VII.—CRITICAL NOTICES.

The Morality of Nations : a Study in the Evolution of Ethics. By HUGH TAYLOR. London : Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1888. Pp. 316.

A subject with such infinite variety of bearings as Ethics easily lends itself to different modes of treatment. Every phase of human development, every department of history, every aspect of man's life, gives to morality a peculiar point of departure. A complete ethics presupposes an exhaustive study of human nature in each and all its elements. Now psychology claims chief importance as an ethical discipline, now sociology; one philosopher sublimates morality into a metaphysical formula, another dissipates it into a social organism; here, it rises up into religion, and there, it is indistinguishable from law. There is room for all, if they are not exclusive; and there is need of a patient and comprehensive thinker if they are not to become dogmatically incomplete.

The present essay professedly shirks the main ethical question. Morality, as the author remarks, is a matter of self-adjustment, and individual effort can alone lead morality to progress (p. 257). The deepest root of morality lies in respect for our own personality ("individuality" Mr. Taylor quaintly calls it). The true source of good as of evil lies in the individual disposition of each political unit (p. 293). And as the source of all conduct is really there, so the highest type of moralisation lies in acquiring such an abstract basis of principle as makes a man a spontaneous and independent fountain of justice and goodness, not a mere channel through which runs a public and common beneficence. Yet though this is admitted, it is not in that direction that Mr. Taylor's investigations proceed. He finds this abstract idealism too good for human nature's daily food, and moral philosophers with their categorical duty have dwelt upon it to the extent of ignoring topics of greater practical and scientific interest.

Nor is Mr. Taylor a stranger to the theories which rest moral distinctions on certain instincts, senses, faculties and intuitions. Such instincts he adduces in large numbers. There are altruistic instincts in man just as there are egoistic appetites; there are germs of morality exhibited in sexual and parental love; there are indwelling instincts of order and self-government; jets of self-sacrifice penetrate the rock of selfishness; and a conviction that the rule of self-assertion would turn life into a chaos gives to the individual mind an eternal measure of right and wrong (p. 159). Morality has an intuitive force: conscience and moral sense raise their voice in the human mind.

There is, then, a moral sense ; but it is not universal (p. 196), and it does not afford sufficient guidance for conduct even in those whom it inhabits. The problem which Mr. Taylor sets himself to solve is to consider how, in fact, the world of right, the rule of justice, has been established ; how the majority has come to recognise and obey, at least in a sort of way, the moral intuition and "prophetic promptings" of its more gifted leaders. For—so he states his case—morality originates in the sporadic phenomenon, occurring now and again, of instincts of self-sacrifice and respect for others, which, through a favourable conjunction of circumstances, have, by an alliance with political power, succeeded in enforcing general submission to their dictates. Not in every people has morality been so invested with large authority. There are slow, unprogressive races which have never got beyond fossilised institutions, containing no germ of advance ; and with such the question of ethical evolution has nothing to do. The student of the genesis of morals turns his attention to the advancing races which hand on one from another the torch of morality to the present day and to its most moralised communities.

But the morality which is thus fostered and handed down is not the morality of the individual—the ideal of the perfectionist or of the utilitarian. It is not the problem of self-adjustment we have to study, but of social adjustment and re-adjustment. It is the institution of right, law, justice,—the organisation of the medium in which morality may flourish,—the problem of Hobbes, in short, and not the problem of Kant, which Mr. Taylor hopes to solve. How does the fundamental idea of right—respect for the "individuality" of others—become a reality and not a mere faculty amongst other possibilities ? For such possibilities are numerous.

To his own contributions on this point Mr. Taylor gives the misleading title of the "Antagonistic Theory of Morals," and he describes the morality he considers as the "morality of nations," i.e., the morality which has its sphere of operation in the relation between man and man in those combinations that are called "nations". The abstract expression of such relations (and of these alone) constitutes the morality of which he speaks. It is his own admission that morality arose only when antagonism gave way to the principle of self-repression and accommodation : that morality (by which, of course, is always meant right) is combination, or, to speak more correctly, the terms and conditions of combination. But that does not hinder Mr. Taylor from stating that "morality is the result of destructive antagonism," and that "antagonism is the central fact from which a moral theory has to start". He complains that moral philosophers have not done their duty by the phenomenon of war. They pass lightly by its horrors, and they offer no explanation of its origin and function. No doubt the moralist *pur sang* no more

discusses the institution of war than he questions the legitimacy of the family-tie. But the moral philosopher who rises to the height of his great argument has never failed to point out the necessary function of the god of battles in a world like ours, where offences must needs come. What Mr. Taylor's explanation amounts to is as follows. The first tendency of all organic beings is towards antagonism (p. 214). Mere proximity is a sufficient reason for contest. The dominance of the fighting instinct seems to throw into the shade even the supposed primary appetite towards self-preservation; and the latent tendency towards happiness which, as evolutionists are good enough to assume, governs the course of human progress in history stands only second as a conscious principle to the terrible instinct of antagonism. Conflict or antagonism is what is called in certain circles a law. It is true that self-sacrifice is also called a law. But trifles like these which suggest at least two legislations—two planes of human life—need not detain us. Sufficient be it to know that Evolution (the modern word for what old-fashioned people call Nature or God) equipped her organisms for the needs of their selfish life with a boundless stock of antagonistic spirit.

It is a mild way of describing the state of affairs which would arise in these circumstances to say that it was a period in which there was "no family-cohesion". Yet it may be doubted if our author means to be seriously taken at his word. Such "cohesion" in some degree or other can never have been absent altogether; but it may be that its early effects were fitful, vague and transient. There was a little altruism—a little respect for the rights of others—in the world; but its security could not be counted on. Antagonism, thus unchecked by fear, would not allow the seeds of right to grow: it was destructive of all justice and beneficence. Its action, so long as thus misdirected, was a curse to man, and the moralised world remained only the dream of a few enthusiasts, who, sometimes daring boldly to be altruistic before it 'paid,' fell victims to the toils of rival selfishness.

The problem, then, is to bind the demon of antagonism, not to destroy him, but by judicious manipulations to convert him from the foe into the friend of man, to transform antagonism to emulation in the service of love. The germ of morality in the family-relationships—frail and fleeting as they were—had to be developed; and "when evolution tended to the formation and consolidation of families, civilisation and morality were assured". What, then, led to the formation of that social organism, which our essayist, with strange oblivion of certain animal societary forms, pronounces an anomaly? For in the formation of a community wielded by one authority—what Mr. Taylor calls a "nation," and what many have lately learned to call a 'State'—lies the secret. Antagonism, which unchecked is a curse, is turned into a comparative blessing by nationalising it. National

war is the safety-valve by which the superfluous energies of antagonism are turned off so as to leave the instincts of right room to develop inside the limits of the nation. Hostility thus turned off on other nations, the law of antagonism, we are told, so changed its form as to reverse its original effects. It is difficult to attach any meaning to the literal phrase ; but it is probably a paradoxical way of announcing that when the temptation to selfishness was removed, when violent egoism was no longer allowed free play, then other "instincts" wrought out the good work of justice and undid the mischief of the pure spirit of hatred. With the institution of a single control, individuals were able to look at each other with indifference.

Thus the warrior and the conqueror are helps to the moral progress of the world. Indirectly, because they concentrate in their military mission the bad blood of rivalry which used to burst out everywhere, and leave others, freed from the feverish taint, to pursue higher and in especial moral ends. Directly, because the spirit of conquest and warlike efficiency communicates a sympathetic stimulus to all ranges of activity in the nation ; the conquering spirit is not alien to the progressive ; and a strong national self-consciousness is a condition of individual greatness. It is in such a community under political sovereignty that right can exist : only as constituted by the relations established between the members of it does morality have a local habitation and substantial being. Whether any further developments of morality and right are possible will appear in the sequel.

But how is such a consummation brought about ? What, in short, is the relation of morality to force ? for that is the question which moral science has to solve : How does might stand to right ? On the priority of force Mr. Taylor has no doubts whatever. He has already given expression to his belief that the family affords no sufficient basis for the political control principle : unless we suppose that on rare occasions the family is obliged to close its ranks in the serried phalanx which befits war against other families. He is no less contemptuous of the theory of Maine, that law is in large part the growth of peaceful and spontaneous custom—the work of a community gradually finding out the conditions of social stratification. Indeed, on his original assumption of atomic human beings, destitute of the least patch of social glue, it is impossible that any other source of social unification can be adduced than the casual preponderance of some one man. The origin of unity, national or political (the two terms are interchangeable), is violence—force. Custom, peacefully developed, is a spurious procedure, of which the right-minded evolutionist is ashamed : he prefers a sudden and erratic invasion. Changes in social condition are the result of accident ; and up rises controlling power. It was but a chance that man spoke—he might never have used his vocal chords ; it was a chance that

he became moral, for he was so seamed by selfishness; and it was an accident that made him the 'political animal'.

Mr. Taylor describes at some length the main features of the reign of force. At first it stood in all the nakedness of violent might. *Im Anfang war die That*—the deed of violent usurpation. Without it the bondless multitude would vegetate on in aimlessness,—eating, drinking and multiplying: with it came the lightning-flash which cleared the air and brought fertilisation of mind and manners. Is it necessary to say that such a theory is fantastic? The annals of early—and of all—ages show, it is true, painfully conspicuous the disturbing action of brute force, but they do not show it alone and solely operative. The picture of the Romans as the human bull-dogs of the Mediterranean is overdrawn. The Roman conquest is not one long roll of unjust aggressions. Rather in national wars, as in pettier struggles, right and wrong are mysteriously mixed up; and though the reason alleged by diplomacy may often be fiction, that may only be because feeling feels its way through the meshes of motives which reflection is too slow to analyse. So much for the somewhat fancifully told story of Carneades (p. 59). Indeed, Mr. Taylor is himself aware that some form of what he calls "moral survival" is indispensable in every society. In other words, no society, however rude or violent, could exist if its members flourished merely because of their physical and intellectual adaptation to their medium. In some measure it must answer to serve the general interest: self-abnegation must be found beneficial by those who practise it. And the first controller of wild wills was not a mere soldier of force and skill; he was also, in however small degree, the minister and organ of the common good.

But Mr. Taylor, omitting this element, proceeds in Carlylesque mood to note the natural pride in the power of the mighty which the multitude feel toward their conquerors, and the hero-worship which greets successful usurpation, at least in the second generation. An easy descent of imagination turns the rule of force into the authority of hereditary right: it even goes a step further, and attributes to the sovereign a charter of power from heaven. Thus force is gradually covered over by the decorative hand of imagination, and sovereign might is converted into kingly right,—just as filial reverence for the commands of parents is the real historic source out of which has come the ideal sense of duty. And with regard to all such genealogies, let the *ex nihilo nihil fit* be remembered: science knows of no development save of the germ into the full-grown organism, and no variations save variations within a species. If there is no right in the first might, no lapse of time will ever confer it, though it may modify and complicate its actual organisation. Political power is ever a social, not an individual, fact, even in its origin: it was the perception of this truth which found expression (unfortunately ambiguous) in the theory of Social Contract.

Mr. Taylor sees that force does not originate, but only consolidate, exhibit, demonstrate morality, making it a palpable and real fact. So, too, he should see that law is more than the mere creation of a political control—more than a mere act of repression. It may not be without some justification that he protests against the idea, which seems to lurk in some heads, that customary law springs up in some mystical mode of growth from a collective body. Quite true that all initiative must be individual. But it need not on that account be merely violent. Rather in the alliance between force and right (neither being in this world at any stage quite absolute) force in each age cannot create law, but can only enforce it. And instead of describing law as “an artificial device for securing a uniform rate of moral progress” (p. 192) in a progressive state, whereas in the beginning of social concentration it was only the command of an “arbitrary power evoked and sustained by the blind forces of evolution” (p. 197), it seems truer to say that law is never so artificial as it is represented in the one passage, nor so casual as in the other; but rather that, like all human affairs, it exhibits a growing tendency to reasonable consistency from a point which is no mere zero of intellect to a terminus which is equally ideal. We know nothing of a man who was the hopeless sport of natural or ‘evolutionary’ freak; nothing of a man who is nature’s and evolution’s absolute master.

We have not space to follow Mr. Taylor’s treatment of the question of justice. Like many writers before him, he is puzzled by the apparently fluctuating nature of the conception—by the contrast between the inner and the outward, the form and matter, the letter and the spirit of justice. Perhaps a little reflection will show that there is a like distinction of shell and kernel in other aspects of virtue. The old question, ‘Is virtue one or many?’ returns in new shapes, and the distinction between legality and morality is more convenient than fully defensible. But it is no doubt possible to trace some progress in the action of the community as it becomes more and more organised. The writer of the Fifth Book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* distinguished between the mechanism of society for the purpose of deciding disputes (the method of proportionate equality) and the disposition or character which aims at avoiding all conduct that can cause dispute; and Mr. Taylor imitates him. What he might have perhaps pointed out more clearly is the progress of morality which consists, as Plato noted, in its growing inwardness—in its discovery that its true imperative reads (as Mr. Stephen says) not ‘Do this’ or ‘Refrain from that,’ but ‘Be thus’. It is however fair to add that Mr. Taylor does give a few words to the higher stage of morality when the individual is not a mere mouthpiece of the social fabric (probably he is never quite so low as that), but is himself an adequate embodiment of the universal principles of sociality.

Within the shelter of the political unity the family is for the

first time enabled to pursue its proper functions without being disturbed by extraneous work, and it comes to be, not (as the essayist represents it) a standard to test morality in general, but the first, nearest and most permanent combination in which antagonism is partially transmuted. But equally within the State other associations (Mr. Taylor's "combinations"—he seems to use "association" for aggregation) become formed and other aims are pursued. Economic immorality repeats on a gigantic scale the same unrestrained self-seeking as prevailed in the pre-association stage: political parties fly each at the other's throat, and rich and poor stand suspicious and suspected on different sides of a great gulf. Within the State, in short, combination is not very moralising: it seeks its own good, and cares little about others: the only hope of reformation is in individual agency. The State, in short, has only given us a home to live a moral life in, and to the individual the mandate rings out—*Spartam nactus, hanc orna*.

So with the question of international morality—the morality from nation to nation. The nation as such is brutally immoral. Nor is there much hope or cheer in the prospect of a federation of nations, even if there were any signs of its coming, and not rather a crowd of portents indicative of the creation of new nationalities more essentially antagonistic than the old. The hope here, too, lies in the transformation of the individual into a being whose cosmic sympathies respond more than ever to the touch of human nature, as well as to the nearer body of nationality—into a complete manhood, self-centred because ruled not by the attractions of a petty clique or isolated aim but by the better-learned and better-loved interests of humanity.

But *Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan*. A high place in the evolution of the moral world is assigned by Mr. Taylor to Woman. It was genius that first grasped the dim outlines of the great moral law, and genius that invented the machinery for realising them. But, while genius has only its day, and then is over, Woman ministers for ever at the shrine of goodness and righteousness by that spirit of love which is the ultimate dynamic of right conduct. It would be ungracious to analyse these enthusiasms: and to inquire into the place of *woman* in the redemption of the world from force and fraud is a task which no *man* can pursue with an unbiassed or particularly well-informed mind.

Next time we meet Mr. Taylor, we hope he may have widened his acquaintance with modern systems of thought, which will give a clearer perspective to his ideas. He might also devote a little more effort to the lucid expression of them.

W. WALLACE.