

LA MORALE.

PAR PAUL JANET.

Books on Ethics are not in general very attractive. "Moral" is regarded as equivalent to "stupid"; and the disputes between ethical writers are often considered as senseless as the endless controversies of theologians. But the central place occupied by Morals in the conduct of life, as in the mind of the universe, and the determining power of theory over practice make the subject of such commanding importance as to require attention to any noteworthy contribution to ethical discussions.

La Morale, by the distinguished author of "Final Causes," is worthy of notice also for the clearness of style, the definiteness of statement, and the closeness of reasoning which its pages reveal. These qualities soon make the reader forget that he is reading French and not English; the mind of the author finds the reader in the way characteristic of only strong writers. The book is interesting, too; both when we agree with the author and when we differ from him. Space will not admit of a review of the work but we desire to call attention to it by quoting some of its principal statements and making a few references to its leading doctrines.

The author's object is to state the principles and the fundamental ideas of moral science. His fundamental principle is that moral good suppose a *natural* good, which is anterior to it, and which serves as a foundation for it. From this it follows that if all the objects of our actions were themselves indifferent, as the Stoics say, it would be impossible to comprehend why we should be held to seek the one rather than the other; and moral law would be void of all contents. If natural good is the ultimate object the question at once arises how are we to discover this *good*. On this point Janet says, these natural goods, anterior to moral good and which ought to be the object of a choice are not valued by the pleasure which they procure us, but by an intrinsic character which we call their excellence, and which is independent of our manner of feeling. He thus denies that *pleasure* and *pain* are the standards by which we determine the moral-quality of actions, and thereby places himself in opposition to the simplest form of utilitarianism. In agreement with his view he holds that the ancients properly arranged goods into three classes: external

goods, bodily goods, goods of the soul, and that they considered goods of the soul as superior to those of the body, and the latter as superior to those of external good. What is most excellent for man is therefore the excellence of his soul, and in his soul the highest and best part is the personality, that is to say, the reasonable will. But the excellence of the personality does not consist in itself; it consists in its union with the personality of other men, that is to say, in fraternity, and also in its devotion to impersonal goods, such as the beautiful, the true and the holy. This ideal excellence of the human person is what is called perfection, and it can be said with Wolf, that good is perfection. This is different from the general trend of utilitarian doctrine, especially from the creed of Bentham's School, by whom it is the quantity of pleasures, their sum, their intensity, much more than by their price and their intrinsic value that good is estimated.

But Janet holds that from his distinction between good and pleasure it does not follow that pleasure may not be a good; for he admits with Aristotle that pleasure is inseparable from the act, that the most elevated act gives the most elevated pleasure, and that perfection is itself a source of happiness. It is in this sense that we can say with Aristotle, with Malebranche, with Leibnitz, that good is happiness.

This view, however, is far from making pleasure the chief thing, and is but little more than Stewart might admit. It is certain that pleasure comes from doing good.

Janet argues this point as follows: Good for man can be only his own proper good, for it would be absurd to hold that a being is required to pursue an aim contrary to his nature. All laws have for their object the advantage of the subjects whose laws they are, and accordingly it would be strange indeed if the moral law alone should be for the detriment of those whom it commands. It would then be a law of tyranny, not of justice and love.

Thus good is at the same time happiness. But happiness is not, as Bentham would have it a calculation, a choice, a combination of pleasures; it is the highest joy, the purest pleasure, adequate to the highest excellence.

While Janet thus gives great force to pleasure, he by no means fails to recognize the sense of duty. He says that the doctrine of perfection and the doctrine