

JANET'S ELEMENTS OF MORALS.*

It is a frequent complaint with teachers of Ethics, whether theoretical or practical, that they cannot find a text-book which is quite adapted for their work. There are plenty of good books on Ethics, on the intuitional side and on the utilitarian; but the difficulty is to find one which the teacher can put into the hands of his pupils as a kind of basis for his lectures. Some weeks ago we drew attention to an English translation of M. Janet's *Theory of Morals*, a work dealing with the foundations and principles of morality. We are now able to recommend a smaller work by the same author of a practical character, which, we believe, will be found most useful as a text-book for the teaching of the principles of practical morality.

There are still persons, we believe, who object to the systematic teaching of human duties. The objection comes, in fact, from two opposite quarters. It comes from those who say that morality can be gained only by example and habit, and cannot be taught. This form of objection is not very common among ourselves, and it is easily met by the simple statement that human conduct is of comparatively small value, and it has no certain permanence unless it is based on principle. The teaching of morality, therefore, must begin, as the book before us does begin, with "preliminary notions" or the elementary principles of goodness and virtue.

The objection which comes from the opposite quarter has behind it the strength of a Christian principle exaggerated or imperfectly understood. It is expressed by Young in his "Night Thoughts":

Talk they of morals, O Thou bleeding Love,
The grand morality is love of Thee.

It is possible that the highly imaginative, but in fact somewhat worldly-minded, poet meant no more than this: that mere external acts could not well be taught apart from the principle which alone could sustain them, the love of God and man, learnt best of all at the Cross of Christ. However this may be, there are many who go further, and declare that the teaching of faith is sufficient, and that details of duty are unimportant and the teaching of them rather hurtful than otherwise. We have not room here to argue this question at length. We would, however, ask these well-meaning people to read the Bible from which they profess to draw their principles, to consult their own experience when they are acting spontaneously and without reference to these cut and dried theories; and perhaps we might further bid them consider cases in which their principles have been most faithfully acted upon, and consider the results.

There perhaps never was a country or an age in which it was more necessary that there should be in our Public Schools a well-considered method of moral instruction than in this country and in this age. It seems hopeless that any dogmatic form of Christianity should be adopted as acceptable to the various communions into which Christians are divided; but we are still agreed that there is a good and an evil, a right and a wrong; that children should be taught to choose the good and to refuse the evil; and we are further agreed that the sanction for moral law is to be found in the existence of a personal God. Even the few Agnostics who are to be found among us would hardly object to the last consideration so long as ethical teaching is put on a scientific basis, and is not promulgated by the mere authority of a Church or even of an alleged Divine Revelation.

M. Janet's book meets this want in a very admirable manner. According to him morality is based on religion; but even those who object to the introduction of religious motives will hardly be offended by the manner in which they are here employed. It is indeed difficult to find a wholly consistent theory of Ethics apart from the being of God. What other idea will reconcile the A-priorist and the Utilitarian? The Utilitarian is quite right in saying that a thing cannot be right unless it does, on the whole, contribute to the highest good of being. The Intuitionalist is right when he says that we discern certain principles and actions as right and wrong apart from their consequences. When we arise to the thought of One who is absolute Perfection and infinite Blessedness, then we see how these two theories are reconciled.

So again, when we are told, for example, by Jonathan Edwards that virtue consists in benevolence to being; and by Butler and the Stoics that it consists in living according to Nature, we find the reconciliation in the Nature of God which is itself Benevolence, and which, reflected in the character of His creatures, is the highest virtue.

This somewhat metaphysical part of the subject, however, was more completely discussed in the larger work on the *Theory of Morals*. In the

present book the "preliminary notions" occupy only thirty-two pages out of the whole 353 of which the volume consists. The rest of it is given to a systematic consideration of the duties of life. The completeness of the treatment will be seen from an enumeration of the heads discussed. The author begins by enunciating the general principles of Social Morality with the division of duties. In theory, he says there is but one duty, namely, to do right; but this duty is sub-divided according to the various relations of man. Hence three classes of duties, duties towards ourselves, towards others, and towards God; in other words, individual, social, and religious morality.

In carrying out this division, he begins with social morality, treating of justice and equity, of charity and self-sacrifice, of duties towards the State, of professional duties, international duties, and family duties. From these he passes to individual morality, treating of duties relative to the body, of those which relate to external goods, to the intellect, and to the will. He then passes on to religious morality. He bases this upon the religious sentiment which has two elements: (1) the sentiment of the infinite, and (2) the need of hope and consolation. He argues that this sentiment involves duties, and lays down that God is the surety of the moral law. This part of his book is brief but excellent, and can be objected to only by the fanaticism which refuses to study such subjects apart from the mere words of Scripture texts, and the equally irrational fanaticism which refuses to consider whether man's religious sentiments may not be a reality which involves religious needs. The last chapter, on Moral Medicine and Gymnastics, is, of course, from a Christian point of view, imperfect; but we venture to say that there are few Christian teachers who may not learn something from it which they can use in their practical teaching, and further, that the child which is educated in any principles, religious or unreligious, will be the worse for not having such guidance and such cautions as are here suggested.

We have thus given a slight sketch of the design and contents of this useful and handy book, while we have briefly insisted upon the importance of the kind of teaching which it has been written to afford. We need only further add, as regards the particular contents of the work, its method, manner, arguments, and style, it would be difficult to imagine anything better adapted for its purposes. Like the best French writers, M. Janet has a style which is surpassingly lucid and graceful. One tries to think how terribly different in this respect a German book on the same subject would have been. Moreover, this one has suffered hardly at all in its translation into English. But the style is not its chief excellence. It is full of vivid illustration, of apt and happy quotation, and throughout it is pervaded by a vivacity of expression which will prevent the reader from ever imagining that the study of Moral Philosophy must be dull and uninviting.

C.

GEOLOGICAL SURVEYS.

It is not yet apparent what action will be taken on the report of the Select Committee of the House "to obtain information with regard to Geological Surveys"; but the investigations of the Committee have made it sufficiently evident that the usefulness of our Dominion Survey, under its present management, has been brought in question with justice, and that radical changes in the system have become imperative.

The importance of a good Survey in a country like our own, when mineral wealth, or the rumours of mineral wealth, are cropping up every day, can hardly be over-estimated. Conducted by the Government, and therefore presumably for the best interests of the country, its authoritative and disinterested information should be invaluable, not only in leading the way to the discovery of the valuable metals and minerals, but in averting the disasters of hasty speculation by wise discouragement. Infallibility, of course, could not be claimed for the work of any survey; but few will doubt at this day, who are acquainted with the subject, that the practical interpretation of the geological facts of a country (its stratigraphy, its palæontology, its chemistry) is indispensable for economical mining.

The Committee's report clearly shows that the Survey, as now conducted, almost entirely ignores practical questions, and is devoted, with the approval of the Director, to the study of Indian ethnology, and to the patient accumulation of archæological curiosities. These are doubtless very interesting, and the study of them might with propriety be pursued at the expense of the Government; but they should not over-ride the more important questions which immediately concern the development of our country. The great North-West is daily giving evidence of mineral wealth, and systematic information of its geology, illustrated by suitable maps, should be available for investor and prospector alike. We do not doubt but that the Director really considers the questions which have seemingly

* *Elements of Morals*: with Special Application of the Moral Law to the Duties of the Individual and of Society and the State. By Paul Janet. Barnes & Co., New York.