisfaction of the personal I, every conflict arising from egotistical motives between the interests of the individual and those of the society or of the state will cease, and the principal cause of crime and sin will be removed. The individual will then, much more easily than at present, be able to strive after personal happiness and agreeable sensations, or to satisfy his personal I, without injury to the interests of human society; he will only advance his own well-being of the community in advancing his own.

In this accordance of the interests of the individual with the interests of the community or of all others, therefore, lies the whole, great moral principle of the future. Let this accordance be once established and we have morality, virtue and noble sentiments in profusion. If not, these will be deficient in proportion as society falls short of this goal, and no external or internal means, no religion, no moral preachers, no criminal laws, will be able by any means permanently to make up for this deficiency. Public conscience is at the same time the conscience of the individual; this public conscience can only be the consequence of rational political and social conditions and of an education and culture of all, founded on the principles of universal philanthropy. It is in youth with its capability of education and culture and its ready accessibility to all external and internal impressions that the foundation for the culture of this conscience and therefore of all morality must be laid; and it must be the highest task of public and general education to waken and strengthen in the young those impulses and talents which are good and beneficial to human society, and to weaken and to suppress the bad and injurious ones. In this way a perfectly new race with a different moral organization will gradually be produced; and crime, sin, vice and the like will disappear in proportion as the soil shall become smaller upon which alone they can thrive!

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