Lecture IV.

Fourth Sunday in Lent.

The Obstacle to Religion—Sin.

S. James i. 15.

When desire hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

The ground which we have hitherto traversed is, in the main, common ground to those who accept the idea of religion in any serious sense at all. Religion is impossible, except as a bond between a real, that is to say, a moral and governing God, and a real, that is to say, a conscious, self-determining, immortal soul. Deny either term of the statement, and religion dissolves into an unpractical sentiment, which either has no adequate object, or else no adequate subject and field for its existence. Hitherto, therefore, at least generally, we have occupied positions which may be taken up even by theories which are very earnestly opposed to some of the most distinctive features of the Christian creed. But to-day we advance a step further; and this advance, it is well to say at the outset, must forfeit the sympathy of many who have thus
far been able to accompany us. We have reached a point at which we encounter a fact of such widespread and deep significance, that it must perforce colour and impress any real religion, from first to last; so that its pressure and importance are felt both in the drift and substance of religious belief, and in the characteristic temper and dispositions of a religious mind. The fact in question is moral evil. Moral evil, or sin, is the disturbing and disorganizing force which breaks up the original relationship of love and confidence between God and man. In view of moral evil, revelation must be not merely illuminative, but remedial; and religion, in order to be true to the facts of human nature, must consist predominantly of penitence and contrition. And Christianity is broadly at issue with not a few of the religious proposals which aspire to take its place in the present day on this very ground. It does, and they do not, practically recognize this universal and fundamental fact: they do, and it will not, consent to gloss sin over, or to explain it away, or to assume that man's religious wants can be really satisfied without looking it boldly in the face, and providing against it a cure and an antidote.

It would be a very great error to suppose that Christianity has invented the idea of sin only for the purpose of remedying it. If sin were not a fact independent of Christianity; if it were not an integral feature of human life, Christianity would long ago have perished. In the spiritual world, too, there is such a thing as supply and
demand; and if a religion pre-supposes wants which do not exist, and brings remedies for diseases of which nobody is conscious, it has already signed its death-warrant. It is true that Christianity, as a revelation of the highest moral truth, has, beyond any other religion, educated man's sense of sin; but this sense of sin was not itself a result of Christianity. Long before Christ came, the moral sin and sickness of the world was felt, rather than explicitly recognized. It was of course recognized by the educated conscience of Israel, with its moral law, creating a knowledge of sin, and its sacrificial system, deepening the sense of the guilt of sin, and its prophetic ministry, bringing these general truths home with an unflinching courage and precision to the sinful kings and populations of the later centuries of its history. But this heart-sickness of the world was also a fact very vividly present to the comparatively uneducated conscience of Greece. What makes a great heathen say that even if death does involve endless unconsciousness, it ought, nevertheless, to be looked upon as substantial gain; a deep sleep throughout a lifetime, a sleep unbroken by dreams, being, in his opinion, preferable to the active life of the most fortunate of mankind? Probably he could not have told us the real reason; this was an instinct of his rather than a reasoned judgment. He instinctively perceived that in human life, as he saw it, even under it brightest aspects, there was on the whole more evil than good. More evil than good,—but not merely or chiefly-more physical evil. The natural courage
of a great soul would never have regarded a preponderance of misfortune or of pain in a human life as a reason for wishing to be practically non-existent. The evil which decided the balance of judgment against the expediency of life, was more penetrating, more oppressive, more fatal to the sense of having a right to live than any pain of body, or loss of friends or of goods could possibly be. It was, in a word, moral evil. The heathen knew of the existence of moral evil, but they had very imperfect ideas of its extent and nature. They knew that there was a right and a wrong, to which man is bound to conform himself. But what is right and what is wrong, and why right is right, and wrong is wrong;—these were subjects upon which their knowledge was exceeding imperfect. Yet the general fact of man’s disloyalty to such moral truth, as he knew, is often admitted by the leading minds of antiquity. They acknowledge man’s secret misery; his proneness to yield to temptations which his conscience condemns; his forfeiture of the light which he actually enjoys by disobedience to its requirements. “I see and approve of the better course,” says Ovid, “I follow the worse.” “Nature has given us small sparks of knowledge,” says Cicero, “we corrupt and extinguish them by our immoralities.” “We are all wicked,” says Seneca, “what one of us blames in another, each will find in his own bosom.”

The Epistle to the Romans itself, which sets out by shewing that both the Jewish and Gentile worlds, by

1 Quoted by Luthardt.
reason of the sin which had overmastered them, stood in need of the justifying righteousness of Christ, is scarcely more explicit in its assertions than are these great heathen. For to observe human life at all, and to reflect on the observation, is to be conscious of its moral anomalies. This consciousness often takes the disguised form of a bitter complaint against the external conditions, nay, the very fact of life itself. So it was at the end of the last century. Werther translated Hamlet into the language of modern life, and Goethe made Werther European. Werther embodied the philosophy of melancholy; of dissatisfaction with life, grounded on a sense of hopeless irretrievable failure. In days nearer to our own, this Pessimism has found a prophet in Schopenhauer, the philosopher of Frankfort. "The history of every life," he says, "is but a history of suffering; the course of life is generally but a series of greater or of less misfortunes. The true sense of the monologue in Hamlet may be thus summed up. Our condition is so wretched that utter annihilation would be decidedly preferable." . . . "The oft-lamented shortness of life may perhaps be its best attribute." . . . "Life," he pursues, "may be represented as a constant deceiver in things both great and small. If it makes promises, it never keeps them, except to shew how undesirable is that which was desired. First the hope, then the thing hoped for, disappoints us. Life gives only to take away. The charm of distance shews us a paradise, which vanishes like an optical delusion; if we
allow ourselves to approach it. Hence our happiness ever
lies in the future or in the past; the present may be com-
pared to a dark cloud which the wind drives before it over
the sunny plain; behind it there is the sunshine, beneath
it a constant shadow. Life is consequently ever unsatisfy-
ing; the future being uncertain, the past irrecoverable.
Life with its hourly, daily, weekly, and yearly, little, great,
and greater discomforts; with its disappointments, its
misfortunes, baffling all calculation; bears so plainly the
impress of something which is to be spoilt to us, that it is
difficult to imagine how this could ever have been mistaken,
and how any one could have conceived that life was given
to be thankfully enjoyed, or man made to be happy. The
general structure of life would rather produce the convic-
tion that nothing is worth our efforts, our energies, and
our struggles; that all possessions are vanity, the world
a bankrupt in all quarters, and life a business which does
not pay its expenses. Satisfaction and prosperity are
merely negative—merely the absence of suffering; only
sorrow and want can be positively felt.”

“We do not perceive that certain days of our lives have been
happy till they have given place to unhappy ones. If, then,
there were a hundred times less sorrow in the world than
there is, its mere existence would be enough to confirm a
truth expressed in various ways, though always with some
indirectness—namely, that the existence of the world is a
matter not of rejoicing but of grief; that its annihilation
would be preferable to its existence; that it is fundamen-
tally something which ought not to exist. Human life, far from wearing the aspect of a gift, has every appearance of an incurred debt, the payment of which is exacted in the form of the urgent necessities, the tormenting desires, the unceasing want which life involves. The whole period of life is generally consumed in the liquidation of this debt, and yet it is only the interest which can be thus paid off. The payment of the capital is effected by death." 1

Such is Schopenhauer's reply to the sunny Optimism of Leibnitz, who deems this "the best of possible worlds"; and in this philosophy of despair we listen to the same chord as that already struck by the Platonic Socrates, although the despair is deeper and sadder than was possible for a heathen, who had never heard of a Christian's hope. For Schopenhauer might also seem at times to be expanding and paraphrasing S. Paul's picture of the whole creation groaning and travelling in pain together until now; only S. Paul saw light upon the distant horizon, and he knew the secret of the present distress. It was moral evil which had introduced this unrest and disorder, or which, if it had not introduced all physical suffering into the universe, at least had made it so intolerable. The aggravated, unappeasable restlessness which results from a conscious forfeiture of the harmony of our being with the moral law of the universe;—this it is which quickens the agony of that piteous wail to which we have just been listening:

this it is which lights up in the human consciousness the sense of an almost infinite capacity for pain.

I.

The presence and power of moral evil in the world has ever afforded matter for the persevering, anxious, weary exercise of human thought. The difficulties of the problem have not silenced inquiry; the failure of one generation of thinkers has not discouraged another. Like the movements of the heavenly bodies, or the laws of health, the existence of moral evil is too patent, too importunate a subject, to be permanently set aside by human beings: it exerts over all who seriously consider the meaning and facts of life too irresistible a fascination not to demand from each generation some attempt at accounting for it, however others may have failed to do so. And in dealing with this problem let us observe that there are two fatal tendencies, which beset, on this side and on that, the necessary path of inquiry with the importunity of a resistless fascination. Like Scylla and Charybdis, they divide between them the great majority of those who would attempt a passage; to escape from the one is generally to fall a victim to the attractions or violence of the other. Our path then lies between the temptation to extenuate the idea of evil, and the temptation to tamper with the idea of God.
1. Of these, the more welcome to the spirit of our time is the former. It is impossible to deny that moral evil exists; but is it impossible to soften that stern idea of evil which haunts the human conscience, and which is sanctioned by Revelation? May not moral evil be represented as a necessary product of man's nature and constitution, as the mere expression and symptom of his place among created beings, nay, even as an indispensable condition of his turning his opportunities to the best account and of fulfilling his destiny? Yes, it has been said, sin in man is only the measure of his failure to achieve ideal or metaphysical perfection. Man is confessedly a finite being; and the evil which clings to him, or which he does, is but an appropriate feature of his original circumstances. "The good is that which is, or the real: evil begins with that which is not, or with the unreal." Therefore the Unbounded, All-powerful Being is alone the good, because of His Infinity and Almightiness. Creatures are partly good and partly evil; they are good so far as they exist; their evil begins with their finitude; it begins at the point where their little life shades off through weakness into non-existence. In this sense too, "whatever is, is right:" whatever tries to be, and cannot be, is wrong. Sin and weakness, strength and virtue, are interchangeable terms. Man as a moral agent suffers in two ways for this metaphysical imperfection of his life. His knowledge of duty is very limited, so that, while he really aims at what is good he constantly does something less than good, only
from want of that enlarged information which is denied him by the limited conditions of his being. And he is also tied down to a gross material body, filled with sensual impulses and instincts, which control and overmaster his loftier aspirations. His sensuous nature necessarily and perpetually depresses the level of his thought and action; and in this depression, thus physically necessitated, from the line of his ideal attainments to that of his actual attainments, consists his sin.

Now, so far is sin from being the product of imperfect knowledge, that the imperfection of man's knowledge is the measure of his innocence. Knowledge is essential to responsibility; the latter can only exist in the ratio of the former. The lower creatures cannot sin against the knowledge which we have, but which they do not possess; we cannot sin against a higher knowledge than that which has been vouchsafed to us. But we know enough to have enormous opportunities for sin open to us; and when we do sin, our consciences do not whisper that had we known more we might have been innocent still. Omniscience is not a condition of virtue; philosophers are not always saints, nor little children always criminals. Nor is sin accurately attributed to the necessary action of our sensuous nature. It is not, by any means, universally or even generally the product of insurgent senses. Ruinous as are the sins for which perverted sensual instincts furnish the material, there are many sins of the darkest type which have nothing to do
with sense. We should be just as capable of envy and hatred, of ambition and pride, of untruthfulness, or the desire to destroy a fellow-creature, if we had no bodies at all. Sin then, as such, is not the irrepressible product of a sensuous body; nor is it the imperfection of moral or spiritual effort which alliance to such a body is thought of necessity to imply. In order to practice virtue, it is indeed often necessary, with the Apostle, to keep under our body and bring it into subjection; but the body does not exert any irresistible power of depression over the higher instincts of the soul, or it would be useless to struggle against it. The seat of sin is in the will, whether sin be chiefly spiritual or sensual; the body merely furnishes one of the spheres wherein temptation may be found and sin is possible; and sin is a much graver thing than any failure to attain ideal goodness which arises from our being weighted with a body of sense. If sin were only inevitable weakness; if it were nothing more serious than a lowly condition in the scale of being resulting from man's physical circumstances; the conscience of man would no more torture him on account of it than the conscience of the cripple or the blind accuses him of his misfortune. Sin differs from virtue not as a flower which has been frostbitten differs from a flower which has escaped the frost, but as a self-made devil differs from an angel; and the body can no more fetter the will of the saint than the triumph of its rebellious senses can be held to measure or diminish the responsibility of the sinner.

1 1 Cor. ix. 27.
So faint an estimate of evil may help us to create a morality that shall accommodate itself to human life as it actually is. It will not furnish us for long with a standard of moral truth which will remind us of what our life actually is not. It may recommend itself at once, and very persuasively, to our self-love. It were pleasant to think, if we could think, that we have never been in the terrible predicament of opposing and refusing a known standard of goodness; that, at the worst, we are only pardonable and even interesting instances of failure to be all that we conceivably might have been. To see in evil nothing beyond the result of man's finite nature; to see in it a privation only and not a contradiction of good, is undoubtedly calculated to put us all on very good terms with ourselves. But is any theory of the kind consistent with the most rudimentary idea of evil? Surely our consciences tell us that evil is a great deal more than a maimed effort at goodness, more than a privation of goodness which might be but is not. Evil and good are not, so to put it, upon the same line of advance, with only this difference, that while goodness is success, evil is failure. If, for instance, I tell a very deliberate lie, with a view to getting possession of a sum of money by doing so, I surely do something more than fail to reach an ideal of perfect truthfulness. I move very deliberately in an opposite direction to that of truth; I do not come short of it; I contradict and trample it under foot. If nobody ever told a lie without wishing to tell the truth, while yet he failed,
from defective knowledge, to do so perfectly, this theory of evil as the symptom of man's finite nature might at least claim a hearing. As it is, the real facts of every human conscience are against it.

And accordingly Holy Scripture speaks of sin 'in terms which are utterly at variance with any such estimate of moral evil as this. It speaks of "sin having dominion over us,"\(^1\) and of the justified being "dead unto sin;"\(^2\) but we are not ruled by imperfect forms of goodness, nor do we "die" to moral efforts which were only less successful than our present ones. It speaks of sin as a service, the wages of which is death;\(^3\) as a defilement from which we must be cleansed and washed;\(^4\) as a bondage from which Christ makes us free.\(^5\) There is, it appears, a law of sin in our members, to which we may be brought into captivity;\(^6\) and sin it is which constitutes the sting of death,\(^7\) and which in its deliberate and emphatic form is the death of the soul.\(^8\)

How is all this language, which presupposes an energetic contradiction to exist between sin and holiness, to be reconciled with any representation of sin as being merely imperfection, whether of knowledge or of moral force? As if there were no sins except those of negligence and omission, no sins of set purpose to do evil; as if there were no such thing as knowing evil to be evil, and deliberately embracing it!\(^9\)

\(^{1}\) Rom. vi. 14.  \(^{2}\) Rom. vi. 2.  \(^{3}\) Rom. vi. 23; cf. 1 S. John iii. 8.
\(^{4}\) Ps. li. 2-7; Isa. i. 16; Jerem. iv. 14; Acts xxii. 16; 1 Cor. vi. 11; Rev. i. 5; Rev. vii. 14.  \(^{5}\) Rom. vi. 16-22.
\(^{6}\) Rom. vii. 23.  \(^{7}\) 1 Cor. xv. 56.
\(^{8}\) 1 S. John v. 16.  \(^{9}\) Rom. i. 32.
Indeed, to represent sin as something due to the original imperfection of human nature is to contradict the sanctity and justice of God. God is the Maker of His creatures; and if creatures are imperfect, as compared with the Creator, it is from the necessity of the case, because the creature is not the Creator. But this inherent or metaphysical imperfection does not necessarily imply moral imperfection: had it been so, God could not have created at all without violating His own attributes. And certainly, if man only sins because his views of absolute good are limited, and his higher aspirations weighed down by the body of sense which encompasses him, the author of that intellectual finiteness and of that sensual frame is the author of man’s sin; and God, in creating, forfeits His sanctity, and in forfeiting His sanctity ceases to be the object of religion.

This conclusion, indeed, is not declined by the Pantheistic philosophy, and by that large body of thought in our day, which is profoundly, because for the most part unconsciously, moulded by it. Sin, we are told, like everything else, is really due to the Divine activity; but, then, sin is not without its uses—I had almost said, its merits. It is, forsooth, the stimulant and condition of goodness. As in the world of Hegelian thought, truth, we are told, is not to be looked for in any single and direct affirmations, but only as the term of a series of contradictions, which not only may be true together, but are together necessary to express the full truth; so it has been asserted, that in the moral sphere there is a somewhat similar law of contradictories; that it is as
unphilosophical to find fault with what is vulgarly described as sin, as it is to keep no terms with what is coarsely described as falsehood. Sin is the necessary foil to goodness: without sin goodness would never be roused into active life. Contradiction is a condition of moral life: goodness is not tranquil conformity to law, but energetic struggle against that which contradicts it, and which by contradicting it makes it what it is. "Just as nature is made up of contrasts, and in it we see light opposed to darkness, and heat to cold, and expansion to concentration, and pleasure to pain, and health to sickness,—even so does the true life of the human soul emerge from deep contrasts; it is only developed by the encounter between truth and falsehood, between good and evil." . . . "Evil is thus a condition, almost an ingredient of good. Goodness would slumber in itself, it would be without the necessary impulse to exertion, unless it were constantly kept on the alert by the antagonistic energies and excesses of evil." ¹

This singular travesty of the account which the Christian Revelation has given of the permission of moral evil in the world, involves a fallacy of confusion. It confounds the good ends which evil, against its nature, may subserve in the purposes of an overruling Providence, with the inherent qualities of evil itself. Certainly it is better for the health of the body that latent disease should shew itself in pronounced illness; and when such illness is over, a patient may be all the stronger and better for having

¹ Cf. quot. by Klotz, in his art. Sünde.
been ill. But for all that, disease is disease, and not a variegated form of health; and a man in whom disease had never been latent, and whose constitution had been even monotonously free from its assaults, will be, at least, as well as another who may have happily survived a scarlet fever. What God in His loving Omnipotence may make evil do in spite of its nature is one thing; what it is in itself is another. Vice is not a necessary aliment, it is not even a necessary foil to virtue. The devil is not necessary to the existence of God; and goodness does not depend either for its beauty or its strength upon the antagonistic efforts of sin. If it were so, we should at once reach the practical conclusion of the Materialistic philosophy, which denies the existence of any free will in man whatever, and sees in all moral actions, whatever their colouring, the inevitable result of antecedents which create them, by as necessary a law as any which rules the world of matter. Upon Materialistic principles, the murderer Traupmann ought never to have been executed: he was no more responsible for his atrocities than a flash of lightning or a wave would be for the destruction of a human life. But upon the principles of the aesthetic Pantheism, it might even have been questioned whether French society did not on the whole gain by his horrible activity: and whether one who had done so much to exhibit the virtue of respect for human life in high relief, by so emphatically contradicting it, was not, in consideration of his services, entitled to receive some higher and more substantial reward than a reprieve of the penalty which he actually suffered.
Indeed, it is here that we see how irreconcilable any such theory is with the plainest instincts of a healthy conscience. If evil is necessary to the existence of good, why should conscience condemn evil? How can conscience condemn that which is necessary to the good which it approves? How, if we are to pursue this line of thought, can we ultimately avoid acquiescing in a theory which, denying all distinctions of right and wrong as of the nature of baseless prejudice, sees in evil, as in good, only an energetic manifestation of life apart from any moral colouring whatever? A last protest may indeed be made to the effect that man's business is to contradict the metaphysical necessity for evil by the moral demand that it should be resisted. But this very demand, if it is to be enforced, must proceed upon the serious conviction that moral evil is evil; that it is a something which need not be; and that if we will, we are individually and perfectly free to accept or to reject it.

Theories such as these are in truth expedients for representing sin as being less serious than it is; for softening the repulsive contrasts which it presents to holiness; for securing to it a right to feel at home in human conduct and in the human soul. Every such theory attempts to put forth a more or less disguised justification and apology on behalf of sin, at the bar of intellect, that sin may, if possible, be received without dishonour, if it be not welcomed at the court of conscience. But conscience, when she is not benumbed or asleep, must protest implacably against these attempts to make sin respectable. She can see in
them only so many invitations addressed to the single soul, bidding it look tolerantly or fondly on the sure instrument of its degradation and ruin; so many invitations addressed to human society, bidding it recognize or welcome the foe who is sworn to impede and to destroy the indispensable conditions of its coherence and progress.

2. It has indeed been the dread of softening down the idea of evil which has led the human conscience in very early ages to tamper with the idea of God. The instinctive recoil from the one error has plunged it into the other. The physical evil of pain, of disease, of death, inflicts itself upon the senses; and conscience accounts for physical evil by tracing it to moral evil. Conscience cannot deny the malignity of moral evil without dethroning herself. But why should moral evil exist? The All-Holy could not have created it: to have done so would have been to cease to be Himself. But why did He permit it? And who gave it being, that He should permit it?

In ages and civilizations when the idea of God was imperfect or impoverished, men accounted for the existence of evil by ascribing it to a being or principle, coeval with God, independent of Him, and of course opposed to Him. Whether this evil was supposed to be matter out of which the Good God had fashioned the world, or whether it was conceived of as something more spiritual, the object and origin of the system was identical. It was an effort to account for the great perplexing mystery—the existence of evil. It is impossible, argued these ancient thinkers,
that moral life and death, that good and evil, can flow from a single source. It is impossible that a Holy God can have been the author of evil. Evil, then, must be referred to some other origin: it must have had an author of its own. So far we cannot but follow; but then the argument appeals, in order to sustain its own false inference, to the gigantic proportions which evil has actually assumed. Considering how world-wide and imperial is the sway of evil, must not evil, it asks, be referred to some person, principle, force, or tendency, higher and older than created things; to some almighty source, existing side by side with the Author and Source of goodness, in eternal contradiction to His mind and work?

If we take the ancient Parsee doctrine as a sample, we find, in the lines of the Bundehesh, the good and evil principles—Ormuzd and Ahriman—contrasted as follows.—

"Ormuzd is the light;
This light is without beginning;
Ormuzd is on high,
Ormuzd is Holy,
Ormuzd hath all knowledge."

On the other hand—

"Ahriman is in darkness;
This darkness is without beginning;
Ahriman is in the depths;
Ahriman delighteth in strife;
Ahriman hath only a derived knowledge."

Here, while Ahriman is in respect of knowledge the inferior of Ormuzd, they are represented as coeval; al-

1 Ahardanesch, qu. by Hanneberg from Jos. Muller, Art. Parseismus.
though the modern Parsees, especially when in conflict with Christianity, have tended, by exalting Ormuzd alone, by teaching that Ahriman became evil through an act of will, or by recognizing an eternal essence above both principles, from which they alike derive their origin, to approach more and more closely to a practical Monothelism. But there is no real question as to the practical Dualism of the earlier doctrine, which prevailed in Persia at least from the date of Darius Hystaspes to that of Alexander the Great, and again after the fall of the Parthian dynasty,—the doctrine which is confronted in the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures. In Isaiah, the God of Israel proclaims—

  "I am the Lord,
   And there is none else:
   There is no God beside Me....
   I form the light and create darkness;
   I make peace and create evil;
   I the Lord do all these things."

Here we have a revelation probably designed to protect the faith of Israel against the Dualistic influences to which it would be exposed during the later period of the Captivity.

1 Cf. Hanneberg, who quotes Wilson, "The Parsee Religion," Bombay, 1843, p. 107. It would seem that the superiority of Ormuzd was never supposed to imply his power of preventing the birth of Ahriman or of annihilating him. Compare on the Zoroaste Akârene, or eternal essence above the two principles, Muller, L. von d. Sunde, ii. 5. "Being only seldom mentioned in the Zendavesta," he says, "this is a very isolated conception, exercising no influence upon the system as a whole, nor on the development of the conflict between the two principles: and thus this ultimate unity is too meagre and weak an abstraction to have any power in itself to rob the evil principle of its strength or to reconcile it with the good."

2 Isa. xlv. 6, 7.
The Eternal Lord of Heaven was much more ancient than this antagonism of good and evil which meets men's eyes in the world, and which suggested the faith from which was evolved the Zendavesta. The evil principle itself was in this sense only created by Him, that He had formed the wills which, in their perverted freedom, gave it birth. "I am the Lord, and there is none else."

In Christian times we find S. Paul insisting upon the truism, as it appears to us, that "every creature of God is good, and nothing to be despised,"¹ as a reason for rejecting certain distinctions of food which were insisted on by some ancient ascetics at Ephesus. But here he is really combating another form of the doctrine of Two Principles; which held matter to be the seat and source of evil, and certain kinds of food to be peculiarly representative of the grossness of matter. When Augustine, in a later age, as a still unconverted young man, giving the freest license both to sensual passions and to intellectual enterprise, was casting about for a theory which would at once countenance his excesses, and furnish him with a working philosophical explanation of the universe, he found it in Manicheeism. Manicheeism was the Dualism which had acquired a Christian flavour by coming into contact with Christianity; and we may form some idea of the strength and fascination of the theory, by observing how tenacious was its hold upon the strong and beautiful mind of the greatest of the

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 4.
Fathers, even when the full light of Catholic truth was already breaking upon him.

Isaiah's words will have already suggested that seriously to believe in two eternal principles is fatal to serious belief in the existence of God. God is the one Self-existent Being; the Maker of all things, visible and invisible. To assert that another—whether essence, person, or even matter—existed eternally side by side with God, is to deny God's first and necessary prerogative, as the Alone Eternal, and Self-existent. If God is to be screened in human thought from the blasphemy which would credit Him with the origination of evil, it must be by some doctrine which, unlike Dualism, does not virtually annihilate Him in order to do so.

But the doctrine of Two Principles does not succeed even in its main object, namely, the protection and affirmation of the unimpaired idea of evil itself. Evil is, in its quaintly perverted estimate, rather a growth of nature than the free product of a created will: evil has a positive substance of its own. Evil must therefore be conquered by a physical rather than a spiritual or moral treatment. This would seem to have been the idea of these mistaken ascetics at Colossæ,\(^1\) whom S. Paul observed and reproved. And the error leads to consequences beyond itself. If evil is physical, there is no more reason for distress at a habit of lying, than at tuberculation of the lungs. If sin is physical, remedies may or may not succeed; and a moral

\(^1\) Col. ii. 22, 23.
struggle is on the whole less reasonable than a torpid resignation.

At any rate, it may be said, we of this generation are not Dualists: and what good is to be done by disinterring and gibbeting the corpses of ancient errors? But let us recollect that when error is buried as a formal theory, it often leaves behind it a miasma which infects the world of thought for many a succeeding generation.¹ We practically affirm a second evil principle in the universe when we acquiesce in the notion that evil in ourselves or in others, in individuals or in societies, is invincible. We do not talk of a second principle; we assume one. We assume not merely a powerful but an unconquerable devil, when we despair of expelling, by God's grace, that which is evil in ourselves or in others. We bow, as we say, to the inevitable; we recognize such and such tendencies of the times. They are perhaps at issue with what we know to be right. But there they are; the current flows all one way and with increasing strength, and we say that it is useless to attempt to make head against it. Instead of overcoming evil with good, like the Apostle, we philosophically resign ourselves to being overcome with evil. But our notion of the invincibility of sin and error is at issue with our still professed faith in the one All-Powerful and Holy

¹ Müller, L. von d. Sünde, ii. 5: "The theological and philosophical characteristics of the present day furnish a poor guarantee that the tendency to take a dualistic view of the world, may not, perhaps at no very distant time, become again as strong as it was a few decades of years ago, and as the Pantheistic leer is again in our own day."
Desire the raw material of sin.

God. Our faint-heartedness, our despair, our abject fatalism in presence of evil, within and around us, is probably a relic of the old Dualistic leaven, which sees in evil the resistless play, the unconquerable energy of an eternal principle; which refers it to a power that, could it have existed, would have made God impossible.

No. There must be no tampering with the idea and character of God; with His Unity, with His Omnipotence, with His Sanctity. To deny these is to destroy, in human thought, the ascertained object of religion. If there is one God, All-powerful and moral, and if moral evil is a fact in the universe, the existence and nature of moral evil must be in some way accounted for by serious Theists, if it can be accounted for at all, without impugning the morality and the Omnipotence of God.

II.

What, then, is sin in itself? What representation of it will neither obliterate the lines of moral truth, nor do injustice to the Sanctity or the Omnipotence of God?

S. James, in the passage which is before us, furnishes us with materials for answering this question. He says that desire when it hath conceived bringeth forth sin. He thus places the origin of moral evil in the created will, of which desire is the moral ingredient. Desire is, indeed,
the raw material of moral life. It is the plastic force which may become, under different circumstances, either sanctity or sin: and thus S. Augustine has defined virtue as “love or desire ruled by true order.” Desire is part of the original outfit of every human being; a sympathetic force by which the various instincts and faculties of our nature are drawn towards something external to itself. What is that something? In man’s unfallen state of old, and in his state of perfectly restored sanctity hereafter, God is the true object of all human desires: man desires God for His own sake, and all created objects only for the sake of God. In the original design of God, desire in the moral world corresponds to the law of attraction in the physical; and the perfected saint, in all the activity of his moral and intellectual life, moves around the great Centre of his adoration with an undeviating regularity, such as is that of the planet circling in its orbit around its parent sun. But the planet cannot modify or weaken the attraction which governs it. It cannot plunge anarchically through space, seeking a place in some other system where it may move around some other sun, or itself become the centre of other satellites; whereas desire, being moral, does not bind free agents to loyal revolutions around their true Centre by any such necessity. Man may at his option cease to desire God: he may, in the stead of God, desire one of God’s creatures for its own sake, and with the vehemence of an absorbing

1 S. John ii. 17, ἐπιθυμησάζων κληρον. Tit. ii. 12; Rom. vii. 7, 8.
passion. And since no other creature can really take God's place, man thus tends to make himself his own centre; to view all persons and events relatively to himself; to think of God, if at all, as only one of the points on the circumference of his own petty and fictitious universe. When desire is thus perverted by being wedded to the things of time and sense, as if they could really satisfy the yearnings of the soul, it "bringeth forth sin." Like an atmosphere charged with infection, desire spent upon created things is pregnant with sin: it implies that idolatrous surrender of self to creatures, that passionate claim upon creatures on behalf of self, which in the end severs the bond between God and the soul.¹ And hence an act, or series of acts, whether of thought, or word, or deed, to which in its freedom the will consents, and which contradict the moral order of the universe.

And this is sin. Sin, to be complete, need not become speech or action: a formed desire, deliberately assented to by the will, constitutes sin. "He that looketh on a woman," says our Lord, "to desire her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."² Indeed, it is the internal act, and not the material product of the act, which is chiefly of moral importance. What is the precise form or turn of the inward act? Here the beautiful and suggestive words, which are used to express the idea of sin in the sacred language, but which are untranslate-

¹ This aspect of sin has been well re-stated in Jul. Müller's Lehr. v. d. Sünde, i. i. c. 8.
² S. Matt. v. 28.
able into our clumsier Western tongue, will help us. In the fifty-first Psalm, for instance, besides the generic expression for evil, there are three words which describe different aspects of the idea of sin. Of these, one implies that God’s will being the aim which man rightly pursues, sin is a missing his true goal in life. A second regards sin as a twisting or perversion of the will from the right way. A third brands it as rebellious transgression of Divine law, of a covenant with God, of the law which man is bound to obey. The New Testament expressions substantially correspond; and they have this in common. Sin is an offence against moral truth; known, and contradicted although known. “Sin,” says S. Augustine, “is something said or done or desired in contradiction to the Eternal Law.”

Why the “Eternal” Law? This question can only be

1 יָרֵא, v. 6, broadly opposed to בָּוָה—Gen. xxiv. 50; Levit. xxvii. 10. In a more emphatic moral sense, Prov. viii. 13; Ps. vii. 10. יָתֵּר means originally to be noisy, tempestuous; the transition to the idea of moral disorder appears in יָתֵר, which is primarily used of breaking in pieces with a crash, Job xxxiv. 24, Ps. ii. 9; then of evil generally, and finally, in the Hiphil especially, of evil action.—J. Müller, Lehr. v. d. Sünde, i. i. c. 2.

2 נָשֲׂא, v. 5. The primary idea seems to be that of stumbling on the way to a goal—Prov. xix. 2; in which is implied the missing of the object of search—Prov. viii. 36. Not that נָשֲׂא is used only or chiefly of sins of infirmity, whether of thought or will: it is often applied to the gravest sins, and implies that which is characteristic of all sin, namely, that sin is a moral action, in which man misses the aim for which he was created by God.

3 יָשָׁר v. 4, from יָשָׂר, to be bent or distorted, implies evil considered as departure from man’s appointed path—Job xiii. 26; Gen. iv. 13.

4 יָשָׁר, v. 5. יָשָׁר primarily implies faithless rebellion against a covenant, as in Isa. i. 2, xliii. 27; Jerem. iii. 13; Amos iv. 4; 1 Kings xii. 19, &c.
answered when we reflect on the nature of moral truth. Moral truth is not like the laws and facts of the physical world; it is not something which might have been otherwise than as it is, had God so willed. God was under no necessity to make either one or a million suns or planets, or to furnish them with a particular temperature and particular inhabitants. Why not? Because there was nothing in His necessary nature which constrained Him to do so. He created in His freedom: He created as He created in His freedom: He might have created otherwise: He was free not to have created at all. But could God ever have sanctioned you or me in saying that that which we know to be false is true? Why not? Because, in sanctioning us, God would be contradicting, not a law which He might have made other than as He has made it, but a necessary truth of His own eternal nature. A moral truth is like a mathematical axiom; we see it intuitively, and we do this because it is necessarily true, and as being necessarily true, is also a truth of God’s eternal nature. Carr any reasonable man, for instance, without destroying and uprooting the very constitution of the mind which God has given him, conceive that under any possible circumstances it could ever have been true that things which are equal to the same are not equal to one another? If not; then, here we have an Eternal Truth. And if this be an Eternal Truth, it is, as such, a real part of God’s Eternal Nature; since if this be denied, we must admit that there are eternal truths independent of God, and existing
eternally apart from Him. Would not this in effect be a
denial of His solitary self-existence? Either God does not
exist, or all that is eternal is God. But if pure mathem-
atical truth, as being eternally true, be thus Divine, moral
truth is not less so. If we cannot believe that a lie was
ever right, this is because veracity is an eternal law of
the Divine nature; and this applies to the whole moral
law, which is, in reality, the Divine nature formulated
into rules which suit the conditions of creaturely existence.
Thus, given the parental relationship, it never could have
been right to dishonour a father or a mother: given human
life, murder could never have been other than criminal:
given the responsibility of transmitting the gift of life, and
adultery, which trifles with that responsibility, could never
have been condoned: given the idea of personal rights, of
property, and stealing is necessarily condemned. And
thus it is that sin does not contradict a rule which God
has made of one kind, but which He might have made of
another; it contradicts a rule which, in its principle, is
necessary and eternal; a rule which does not depend even
upon the will of God Himself, since it embodies and
expresses His Divine and unchanging Nature; a rule which
accordingly it is impossible to contradict, without running
counter to, and, so far as we can, setting at naught and
destroying the very being and nature of God Himself.
"Against Thee only have I sinned," is the voice of the
sinner's deepest knowledge of himself. And it was this
which led ancient divines to say, that if, per impossibile,
moral evil could be pushed to a point of sufficient exaggeration, it would annihilate God. By this saying, they expressed the vital and fundamental antagonism which exists between sin and the Divine nature.

Now, such an account of moral evil cannot be said to attenuate its malignity; but is it equally careful of the character of God? If evil be thus antagonistic to God, how can God, at once Almighty and All-holy, have allowed it to exist? As All-holy, He must abhor it; as Almighty, He surely might have proscribed what He abhors?

The answer is, that, notwithstanding the inherent quality of evil, the possibility of its existence is, so far as we can see, a needful condition of true moral freedom. God might have created a universe ruled from first to last by physical law, and so incapable of deviation from the true rule of its action. In such an universe, moral evil would have found no place, only because there would have been no creatures properly capable of moral good. Our experience tells us that God has not chosen to stint down His creative activity to these proportions: that we are free agents, is not more a matter of faith, than of experience. We know that God has created beings whose high privilege it is to be able freely to choose Him as their king, as the accepted Master of their whole inward life; but if this privilege is to be real, it also carries with it the implied power of rejecting Him. The alternative risk is the inevitable condition of the consummate honour: it is actually a substantial part of the
honour. A moral being must at least have a capacity for disobedience if he is to be able freely to obey.

If, then, God has permitted evil, it is not because He has ceased to be Himself, but because His generosity has been abused. The source and root of moral evil is to be found not in the Good God, but in the abused freedom of the creature, whether it be man or angel. It were hard indeed to blaspheme God for His generosity; to complain that He has made us men and not brutes or stones, because, forsooth, as a race, as well as in our individual lives, we have turned His bounty against Himself, and made the greatness of His gift the measure of our degradation.

It will be urged that God must have "foresee" the abuse that would follow upon His gift of freedom. Certainly. But those who believe in His wisdom and His love at all, must surely believe that He foresaw much else. They will believe with S. Paul that if, in the event, sin has abounded, grace has much more abounded.\(^1\) They will believe with S. Augustine that "God knew it to be more agreeable to His almighty goodness even to bring good out of evil, than not to permit evil to exist."\(^2\) He might be trusted to strike the balance of advantages between

\(^1\) Rom. v. 18, 19, 20, oδ δε ἐπέδωκας ἡ ἀμαρτία, ὑπερεπέφευγον ἡ χάρις.

\(^2\) De Cor. et Gr. c. 10. Qui creavit omnia bona valde et mala ex bonis exoritura esse præscivit; scivit magis ad omnipotentissimam suam bonitatem pertinere etiam de malis benefacere quam mala esse non sinere.
a universe ruled only by physical law and a universe so open to the possible invasion of evil as to be darkened by its actual presence and apparent victory, but withal illuminated by the remedy, which, in the long run, was to be much more than equal to grappling with the disease. Sin might be tolerated, if the Eternal Son was to redeem the world. We know at any rate how the world's Ruler has decided, and it is scarcely reasonable to complain that He has not admitted us to share all the reasons which governed His decision.

III.

Here, then, I repeat the statement with which I began, that if a religion is to be real life-controlling power, it must practically recognize the fact of sin. For, since sin provokes God's necessary displeasure on the one hand, and destroys man's power and even his wish to seek God on the other, its direct effect is to break up that bond between God and man in which religion essentially consists. Religion, therefore, must deal with sin, not as if it were making a supererogatory exertion, but as a condition of its own existence. It must remove this fatal obstacle to its proper activity, if it is to exist at all. Not less necessary is this practical recognition of sin by religion, if religion is to be of any
real benefit to society. Go out into the streets of this
great capital, or read the daily journals which register the
thought and incidents of our national life, and what are
the two spectres which meet you most constantly? Are
they not suffering and crime? And what is suffering, at
least in the main, but the effect and shadow of sin; if not
of the sufferer's own sin, yet at least of some physical or
social legacy from a parent's error? What is crime in its
most venial form, but sin, prompted by suffering and
organized and solidified, until in its brutal exuberance it
threatens even the existence of society? Has religion
nothing to say to the moral mischief which is the parent
of these dark phantoms? Is she dreaming? Is she power-
less? Is she abandoning her high hope and mission of
saving humanity from its worst enemies?

It is here that true religion parts company altogether
with certain phases of so-called religious thought, which
are not without an ambition to be considered at least the
rudiments of some future religion of civilization. Doubt-
less they embody much which recommends them, at any
rate, to the interest of educated people. They are philo-
sophical; they are enterprising; they are in good taste; they
occupy a large amount of attention in our journals and
periodicals. Nor are they insensible to the evil of crime,
considered as a cause of social disturbance and danger.
They would sometimes deal more hardly with it than
would be morally possible for men who had a deeper insight
into the relative responsibility of criminals. But ignoring the
awful yet blessed doctrines of Redemption and Grace, they have no remedy for sin; no remedy, that is, of any practical value; and after all, sin is the great fact with which they ought to deal. Animated speculation on religious topics, careful reproduction of the external drapery of scenes in early sacred history, quick capacity for analyzing and delineating sentiment, is very welcome in its place. It has indisputably a literary value; but it does not help us to confront the stern realities of this human world. The religion which has no fixed doctrines, or scarcely any; no code of absolute truth, to be taught and suffered for at all costs; no word of heart-searching warning, and yet of tenderest consolation for sinners,—is not really a religion at all. It is at best a very one-sided philosophy. Its endeavours to deal with

1 The profound remarks of Julius Muller on the attempt observable in many modern schemes of education to expel one sin by the cultivation of another, are well worth transcribing here. Speaking of the internal disagreement of evil with itself, he observes that "the two fundamental sinful tendencies, pride, and the empire of fleshly desires, are precisely those which stand in the most striking contrast and mutual hostility to each other. Whoever gets between these two currents is unceasingly driven by them hither and thither; when he gets clear of the one, he is seized by the other. In a condition of higher cultivation, this alternate service of opposing sins is determined by the play of man's own secret will. Man learns the miserable tricks of turning, now to the one side, and now to the other, to pride at one turn, at another to sensuality. The virtuous aspirations to which man rises out of his sensual degradations, only serve to excite and satiate a self-satisfaction which had been humbled; he abandons the pleasures of lust in order to refresh himself with the efforts of his pride. Rightly recognizing the fact of this internal conflict of evil with itself, Modern Education, by alienating itself from that Christian principle upon which alone true self-love and noble self-reliance may rest, often adopts the plan of conquering the sins of self-degradation and dissipation in youth by the passionate stimulus of pride and ambition; and thus, alas! it has achieved nothing beyond casting out the devil by Beelzebub the prince of the devils." Lehr. von d. Sünde, ii. 5.
the great heart-sores of humanity remind us of some great physician who, at the bedside of a patient, writhing in protracted agony, should airily discuss his own last excursion in the Alps, or the last debate in Parliament, or at best the most recent resolution arrived at by the Metropolitan Board of Health.

The religion of Jesus Christ, as taught by His Apostles, does not thus trifle with the seriousness of sin. It begins by deepening the sense of sin, the perception of its real area and power in human life. It adds poignancy to the feeling of shame and guilt which follows upon deliberate sinful action in a healthy conscience. By the Mosaic law there was a knowledge of sin.\(^1\) By the teaching and example of Jesus Christ there is a much truer and deeper knowledge of it.\(^2\)

That faultless and unapproached Life which we study in the pages of the Gospels, brought home to the heart as well as to the understanding by the secret teaching of the Eternal Spirit, endows the Christian with an ideal of sanctity altogether his own.\(^3\) Around the Sermon on the Mount, or the last discourse in the supper-room, there is an unearthly atmosphere of purity and holiness, which lights up in the soul, with microscopic distinctness, the consciousness of secret evil, more perfectly than could any code of precepts. One only appearing among us in human form has been able to ask the tremendous question, “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?”\(^4\) And as we gaze on Him, holy,

\(^1\) Rom. iii. 20.  
\(^2\) S. Matt. v. 21-48.  
\(^3\) S. John viii. 12.  
\(^4\) S. John viii. 46.
harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, in His purity, His courage, His humility, His tenderness, His majestic moral strength, His fearless loyalty to truth, His vast charity, we see that which reveals us to ourselves. At the feet of the Lamb without blemish and immaculate, we feel, with Job, that the report of God’s sanctity has been at length exchanged for sight;¹ we exclaim with the Apostle, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”²

Nor does Jesus Christ stop here. He reveals, as does no other, not merely the fact and malignity of sin, but its consequences. The sternest things that have ever been said, as regards sin’s prospects in another world, first passed the tenderest lips that ever proclaimed God’s love to man.³ Our Lord would not leave the revelation of the pellucid future to His Apostles: He took the unpopularity of making such a revelation upon Himself. No unbelieving criticism can really touch the plain meaning of the tremendous words in which the All-Merciful One has depicted the case of a moral being, stiffened by final impenitence into a permanent self-torturing rebellion against Eternal Justice and Eternal Love. But for that awful measure of sin, the saying concerning Judas had been a paradox; “It were good for that man if he had never been born.”⁴

Yet if Jesus Christ had only taught us the penalties of

¹ Job xlii. 5. ² S. Luke v. 8. ³ S. Mark ix. 48-49; S. Matt. xxv. 46; S. John v. 29. ⁴ S. Matt. xxvi. 24; S. Mark xiv. 21.
sin, He would but have enhanced the terrors of the ancient law. Whereas, in reality, He has made it possible for us to look at moral evil as it is. We Christians can dare to examine it, for He has brought us both a pardon and an antidote. His cross and passion are a revelation as well as a cure. When dying, He shews us what sin is. At least to those who take Him at His word, and see Him One Higher than the sons of men, the Cross will surely have this meaning. Why could not the Holy One, manifested to His reasonable creatures in a form of sense, have ended a life of beneficence and glory by such a visible ascent to heaven as was that of the Tishbite? Why those years of privation and sorrow, those sufferings and insults, that shame and scorn? Why the prostration in the garden, and the Wounds and the Blood, and the agony lengthened out by ingenious cruelty, and the ostentatious exultation and triumph of the hosts of evil, and the darkness and gloom of the closing scene? Would not this mean failure, if it had not been proved by the event to mean a victory, wherein the Divine Sufferer was triumphing, as His Apostle notes, over the associated powers of darkness?¹ That unfathomed pain is the true measure of sin for Christians. In that keen sensitiveness, in that strength of a self-sacrificing Will, in that exhaustive anticipation of and intellectual familiarity with the coming Agony, followed by so entire an acceptance of it, we Christians discern the real character of the adversary which the Perfect Moral Being

¹ Col. ii. 15.
conquered by His voluntary death. From that fountain of pardon and strength which He opened upon Calvary, all the resources which His Church can wield in her struggle with His great enemy, and in her continuation of His work of reconciliation and peace, are consistently derived. No virtue exists in the world which is not His; no cleansing which His Blood has not made good. Standing beneath the Cross, we can never deem moral evil less or other than the greatest, if it be not rather the only evil. Kneeling before the Crucified, be our sense of guilt what it may, we can never despair; since the complete revelation of the malignity of sin is also and simultaneously a revelation of the Love that knows no bounds.  

It is these concrete truths, and no abstract considerations, which really keep alive in the Christian heart an abhorrence and dread of moral evil. With that evil, even when all has been pardoned, every Christian life is, from first to last, in varying degrees, a struggle. There are great conflicts, and there are periods of comparative repose; there are days of failure as well as days of victory; there are quickenings of buoyant thankful hope, and there are hours of a discouragement which is only not despair. But two things a genuine Christian never does. He never makes light of any known sin, and he never admits it to be invincible. While he constantly endeavours, by the sanctification of his desires, by entwining his affections more

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1 Acts iv. 12.  
2 Cor. v. 14; Rom. v. 15.  
1 S. John iii. 9; v. 18.  
1 Cor. x. 12.
and more around the Source of goodness, to destroy sin in the bud, or rather in its root and principle, he is never off his guard; never surprised at new proofs of his natural weakness; never disposed to underrate either his dangers or his strength. He knows that now, as eighteen centuries ago, he wrestles not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers that bear him no good will; he knows, that as at the first so now, "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins." And thus, in his inmost life, he is at once anxious and hopeful; confident yet without presumption; alive to all that is at stake day by day, hour by hour; yet stayed upon the thought, nay, upon the felt presence of a Love Which has not really left him to himself. And at last, when it seems 'best to that Eternal Love, the day of struggle draws to its close;' and, the towers of the Everlasting City come into view; the city within whose precincts intellectual error cannot penetrate, and moral failure is unknown. "Thanks be to God Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

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Your alms are asked to-day on behalf of the additional clergy needed by this great parish with its twenty thousand

1 Eph. v. 12.  
2 Tim. iv. 6.  
3 1 S. John ii. 1.  
4 1 Cor. xv. 57.
poor.¹ You will feel that this is an opportunity of testing the earnestness of your desire to struggle against our common enemy, whether in the world or in your own hearts, by freely placing your means at His disposal, Who is its only real Conqueror.

¹ St. James's, Piccadilly, Additional Curates' Fund.