

ARTICLE III.

THE RULE IN CAIN'S CASE: A STUDY IN ETHICS.

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A MEMORY of a study in law, long gone, lingers. In that study I found something called, "The Rule in Shelley's Case." What that rule was I do not now know — perhaps I never knew. No matter. I want the form in blank. I wish to fill the blank in the form with the name "Cain"; so that it will run, "The Rule in Cain's Case."

We read in Genesis iv. that Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord. Something was wrong with Cain or with his manner of offering; so that it is said that Cain and his offering were not acceptable to the Lord. Whereupon it is said that "Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell." Then comes, in the record, a statement of what I call, *The Rule in Cain's Case* (Gen. iv. 6-7):—

"And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?"

"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin coucheth at the door."

I would fix attention upon the detection and recognition of the rule in our personal experience, and wherever we may find it expressed or indicated in literature—in the workings or the work of the mind of man. If one keeps the rule in point of regard, interest in it will grow with years. Out of his study will come the conviction of the universality

of moral experience, and knowledge of a constant form of its expression.

The Rule in Cain's Case is the most primitive and comprehensive statement of the moral government of God over man. As a rule of morals it is Alpha and Omega. The first man knew it and the last man will. The rule has presided over human history and will preside over human destiny. It is a primal, inclusive, and ultimate statement of the psychology of ethics—of the experience of man in the domain of right and wrong. All that we have done in morals and in ethical philosophy is illustrative of some phase of this rule, or of some natural and justifiable inference from experience under it.

The double character of the rule strikes attention at once. It contains both "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not," or rather "thou shouldst" and "thou shouldst not"; for it is suggestive rather than mandatory, with a declaration of their respective consequences. According to this rule, right finds assent, and wrong negation. To illustrate: take a coin of the realm—a silver dollar. The numismatists, or coin experts, say it has an obverse or a front side, and a reverse or rear side. In this rule, the two sides of moral government are as clear to apprehension as the obverse and reverse faces of a coin.

We often speak of moral government as one thing, and so forget its divarication into two sides in its essence and inception. This radical divarication between right and wrong is minted on the front and the back of this rule. The human race *in its moral experience* has always read therein this double inscription, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? if thou doest not well, sin coucheth at the door."

I have said we have done nothing in ethics except to ex-

plicate this rule and the results of action under it. To bring this clearly to view, let me plunge down a long way in history, and take up an illustration from a great master in ethics. Take the fifth chapter of Paul's letter to the Galatians, and you find him cataloguing what he calls "the work of the flesh" on the one hand, and "the works of the Spirit" on the other. He has fifteen specifications under "the works of the flesh" and nine under "the works of the Spirit." But the nine specifications will fall on one side, and the fifteen on the other, of the rule in Cain's case. The nine indicate ways of doing well, and their results; and the fifteen, ways of doing ill, and their results. All the specifications are but modes of moral practice into which the rule in Cain's case will differentiate.

For a summary of difference in *results*, Paul has given a sentence on which we must pause. He says, speaking of "the fruits of the Spirit,"—differentiations of the front face of the rule,—“Against these there is no law”—there is no restriction—no limitation. There is liberty to wander among the fruits of the Spirit forever. We find no bar in any direction. Freedom is absolute. We can go anywhere in "doing well" and find no check. To all "well-doing," proposed or accomplished, we find always, "Yes"—we have and see the "uplifted" countenance of "approval." If we regard Paul's specifications of "well-doing" as a spectrum, we can take a forty light-year flight to Arcturus, and see nothing on our way but corruscations of all colors, and infinite combinations of tints from the primal lines of this moral spectrum,—see nothing but "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." If we take Paul's specifications of "well-doing" as a gamut, we hear nothing on the same immensurable journey but tones

harmonious with the music of the spheres. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" in their journey in "well-doing," but "God hath revealed them" in the psychology of the well-doer.

"Look how the floor of Heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.
There is not the smallest orb which thou beholdest,
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims:
Such harmony is in immortal souls."

Merchant of Venice.

But it is somewhat different if we get on the reverse side of the rule—if we do not well. We then find ourselves front to front with the restriction of law. We face a hedge of thorns. We are in an infinite tangle of barbed wire. There is no play of color tint there—nothing but the forbidding blackness of darkness. There is no outlook in that direction. Night shuts down. In that land is no song. We hear nothing but the harsh tone of disapproval. The drift of things is not that way. It is against whoever walks therein, first, last, and forever. Burns, the detective, says, "There are no mysteries in crime. Every criminal leaves a track behind him." Hence "the way of transgressors is hard." A thief needs omniscience and omnipotence to cover up his tracks. "A liar needs a long memory." "Murder will out." Two criminals recently thought to escape from England to this continent. But all the ether was aquiver with inextinguishable derisive laughter over their folly in trying to hide their crime and themselves, and whispered to all men over sea and over land their location; and they landed in the arms of retributive law.

We shall not do better than to take our symbol of the con-

dition on this reverse side of the rule from the language of the rule itself. "If thou doest not well, sin coucheth at the door." There you are—the canine tooth is before you. Now interpret the canine tooth in the realm of spirit. What did the canine tooth mean to the early generations of men? It was the supreme fear. Men knew it was merciless. It had the art too of concealing itself till it made its spring. The first thing known was that one was in its power. The saber-toothed, couched tiger lashed his tail, bared his teeth, sprang, and man was a helpless victim. Is not that exact symbolism of consciousness when one is on the wrong side of the rule in Cain's case? There you are—disapproval, sudden and remorseless. Sin couched, and made its spring.

Though we know the rule in Cain's case, we have not exhausted methods of its explication and application. We say, There are advances in thought. There are certainly changes. We need to take advantage of these or to meet their demands. We are not failing, I think, properly to set forth the advantages of harmony with God and such adjustment with him as is represented by the obverse or front side of the rule. The abounding and superabounding love of God does not lack exposition in these days. The joy of heaven in heaven and on earth is none too highly painted. Exhortation to "do well," and thus secure acceptance with God, is not neglected. But we do not like to deal with the reverse side of the rule, and perhaps are not happy in our method when we do. In fact, it may be said that our philosophy of retribution is chaos. A large element of our difficulty comes from the fact that we, perhaps in the main, suspend retribution as a threat over the future; whereas we should fix attention to it as an experience of the present.

PSYCHIC RETRIBUTION.

We are not adepts in this day in the treatment of the *results* of sin. Of course, retribution, like everything psychological, had to be first expressed by physical symbol. We have dismissed hell with its fire and brimstone physically, and there we seem to have stopped. In dismissing physical conceptions, we have failed to explicate the psychic conditions of which they are symbol. It is much more agreeable to treat of the goodness than of the severity of God. The goodness is there, but the severity is there also. It is as unwise and as unkind to be blind to the latter as to the former. The latter is just as evident as the former; and we "lie, and do not the truth," when we fail to declare it.

Look at this. If it expresses a result of being on the reverse side of the rule, could even Jonathan Edwards have depicted to thought anything more fearful?

"The serpent of the fields
By art and spells is won from harming.
But that which coils around the heart
Ah! who hath power of charming!

"It will not list to wisdom's lore,
Nor flattery's voice can lure it;
But there it stings forevermore
The heart that must endure it."

Lord Byron is here on psychic ground. What shall we do with him?

"Shall I kill myself? What help in that?
I cannot kill my sin, if soul be soul."

Psychic ground! What will you do with Guinevere?

"The still whisper of the Inward Word;
Bitter in blame, sweet in approval heard,
Itself its own confirming evidence:
To health of soul a voice to cheer and please,
To guilt the wrath of the Eumenides."

Whittier.

Look at this:—

“In every fearful shape
Guilt still alarms, and conscience ne'er asleep
Wounds with incessant strokes, not loud but deep,
While the vexed mind, her own tormenter, piles
A scorpion scourge, unmarked by human eyes.
Trust me no tortures which the poets feign
Can match the fierce unutterable pain
He feels, who night and day devoid of rest
Carries his own accuser in his breast.”

Gifford's Juvenal.

The phenomenon of psychic retribution was patent to Juvenal, and he fearlessly proclaimed it. And Juvenal was not a child of Christianity.

Cain cried out, “My iniquity is greater than I can bear.” Cain was not in hell. He was on the green-flowered earth, with soft orient breezes playing about him. He found out that there is a canine tooth *within* for ill-doing. He could not stay where he was—“he went out.” Is not that what they usually do who are on the reverse side of the rule? They “go out.”

“Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care,
Fashioned so slenderly,
Young and so fair.”

Now we will “be pitiful, courteous,” but we must not lie. Here has been experience “in *doing not well*.” Result:—

“Glad to be hurled anywhere,
Anywhere out of the world.”

Of such there is a daily procession *out*. And he! the co-author in causing such tragic wretchedness and wreck. What dreams of having done “*not well*” may not come to him *out* in the wireless—“while the years of eternity roll”? Even here—

“Out in the desert alone rode he,
 Alone with the Infinite purity,
 And measured his path with prayers of *pain*,
 For peace with God and nature again.”

It was the Saviour of men himself who said: “Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him, lest the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt not come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.” This is not a sociological direction to keep out of a court of a justice of the peace, in an action of *assumpsit*. Fall into practice on the reverse side of the rule in Cain's case, and you will find an adversary of Infinite power who will not tolerate antagonism in his universe without a protest any one can understand.

Physical conditions consulted . . . it is well.

Not consulted The Titanic!

Moral conditions consulted . . . it is well.

Not consulted The Titanic!

One in the Sea!

One in the Soul!

It is a far cry from Cain at any time or place in ancient history, to a court house in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1830 — from sacrifices, to a criminal trial in a court of law; but we must take that transition. Let us look at Mr. Webster in the trial of the murderers of Captain Joseph White. Remember the year — 1830. Mr. Webster had just given to the country the words, “Liberty and Union now and forever, one and inseparable,” — which in the thirty years will defeat the war of rebellion, and make us a united nation with liberty throughout all its borders. I call attention to the date

and the preëxisting speech of the same year, that we may have the idea that we have a great man before us in the full possession of his faculties. We may find that his perception is as clear in ethics as in statesmanship. Listen:—

“A sense of duty pursues us ever. It is omnipresent like the Deity.” “If we take to ourselves the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, duty performed or duty violated will be with us for our happiness or our misery.”

That is the rule divaricated in the very form in which you find it in the fourth chapter of Genesis—“If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? if thou doest not well, sin coucheth at the door.” Choate in his Eulogy on Webster called attention to this treatment of moral duty by Mr. Webster, and in his own masterly way spoke of the “universality, the authoritativeness, and the eternity of moral obligation.”

These are days of erection of commemorative tablets. I suggest that a tablet bearing the inscription, “Duty performed or duty violated will be with us for our happiness or our misery,” be placed over the entrance of the Court House in Salem. No sentence of greater import or reach was ever uttered by man. It is greater than Mr. Webster’s own “Liberty and Union now and forever, one and inseparable,” for that was gauged to national intent; while “Duty performed or duty violated will be with us for our happiness or our misery” is anthropic, eternal. Indeed, why not place the sentence over the portal of every court house? What is law but applied ethics, wrought by reason and practice under the rule in Cain’s case? What is it but effort to find and execute right or repress wrong?

“And sovereign law, the state’s collected will,

O’er thrones and globes elate,

Sits Empress, crowning good, repressing ill.”

Sir William Jones.

Let us cross over wide realms of race distinction and history. I found the following but just the other day. "The Problem of Religion in Japan." In the Japanese Magazine for December, 1913, the President of the University of Kyoto writes:—

"Where then is the youth of Japan at this time to find the authority that is to be obeyed? He will find it in the *obligations* that attach to *all good*. The moral and spiritual laws that compel the *best* of men to *right conduct* are equally binding on all. There is no higher authority than that of righteousness. Man should lead a rational life and it is irrational not to obey, and follow *the best*. And the best is not necessarily the new. The best is that which has the authority of *right*, and authority that is very *old*, though always growing stronger because better appreciated. Good manners and customs are based on this authority and such manners and customs are binding on all true men. Therefore let our young men follow in the way that leads to life."

Take down Whittier. Toward the bottom of the last column of the first page of the last leaf, you read something like this: "Oriental Maxims, Paraphrase of Sanscrit. The Inward Judge. From Institutes of Manu." Now I do not know who Manu was, I do not even know that he was. Perhaps he was another man of the same name; perhaps he was a tendency. I do not know. But this I know, that there was some one back in the dimness of history on the Aryan-Japhethian line who knew that there are moral universals as well as physical, and who knew how to express the great moral universal in the duplex form of the rule in Cain's case. Hear this ancient Aryan Moral Seer:—

"The soul itself its awful witness is.
Say not in evil doing, 'No one sees,'

And so offend the conscious One within,
Whose ear can hear the silences of sin
Ere they find voice, whose eyes unsleeping see
The secret motions of iniquity.

“Nor in thy 'folly say, 'I am alone.'
For, seated in thy heart, as on a throne,
The ancient Judge and Witness liveth still,
To note thy act and thought: and as thy ill
Or good goes from thee, far beyond thy reach,
The solemn Doomsman's seal is set on each.”

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: “Quench not the Spirit.” See that ye refuse not him, who, seated in thy heart as on a throne, speaketh with you according to the rule in Cain's case,—

“I thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? If thou doest not well, sin coucheth at the door,”—

which rule was, and is, and is to be, forever and forever.