

ARTICLE IX.

LANGE'S CHRISTIAN ETHICS.¹

BY PROF. J. P. LACROIX, PROFESSOR OF MODERN LANGUAGES AND HISTORY,
OHIO WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY, DELAWARE, OHIO.

THOUGH Dr. Lange is chiefly known in America by his Commentaries, yet this is by no means his main field of labor. He is also a fruitful laborer in systematic theology. Some of his productions here are of very high rank.

Most recent among his works is the one now before us: Elements of Christian Ethics. A glance at this work will show that it is a marvel of compact erudition and suggestiveness. Like most German works, and unlike most English works, it gives great prominence to the history and literature of the subject. On the latter point it is very comprehensive, thorough, and recent. Every ethical writer worthy of mention, from Menes to Rothe, Wuttke, and Kaulich, is critically examined and judged. Indeed there runs a very incisive polemical element throughout the whole book. We purpose here to give simply an outline of the subject-matter of the work, and then to cite some of the positions of Lange on several vital points.

After a preface of eight pages there follows a critical-historical introduction of fifty pages. This consists largely of a sharp criticism of the systems of Schleiermacher and Rothe. At the opening of this discussion we find a suggestive synoptical view of the two streams (Protestant and Catholic) of ethical development since the revival of learning: 1. Reformed and Tridentine ethics; 2. Orthodox and Jesuitic ethics; 3. Pietistic and Jansenistic ethics; 4. Rationalistic and Josephinistic ethics; 5. Christological and confessional forms.

In the midst of the introduction occurs a valuable discussion of the subject of *conscience*. We submit a synopsis: The idea of conscience is as universal as that of God; for its very notion is that of a revelation of God in man. Despite the varieties of its actual manifestation, it is a direct activity of the Spirit, and its witnessing power is comparable to that of revelation itself. It is hardly conceivable that the reality of conscience should be denied. But it has been denied. Rothe does it; and yet his denial amounts to nothing but a denial of its name. It is simply one of Rothe's magnificent eccentricities.

¹ Grundriss der Christlichen Ethik. Von Dr. J. P. Lange. pp. 248. Heidelberg. 1878.

Unfortunately the essay of Ritschl — Ueber das Gewissen — furnishes but little light. He denies that conscience makes its validity universally felt. He attributes the upbraidings of conscience to the effects of moral education; and he overlooks the difficulty in which he thus involves himself of accounting for the beginnings of conscience in society at all. If society creates conscience, what are the elements out of which it creates it? Is not such a position contradictory? Does it not imply that society has already the essence of conscience?

To say that society creates conscience, or that law creates it, or that the Romish hierarchy creates it, are simply three variations of the same thought. Vilmar has defended the second position; and he has been refuted in a masterly manner by Wuttke. Conscience, says Wuttke, is not an empty vessel into which an objective law pours its contents; but *it has contents itself*. And it is only by virtue of having positive contents within itself that objective revelation can and does appeal to it. Had it no contents of its own, a code of tyranny and murder would be approved by conscience just as readily as a code of righteousness. Divine revelation is not sent to create conscience, but to educate and complement it.

The Romish moralists make of conscience a function of the intellect, a *dictamen practicum rationis* (Gury). Thus the way is open for the intrusion of the tyranny of the hierarchy. For the *intellect* can be trained into submission. Conscience is merged into submission; and then we are required to sacrifice our intellect, our private judgment, to the decisions of the pope. Thus the Syllabus is made the law of the conscience. And then, all resistance to the Syllabus is termed a violation of the rights of conscience.

A chief occasion of these contradictory views of conscience arises from not distinguishing between conscience itself and our subjective interpretation of its voice. This difference is illustrated by the difference between the direct oracle of the Greek priestess, and the priestly interpretation of that oracle. So in the account of the fall, — what *God* said was the voice of conscience; what the *serpent* said was the voice of subjective reason. Also Paul distinguishes between the firm word of conscience and the subjective reasonings of the understanding.

The fact is, conscience is perfectly clear, and yet perfectly pervertible. *It is the innate moral sensorium of the personality for differentiating right and wrong, good and evil.* Unquestionably man has an innate sensorium also for the true and the false, and for beauty and deformity. The primitive utterance of conscience is a sentiment of right and wrong, good and evil. The voice of primitive conscience is as truly a voice of the moral sensorium in man, as is pain a voice of the bodily sensorium in man. But its voice expresses itself in a *synthetic sentiment*, and not in *analytical words*. But now comes in reason, and interprets this sentiment into words; and it does so under motives of self-love, — hence its liability to misinterpret.

But the primitive utterances of conscience, the synthetic sentiment, is the essential and inconvertible phase of conscience. The Romish church has an interest in denying or overlooking this first phase. But if it is overlooked, then the image of God in man is overlooked. Man is then absolutely unredeemable. For, if there remains no smouldering spark of a sense of right and wrong in man, how can Christ, how can the gospel, awaken in him any response.

In the work of R. Hofmann we find a valuable discussion of the relation to the two Greek words for conscience — *συνείδησις* and *συνελθῆσις*. The former word designates the conscience in its primitive and pure stage. It signifies the organic health of man's higher powers in virtue of their harmony with perfect rectitude. It is the moral reaction of man's primitive ideal nature against the fleshly side of that nature, i.e. it is the *conscientia pura* as a *scintilla divina*. The *συνελθῆσις*, on the contrary, is the *συνείδησις* after being translated by the understanding from sentiment into words.

It is an interesting fact that we are presented with three diverse conceptions of conscience by three eminent contemporaries at Heidelberg. Schenkel defines conscience as the religious organ of the human mind, the sole bond between man and God. Rothe holds the opposite extreme. Gaes holds a mean place between the two. The latter emphasizes the importance of the two forms of conscience as mentioned above. It is only by holding fast to this distinction that we can explain the fact that some writers regard conscience as infallible, while others vigorously deny it, as also that we hear of so many different kinds of conscience. Conscience *per se* is infallible, for it is the innate norm of morality in the essence of human nature itself. The special verdicts of conscience are fallible, for they are mediated by a sin-affected understanding. But why was man's nature so constructed that the voice of conscience is capable of misinterpretation? In order to give play-room to moral freedom of choice. Conscience does not *force*, it only *admonishes*. A conscience that should *force* would be a *contradictio in adjecto*. A false decision of conscience would not involve guilt, were it not for the fact that the very existence of such a decision implies a sin-occasioned perversion of the primitive moral sentiment. The various so-called kinds of conscience — a true, a false, a doubting, a timorous, a lax, a sickly, a strong, a weak conscience — are only applicable to conscience in its secondary, analytical form. No system of ethics can have a safe basis without admitting this two-fold form of conscience. As justification by faith is the *articulus stantis et vel cadentis ecclesiae*, so is this conception of conscience the *articulus stantis et vel cadentis reipublicae moralis*.

After this able preparatory essay, Dr. Lange throws the whole body of ethics proper into the following general classification. Introduction: (1) General Introduction; (2) Special Introduction: (a) Sketch of Philosophical Ethics; (b) Sketch of Practical Ethics.

Part First—Principles: (1) Ontological Principles: (a) Of Personality; (b) of Spirit; (c) of Nature; (2) Soteriological Principles; (3) Organic Principles.

Part Second—Duties: (1) Duty in general; (2) The moral law; (3) The moral purpose; (4) Moral action.

Part Third—The Virtues: (1) Vice; (2) Virtue in process of genesis; (3) Christian virtue realized.

Part Fourth—Goods: (1) The moral good; (2) Evil; (3) The hierarchy of goods; (4) The goods in their historical development.

Under these general heads the author gives a very elaborate system of divisions and sub-divisions. Indeed, the subdividing is carried to such an extreme, the various subjects are treated under so many phases, that the reader sometimes finds it difficult to bring together the author's whole view of each separate subject. It is a tropical tree of almost infinite branchings and sub-branchings into twigs and twiglets, before arriving at the final fruitage.

Such a complicated system of classification, though having many advantages, has yet serious disadvantages. It tends to disjoin things which ought always to stand together. It is dangerous, e.g. to treat of moral action apart from the fruits of such action, to wit, the virtues. And how can we safely discuss the virtues in one place, and the goods in another? Are not the virtues *among* the goods? But the classification is not the most essential thing. The golden truth may be fully expressed under a very defective rubrication. We, therefore, turn away from the form of Dr. Lange's book, and glance at some further features of its contents.

As a general basis to the sciences we find the following sound statements: Ethics treats of that specific phase of human life which does not lie under the law of natural necessity. Nature is bound up in a play of cause and effect. The ethical life of man is *not so bound up*, but is under the law of freedom and self-determination.

The true morality of man consists in this,—that he freely guides his life in harmony with the requirements of his origin, his surroundings, and his end. By his very constitution he stands (through conscience) in organic communion with God, and hence with all necessary knowledge. His surroundings furnish the scope for the application of this knowledge. His end is the ideal perfection of himself and of his fellows, together with their cosocial surroundings.

As to the source of Ethics, Lange says: The chief source of ethics is the human conscience; for conscience is the moral law as incarnate in man. But as man's conscience is beclouded in consequence of sin, hence it is in the conscience of Christ that we are to look for man's conscience in its purity; for in Christ alone is human nature to be found in ideal perfection. But how are we to come into contact with the conscience of Christ? (1) Through the biblical record; (2) through the history of doc-

trines; (3) through our individual consciences as regenerated by faith in Christ.

As to form, ethics is a part of dogmatics. Up to the early Middle Ages, it was so treated. In the Middle Ages it tended toward independence. In the period of the Reformation it comes closer to dogmatics, and so remains till the close of the seventeenth century (Dannaëus, Callixtus). In the age of Spener it even encroaches on dogmatics. In the age of rationalism it declares its independence. In the Christological age which has overcome rationalism (Schleiermacher—Wuttke) it has come back to organic union with dogmatics; and such is also its present attitude.

In treating of the ontological basis of ethics, Lange holds: All ethics is based upon God. Atheism can have no ethics. And it is the triune, personal God who is the basis of ethics. In the divine self-consciousness which is the basis of the universe, God is Father. In the divine self-consciousness which is manifest in the world, God is the Son. In the divine self-consciousness which acts and reacts throughout the spiritual life of the universe, God is the Spirit. This three-fold relation of God to the universe is but the correlate of his threefold relation to himself. In the eternal consciousness of his self-determining power, God is the Father. In the eternal consciousness of his self-determined power, he is the Son. In the eternal consciousness of his free activity and unity, he is the Spirit.

In regard to the origin of sin, our author says: On the slightest first consciousness of an ideal norm, that is, a goal to be reached, man's freedom of choice is called into action. Now he can, if he will, correctly interpret the ideal, and come to the right form of action. Or he can also misinterpret it, and thus become a sinner. The ideals are the variegated manifestations of the idea, which flit before the race or the individual, as the guiding star before the magi. The true ideals are permanent, and do not evanesce. But opposite to them stand their travestied images, as *idola*. By following the *idolon*: *eritis sicut deus*, humanity fell a prey to a ruin from which only a miraculous intervention of the true ideal (in Christ) could redeem it.

This introduces us to soteriology. Soteriology proposes recovery from sin. The condition from which sin debased man, consisted of these points: (1) That man's original constitution was pure, and that he possessed *formal* freedom of choice between moral opposites. (2) That his destination was to develop himself in harmony with his original constitution, and to raise his formal freedom of choice into *material* freedom, or virtue. (3) That he failed to follow his destination, and thus became a sinner.

Sin is moral disorganization. It leads to death, but not *fatalistically*. Depravity consists in an inherited preponderance of tendency to sin over our innate impulsion of conscience toward God.

Salvation consists in a providential re-establishment of divine inter-communion with the human conscience through the medium of chosen

human instruments. Human redemption might be defined as a progressive *re-establishment of human conscientiousness*. Contact between God and the human conscience has existed sporadically throughout heathendom. In Abraham it became more permanent. Moses was the prophet of conscientiousness. But that which he possessed as only a bright vision, Christ fully realized in his person. Hence the theanthropic life of Jesus is the organic starting-point from which all individual human recovery from sin sets out. By laying hold upon Christ through faith, we receive forgiveness of sin, and acquire strength to obey our primitive pure conscience. Let no one say, first freedom from the *power* of sin, and then from the *guilt*, for the two things are simultaneous. And our disenthralment from an evil conscience is the source of our joy in God, and of our delight in the good. There is no methodistic second conversion to holiness apart from our state of justification by faith as persevered in by holy living.

In his general discussion of *duty*, Lange is sharply polemical against Rothe, and essentially harmonious with Wuttke and Martensen. What is duty? It is the realization of the moral law in harmony with the changing circumstances of the moral subject. There can be no conflict of duties, for the norm of duty, the moral law, is *one*, and hence cannot contradict itself. It is an egregious blunder of theologians to have taught that the *Christian moral law is different from the original moral law*. They are not different, but identical. Redemption saves not *in*, but *from* sin. Christ came to *do away* with the works of sin. But the question may very naturally rise, Can sinful man perfectly fulfil the ideal moral law? No; not so long and in so far as he is sinful. But he can, and does do so, just in proportion as through faith in Christ he *ceases to be a sinner* and *becomes more and more a Christian*. We must distinguish between the ideal goal of man and our progressive steps toward that goal. A steady advancement towards that goal is the present duty of every one, even of the sinner.

The moral law is the expression of the will of God. This law is actually expressed in two forms — in the human conscience, and in the revealed Word. These two forms are *essentially identical*. The conscience is the perfect expression of the ideal man. The moral law of the Bible is the same. For this thought we heartily thank the author. It is a point which is but imperfectly expressed even by Schleiermacher, Rothe, and Müller. Also Ritschl misses it. This, however, does not imply that the one or the other is superfluous. On the contrary, they are correlates and mutual helps. The Bible would be useless without conscience. The conscience of sinful man would be inadequate without the Bible. The primitive conscience of unfallen humanity would have been sufficient, had the race developed its original *formal* freedom into the *material* freedom of positive virtue. For, then, each successive new-born individual would have found himself environed by, and imbedded in, an atmosphere of objective mor-

ality (history, institutions, customs) which would have adequately guided him in translating his innate conscientious impulse into its correct analytical application to the circumstances of actual life.

Such are a few of the ground thoughts upon which this compact and richly suggestive system of ethics is erected. We have cited them both because of their intrinsic worth, and also in order to call attention to this freshest fruit in the rapidly enriching field of Christian ethics. The work of citation might be extended much further; but our purpose would not be thereby more fully accomplished. We therefore abruptly break off, and refer the public to the work itself.

ARTICLE X.

NOTICES OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS.

A. GERMAN WORKS.

OUTLINES OF THEOLOGICAL ENCYCLOPÆDIA, INCLUDING METHODOLOGY.¹—Dr. Lange is of opinion that Hagenbach's well-known Theological Encyclopædic View of Theology, though an admirable work in its way, needs supplementing. He remarks, not incorrectly, that whilst its lists of literature are over long, its definitions are wanting in definiteness. My own feeling has long been that Hagenbach's work was much too general in its character, and too large for its purpose. What Dr. Lange's view of the subject is will be best described in his own words: "Theological Encyclopædia, as the organic unity of all the theological *Disciplinae*, i.e. as the concentrated theological consciousness, the intuition of the theological idea, is the most necessary of studies, not merely for beginners in theology, but for every theologian. The lack of encyclopædic consciousness manifests itself in the manifold entanglements of theological works, but especially in the analytical fragmentariness of the theological reminiscences of theological beginners. Very rarely is the theologian as such an *omnia sua secum portans*. Many live in theology like hermits in a great forest, with whose boundaries, contents, entrances, and outlets they are but very defectively acquainted. This is specially true at the present day, in which synthetic studies are neglected in favor of analytical." The main divisions of his work are: Introduction. Part I. General Theological Encyclopædia; Groundlaying. A. The Idea of Objective Theology; B. The Idea of Subjective Theology. 1. The genesis of objective theology: *a.* the movement of religion, especially of Christian knowledge, towards science; *b.* the development of science in its move-

¹ Grundriss der theologischen Encyclopædie mit Einschluss der Methodologie. Von Dr. J. P. Lange. Heidelberg. 1877.