

*SIN AS A PROBLEM OF TO-DAY.*

VII. SIN AND HEREDITY—THE RACIAL ASPECT.

HEREDITY is one of the most interesting, as it is one of the most recondite and baffling, subjects in modern biological science. Heredity, indeed, is not a new discovery, any more than sin is a new fact. Everywhere in nature kind is seen producing its kind with undeviating regularity. Ancestral traits, good and bad, reappear in offspring. But recent science has given heredity a new grounding in the study of the laws of organism, has tracked its operations with a precision formerly unthought of, has built up complicated theories regarding it, and drawn conclusions from it of the most far-reaching character. It is an inseparable part of evolutionary theory in all its forms. In itself, however, apart from this relation, no one acquainted with recent discussions will question that the bearings of heredity on the doctrine of sin are both deep and vital.

Doubtless it lies beyond the province of biological science to tell us anything properly of the nature of *sin*. Categories of nature do not explain moral and spiritual facts. When discourse turns on laws of freedom, moral responsibility, ethical ideals, ends of conduct, responsibility to God, a sphere is entered different from that with which biology has to deal. Yet it is a sphere in which, when regard is had to the constitution and facts of human nature, and the part which undeniably heredity does play in the shaping of character and conduct, very difficult problems arise. Sin, we have seen, stands for something which we distinguish from a result of nature; for which we attach to ourselves and to others a solemn responsibility; which we say *ought not* to have been; which only grows the more lurid in its colouring as we bring it into the light of the divine

Holiness. But then—the question forces itself—can this view of sin be maintained together with the teaching on heredity with which our text-books and much of our current literature are making us familiar? How, for instance, if a major part (some would say the whole) of what we call sin is the result of inherited disposition and tendency,—how, if heredity and environment, the latter itself a product of inherited forces, predetermine for the mass of mankind their place in the moral scale,—how if, as many contend, heredity controls will, while will is without power to modify heredity,—is it possible to represent the existing condition of humanity as abnormal and in contradiction of its true destiny, how vindicate responsibility in the midst of it, how hope to effect the deliverance of the race from it?

A very definite issue is thus raised. It seems plain that if Christianity, retaining its view of sin, is to accomplish anything in the world, it must, while willingly accepting from heredity the idea of a single organic life of the race, and of descent of good and evil traits from generation to generation, join with this something else—the acknowledgment of an inherent law of good and evil in life, of a personality in man from which forces proceed that act upon environment and modify it, and, not least, of a divine redeeming power able to cope with and overcome the worst manifestations of the world's evil. In affirming God and the soul, sin and redemption, Christianity lifts life, with all its strands of racial influence, out of the web of fatalism into which heredity, taken alone, tends to sink it.

To gain clearness on this point, a closer view must now be taken of heredity in its present-day developments.

I. What heredity *is*, every one, in a general way, understands. It is simply, to use words of Weismann's, "that property of an organism by which its peculiar nature

is transmitted to its descendants.”<sup>1</sup> The *fact* of heredity is familiar : it is the *explanation* of it, and the defining of the *limits* of its operation, which science finds puzzling. The first and most obvious thing about heredity is that, in ordinary course,<sup>2</sup> type invariably produces type, yet always with some degree of individual variation ; further, that these variations, with the other peculiarities that go to make up the individual—themselves results of past variation—tend likewise to be transmitted.<sup>3</sup> Men do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles.<sup>4</sup> Wheat may be relied on to produce wheat ; maize to produce maize ; the eagle an eagle ; the horse a horse ; the man a man. The negro type is reproduced in the negro, the Indian in the Indian. Mental and moral,<sup>5</sup> as well as physical, qualities reappear in offspring, though often curiously distributed, modified, or blended—the qualities of the parents, as Emerson says, being frequently drawn off and “potted” in the several members of the family.<sup>6</sup> Sometimes the ancestral quality leaps over one or more generations and reappears in a descendant.<sup>7</sup> Here then is the problem which science sets itself to solve—How is this wonderful result brought about ? What is the *rationale* of it ? As Weismann again puts it : “ How can such hereditary transmission of the characters of the parent take place ? How can a single reproductive cell reproduce the whole body in all its details ? ”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Essays*, i. p. 72. For more elaborate definitions, cf. J. A. Thomson, *Heredity*, pp. 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Allowance is made here for mutations. Cf. Thomson, *Ibid.* pp. 82 ff.

<sup>3</sup> “ There is the tendency to breed true,” *Ibid.* p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew vii. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Thomson, *Ibid.* p. 248.

<sup>6</sup> *Conduct of Life*, on Fate : “ It often appears in a family, as if all the qualities of the progenitors were potted in several jars,—some ruling quality in each son or daughter of the house,—and sometimes the unmixed temperament, the rank unmitigated elixir, the family vice, is drawn off in a separate individual, and the others are proportionally relieved.”

<sup>7</sup> Thomson, *Op. cit.* p. 132.

<sup>8</sup> *Essays*, i. p. 73.

The answer or answers given by current biology to these questions are very characteristic. In all the leading modern theories of heredity it is taken for granted as a thing self-evident that the only kind of explanation science can entertain must be a "mechanical" one: all talk of a living, organising principle, of vital agency, of a "directive force," is rigorously excluded. Only that can be admitted which can be stated in terms of physics. As Huxley says in an often-quoted passage: "To speak of vitality as anything but the name of a series of operations is as if one should talk of the horology of a clock."<sup>1</sup> It will be asked below whether—as other eminent biologists contend<sup>2</sup>—this huge assumption is not unwarrantable, does not, indeed, demand the impossible; but it is interesting at present to inquire whether, notwithstanding the rejection of a vital principle, it is found practicable, when an actual theory is attempted, to get on without it, or its equivalent.

Mr. Darwin led the way in this direction in his theory of *Pangeneses*—a theory still spoken of with respect as anticipative of later discovery.<sup>3</sup> The theory, in brief, is, that every cell in the whole organism is continually, at every stage in its development, throwing off minute portions of itself—"gemmules," as Darwin calls them—which, by a mysterious law, find their way to, and get stored up in, the reproductive cell, whence, under suitable conditions, a new organism is produced, containing all the parts of the former.<sup>4</sup> But, setting aside the numberless other difficulties of this "gemmule" theory, there is one which even Darwin could not ignore, viz., how, even assuming the parts all safely

<sup>1</sup> Art. "Biology," *Ency. Brit.*

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Thomson says: "Not a few embryologists, such as Driesch, believe themselves warranted in frankly postulating a vitalistic factor—an Aristotelian 'Entelechy'" (*Op. cit.* p. 417; cf. p. 399).

<sup>3</sup> *Dar. and Mod. Science*, pp. 84, 102, 111.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Darwin, *Variation of Plants and Animals*, II. ch. xxvii.; Weismann, *Essays*, i. p. 78; Thomson, *Heredity*, pp. 406 ff., etc.

housed in the reproductive cell, they manage, streaming in from all sides in countless numbers, to arrange themselves in the precise position and relations necessary to build up the new organism. How is it that each gemmule in this whirl of particles is guided to the exact place it is meant to occupy, and manages thereafter to keep to it? <sup>1</sup> Darwin's answer is given in the phrase "elective affinities." The gemmules have "affinities" which lead to their arranging themselves in the proper order and relations. What, however, is this "elective affinity" but just the organising, directive principle to which exception is taken under another name? As Weismann in criticising it says: "An unknown controlling force must be added to this mysterious arrangement, in order to marshal the molecules which enter the reproductive cell in such a manner that their arrangement correspond with the order in which they must emerge as cells at a later period."<sup>2</sup> As well postulate the vital principle at once.

Mr. Spencer, in his *Biology*, likewise criticises Mr. Darwin, but it is difficult to see that his own theory is in much better case. He rejects "elective affinity," but only to substitute what he calls "polarity." There is, he tells us, "an innate tendency in living particles to arrange themselves into the shape of the organism to which they belong." For this tendency, he observes, there is no fit term, so he proposes this word "polarity."<sup>3</sup> Is there any advantage?

Discarding these theories, Weismann takes another line, based on his doctrine of the "immortality" of the (reproductive) "germ-cell," or of the germ-plasm contained in it.<sup>4</sup> In contrast with the perishable "somatic" or body cells, the germ-cell is absolutely continuous: it divides

<sup>1</sup> The difficulty is not lessened on the (Mendelian) theory of "unit-characters" with which some would correlate Darwin's hypothesis.

<sup>2</sup> *Essays*, i, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> *Biology*, on "Waste and Repair."

<sup>4</sup> *Essays*, i, p. 209.

and subdivides, but never dies. Each part has in it the peculiar molecular structure, with all the other properties, of the original cells ; it therefore produces, when developed, precisely the same kind of being. Thus he thinks he solves the problem : " How is it that a single cell of the body can contain within itself all the hereditary tendencies of the whole organism ? " <sup>1</sup> It may be doubted, however, whether, so far as the essential point is concerned, viz., *how* the germ-cell comes to possess this peculiar molecular structure, and is enabled to give off its infinitely complex molecular structure in its entirety to myriads of derivative cells, we are not left as much in the dark as ever. To explain the rise and growing complexity of germ-structure, we are thrown back on the hypothesis of natural selection working on fortuitous variations, in forms of life originally unicellular, therefore presumably structureless. As to perpetuation, " fission " affords no explanation of how the marvellously complex molecular mechanism of the parent cell should divide into multitudes of cells each with the mechanism complete.

It seems, in short, even in these theories, necessary to supplement them by the factor they are so slow to recognise, viz., a soul-life, the presence of a living, organising principle, which is the true agent in building up a structure of a given type from materials which do not originally contain it. Such a principle is not, as sometimes asserted, an imaginary cause, the counterpart of the pseudo-" horology " of the clock. Mechanical and chemical forces are only one side of the universe : our own soul-life furnishes us with the type of another. We come back to the sound Aristotelian principle that it is the soul which is the cause of organism, not conversely. If this is conceded, the necessity for these elaborate germ-mechanisms largely disappears : the germ

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 209.

has in it the potency for building up structure where none previously existed. To what but this does Weismann himself come back in his admission of the unsolved mystery in cell-life of "assimilation"—the power, as he explains it, which the organism possesses "of taking up certain foreign substances, viz., food, and of converting them into the substance of its own body?"<sup>1</sup>

II. If, in these discussions, we seem far enough from the doctrine of sin, a remaining step will perhaps bring us within full view of their relevancy. It has already been remarked that heredity hands down not only the specific type, but individual variations. But here the question arises which occupies a chief place in recent discussions on heredity, viz., the possibility of the *transmission of what are called "acquired characters."* Some variations are *congenital*, that is, arise from unknown causes in the organic germ; other characters are *acquired*, or impressed on the organism, in the course of its history, e.g., through external conditions or environment, through use or disuse, through voluntary agency. That congenital variations are or may be inherited all agree; but is it the same with acquired characters? Till within the last twenty or thirty years it was commonly supposed that it was, and evolutionary theory took the fact for granted. Lamarck built his theory of development on the supposed inheritance of changes wrought by use and disuse of parts. Darwin, as time went on, gave an increasing place to the same factor alongside his principle of "natural selection." Herbert Spencer in a manner built his philosophy, especially his psychology and ethics, on the inheritance of acquired qualities. It is through accumulation and registration in the organism of past experiences that he accounts for mental development and the immediacy of seeming "intuitions," as of

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* i. p. 73.

space and time, of ethical distinctions, etc. All this, it is allowed, falls to the ground, if inheritance of acquired characters is denied. In Weismann's words, in the Preface to the lecture in which he propounded the opposite view, in 1883: "If these views be correct, all our ideas upon the transformation of species require thorough modification, for the whole principle of evolution by means of exercise (use and disuse), as proposed by Lamarck, and accepted in some cases by Darwin, entirely collapses."<sup>1</sup> The results of the theory for ethics and theology, it will immediately be seen, are not less serious. Besides cutting at the root of the ordinary belief in inherited evil tendencies as the result of vicious lives in the parents, it no less effectually takes the foundations from the doctrine of Original Sin, or of a hereditary vitiation of nature due to a moral lapse in the beginning of the race. For changes due to human volition admittedly rank as "acquired characters."

III. It is unnecessary to enter into the keen conflict of opinion among scientific authorities on this difficult point: <sup>2</sup> it will be enough to look at the *grounds* and *bearings* of the theory as it affects our present subject. It is important to notice, in forming a judgment upon it, that, with Weismann, the case for the theory, developed with remarkable skill, is based partly, indeed, on *the alleged lack of evidence*

<sup>1</sup> *Essays*, i, p. 69. Cf. the following from Spencer, quoted by Prof. Thomson (*Heredity*, pp. 164, 195): "A right answer to the question whether acquired characters are or are not inherited underlies right beliefs, not only in biology and psychology, but also in education, ethics, and politics." "Close contemplation of the facts impresses me more strongly than ever with the two alternatives—either there has been inheritance of acquired characters, or there has been no evolution."

<sup>2</sup> The diversity of view is seen in the volume *Dar. and Mod. Science*. Weismann defends; Haeckel, Schwalbe and others oppose. The *pros* and *cons* are well exhibited in Prof. Thomson's chapter on the subject in his *Heredity* (ch. vii.). Prof. Thomson leans personally to Weismann's view, but admits that the subject is still *subjudice*. The late Prof. G. J. Romanes contests it in his *Darwin and after Darwin*.



for the inheritance of acquired characters, but partly also—indeed primarily—on the doctrine of the continuity of the reproductive germ, and the *necessity of finding a “mechanical” explanation* of the transmission of changes from other parts of the organism—the “somatic” cells—to the reproductive cell, so as to become a constitutive part of the latter. As he says in one place: “Use and disuse cannot produce any effect in the transformation of species, simply because they can never reach the germ-cells from which the succeeding generation comes.”<sup>1</sup> This means that he can conceive of no “mechanism” by which they can do so. The theory, in brief, is, that all changes that are reproducible are in the germ-cell, and in the germ-cell alone; and that this is unreachable by influences from changes in other parts of the organism.<sup>2</sup> It cannot escape notice how deeply an assumption of this kind must colour the treatment of evidence; it is not less obvious that, if the “mechanical” view of the propagation of organism is rejected, the problem assumes an entirely different aspect. If the body is a “mechanism,” as no doubt in some sense it is, it differs from every mere mechanism in the fact that it is *animated*. It is a mechanism self-originated, self-repairing, self-perpetuating. A single life pervades it; every part is in *rappor*t with every other; probably no vital change takes place in any part which is not attended by changes in other parts that defy all purely physical explanation. When we can explain, e.g., how the feeling of shame can determine the blush to the face, we may be at liberty to doubt the possibility of an impure thought or

<sup>1</sup> *Essays*, i. p. 400.

<sup>2</sup> Weismann puts this briefly: “The foundation of all the phenomena of heredity can only be the substance of the germ-cells; and the substance transfers its hereditary tendencies from generation to generation, at first unchanged, and always uninfluenced in any corresponding manner by that which happens during the life of the individual which bears it” (*Ibid.* p. 69).

base desire leaving its subtle impress even on the germ-cells concerned with reproduction.

One immediate result, it must be seen, of Weismann's theory is to withdraw heredity absolutely from every sphere controlled in any degree by *volition*. It has been generally believed that a man's actions have some influence for good or evil, not only on his own character, but on that of his offspring. Live a vicious life, it has been thought, and you do irreparable mischief, not only to yourself but to your offspring, to whom you transmit, in some measure, your own evil tendencies. This, if Weismann is to be followed, is an entire mistake. Weismann grants, of course, that the effect of vicious habits is a general physical enfeeblement in which, through defective nourishment or from other causes the germ-cells are involved; in this way, indirectly, offspring suffers.<sup>1</sup> But *directly*, neither in body nor mind, it is held, can offspring be affected by volitional acts on the part of the parent. Any changes flowing from these fall, as already said, under the category of "acquired characters," and cannot be transmitted. Further, as human will has no share in inducing, hereditarily, the deterioration seen in so many broken specimens of the race, so neither can any exercise of will help to secure, through inheritance, improvement in the future. There is, if freedom is granted—which commonly it is not—the possibility of reform for the individual; there is the undoubted gain for posterity of a better social environment. But nothing is accomplished directly through the principle of heredity. That moves on its isolated way, unaffected by accidents of external condition, by helping or hindering influences of surrounding, by good or evil determinations

<sup>1</sup> Even this, as critics point out, involves a considerable admission, hardly reconcilable with the general theory. Cf. on a related point, Romanes, *Darwin and After Darwin*, ii. p. 108.

of volition. If it is asked, How then explain the many wrecks of society who do seem to owe their degradation in some degree to the weakened intellects, depraved appetites, and enfeebled wills inherited from parents? the answer is that what is really effect has been mistaken for cause. Volition had as little to do in the parent as in the child with the depraved tendencies that are inherited. By an unfortunate germinal variation with which will had no more to do than with the colour of the hair, the parent was born with an unbalanced nature and strong propensities to vice. Circumstances favouring, he went the road that might have been anticipated. What, now, the child inherits is the congenital tendency, not the later acquired habit. Here, it must be owned, is a theory that cuts deep into the view it has been customary to take of the sin and crime of society, and of society's duty and responsibility in regard to it.

It has been indicated that the *theological* consequences of the Weismann doctrine are no less far-reaching than the *social*. The evolutionary theory of the "brute inheritance," which takes the place of the Church doctrine of "Original Sin," Weismannism does not, of course, touch, though it seriously affects the possibility of a working out of "the ape and tiger" strain from humanity.<sup>1</sup> But the idea of an original pure beginning of the race, and of a defection from the right, with a consequent perversion of the nature, and hereditary transmission of this wrong state to posterity, is in its principle subverted by the Weismann theory. Such a "Fall" as the Church doctrine conceives, and as appears to be taught in Scripture, would at most be a case of "acquired character," and could pro-

<sup>1</sup> Only unfortunately man has not come through the "tiger," and it is becoming even doubtful whether he has descended through the "ape." See last paper.

duce no hereditary effects. The inference is obvious, and has been drawn with exceptional acuteness by Mr. F. R. Tennant in his Hulsean Lectures on *The Origin and Propagation of Sin*. "The question," the writer says, "turns entirely on the possibility of the transmission of acquired modifications as distinguished from congenital variations," and he adds, "The conviction very largely prevails amongst the authorities that unequivocal instances of such transmission have never yet been supplied."<sup>1</sup>

IV. Heredity in the naked, unqualified form in which it is often presented by science, with denial of free-will, would seem to *destroy responsibility* at its base.<sup>2</sup> At first glance the theory of Weismann, in questioning the inheritance of contracted tendencies, might appear to relieve the pressure on posterity. In this light Mr. Tennant is disposed to welcome it. In reality, however, no doctrine rivets fatality on man so completely as this of Weismann's. It does so, as has been seen, by withdrawing heredity completely from the control of will. The tendencies now hereditary were in their origin simply unfavourable variations: a rigorous necessity has ruled the subsequent development; will has no influence at all in changing things from their predetermined course. The question of the degree of evidence for the transmission of acquired characters must be left to the decision of experts, but the issues involved are sufficiently grave to warrant us in asking on general grounds whether there are not considerations that point to the need of at least *some qualification* of the Weismann hypothesis.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 34, 36. Mr. Tennant, with Weismann, urges the seeming impossibility "of conceiving the nature of the mechanism" by which a specific effect on the organism could modify its reproductive organs (p. 17). But is a "mechanical" explanation necessary? Cf. the writer's *God's Image in Man*, pp. 236 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the illustrations in Dr. Amory Bradford's *Heredity*, pp. 81 ff.

The weakness of nine-tenths of the scientific discussions on this subject, one cannot help feeling, lies in the all but complete ignoring of the factor of *personality*, of will, of moral decision, in man. The physical is viewed as a sphere complete in itself, ruled only by mechanical or chemical laws, and any interaction of mind and body—certainly any action of mind *on* body—is rejected as unscientific. Science, it is assumed, can take account only of physical causation: mental concomitants of molecular changes may be noted,<sup>1</sup> but it cannot be allowed that they have the least influence on the train of the physical phenomena. This may be called science, but it is a science which can never accomplish its task; for experience shows that it is the forces emanating from personality which are the most efficient in the making or marring of human life. Organic changes are not the whole. So far as these changes are the results of deliberation, forethought, resolve—as in the execution of a purpose—they cannot be explained if the volitional factor is left out of account. This bears on heredity. The moral forces of life, if good, act as a lever to lift up; if evil, operate as a force to break down. Only a violent misreading of history can affirm the opposite.

The writer has argued elsewhere that probably a mistake has been made in these discussions in stating the alternatives *too absolutely*, as if one must hold either that *all* acquired characters are hereditary (though few will be bold enough to maintain this), or else that *none* are.<sup>2</sup> Is it not possible to make a distinction, and may not the principle of the distinction lie in the fact that some changes in the nature go deeper than others—come nearer the seat of personality

<sup>1</sup> They may be noted, but they cannot be *explained* by the physical causes, which exhaust themselves in the production of their physical effects.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *God's Image in Man*, pp. 236 ff.

—and that these may be transmissible, while more superficial changes are not? Purely *physical* changes, e.g.,—mutilations and the like—enter least deeply into the organism, and commonly, at least, are not transmitted. *Intellectual* acquisitions again—those on which Mr. Spencer chiefly builds—still lie outside the depths of personal life, and do not ordinarily pass to offspring. In the *emotional* life, and life of feeling generally, on the other hand, it is difficult to deny that impressions are sometimes made which go down to the seat of life, and occasionally are transmitted in very definite form. Even here we are outside the properly volitional life—the *moral* life—of man, and it is there, as already suggested, that the deeper effects on character seem to be produced.

There remains the *religious* sphere. To this the same reasonings apply, but with the infinitely intensified significance which belongs to the loss of the soul's true relation to God, and the adoption of a fundamentally wrong principle into the ground of the will. For this, as before seen, is what sin essentially is—not the breach simply of some particular moral precept, as when one is betrayed into an unkind thought or untruthful word, but the exchange of a right relation to God, in which His will is supreme, for an opposed relation, in which God's authority is cast off, and the human will becomes a law to itself. Such an altered relation to God in a primal act of disobedience is the greatest change a nature can undergo, and involves a shock the effects of which we cannot, on the lower plane in which the irreparable damage is already done, adequately realise. Sin has been spoken of in preceding papers as something tragic, catastrophic, in the history of the race: it is thus, also, that experience, with Scripture, teaches us to regard it. The terrible spectacle presented by heredity on its physical and moral sides—the vice, sin, crime, lust,

cruelty, that seem to have their origin in inherited conditions and perverted tendencies—first find an adequate explanation, and is set in their proper moral light, when traced back to an origin in the voluntary turning aside of man from his true life in God. The race is an organism. There is a racial sin and guilt in which the world of mankind is involved,<sup>1</sup> the effects of which it shares, as well as a harm that flows from personal transgression. Heredity is not the denial of this truth, but, in its own way, is the reaffirmation of it.

On the brute-inheritance theory of evolution, which takes the place of the Christian doctrine, it need only be said at present that, if this were the whole, it would in no proper sense be sin at all. "The victim of it," as has been elsewhere remarked, "might groan under it as an all but unendurable cross, but he could never judge of it as the religious man does, when he looks down into his heart, and condemns himself for the self-seeking, impure, and God-resisting tendencies he finds in operation there."<sup>2</sup>

V. When, however, all abatements have been made, it remains that heredity is a *terrible reality* in human life, and that, under its sway, the position of vast multitudes, even in our nominally Christian lands, is so dark as, at times, to appear all but hopeless. It is not simply inherited tendencies, powerful as these are, but that vast complex of influences—itsself largely an outgrowth of heredity—we call "environment," which gives the problem its tremendous magnitude. The hearts of the best often fail in contemplating the difficulties that confront them here; yet they should not fail. On the basis of naturalism a gloomy pessimism may be permissible, indeed inevitable. But Christianity has a better message. For heredity, after

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dormer, *System of Doctrine*, iii. p. 54 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *God's Image in Man*, p. 234.

all, is no blind destiny, binding human beings to their ruin. There are forces of personality that can be invoked to counteract the evil influences of even heredity and environment, and Christianity does not leave man to mere nature in his conflict, else he would surely fail, but brings to his aid supernatural forces powerful enough to cope with the worst evils with which human nature is infected.

Christian duty, indeed, cannot neglect the task laid to its hand of endeavouring to break down the *evil social environment* which, for so many, destroys, from infancy, almost the possibility of growth in goodness.<sup>1</sup> Even here, no doubt, singular exceptions occur—a proof, if one were needed, that heredity is not everything in human life. But they are exceptions, not the rule. No effort, therefore, is to be spared—here Christianity and the social reformer are at one—in improving external conditions, removing temptations, and, as far as possible, securing, if need be compelling, tolerable and decent conditions of existence for every member of the community—specially for the *young*. This, however, of itself only removes obstacles—creates opportunities and facilities. To utilise these, higher forces must be brought into play, appeal must be made to the man himself as a moral and responsible being—to reason, to conscience, to will—to the power which every one has of appreciating the good when put before him. The individual must be trained to feel that he *has* personality—is not the helpless plaything of outside forces, but is called to bend these to his own purposes instead of being bent by them. It is here at once that human weakness reveals itself, and that religion, as already mentioned,

<sup>1</sup> In a powerful passage Prof. Seeley, in his *Ecce Homo* (ch. xix.) speaks of those who from the first hour of their existence are received into the devil's church by a kind of infant baptism, and shows the disabilities under which they labour.



comes with its mighty aid, furnishing man with resources which nature alone could not supply.

If we turn to Scripture, we find both of the truths now asserted—*heredity* and *human responsibility*—strongly emphasised; emphasised, moreover, not as contradictory, but as complementary. In no case is it hinted that heredity is an entail which cannot be broken by individual repentance. Even the seemingly harsh word of the second commandment, “visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children,”<sup>1</sup> is in its context and intention anything but harsh; for, in contrast with the inheritance of loving-kindness to thousands of them that love God and keep His commandments, it refuses to contemplate the entail of penalty beyond the third and fourth generation of them that hate God—a suggestion that judgment is God’s strange work, and that evil in the end may be swallowed up of good. On the other hand, Ezekiel’s repudiation of the proverb, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge,”<sup>2</sup> and enunciation of the opposite principle of individual responsibility, are not in contradiction of the patent facts of heredity, which the prophet elsewhere plainly enough recognises,<sup>3</sup> but supply the balancing assertion that no man will perish for the sins of his fathers who does not make these sins his own, and that the worst entail of a father’s wrongdoings can be cut off by personal repentance and right-doing.<sup>4</sup> Each man, that is, stands or falls at the last by what he himself is, and while the divine judgment can never call that good which is in reality evil—be its origin what it may—the *personal* responsibility of each individual will be measured by the Omniscient with full regard to all the circumstances

<sup>1</sup> Exod. xx. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ez. xviii. 1.      <sup>3</sup> Cf. chs. iv.-vii., xvi., etc.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. chs. xv. 14, 20, etc; xviii. 14 ff.

of his lot. It will be more tolerable, Jesus says, for Tyre and Sidon, and for Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for those who have received and rejected better light.<sup>1</sup>

What Christianity does for man with its divine help will be considered later.

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### *THE LAMB OF GOD.*

AMONG all the haunting phrases of the Fourth Gospel few, if any, are so haunting as the two in chapter i. which bear upon the Lamb of God. Not only do they appear there all of a sudden, and then disappear, but they appear on the lips of a man, who, if we judge by what we learn in the Synoptic record, was wont to use a far more rugged and even ruthless form of speech: "Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matt. iii. 7). "He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear . . . Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor, and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Matt. iii. 11, 12). The spirit of these burning words is clearly that of the old dispensation, "that which was passing away," and Jesus passed sentence upon it when He said, "Yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. xi. 11). If, then, we find in the Fourth Gospel coming from the same impetuous lips two such words as these, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!" and "Behold the Lamb of God!" words touched by what seems to be a very different spirit, breathing the air of another world, we cannot but admit that there is a problem, psychological and critical alike, of deep interest,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xi. 20-24.