

ARTICLE VII.

GUILT.¹

JULIUS MÜLLER, in his treatise on "The Christian Doctrine of Sin," finds an antinomy between the fact of "Original Sin" (so called) and the human self-accusation called "Guilt." In the survey of the ground occupied by the former, he finds no place for moral freedom, and that the seeming choice must be pre-determined by the necessities of the nature; and on the other hand concludes that the consciousness called "guilt" is inexplicable except upon the admission of moral freedom, since the self-accusation implies that the subject might have decided otherwise. Hence his attempt to resolve this antinomy by the notion of an *extra-temporal* decision, involving the subjects, having come under time conditions, in the chain of necessity. An examination into the genesis of the judgment of guilt may show that there is no need of any such postulate; which has, besides, its own other difficulties.

The *feeling* of guilt, in concrete experience, precedes the *Judgment* of guilt, and ever after accompanies it, such feeling anticipating obscurely the fully formed and conscious judgment; but as feeling, it is, in part at least, a *posteriori* in origin. It comes from the discovery in experience that suffering and ill-being are possible and actual; and that while much of it is indeed inevitable and indubitably *ab extra*, much beside might have been avoided, and has come from the violation of known laws of the universe. The simpler and more obvious the law, the sooner comes the retribution. The subtler and profounder the law, the remoter is the recoil. Sooner or later, and with variant depth of conviction, is the inference drawn that no law of the universe can be violated with impunity. Hence the dread of suffering, more or less clearly imagined, which is the primal feeling in human guilt. The inference is first and most readily drawn with reference to physical laws. To disregard the law of gravitation brings accident; to disregard the laws of health brings bodily pain; to disregard social laws brings various and remoter distress; to disregard the simpler moral maxims, such as command truth and honesty, is met by punishment in so many cases, as to arouse the suspicion or create the conviction that every violation of moral law must meet its return in suffering,

¹ The following is a chapter from a work that will shortly be published in two octavo volumes by G. P. Putnam's Sons, entitled "Christian Doctrine Harmonized, and its Rationality Vindicated." Copyright secured, 1888, by John Steinfors Kedney. It is selected as having independent interest; yet in another chapter the argument is to be found that the doctrine of "Original Sin," need not be, and can not be, so thought as to exclude moral freedom, and on this account also, that there is no true antinomy.

or something equally to be dreaded. To set the whole life in violation of known moral law and by a refined prudence to evade its speedy, and fence off its remoter retribution may indeed dull the apprehension, since imagination cannot wander very far into the remote, yet not so utterly as to put to sleep the dread that the law of retribution has no exception, and that the deeper the ground of perversity from which such calculating violation may spring, the farther off indeed but the surer the return, and the more dreadful the penalty.

This dread of suffering, and perhaps permanent ill-being, is one constituent of the feeling of guilt, and the first form which it takes. It is, however, individualistic, and respects the subject as able to suffer or enjoy in and for himself alone. Thus far the feeling, and the judgment therefrom formed, that by transgression of the moral law the subject has rendered himself liable to suffering, are *a posteriori* in origin, and no other ethic is needed to explain them than an ethic of expediency.

But in the judgment of guilt there is something *a priori* in origin, and here in consciousness the judgment antedates the feeling. As the moral law comes to be understood as the law, not only for the individual reflecting subject, but for humanity as such, and for the whole rational universe, if it be in thought extended beyond humanity; as it takes a universal form, and is thus absolute in its character, and is ruled as to its requirements by some ideal state of things, possible in thought to be realized; as it is seen to imply a commonwealth, and an organic unity, moral, intellectual and physical, and therefore spiritual by virtue of the harmony and normal inter-relation of these three aspects or elements of all concrete being; the knowledge of one's self that he is not yet a member of such commonwealth, and that while others are endeavoring to realize it, he is a disturbing and disorganizing element, either from wilfulness or weakness; the knowledge that one withholds himself from the stream of tendency towards this realization, or by some single act, throws himself out of the current;—such knowledge forces a comparison of one's self with the ideal requirement, and brings about the discovery that he is in an irrational state. Here is not only a contradiction to the reason, but a violation of the moral sense, (this name being given to the feeling which ensues *after* moral judgments). This is not the apprehension of punishment, but the present discontent from the consciousness of discord. The moral sense is here identical with the æsthetic sense. That harmony and beauty which only can bring about the purest and highest æsthetic emotion is troubled by the discordant element, and when seen to be so troubled by the subject's own wilful act or neglect, the discovery produces this feeling of discontent, or spiritual pain, which too is an element in the complex consciousness of guilt. Whether it would receive this name, were it purely this spiritual pain, and not mingled with the feeling of apprehension for our composite being above described, may be questioned; but that is a needless and unprofitable enquiry, since in the concrete they are never separate, but more or less intimately mingled.

In our conscious experience we find that conviction of moral freedom

accompanies this discovery of the violation of the prudential law of the understanding, as well as the discovery of the moral shortcoming towards the requirements of the reason and the æsthetic sense. These mental states would be inexplicable were not such moral freedom implied. But even if the conviction of such freedom be apparently abandoned and denied in some objective utterance, and the subject regard himself as determined and in the chain of necessity, the judgment and the feeling of guilt, as I have analyzed it above, would still exist in all the essential constituents. He may apprehend punishment and lament his liability to suffering, even though he think he has been irresistibly drawn along in the current of events, and dread the result of his misfortune in the one case, as he dreads the result of his fault in the other: and his æsthetic sense may be violated by the discovery of his shortcoming toward his own ideal, just as poignantly when he regards his condition as remediless as if he thought it remediable.

If we thus eliminate the conception of moral freedom, the judgment of guilt does not constitute the judgment of *sin*; and there is no true antinomy between this and the fact of the universally inherited selfish propensities of human nature, called or miscalled "Original Sin." Thus far there is no need of the doctrine of moral responsibility, or of immortality, or even of God as a personal principle. But these ideas, and the convictions ensuing, exist, as we have claimed, implicit in human consciousness. Were there no personal God, infinite in resource, no human immortality, no responsibility, these ideas and convictions could never have been reached by any physical process thought as purely such. They constitute the very essential fibre of human consciousness, and their very existence is the highest possible evidence that we belong to a universe other than merely physical. They are convertible terms. To say that we have these ideas is to say that we transcend the physical *nexus*. They show themselves in all human knowledge, and without them we could never rise above animal understanding. If these ideas are baseless and untrustworthy, all knowledge is baseless and untrustworthy, and we reach the vanishing point of pure subjective idealism only to recoil into a Pyrrhonism that contradicts itself in its very attempted attitude of negation.

If, then, we hold as firm against all possible attacks the truth of moral freedom, we find that it implies the possession of a universalistic ideal more or less dimly descried, to be preferred to any individualistic end manufactured out of the material of the universe changeable by our physical liberty or power. This ideal, to satisfy the requirements of the reason and the æsthetic sense, and produce the judgment and the feeling called "obligation," must do so at all points. It must comprise not only an accord of wills, strong beyond assault, but free from assault, therefore in accord with the environment. Human aspiration, man's highest need, must be met. No want, no longing must be unsatisfied, since there exists no longing that may not be satisfied without removing the contradiction. No power can be denied the possibility of successful exercise. No limit must be set to the subject's advance and expansion. The personal God cannot be left out of

this ideal commonwealth, thus environed. The whole structure falls to pieces if He is. Love, which craves the perfect object, can be content with nothing less than God. To deny to the soul a never ending approach to him, and penetration of the recesses of the infinite, or to leave out the unifying principle and erect here an impassable wall of darkness, would be to repel it back in an infinite recession. The desire for knowledge and the delight in it, would expire unless the field for knowledge were infinite, unless there were room for its activities through all the eternities, and unless there were indeed a perfectly satisfying object for such delight.

Unless, then, God, freedom, and immortality are ideas involved in the very mental structure of the human being, *sin* cannot exist, and no notion of it can be legitimated. And if sin cannot exist, then we have a world in which more or less prudence only is possible,—in which any future generation, however it have attained a state of things more desirable, yet has not conquered nature, nor subdued the elements and all pain-giving powers, from which deranged and selfish instincts might again spring and renew the conflict, nor avoided death. Such a world is but little satisfying to the æsthetic sense, rather violates it the uttermost; since the contradiction between the spiritual soul and the physical environment is more pronounced than ever, and seems to be remediless. As the desire for elevation and the ideal harmony becomes more intense, and these clearer and purer, the human soul would become more hopeless of gratification, and the acutest agony would have become possible. ²

But with the postulates of God, freedom and immortality, sin and guilt, become for our thought something more than liability to suffering, contradiction to the reason, and violation of the æsthetic sense thus far defined. These all must receive modification and new elements, as they connect with the idea of God; and we find disharmony not only between the subject and the physical forces, not only between the actual and the ideal, but we have an abnormal or deranged personal relation, the normal and highest conceivable one declined, and a spiritual independency seeking to make itself absolute. Thus only does the notion of sin acquire its full significance, and the contradiction its full intensity. If moral freedom be postulated, sin becomes then a wilful refusal to realize or aid in realizing that ideal for all rational existence which only can satisfy the reason; and guilt is the natural yet attenuating pain at this contradiction. If immortality be postulated, sin becomes a refusal to accept the perfect well-being and the amplifying development, and proposes to stop up all other avenues of delight, and concentrate all complacency upon one—of spiritual independency; and guilt become the apprehension of a hostile environment from which the subject is not yet strong enough to escape. And thirdly, if God be postulated, sin becomes

² The terms "moral sense"—"æsthetic sense" are used, meaning thereby a spontaneous judgment accompanied by feeling, which bears resemblance to "sense" proper, in its immediacy; yet it is a true judgment, and requires the presence of the absolute norm to furnish ground for the comparison.

likewise a refusal of that personal relation which is felt to be possible, and which is the true spring and real element in all original human desire; for all going out of one's self for delight is a confession of dependence. It is the first element of love, gathering itself afterwards into clear consciousness. The soul, therefore, cannot become purely and intrinsically evil until it has acted from this spring and made for itself a world of ideas; and thus, in its very attempted independence it confesses its obligation, yet declines all return, and ultimately scorns any new increments to its subjective world. Thus sin is potentially and may become at length an absolute reversal of the primitive tendencies of our being; and a re-creation of one's self with material limited and shut off from further supply. In this case the judgment of guilt, which remains clear, separates itself from the feeling, which goes on to a vanishing point; for while it remains, recovery and retrogression are in our thought possible.

In the ordinary Christian consciousness, the most constant and pain-giving element in guilt is the deranged and inadequate relation between one's self and the personal God, in which the man looks upon himself as temporarily severed from the source and security of all harmony and well-being, as having interposed an impediment in the currents of love flowing between Father and child.

The apprehension of suffering from violation of law which constitutes the primary feeling in guilt receives a new element from the acknowledgment of a personal God. Transgression and suffering exist. They are either entirely disconnected, and belong to different processes and only accidentally meet, or else they are connected by an intelligent will, which can adapt the latter to the former. The faith in such adaptation modifies the pain. Nature no longer appears a merciless tyrant, but a free movement, with far-off purposes of love. Thus while the pain which she brings is borne with more courage, the agony of guilt becomes so much more poignant that one hastens to extinguish it in repentance.

If, then, the total and complex judgment and feeling of guilt contain the idea of a personal God, the healthy moral consciousness and life *a fortiori* imply it; and we are ready to seek the indication of this idea from other, ampler, and purer sources.