

M O R A L
 P H I L O S O P H Y.



B O O K I.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS.



C H A P. I.—7

Definition and Use of the Science.

MORALITY, Moral Philosophy, Ethics, Casuistry,
 Natural Law, mean all the same thing; namely,
*That science which teaches men their duty and the
 reasons of it.*

The use of such a study depends upon this, that,
 without it, the rules of life, by which men are ordinarily
 governed, oftentimes mislead them, thro' a defect either
 in the rule, or in the application.

These rules are, the Law of Honour, the Law of the
 Land, and the Scriptures.

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CHAP.

2 THE LAW OF HONOUR.

C H A P. II.

The Law of Honour.

THE Law of Honour is a system of rules constructed by people of fashion, and calculated to facilitate their intercourse with one another: and for no other purpose.

Consequently, nothing is adverted to by the Law of Honour, but what tends to incommode this intercourse.

Hence this law only prescribes and regulates the duties *betwixt equals*; omitting such as relate to the Supreme Being, as well as those which we owe to our inferiors.

For which reason profaneness; neglect of public worship or private devotion; cruelty to servants; rigorous treatment of tenants or other dependants; want of charity to the poor; injuries done to tradesmen by insolvency or delay of payment; with numberless examples of the same kind, are accounted no breaches of honour; because a man is not a less agreeable companion for these vices, nor the worse to deal with, in those concerns which are usually transacted between persons of honour.

Again,

THE LAW OF THE LAND. 3

Again, the Law of Honour being constituted by men occupied in the pursuit of pleasure, and for the mutual convenience of such men, will be found, as might be expected from the character and design of the law-makers, to be, in most instances, favourable to the licentious indulgence of the natural passions.

Thus it allows of fornication, adultery, drunkenness, prodigality, duelling, and revenge in the extreme; and lays no stress upon the virtues opposite to these.

C H A P. III.

The Law of the Land.

THAT part of mankind, who are beneath the Law of Honour, often make the Law of the Land their rule of life; that is, they are satisfied with themselves, so long as they do or omit nothing, for the doing or omitting of which the law can punish them.

Whereas every system of human laws, considered as a rule of life, labours under the two following defects:

I. Human laws omit many duties, as not objects of compulsion; such as piety to God, bounty to the poor, forgive-

4 THE LAW OF THE LAND.

forgiveness of injuries, education of children, gratitude to benefactors, &c.

The Law, never speaks but to command, nor commands but where it can compell; consequently those duties, which by their nature must be *voluntary*, are left out of the statute book, as lying beyond the reach of it's operation and authority.

II. Human laws permit, or which is the same thing, suffer to go unpunished, many crimes, because incapable of being defined by any previous description.—Of which nature is luxury, prodigality, partiality in voting at those elections, where the qualification of the candidate ought to determine the success—caprice in the disposition of men's fortunes at their death—disrespect to parents—and a multitude of similar examples.

For this is the alternative; the Law must either define, beforehand, and with precision, the offences which it punishes, or must leave it to the *discretion* of the magistrate, to determine upon each particular case, whether it constitutes that offence which the law designed to punish, or not; which is, in effect, leaving it to the magistrate to punish or not to punish, at his pleasure, the individual who is brought before him—which is just so much tyranny. Where, therefore, as in the instances above-mentioned, the distinction between right and wrong is of too subtle or too secret a nature, to be ascertained by any preconcerted language,

THE SCRIPTURES.

5

language, the law of most countries, especially of free states, rather than commit the liberty of the subject to the discretion of the magistrate, leaves men in such cases to themselves.

C H A P. IV.

The Scriptures.

WHOEVER expects to find in the Scriptures, particular directions for every moral doubt that arises, looks for more than he will meet with. And to what a magnitude such a detail of particular precepts would have enlarged the sacred volume, may be partly understood from hence—The laws of this country, including the acts of the legislature and the decisions of our supreme courts of justice, are not contained in fewer than fifty folio volumes; and yet it is not one time in ten, that you can find the case you look for, in any law-book whatever; to say nothing, of those numerous points of conduct, in which the law does not profess to prescribe or determine any thing.

Had then the same particularity, which obtains in human laws, so far as they go, been attempted in the Scriptures,

THE SCRIPTURES.

tures, throughout theiwhole extent of morality, it is manifest, they would have been by much too bulky to be either read or circulated; or rather as St. John says, “ even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.”

Morality is taught in Scripture in this wise—General rules are laid down of piety, justice, benevolence, and purity—such as worshiping God in spirit and in truth—doing as we would be done by—loving our neighbour as ourself—forgiving others, as we expect forgiveness from God—that mercy is better than sacrifice—that not that which entereth into a man, (nor by parity of reason, any ceremonial pollutions) but that which proceedeth from the heart, defileth him. Several of these rules are occasionally illustrated, either in *fiſtitious examples*, as the parable of the good Samaritan—of the cruel servant, who refused to his fellow-servant, that indulgence and compassion which his master had just shewn to him; or in *instances which actually presented themselves*, as the reproof of his disciples at the Samaritan village—the praise of the poor widow, who cast in her last mite—the censure of the Pharisees, who chose out the chief rooms—and of the tradition, whereby they evaded the command to sustain their indigent parents—or in *the resolution of questions, which those about our Saviour proposed to him*, as his answer to the young man who asked him, “ What lack I yet?” and to the honest scribe, who had found out even in that age and country, that to love God and

THE SCRIPTURES.

7

and his neighbour, was more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifice.

And this is the way in which all practical sciences are taught, as Arithmetic, Grammar, Navigation, and the like.-- Rules are laid down, and examples are subjoined; not that these examples are the cases, much less all the cases that will actually occur, but by way only of explaining the principle of the rule, and as so many specimens of the method of applying it.—The chief difference is, that the examples in Scripture are not annexed to the rules, with the didactic regularity to which we are now-a-days accustomed, but delivered dispersedly, as particular occasions suggested, which gave them however, especially to those who heard them, and were present to the occasions which produced them, an energy and persuasion, much beyond what the same, or any instances would have appeared with, in their places in a system.

Besides this, the Scriptures commonly presuppose in the person they speak to, a knowledge of the principles of natural justice; and are employed, not so much to teach *new* rules of morality, as to enforce the practice of it by *new* sanctions, and a *greater certainty*; which last part seems to be the proper business of a revelation from God; and what was most wanted.

Thus

8 THE MORAL SENSE.

Thus the “ unjust, covenant breakers, and extortioners are condemned in scripture, supposing it known, or leaving it, where it admits of doubt, to moralists to determine, what injustice, extortion, or breach of contract are.

The above considerations are intended to prove, that the scriptures do not supersede the use of the science we profess to treat of; and to acquit them of any charge of imperfection or insufficiency on that account.

C H A P. V.

The Moral Sense.

“ THE father of *Caius Toranius* had been proscribed by
 “ the triumvirate. *Caius Toranius* coming over to
 “ the interests of that party discovered to the officers, who
 “ were in pursuit of the old man’s life, the place where he
 “ concealed himself, and gave them withall a description,
 “ by which they might distinguish his person, when they
 “ found him. The aged parent, more anxious for the safety
 “ and fortunes of his son, than about the little that might
 “ remain of his own life, began immediately to enquire of
 “ the officers who seized him, whether his son was well,
 “ whether he had done his duty to the satisfaction of his
 “ generals. That son, replied one of the officers, so dear to
 thy

THE MORAL SENSE.

9

“ thy affections, betrayed thee to us ; by his information
 “ thou art apprehended, and dieſt. The officer with this
 “ ſtruck a poniard to his heart, and the unhappy father
 “ fell, not ſo much affected by his fate, as by the means
 “ to which he owed it.” *

Now the queſtion is, whether, if this ſtory were related to the wild boy, caught ſome years ago in the woods of Hanover, or to a ſavage, without experience, and without inſtruction, cut off, from his infancy, from all intercourſe with his ſpecies, and conſequently under no poſſible influence of example, authority, education, ſympathy, or habit ; whether, I ſay, ſuch a one would feel upon the relation, any degree of *that ſentiment of diſapprobation of Toranius's conduct*, which we feel, or not.

Thoſe who maintain the exiſtence of a moral ſenſe—of innate maxims—of a natural conſcience—that the love of virtue and hatred of vice are inſtinctive—or the perception

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of

* “ Caius Toranius triumvirum partes ſecutus, proſcripti patris ſui prætorii et ornati viri latebras, ætatem, notaſque corporis, quibus agnoſci poſſet, centurionibus edidit, qui eum perſecuti ſunt. Senex de filii magis vita, et incrementis, quam de reliquo ſpiritu ſuo ſollicitus ; an incolumis eſſet, et an imperatoribus ſatisfaceret, interrogare eos cœpit. E quibus unus : ab illo inquit, quem tantopere diligis, demonſtratus, noſtro miniſterio, filii indicio occideris : protinùſque pectus ejus gladio trajecit. Collapſus itaque eſt infelix, auctore cædis, quam ipſa cæde, miſerior.”

VALER. MAX. Lib. IX. Cap. II.

10 THE MORAL SENSE.

of right and wrong intuitive, (all which are only different ways of expressing the same thing) affirm that he would.

Those who deny the existence of a moral sense, &c. affirm that he would not.—

And upon this issue is joined.

As the experiment has never been tried ; and from the difficulty of procuring a subject (not to mention the impossibility of proposing the question to him, if we had one) is never likely to be tried, what would be the event, can only be judged of from probable reasons.

Those who contend for the affirmative, observe, that we approve examples of generosity, gratitude, fidelity, &c. and condemn the contrary, instantly—without deliberation—without having any interest of ours concerned in them—oftimes without being conscious of, or able to give, any reason for our approbation—that this approbation is uniform and universal ; the same sorts of conduct being approved or disapproved in all ages and countries of the world—All which circumstances, say they, strongly indicate the operation of an instinct or moral sense.

On the other hand, answers have been given to most of these arguments, by the patrons of the opposite system ; and

First,