

FREE THOUGHT JOURNAL



Vol. 1.

TORONTO, NOVEMBER 20TH, 1877.

No. 3.

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MORALITY.

BY B. F. UNDERWOOD.

Morality depends not upon any system of faith ; it requires no miraculous evidence ; it is independent of theological dogma ; no supernatural influence can heighten its beauty ; no ecclesiastical influence can strengthen its obligations ; it is confined to no one country, limited to no one age, restricted to no one form of faith, the exclusive possession of no one class, sect, order, nation or race of men ; it requires no written decalogue, needs no single individual authority ; theology cannot add to it, neither can it take from it. It has its indestructible basis in the nature of man as a feeling, thinking, acting being, and in society as an aggregation of such beings, with the manifold relations and the acknowledged rights and duties that spring therefrom.

Empires rise and perish, religions grow and decay, special forms of civilization appear and give way to other types ; but, as amid all the mutations of human existence, the nature of man remains essentially the same, and as through all these changes the social condition overlastingly persists, morality can never be without a foundation as broad and deep and enduring as humanity itself. It changes not, but, as Cicero says, it is “the same at Rome and at Athens to day and to-morrow ; alone eternal and invariable, it binds all nations and all times.” Its highest standard is the enlightened reason of man. The better man understands his nature, and the more he is capable, by reason of intelligence and culture, of comprehending the object of society and his relations thereto, the better understanding he will have of the principles of morality.

Theologians could have no idea of moral qualities unless they had discovered them in humanity. They are observed in man, and as in him they are admired in contrast to opposite qualities, they are ascribed to God ; and these theologians having invested God with human qualities and denied to man what they have borrowed from him with which to invest God before they could form any conception of him as a moral being, most ungratefully, as well as inconsistently, declare there can be no morality independently of their theological system and book revelation. Of course it is nothing to ignore the fact that, before either the one or the other appeared, society existed and nations flourished essentially the same as they do to-day.

One would suppose, from the claims which are frequently made, that there was no morality before the Christian era ; that men were entirely wanting in knowledge of what is right and in the disposition to do it ; in short, that all men were thieves, robbers and murderers before they heard of Jesus Christ !

The morality of the advanced nations to day is commonly called *Christian morality* ; but only with the same disregard of truth which is implied in denying the existence of virtue and goodness before Christ and outside of Christendom. *The morality of this age does not owe its existence to any religion, to any book, to any historic character*, however much or little any one of these has influenced mankind. Our present conception of morality has grown through many centuries of human experience, and exists now only because, by many mistakes and much suffering, man has learned its adaptedness to his wants. It is the result of the combined influence of our natural character and education. To ascribe it to the dominant religion were as absurd as to attribute the enlightenment of the ancient Greeks to their mythology, or the enlightenment of the Saracens of Spain in the ninth and tenth centuries, when darkness enveloped Christian Europe, to Mohammedanism.

The fact is, with the advancement of the human mind, with discoveries in science and progress in morality, believers in *all* systems of religion modify their views so as to adjust them to the new order of things, always claiming, in ancient and in modern times, in Egypt, India, Greece, Rome, Turkey, England, America, that they find authority for the new ideas or reforms (after they