

ARTICLE III.

A NEW METHOD WITH AN OLD PROBLEM.

BY THE REV. E. H. JOHNSON, D. D., PROFESSOR IN CROZER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, CHESTER, PA.

IF we take care not to hold the Bible responsible for doctrines which it does not expressly teach, then we are quite at liberty to offer as more or less probable other doctrines inferred from these. More still, we may ask help from the current philosophy and science in exploring the nature of the biblical facts. A better science or philosophy than that of a former day may improve our theology. This article proposes a new method with an old problem, because it would make full trial of an accepted doctrine of science.

Which holds the primacy, justice or benevolence? It may seem a narrow issue; but thin blades cut deep, and the answer to this question is the real answer to a great part of the questions by which, ostensibly, the church has been distracted. It was a conviction on this point that led Anselm to protest against, and enabled him to overthrow, the unworthy fancy of Origen, that Christ was given over as a ransom to Satan; an opinion on this theme divided Bernard from Abelard, Scotus from Aquinas, Socinians from Lutherans and Calvinists, Calvinists from Arminians, rent American Presbyterianism into Old School and New, set Princeton against the Andover of Dr. Park, and in our day defines to popular apprehension the issue between the old and the new theology. There is only a theory to offer; but, unless one can keep his mind clear of all theory, he needs a definite view on this point; otherwise he cannot hold coherent opinions on the perennial issues of all Christian generations.

And it has been a difference on this point which embittered the debates. Not only because the issue is fundamental, but because it is an issue on which different minds are radically disqualified from seeing alike. To some it has seemed to give us one or another God. Wesley went as far in this as Channing, and both refused to worship the God of the Calvinist,—a God to whom justice was necessary, and mercy optional. The question can never lose its interest until Christians cease to think, and they have not yet given sign that they will ever stop thinking on this matter.

And yet it is not one of those problems about the Most High which it is absurd to attempt. True, the attributes of God are infinite, and we cannot foresee what his infinite attributes will lead him to do. But the infinite is a factor in every term of the equation; it may therefore be cancelled out, leaving, as the subject of inquiry, the nature and relations of the moral attributes holiness, benevolence, and justice. These are exactly the same in man as in God. Differing between God and man in quantity, they are identical in quality. The theological problem resolves into an ethical problem, as to which we need not despair of gaining further insight.

We need not despair, although the debate has run so long, because we can bring a means of analysis which has not a great while been available, and which is confessedly so potent that it has been thought too hazardous for use by any except the reckless. This relatively new means of resolving the moral attributes into their elements is found in the scientific conception of law. Familiar as its use has become in the evolutionist school of ethics, its service has not been fully drawn upon for the theological aspects of ethical problems.

Law is order of facts. To science, this is all. Science cannot complicate her statement of facts or law with any notion of cause; for in the physical world cause is efficient force, and force is utterly undiscoverable to the appliances of physical science. The closest approach which science can make

to causation is the purely phenomenal relation of invariable sequence. Science does not even know substance; she knows only phenomena. Matter is to science, what Mill called it, only a "permanent possibility of sensation." I have said that science knows only phenomena, meaning that scientific men say so, and we have no need to take issue with them on this point. But it is clear that some philosophy underlies any study of phenomena; and the philosophy germane to science is realistic. Science takes for granted that she does not deal with mere ideas, or with phenomenal symbols of fact, but with fact, with things. Philosophy affords to science force as the cause of change, and matter as the subject of change. Law as defined by science may accordingly be further elucidated by philosophy, as an order of facts determined by the nature of the facts. The phenomenal order which the student of science calls law, is really the characteristic, the inherent quality, of the facts which he studies.

Now this observation, that law, or order of facts, is another aspect of the quality, or characteristic nature, of things, indicates the use to which the idea of law may be put in theological inquiry. In accepting this notion, theology finds herself forbidden to regard the order or law of the object which she studies as merely attached to it by the divine will, and changeable at the divine discretion. She accepts law as inherent in the object, as an expression of its innermost nature; theology is therefore obliged to reject any theory as less than thoroughgoing, as not even presumably correct, which is anything else than an exposition of law. The normal alone is the credible in God's ways. We may be sure that, in dealing with his creatures, he never violates his own laws, and therefore never does anything not provided for in the natures of the beings with whom he deals. Even the transcendent operations of atonement and regeneration are provided for in the natures of the beings concerned, or they would be impracticable.

For beings who choose their way, for beings that can recognize the moral element in the normal, that is, for all rational beings, the normal, and only the normal, can be right. We ought to use our faculties, because we have faculties; and we ought to use them according to their nature, because they have a nature. Every sin is therefore essentially a crime against nature. It is an evil which cannot be further analyzed, and does not need further analysis. Unhappily we are not so constituted as to be able always to fulfil all our functions. The physical has to yield to the mental; the mental employment to the domestic or social; this, it may be, to the physical; all to the patriot's function, in time of war, and even this last to the duty which the missionary must expatriate himself in order to fulfil. In any case, when choice between functions has to be made, the highest ought to be chosen. It then becomes the function of reason to know which is the highest; and when reason so decides, the normal is still the right, the law is still the order of facts which is prescribed by the nature of the facts. To follow reason is not only normal, but it is the highest order of the normal, it connotes man's place in the same class of being with angels and with God.

The morally good, as interpreted by the scientific idea of law, is just the normal, the conformable to constitutive law in rational beings. Moral acts are not acts of a special faculty, and of no other, as are those we call intellectual, emotional, volitional. The moral is sheer quality inhering in the relations to law of a rational being, whatever the faculty in exercise may be. It is doubtful, whether, in the last analysis, any normal conduct of such a being can be called morally indifferent; it is certain that any abnormal conduct is morally bad. What help do we thus get toward understanding what holiness is?

Moral purity is the absence of the abnormal, freedom from anything in character or conduct contrary to the typical constitution of man as a rational being. But holiness is much

more. Purity or innocence is negative; holiness is positive. It is unalterable and supreme conformity to law, in the scientific meaning of the term. If a somewhat figurative statement may be allowed, holiness is moral excellence persisted in with all the energy of which a moral being is capable. With God it is moral excellence persisted in with infinite energy, as of infinite worth. This distinction between the negative and positive forms of moral goodness enables us to answer the question, whether finite beings can ever equal God in moral goodness. They may be as free from fault, that is, as pure as he; but they cannot be as holy, because they cannot guard their normality with infinite energy. The holiness of God is unapproachable. As the Temanite said of a higher order of beings than we are, "His angels he chargeth with folly," surely meaning no more than that their wisdom was but as folly to his wisdom; so any righteousnesses even of the innocent, when compared with God's righteousness, "are but as filthy rags."

Normality then in a rational being is *the objective fact* of conformity between the dispositions and conduct of such a being and the constitutive laws of his nature, while holiness is the *moral aspect* of persistent normality. It is moral excellence *per se*. As such it is a characteristic shared by all other moral attributes, such as benevolence and mercy, justice and veracity; but it is not the sum of those attributes. *They* are attributes of relation; *this* is an attribute of being. Holiness must therefore hold the primacy over all other moral attributes in God. Among moral excellences none can be more excellent than moral excellence.

Holiness, as interpreted by the idea of law, has also an important relation to all the divine attributes. It is not indeed the sum of them, for they contain non-moral elements. Eternity, immensity and spirituality, omnipotence and omniscience, are something else than moral, and the sum of their non-moral elements does not make them a moral perfection.

At the same time they are perfections, and they are distinctively divine. To impair either of them would be wickedness too awful to harbor in our imagination. Holiness insists upon their maintenance. In its relation to the other attributes of the Most High it may be regarded as the moral instinct of self-preservation. There is thus much of justification for the frequent definition of holiness as "wholeness"; not that it is the entirety of God, as holiness is not even normality; for it is not a merely objective reality; but it is a moral quality inherent in wholeness as normal.

From this supreme excellence, which claims the worship, the love, the obedience to God of all rational beings, and the due recognition of which gives to Christian monotheism its throne in the convictions of those who have accepted it, we turn to the attribute which makes the thought of the divine holiness endurable to us sinners; and we ask, whether the conception of law which is furnished by modern science will give us insight into the love of God. For benevolence is the best name we have for that attribute of the divine essence which is revealed in the sentiment, or emotional movement, that we call love. Benevolence is literally well-wishing; but well-wishing is *an act* of the divine mind; and we must sacrifice something of etymological strictness in adopting the word "benevolence" as a name for the quality of the divine nature described by the adjective "benevolent." The real nature of this attribute is best explored by making its exponent love the immediate object of study. Here the idea of law is at once available.

Love, from the lowest to the highest reach of it, from mere liking for physical objects to absorption in spiritual things, from self-recollection to self-forgetfulness,—love in all its forms and in all cases is essentially a native impulse to fulfil functions. One may be as willing to admit this concerning appetites as to deny it of social and religious love. Yet it is to this result that the idea of law leads; and in so lead-

ing, this idea affords the only rational justification of love; that is, the only indication of its place in that organism of powers and functions which constitutes a sentient being. The idea of law calls attention to organs and their offices. It sees in their use the only possible, the only worthy, end of being. If love can be accredited with the office of securing the discharge of all normal offices, it is certain that love is not thus belittled; it is certain that it is exalted to the highest thinkable relation toward the active powers of a sentient creature, or even of the Creator himself. Further analysis ought to make this plain.

To confine our attention, for the sake of simplicity, to man and his Maker, a personal being has self-regarding and social faculties. That is to say, he has powers the office of which is tributary to himself, and other powers the office of which makes for him a place in the lives of other persons. All these powers are his to employ, and the moral value of their exercise is exactly proportioned to the rank they or their objects severally hold. It is not the highest duty of a man to look after his own interests, but it is one of his duties, because it is one of his functions. Furthermore, his self-regarding faculties normally make the first claim upon his attention, for on their employment his existence and the use of his higher powers depend. Self-love incites him to self-service, that is, to discharge of his self-regarding offices or functions. Well for him that a liking for food, if we shrink from calling the impulse to eat a sort of love, well for him that a relish for this fleshly office does not deduct as much from his enjoyment as it does from his time! Well for him if he likes, that is to say, loves, the employment of his mental powers which we call study; and if he has a relish, an inward driving toward those spiritual exercises by which he gains spiritual good. The office of love as a native appetency for fulfilling self-regarding functions is as normal, as strictly lawful, as any longing which the soul can feel.

But we have also social faculties, and nature happily supplies an impulse toward their activity. This impulse is love to others. If studied from the point of view which the idea of law furnishes, its phenomena are found to be very curious, and as consistent in origin as they seem to be incongruous in result. The first of all the social powers in a rational being is reason itself, the ability to take account of foundation truths. Reason teaches us that in others, as in ourselves, the self-regarding faculties are of primary importance, if not of highest rank. What is the corresponding dictate of love? It is the peculiarly rational desire that those we love should discharge for themselves any practicable self-regarding offices. We would not have them fail to look out for themselves, so far as this is their normal office. In our relations with the poor, experience proves that it is emphatically in their interest to turn them back, so far as practicable, upon their own resources; and what experience has proved, the idea of law shows to be the primary dictate of love. Experience recommends it as wise; the idea of law enjoins it as normal. In like manner, one who loves God sincerely and deeply, wishes that God himself should use his self-regarding faculties, that he should get for himself all the good suitable to him, all which his own nature provides for. The truly pious spirit longs that God should come to his own, should provide for his own interest as the noblest aim for the universe, the only aim fit to be supreme with God himself. If the self-regarding faculties are not the highest for man, they are for the Most High, because he *is* the Most High. There is also a further reason which will presently come to light, and which will bring this conclusion into order with others more obvious.

Our other social faculties are faculties of both giving and getting. The lofty power of speech is a faculty of giving; sight and hearing are faculties of getting; the hand has both functions. The impulse to exercise the office of giving is the familiar impulse of love to bestow something, to bestow even

one's self, on the person loved; but the impulse of the getting faculty leads the lover to win and possess the person beloved. The impulse to give is so congenial with what love is naturally felt to be that love is often defined as the sentiment which leads one to bestow himself upon another. Those who hold to this definition utterly refuse the name love to a passion toward one's own enjoyment. But the only explanation of the longing of love to give is that giving is a normal function, and love a longing to fulfil this function. This is the physiology of love; and this is seen to be in physiological accord with the not always lower love of possession, and even with the love of self, when we hold our minds to the fact that in all cases love is but a yearning to do what we are made for doing. When the reader can imagine a form of love which is not thus to be accounted for, then he may deny the name of love to the passions, and confine it to the nobler sentiments. Whether the longing shall be to give or to get, all turns on what faculty wants exercise. It is the parent's office to give, and parental love is noticeably self-devotion; it is a child's office to get, and he normally loves the things he can get from a parent,—little animal that he is. But that neither parent nor child is confined to one set of offices is seen when the mother greedily hugs her child as her very own, and when the "little animal" lovingly puts his sweetmeats to the mother's lips.

Strangely diverse as the counter demands are of the giving and the getting faculties, their normality is further revealed by the fact that love leads one to wish that the person loved should use *his* faculties of both sorts, that he should take what one offers, and offer himself to the one that loves him. Jealousy is, of course, but an allotropic form of love, a form which love must take when the appetency to perform its office of getting is opposed by someone else's bent toward the same end. The jealousy is normal when the interference is abnormal.

Now it is easy to understand that love's twofold office of putting into exercise the faculties of getting and giving is to be accounted lawful in the case of man's relations to that Being whom it is the first of laws that he should love with all his heart and soul and strength. What less does real love toward God exact than that we should surrender ourselves wholly to him as worshippers, and in turn fully possess him as our God? It is but the counterpart of this social function Godward, that we should wish God himself to put in use his social functions, and accept what we offer, and grant what we seek. In terms, then, of the scientific conception of law, religion is an exercise of social functions between God and man, while the office of love in religion is to serve as an appetency, an "hunger and thirst," toward the due employment Godward of our social faculties. The possession of faculties which can normally be so used, makes their religious use as much the dictate of constitutive law as any other use can be; conversely, it notifies us that the mere neglect of these uses is a process of degeneration, tending toward atrophy and the lapse of man into a lower order of being.

It was remarked above, as to the ends which God sets before his own mind, that for him to seek in himself the worthiest end of being would presently be found in keeping with every other worthy end. The further lesson which the idea of law affords on this much debated subject is that self-regarding and social functions differ indeed in ostensible aim, but are alike normal functions; therefore those which are not self-regarding are even the more profitable to one's self as they are superior in dignity and importance. From this point of view we may understand the scientific accuracy of that repeated saying of the Master, which all four evangelists have reported in various forms, "He that saveth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall save it." A man can hardly constrain himself to love others by dwelling upon the fact that this is the dictate of rational self-love; but

God, on the other hand, in making the normal employment of his powers the highest end of his existence, must find use for such powers or faculties as belong to his normal relations with creatures; that is to say, the completest guarantee men can have of divine concern for them is that God cares supremely for himself. If this yet seems at all unworthy of him, we must raise our thought concerning God until we have so exalted an idea of what he is as to feel that it would be unsuitable for him to seek supremely any end outside himself, or to furnish to the universe any guarantee of well-being equal to this, that it shall find its good also in him, when he makes everything subservient to himself.

If the idea of law has not led us to misinterpret the nature of love, we are prepared to see that love's merit is not something unaccountable, but is due to its relation toward the normal functions: it is the incentive to them all. It follows also that there can be no issue between the divine holiness and benevolence. The holiness of God, in its relation to his other attributes, is his moral persistence in being and acting conformably to what he is; it is plain that this cannot lessen his desire that all his creatures should be and act according to what he has made them; and this, we have seen, is the dictate of love toward them, as well as of love in them. Or, if the resolution of love into a native impulse to fulfil functions seems to degrade it to the level of animal appetites, it is enough to reply that the rank of any function, in the estimate of reason, is to be determined in part by the end sought. The moral difference between destroying the body by sensual indulgence and spending it in the service of one's fellow-men is solely in the relative worth of the ends sought. Physical exhaustion is as real in the one case as in the other; but one object is rational as being best, the other irrational as being worst. And so the impulse to fulfil functions is high or low according to the object of the function. Love is love whether it is a little girl's fancy for a doll or a mother's devotion to a

child; whether it is a sensualist's appetite for victuals and drink, or a saint's appetency for righteousness. It will be impossible to find any form or any instance whatever of love which is anything else than a native impulse to fulfil a function. This truth clears the way to a settlement of the ancient feud between benevolence and justice.

Peace is not to be won by inducing either attribute to give way to the other. But no issue is left between them when each is allowed its full rights. In fact, when both are put in their proper places, they move from opposite sides toward the same goal. It might be known in advance that the idea of law would refuse to acquiesce in that conflict between justice and benevolence which the elder theology believed was going on in the divine mind, and which the later theology sought to be rid of by denying that God has need to be just. Whether justice is as native and necessary to God as benevolence, we may perhaps be able to answer, if, bearing in mind that idea of law which finds rules of conduct prescribed by one's constitution, we then answer the question, whether we may not call it "just" to render to anyone that which is precisely fitted to him, which is therefore his due, his own; and then, whether the attribute which impels a rational belief to deal justly after this fashion may not fitly be named "justice." Whether one's due be evil or good,—that is, whether evil or good be most suitable,—that idea of justice which the idea of law suggests is precisely the rendering of what is suitable. To withhold the fitting would be abnormal, and if man may not render it, God must. In fact, justice is so enclosed in law, according to the notions of both which natural science supplies, that to act according to law is nothing more nor less than, in one's relations to others, to act justly. Still further, since it is the essence of holiness to be normal, to act normally or justly is the exact demand of holiness upon conduct.

There can hardly be doubt as to this point, except on the

part of those who have set up some notion of benevolence which cannot be correlated with the idea of the normal, or law, and who are therefore afraid that to concede the normality of justice is to risk the reign of love. And so it would be, if justice sought anything else than the fit, or benevolence anything else than the well. But the well-for-us and the fit-for-us are identical. The kind to anyone is that which is fit for him, and the just to anyone is that which is well for him. Why may not a father give his child a stone when he asks for bread? Only because the human stomach cannot digest stones. The only thing fit and proper in the case of any being is that he should use his powers according to their nature; but the only thing well for any being is that he should use his powers according to their nature. Justice contemplates this result as proper, benevolence looks to it as kind. What departure in the least degree from such a standard would be either kind or just? If there seem to be any disparity, or even a conflict, between justice and benevolence, we may be sure that the difference is not between the ends aimed at; but, on the part of God, it is in the fact that the same end is approached from opposite directions, and on the part of man it is in our own greater, astonishingly greater, ability to discern what is well for any man than what is precisely due to him. This alone were reason enough why with us "mercy should always rejoice against judgment."

If we allow ourselves to follow such conceptions to their logical issues, it ought to be with the express admission that our conclusions are but the best conjectures we can make. Now two very different inferences from the doctrine of this article seem equally valid. The first is that, if it be true there is no issue in the divine mind between justice and benevolence, then it was as much the part of justice as of benevolence to provide an atonement. This has often been laid down as a basis for some theory of atonement; but it is too exclusively in the nature of an inference to allow it a place so

important. And yet, if justice contemplates the exercise of one's powers according to their norm, I see not how it can be anything less than just on the part of our Maker to provide by means of the atonement for such a result. God, we know, "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," if we are penitent; and his justice may well have been engaged with his mercy in providing the conditions of redemption. But if we are to venture this wholly speculative inference as probable, or even as possible, we must go as frankly and as far in the opposite direction.

To wit: if the justice of God impels him to provide whatever is well for sinners, his benevolence impels him to provide whatever is fit. If justice concedes what benevolence asks, benevolence must yield whatever justice demands. Should it then prove that some impenitent sinners have forever to endure any fitting penalties of sin, these penalties are precisely what benevolence would accord in such cases. Just penalties are by definition precisely what is suitable; and what is suitable is the only good, is the very best for any being. It must be so, even if we can see nothing well in so woful a case except that the case is no worse. God is kind, and God is just; he is both, because he is holy; he is all,—he is holy, just, and kind,—because he is the perfect One, the ineffably Normal.