

The Journal of Theological Studies

JULY, 1904

A MODERN THEORY OF THE FALL¹.

FOR a long time past—and not least since the Abbé Loisy published his little book on the *The Gospel and the Church*—we have had it urged upon us that the Christian faith needs to be presented afresh, in terms suited to the thought and knowledge of our time, and that to adhere to ancient modes of formulating it, is to court disaster for what Christians most prize. So familiar are we in England with this way of speaking, that it is difficult not sometimes to be a little impatient with it. The hearer considers the assertion to be a commonplace and a truism in itself, and waits to hear the new statement which is to be such an improvement upon the old.

Among those who have laboured the most earnestly to convert the truism into a reality, and to apply the general proposition to a particular doctrine, is Mr F. R. Tennant of Gonville and Caius College. His Hulsean Lectures on *The Origin and Propagation of Sin*, followed by a more extended and mainly historical work on *The Fall and Original Sin*, give abundant material for reflexion on the subject with which they deal; and believers who take an interest in the philosophy of their religion cannot afford not to read those works. The style of them is clear and telling; the learning which they disclose is most remarkable. The author is a man who has earned the right to be heard on topics such as these, by his eminence both in Natural Science and in Philosophy. His position is that of a sincere and devout Christian; and no one can read his books without feeling the dignity and high purpose with which Mr Tennant writes.

¹ A paper read to the Reading Branch of the Central Society of Sacred Study.

Even when his argument fails to carry conviction, it impresses the reader with deep respect for one who has courageously grappled with a difficult task,—a task for which he is much better qualified than most of his critics can ever hope to be. I for one am profoundly conscious that this is so.

The general belief of Christians,—at any rate of Western Christians and since the time of Augustine—has been that the first human beings lived for some undefined length of time in a state of innocence, from which, under stress of temptation, they fell, and that in consequence of their fall all subsequent generations of mankind have been sinful by heredity, and lie under condemnation from the outset. There have been various ways of propounding this doctrine in one part of it or another; but, broadly speaking, the belief, as I have stated it, has been the belief of Christendom.

It has become difficult to retain this belief in modern times. In particular, 'several natural sciences', as Mr Tennant says, are combined against that which forms the 'fundamental basis of the doctrine of the Fall', viz. the notion that mankind at its beginning existed in a state of original righteousness. 'Literary criticism', he says, 'and historical exegesis, Comparative Religion and Race-Psychology, Geology and Anthropology all contribute materially to the cumulative evidence on this head.'¹ And if we could maintain the theory of a state of original righteousness, it would be impossible to understand how the transition from that state could be brought about, or how a single act of sin could shatter and ruin the whole nature of the doer. Even if we could be convinced that our first parents had actually accomplished such a disastrous change in themselves, it is difficult to understand 'how the results of the Fall upon the nature of our first parents could be transmitted to their posterity by natural descent'².

The counter-theory of man's original condition now propounded to us is one which is based upon evolution and evolution alone. 'What if he were flesh before spirit; lawless, impulse-governed organism, fulfilling as such the nature necessarily his, and therefore the life God willed for him in his earliest age, until his moral consciousness was awakened, to start him, heavily weighted with the inherited load, not indeed of abnormal and corrupted nature,

¹ *Hulsean Lectures* pp. 26, 27.

² *ibid.* p. 31.

but of non-moral and necessary animal instinct and self-assertive tendency, on that race-long struggle of flesh with spirit and spirit with flesh, which for us, alas! becomes but another name for the life of sin. On such a view, man's moral evil would be the consequence of no defection from his endowment, natural or miraculous, at the start; it would bespeak rather the present non-attainment of his final goal.¹

The text, if I may so call it, of Mr Tennant's dissertations is contained in a sentence or two of Archdeacon Wilson's, expressed with all the vigour and forcibleness which we are accustomed to expect from him. 'Man fell according to science,' says the Archdeacon, 'when he first became conscious of the conflict of freedom and conscience. To the evolutionist sin is not an innovation, but is the survival or misuse of habits and tendencies that were incidental to an earlier stage in development, whether of the individual or the race, and were not originally sinful, but were actually useful. Their sinfulness lies in their anachronism: in their resistance to the evolutionary and Divine force that makes for moral development and righteousness.'²

This is the theory which I propose briefly to discuss. It will obviously be impossible to examine it in all its parts and bearings within the time at our disposal; and what I say must be considered, not as a refutation—or even as an attempt at a refutation—of the theory, but only as the offer of some considerations which, it seems to me, must be more fully weighed before the new theory can be adopted.

In passing, before examining Mr Tennant's development of his text, I will venture one criticism upon the text itself. I am not sure whether Dr Wilson states his position as clearly as he might when he says that sin is 'the survival or misuse' of certain habits. 'Survival and misuse' are not words which belong to the same logical class. The wrongfulness of a survival may lie in its anachronism,—as for instance, when the grown man refuses to put away childish things, and to think and act as a grown man. But 'misuse' is a wholly different thing from continued use. It is a thing which is not to be defined by dates. Anachronism cannot describe it. A misuse of a faculty is a misuse at any stage in the agent's career. Two quite distinct

¹ *H. L.* p. 11.

² *ibid.* p. 82.

classes of sins are denoted by the terms 'survival and misuse'. The Christian who is an anti-evolutionist—if such there still are—will quite agree with the Christian evolutionist, that sin is the 'misuse of habits and tendencies that' once 'were actually useful',—though possibly the language may seem to him a little mixed. St Augustine himself might subscribe to the statement; but he would refuse to say that the sinfulness of both classes of sins lies in their anachronism.

I pass to Mr Tennant's works.

I. I think that we shall all be ready to admit that the early chapters of Genesis are not in the strict sense history. Whether the writer who threw them into their present form believed them to be history or not, may be disputed; but that they are not history, in the sense of a plain statement of definite facts which occurred at a given date, related to us on the authority of persons who were present and cognizant of the facts when they occurred,—this, I say, will probably be admitted by most of us. I may add that few people would now believe that the story of the Fall was directly and independently revealed to Moses or some other writer by God. Comparison with the folklore and the speculations of Gentile nations renders such a view untenable. Mr Tennant sums up his discussion of this question by saying that 'it must be considered as utterly unfaithful to the cumulative and conclusive results of modern study, still to seek for even a kernel of historical truth, and a basis for a theological doctrine of human nature, in such a narrative as the Fall-story of the Book of Genesis'¹.

I venture to think that in this short summary Mr Tennant has joined together two things which ought not by rights to be joined. It is one thing to seek in the narrative for a 'kernel of historical truth'; it is another to seek in it for 'a basis for a theological doctrine of human nature'. I am quite prepared to say that we must not seek for historical truth in the story of the Fall, though here I may remark in passing that we must distinguish between two different senses in which the words 'historical truth' may be used. It may be used to signify what is recorded for us on sufficient documentary or oral evidence, or it may be used to signify what actually occurred, whether known to us or

¹ *Fall and Original Sin* p. 78.

unknown, and, if known, whatever may be the source of our knowledge. The former is the right sense of the phrase; and in this sense I repeat that we must not seek for even a kernel of historical truth in the third chapter of Genesis: but I am not prepared to say that we may not look to it for religious truth. I think that the Christian doctrine of man must to the end of time be largely based upon that chapter. In this respect, the story of the Fall stands on much the same footing as the account of Creation in the first chapter, although the two chapters may be derived from different sources. In the first chapter, no less than in the third, we should do wrong to look for historical truth. It is not the historian, any more than the physiologist, who tells us in that chapter how man came to be what he is. But it forms an inalienable part of Christian doctrine, or rather it is the foundation of it all, that God created man in His own image. I do not know what religious truth is, if that account of man's origin is not religious truth. The whole teaching of the Gospels and Epistles would be shattered if that view of man's origin were taken away. And in the same manner I cannot but feel that the teaching that man at his first creation was, in his place in nature, 'very good', and then by his own act came to be far otherwise, is rightly used as 'a basis for a theological doctrine of man'. It is, to my mind, a matter of little importance, though of much interest, from what quarters the accounts in these chapters of Genesis came; but it was, I believe, the true prophetic spirit which gave to the Israelite teachers the insight to select or to develop out of the floating legends of antiquity these particular accounts of the beginnings of the human race, just because they contain so noble a doctrine of man. That man was made in the image of God; that man and his world, as they came from their Maker's hand, were 'very good'; these beliefs—however we may interpret them—form an unfailling 'Gospel of Creation'. Indeed, I suppose that Mr Tennant himself does not challenge either of these propositions, though he disputes the form which they have assumed in Christian theology. They still are to him a basis of theological doctrine concerning man. He only thinks that man is still 'very good', as he was in the beginning, though each human being falls from the 'goodness' in which he is born.

II. Mr Tennant has, in my opinion, very largely made good

his contentions with regard to the teaching of St Paul upon the transmission of Adam's sin to his offspring. In the first place the sources of St Paul's doctrine may, as he says, be found rather in the current ideas of his time than in the text of Genesis. '(Our) doctrines of the Fall and of Original Sin', Mr Tennant says, 'have their beginnings, as doctrines, neither in the Old Testament nor in the New, but rather in the Jewish speculation and the uncanonical literature of the age which intervened between them.'¹ I am not sure whether the statement is not a little too sweeping. I am inclined to think that Mr Tennant's argument is in danger of falling to the level of special pleading when he deals with the Old Testament doctrine of man. The book of Genesis, in particular, seems to me to imply much more of a connexion between Adam's sin and the corruption of the ancient world than Mr Tennant is willing to admit. He appears to catch too eagerly at anything in the Old Testament which might possibly indicate other notions of the origin of man than those contained in the book of Genesis; and this eagerness leads him to see 'obvious allusions' and 'undoubted accounts',² where to other readers the interpretations which he adopts appear fantastic and improbable in the extreme. Nevertheless, it may be safely affirmed that the Old Testament contains a far less consistent and formulated teaching about the origin of human sin than has often been supposed; and Mr Tennant has done good service in bringing this fact into view.

But I would observe on the other hand that the Christian student is not, after all, much concerned to know what were the sources of St Paul's doctrine. It would make little difference to us if it were proved that some part of that doctrine were derived from still less venerable quarters. Suppose that St Paul, like the author of the book of Wisdom, was affected by an acquaintance with Hellenic philosophy. The belief so derived would be none the worse for its origin. Our confidence in the insight and inspiration of St Paul is such that the fact of his embracing and enforcing a belief would strongly commend the belief to our acceptance, from whatever quarter it might be shewn to come. If St Paul was to a considerable extent influenced, as Mr Tennant thinks, by apocryphal and pseudepigraphic Jewish writings, or

¹ *F. and O. S.* p. 272.

² *ibid.* pp. 61, 63.

by traditional teaching associated with them, the fact will dispose us to value those writings more highly, and not St Paul less.

But the doctrine of St Paul himself is by no means so certain and so definite as has been often thought. With Mr Tennant's exegesis of St Paul I am inclined to agree at almost every point. Perhaps the only passage where I demur is the well-known passage in Eph. ii 3 *καὶ ἡμεθα τέκνα φύσει ὀργῆς ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποί*. Even there I assent to what he says, and only quarrel with what he does not say. The word *φύσει* in that passage, as Mr Tennant indicates, is not intended by St Paul to cover a whole theory of the mode in which sin is transmitted from generation to generation. It does not mean 'by heredity', scarcely even 'by birth'. It stands tacitly contrasted with a word like *θέσει*, 'by adoption', 'by intentional transference from one position to another'. *Φύσει* refers, to use Mr Tennant's own language, 'to the natural state before conversion, apart from the grace of God'. But all is not said when this fact is pointed out. The position of the word *φύσει* in the sentence, an unimportant position in itself, has the effect—the intended effect—of throwing into greater prominence the two words which it divides, *τέκνα ὀργῆς*; and although the words *τέκνα ὀργῆς* do not define, any more than *φύσει*, the mode in which sin is transmitted, which would be foreign to St Paul's purpose, yet they emphatically declare that the persons spoken of were 'born to wrath'. *Τέκνα ὀργῆς* is a phrase which may be contrasted with *υἱοὶ τῆς ἀπειθείας* immediately before. I cannot hold with the Dean of Westminster that the meaning of *υἱοί* and *τέκνα* is precisely the same, because either of them might represent a common term in Aramaic. *Τέκνον* denotes a birth connexion, *υἱός* denotes a status; and there is an instinct which guides St Paul to choose now the one word and now the other. But even if *τέκνα*, strengthened by *φύσει*, did not indicate that the persons spoken of were objects of God's wrath from birth, there is still the word *ἡμεθα* and there is still the context. The Jewish descent of these persons—for St Paul is for the moment speaking of himself and other believers belonging to the chosen race—made no distinction in one respect between them and the mass of mankind. They were 'by nature children of wrath even as the rest'; and it is a mistake to suppose that St Paul means that their evil lives, of which he speaks

so vehemently, had made them so. 'Εγενόμεθα would in that case have been a better word than ἤμεθα. Rather the opposite. They were not naturally 'children of wrath' because they had lived bad lives; their bad lives were the evidence that they, like the rest, were 'naturally children of wrath'. I have laboured this point at some length because Mr Tennant's brief treatment of the passage is an example of the tendency which is sometimes discernible in this chapter of his book to *minimize* the teaching of St Paul on the natural and universal corruption of mankind. Taking that teaching in its broad outlines, it contains more than Mr Tennant seems willing to admit.

III. The scientific theory of evolution must necessarily affect our views of the beginnings of man in the world. Probably all of us are ready to accept the belief that the life of man is continuous with that of lower animals, and has at a very early period been developed out of it. But while we frankly accept that belief, it is still possible to question whether *all* the facts of nature are to be explained by evolution, and by evolution alone. I submit that there is good reason to think that the history of the world contains some moments of new departure, which were not the work of evolution, though evolution lends itself to them. Two moments, at least, of new departure a Christian must recognize. The incarnation of the Son of God was not the result of evolution. It was the introduction of a wholly new factor from without—or shall we say from within?—into a world prepared by evolution to receive it. The original act of creation was not the result of evolution, but the starting-point of the whole cosmic process. So far as I am aware, science offers no contradiction—rather the opposite—to the biblical view that such a beginning there was, and that the world of matter and force is not eternal in the sense of stretching back and back through time that is without limit.

If, then, we are compelled to acknowledge *some* points in the history of the world at which a thing took place effected by no evolution, is it disloyal to the teaching of science to suppose that there may have been *more* such points? At present, we are unable to shew any examples of life which are not derived from life anterior to them. Yet life was certainly at one time impossible upon this planet. Science is very confident that it will

be able to account for the beginning of life on the principle of evolution. Far be it from me to say that science will never do so. But at present it is not done. Science here walks by faith. It is at least open to us to think that the first beginning of life upon the earth was a creative touch, which introduced a new element into the world made ready for its habitation. The same thing may be said of human existence. If it is ever proved that the mental and spiritual faculties of man are as purely a product of evolution as his body, the Christian will find no difficulty in receiving the truth. But so great and unbridged at present is the division between self-conscious man and the animals most akin to him, that it is no treason against science to believe that the introduction of human powers into a physical organism capable of serving as a basis for them, was a new thing, a sudden interposition, a creative moment, for which evolution prepared, but which was no necessary result of evolution.

I do not affirm that this was so ; I only express my belief that it is still possible for a man to believe that it was so. And supposing it to be the case, then it is not only possible but natural and pious to imagine, that the first man, or the first men, with their divine endowments fresh upon them, were in a different moral position from that which we occupy, and that, although it would be unnecessary and unreasonable to imagine that they were perfectly holy in the manner in which the Christian strives to be so, yet their moral instincts were sound, their lives were governed by them, and they were innocent in a different sense from that in which ' the ape and tiger ' may be called innocent.

IV. But, it is argued, even if we can imagine the first specimens of humanity as having existed in such a state, and as having fallen from it, it is not easy to see how their fall can have been such as to affect their progeny. The only way in which the physiologist can imagine it to have done so, is to suppose that the fall was an act of so violent a character as to alter the physical organization of man. But on the other hand, according to the theory which now offers itself, the first sin must have been of a very different character. The knowledge of what is morally right and wrong is a matter of slow growth ; and as sin consists in transgressing a law which the conscience of the sinner recognizes as authoritative, it is most unlikely that the

first breach of that law would be such an act as to impair the very physique of him who did it. 'The origin of sin', Mr Tennant says, 'like other so-called origins was a gradual process rather than an abrupt and inexplicable plunge. . . . The sinfulness of sin would gradually increase from a zero; and the first sin, if the words have any meaning, instead of being the most heinous, and the most momentous in the race's history, would rather be the least significant of all.'¹

To these weighty allegations I would with great deference, and in a purely tentative manner, submit a few considerations in reply, reserving to myself, as well as to others, the right to change my mind, upon cause shewn.

(1) I know of no reason why we should not accept Mr Tennant's view of the relative magnitude of the first sin. The very imagery which is used in Genesis to describe it is that of a childish fault. The history of sin does not begin with the fratricide of Cain, but with the longing look at a forbidden fruit. It is part of the imagery of the story that the first gratification of that longing was immediately followed by the sense of shame, and alienation from God, and expulsion from the happy Garden. We may, if we are so led, interpret that imagery of the instantaneous fall of a man and his wife to stand for a slow and gradual deterioration of a race. Their earliest sin may well have consisted in allowing impulses which were inherited from their animal ancestry, and which in their animal ancestry were blameless, to prevail over higher impulses which belonged to them as men, and which indeed made them men as distinguished from the animals that they or their fathers were before. The fall may have been a process rather than an act; but to use such words as those which I have quoted—'the first sin, if the words have any meaning'—is to imply that there is no real line of demarcation between right and wrong, and that if there is one, the first sinner could not have been expected not to overstep it: in other words, first sins are not sinful, and men found themselves sinners through no fault of their own. Here, I submit, is a confusion of thought which is much to be regretted.

(2) It is well known that the masters of science have not yet been able to decide for certain whether 'acquired modifica-

¹ *H. L.* p. 91.

tions' can be transmitted from parent to offspring—whether, in the case before us, the children of an Adam and Eve could be themselves modified as a direct result of their parents' fall. I will not attempt to argue the point upon the assumption that the story in Genesis is historical—an assumption which I have already disclaimed. But if the fall may be interpreted in the way that has been suggested, as a gradual process, lasting, it may be, through many generations, it would not, I believe, be unscientific to suppose that at length the race itself might be profoundly modified by successive resistances to the nobler impulses; and that as, by the laws of nature itself, special bodily characteristics imprinted themselves by degrees upon various strains of animal life, and one became a race of elephants, while another became a race of whales, so humanity at large came to bear a certain ethical impress, not derived merely by imitation from the state of society into which the individual finds himself born, but by each member bringing with him into the world tendencies and aptitudes, proclivities and insensibilities, which are the result of habits formed by generations of his human ancestry.

And even if it should be held impossible for acquired modifications to be transmitted in the present state of things by natural generation, I would submit that this need not always have been the case. In earlier conditions of existence much may have been possible which we cannot observe to take place now. This is the very plea which the evolutionist urges in favour of the view that the original production of life, for instance, was at its own date a necessity of evolution. 'We do not maintain', says the philosopher Lotze, 'that all which the elements can accomplish is to be measured by the narrow possibilities still left open by the rigidity which the most essential natural relations have attained. In earlier stages of cosmic development, when (everything being yet in process of formation) there was both greater celerity of change and also a prevalence of modes of connexion which did not afterwards recur, it may perhaps have been the case that the elements produced effects different in nature and magnitude from those to which the present course of Nature gives rise, limited as this is to the maintenance of uniform conditions.'¹ In accordance

¹ *Microcosmus* ii p. 138 (E. T.).

with this observation of Lotze, I ask whether moral effects, or effects which are both moral and physical, may not have been possible in the first plastic stages of human history which would no longer be possible now.

(3) It forms part of the modern theory which we are discussing that nothing can be called sinful which is not a conscious and wilful refusal to comply with a recognized law. In other words, nothing can be morally wrong except for those who know that it is wrong. In this way, the champions of the theory can see no meaning in attributing any sinful character to an infant. At about the age of three years, according to a statement which Mr Tennant seems to regard with approval, 'moral sentiment' begins to make its appearance in the young child¹. Before that time it is incapable of sin. 'It is the basal proposition of the theory of sin which is now being elaborated', Mr Tennant says, 'that until the will has emerged, and the life begins to be self-conducted, no germ of evil can be said to exist in the individual. The young child in following the impulses and instincts which it is as yet unable to direct or control, is entirely fulfilling its life's purpose. With the dawn of will and reason morality first becomes a possibility. And until moral sentiment appears, the existence of sin is of course excluded.'²

Lest any one should suppose from this passage that Mr Tennant has an optimistic opinion of the ways of little children, and thinks that they all behave like little angels, I must say that, on the contrary, he speaks of 'children's impatience of restraint, their wilfulness and passionate temper, their unconscious cruelty, their greed and envy and self-pleasing'³. He calls them 'pure little animals', and says that 'the young child presents sometimes an appalling spectacle of self-centredness in the satisfaction of its impulses and appetites, and of passionate resentment to restraint on their indulgence'⁴. But it is a mistake, according to the new theory, to suppose that there is anything wrong in all this. 'The naturalist reads there only a sign of future sanity and vigour.' 'The apparent faults of infantile age are in fact organic necessities. There *must* be what looks to older eyes so much like unmitigated selfishness.'⁵

¹ *H. L.* 104.

² *ibid.* p. 103.

³ *ibid.* p. 95.

⁴ *ibid.* p. 97.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 97.

I would only ask in reference to this view of infancy, what its upholders have to say about the sacred infancy of Jesus Christ. He came, as we have learned from Irenaeus, to sanctify all ages, infancy included, by passing through them Himself. Can we imagine that the blessed Babe gave 'signs of future sanity and vigour' by presenting appalling spectacles of self-centredness and resentment? Is it only a perverse and unreasonable prejudice that makes us shrink from the thought? I ask again, what would be the nature of an education conducted on the principle that the child is a non-moral being till it reaches the age of three? For my own part I am convinced by observation, no less than by other methods, that there are movements of conscience long before the child knows the meaning of the words which formulate the law for it, that it recognizes when, as we say, it has been naughty—partly, no doubt, by the looks and demeanour of its parents, but partly also by some responsive motion within itself—that it has impulses and instincts of love and trust which run counter to the impulses and instincts of self-will and self-assertion—and that a perfect childhood, at any rate when lived under good and wise direction, would be free from those storms in which 'the naturalist' sees nothing but what is wholesome. That Christian teachers have often exaggerated the depth of human corruption, and have often planted at the wrong point the boundary between what normally belongs to man as an animal being and what belongs to him as a fallen and sinful one, this I readily admit; but I cannot think that all the phenomena which shock and grieve us in the ways of little children are necessary tokens of their animal well-being, and should be welcomed as such—or that we should have observed them in the one human life which we believe to have been perfect throughout.

(4) Mr Tennant finds it difficult to see how a 'nature' can be said to be sinful and corrupt. He complains—I will not say that he complains unjustly—of the loose and confused way in which the word 'nature' is often used. I should wish to be free from the ambiguity which he condemns. His own definition of what human nature means is to me quite satisfactory. It denotes 'the sum of the equipments, actual and potential, with which a man is born: his congenital endowments, in fact,

as distinguished from what is afterwards bestowed upon him, or acquired by him, from his surroundings and his education and experience'¹. This is the nature which according to traditional Christianity is sinful. Mr Tennant does not see how sinfulness can attach to it, when 'sinfulness', as he truly says, 'attaches exclusively to the consent of the will itself'².

It is with great diffidence that I criticize the language of so clear and philosophical a writer as Mr Tennant; but I cannot but feel that he has been misled into his denial of a sinful nature by taking too narrow a view of what constitutes sin, especially with regard to two particular points.

(a) He can only conceive of sin as an 'act of will'³. Here he is partly right, in my opinion, and partly wrong. That sin resides in the will, and the will only, I heartily agree; it would be pure Manichaeism to place it elsewhere; but it seems to me that will is not to be seen only in 'acts of will'. It would lead to what I might call an atomistic view of life if in estimating moral values we were to confine our attention to express and definite volitions. There are such things as moral states and attitudes to be considered, as well as distinct movements of will. Such states and attitudes are of course recognized at that advanced stage of moral progress or declension where good or bad habits and character have been formed. We do not in these cases measure a man's meed of blame or praise solely by his acts of will. There are times in the life of the most confirmed drunkard when his will is not actively going out towards the intoxicant; for instance, when he is asleep, or when some other dominant passion has possession of him, the drink is forgotten. But at such times he is not ethically to be considered as holding a position free from blame, even with regard to the drink. His will, though quiescent so far as the drink is concerned, is nevertheless set in a wrong direction in the matter. When the temptation to drink comes again, he is certain to yield to it. The Christian is not wrong in saying that that drunkard is sinful all the time, not only when he sets himself to commit excess, but also in the intervals when his volition in that respect is in abeyance.

Something of the same kind may not unreasonably be said

¹ *H. L.* p. 172.

² *ibid.* p. 170.

³ *ibid.* p. 169 foll.

of an infant at the hour of its birth, before it has done either good or ill. Habit and character have not yet been formed ; but the still dormant faculty of will may not be wholly neutral, for all that, in its attitude towards moral good and evil. One who possessed the gift of insight—one who could see the oak in the acorn—might be able to discern from the outset which way that undeveloped being is sure to exercise its coming powers, unless influences from without acquire a mastery over it. As the child is father of the man, so the babe is father of the child. His very nature, 'the sum of the equipments actual and potential, with which he is born', includes moral elements no less than intellectual ones. He is born to be a coward or a profligate, as much as another is born to be a poet or a calculating boy. Over and above that common stock of non-moral impulses and instincts which belong to him as an animal among animals, he has already the propensity to use those endowments in such and such a way ; and so, even from birth, he may justly be regarded with moral approval or disapproval—unhappily in every instance that we know of, but One, with some degree of disapproval.

(b) Mr Tennant again and again insists that nothing can be sinful which is not consciously so. 'Apart from the conscious volition of a person there is no such thing as moral goodness or badness.'¹ The definition of sin makes it 'a transgression of the law in the sense of *his* (the doer's) law, what is known and recognized by him individually as constituting a moral sanction'².

It is perhaps in this insistence that the new theory comes more gravely and practically into conflict with Christian teaching in general than at any other point. The Bible by no means identifies sin with guilt. 'Sin is not imputed when there is no law'; but sin is there, whether imputed or not. The sin which is committed ignorantly in unbelief is forgiven on that account, but it needs forgiveness, and it involves a life-long penitence. And although the guilt of sin may be indefinitely diminished by the sin being unwittingly done, yet even the guilt is not wholly done away: the man who commits things worthy of stripes without being aware of the character of them receives few

¹ *H. L.* p. 161.

² *ibid.*

stripes in comparison with other sinners, but he receives stripes. Thus even guilt is not wholly dependent upon consciousness, and sin is by no means conterminous with guilt.

It is impossible really to maintain that the sinfulness of an action is wholly to be measured by the doer's standard of right and wrong, and by his sense of transgression at the time of doing it. A single proof of this is sufficient. It is the well-known tendency of indulgence in sin, to harden the sinner's heart, and to make him less sensitive to the moral quality of his actions. The sin which at first he committed with misgiving and hesitation, and perhaps with subsequent remorse, he comes to do half mechanically, with no struggle of conscience, until at last, in the words of the Psalm, he 'imagineth mischief as a law'. Is his last sin, committed when his conscience ceases to remind him that he is doing wrong, or when in its perversion it tells him that he is doing right, to be regarded as less sinful, and less liable to just punishment than the sin committed when conscience was tender and the true canon of action stood vividly before it? That would be no just judgement. The hardened offender is guilty, not only of the sinful deed which he so lightly commits, but of the injury done to himself by which it becomes possible for him to sin so lightly.

I admit that with regard to the moral disabilities with which we all, according to the traditional belief, begin life, we are not to be accounted guilty for them, like the sinner who has hardened his own conscience. It is no fault of our own if we are born in sin. That is our misfortune. Only when we consent to the evil warp in our nature, and begin, as Mr Tennant says, to weave sinful acts into sinful habit and sinful character, do we become justly subject to punishment for it¹. But we may begin at a very early point in life either to consent to be what we are by nature, or by God's grace to rise to something better. No clear consciousness of the issues is needed to make a difference between our movements of will—some movements right and others wrong. Sin consists in the will to do wrong things, and there is (strictly) no such thing as an involuntary sin; but the wrong thing may be done without knowing how wrong it is.

The fact is, I believe, that there is an 'ought' and an 'ought

¹ *ibid.* p. 168.

not' independent of the feelings and opinions of this man or that, and perhaps extending further than most of us suppose. We are not justified, I think, in treating as a fantastic Jewish speculation the belief expressed by St Paul that human sin is a fact of cosmic significance¹. Is it entirely a poetical figure of speech when Jesus 'rebukes' the wind and the fever; or when the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the 'curse' awaiting the ground which, in spite of advantages and culture, fails to bear fruit? Is it (to use Ruskin's phrase) nothing but a 'pathetic fallacy' to see something that 'ought' not to be in the needless cruelties of a cat with a mouse, or in the evasion of parental duties on the part of the cuckoo? True, the creatures know no better, and it would be absurd to blame them for what, as St Paul says, they are made subject to 'not willingly'; but wherever the blame may lie there is sin somewhere to account for it. To come a step higher, it would be absurd to blame the individual South Sea Islander for taking part in the cannibal feast which the custom of his village prescribes, in the same degree as if the thing were done by Englishmen. The blame is hard to locate; but no one can well doubt that things have gone very far wrong where cannibalism exists, and that the custom is a wicked custom which ought not to be tolerated or excused, and that the whole tribe or nation which tolerates it is heavily loaded with sin.

The Christian is not much concerned to distribute and apportion the blame of sin amongst the units who compose mankind. That is a task which he is wisely warned to leave to an intelligence above his own. Nor does it greatly concern him to say how much of the sin in the world is to be traced to a depravity of nature transmitted by physical descent, and how much to what is called social heredity. It is enough to say that humanity is both outwardly and inwardly one. Mankind is a single, living whole, out of which and into which the individual man is born. In both ways he partakes of the life of the race, and in both ways, as I believe, of the sin which penetrates the life of the race. It does not seem to me to be probable that all our sins are to be attributed to the vicious surroundings into which we come, and that we come into them capable indeed

¹ *F. and O. S.* p. 271.

of sin, but sinless. It will always, so far as I can judge, be the simplest explanation of the acknowledged universality of sin, as well as that which expresses best the penitential experience of good men, to say with the Psalmist 'Behold, I was shapen in wickedness; and in sin hath my mother conceived me'. If, according to the striking expression of Baruch, 'each one of us has been the Adam of his own soul'¹, and has started from the same neutral position—morally speaking—as his first human ancestors, it becomes beyond all calculation of chances improbable that no single human being, except the One who was also more than human, should have lived without sin. But however else the fact may be explained, I cannot believe that the Christian consciousness will ever reconcile itself to a theory which endeavours to account for the universality of sin by really denying its sinfulness.

A. J. MASON.

¹ Quoted in *F. and O. S.* p. 217.