

the development of Christian faith into true knowledge (Gnosis), and the value of the natural development of man through marriage for the normal perfecting of the Christian life. So again, there is a marked difference between the writers before Augustine and those that succeeded him in all that concerns the internal conditions of Christian morality. By Justin and other apologists the need of redemption, faith, grace is indeed recognized, but the theological system depending on these notions is not sufficiently developed<sup>1</sup> to come into even apparent antagonism with the freedom of the will. Christianity is for the most part conceived as essentially a proclamation through the Divine Word, to immortal beings gifted with free choice, of the true code of conduct sanctioned by eternal rewards and punishments. This legalism contrasts strikingly with the efforts of pagan philosophy to exhibit virtue as its own reward; and the contrast is triumphantly pointed out by more than one early Christian writer. Lactantius (*circ.* 300 A.D.), for example, roundly declares that Plato and Aristotle, referring everything to this earthly life, "made virtue mere folly;" though himself maintaining, with pardonable inconsistency, that man's highest good did not consist in mere pleasure, but in the consciousness of the filial relation of the soul to God. It is plain, however, that on this external legalistic view of duty it was impossible to maintain a difference in kind between Christian and pagan morality; the philosopher's conformity to the rules of chastity and beneficence, so far as it went, was indistinguishable from the saint's. But when this inference was developed in the teaching of Pelagius, it was repudiated as heretical by the church, under the powerful leadership of Augustine (354-430); and the doctrine of man's incapacity to obey God's law by his unaided moral energy was pressed to a point at which it was difficult to reconcile it with the freedom of the will. Augustine is fully aware of the theoretical indispensability of maintaining Free Will, from its logical connexion with human responsibility and divine justice; but he considers that these latter points are sufficiently secured if actual freedom of choice between good and evil is allowed in the single case of our progenitor Adam.<sup>2</sup> For since the *natura seminalis* from which all men were to arise already existed in Adam, in his voluntary preference of self to God humanity chose evil once for all; for which ante-natal guilt all men are justly condemned to perpetual absolute sinfulness and consequent punishment, unless they are elected by God's unmerited grace to share the benefits of Christ's redemption. Without this grace it is impossible for man to obey the "first greatest commandment" of love to God; and, this unfulfilled, he is guilty of the whole law, and is only free to choose between degrees of sin; his apparent external virtues have no moral value, since inner rightness of intention is wanting. "All that is not of faith is of sin;" and faith and love are mutually involved and inseparable; faith springs from the divinely imparted germ of love, which in its turn is developed by faith to its full strength, while from both united springs hope, joyful yearning towards ultimate perfect fruition of the object of love. These three Augustine (after St Paul) regards as the three essential elements of Christian virtue; along with these he recognizes the fourfold division of virtue into prudence, temperance, courage, and justice; which, however, he explains to be in their true natures

<sup>1</sup> To show the crudity of the notion of redemption in early Christianity, it is sufficient to mention that many fathers represent Christ's ransom as having been paid to the devil; sometimes adding that by the concealment of Christ's divinity under the veil of humanity a certain deceit was (fairly) practised on the great deceiver.

<sup>2</sup> It is to be observed that Augustine does not himself understand by "freedom" the power of willing either good or evil, but the power of willing good. The highest freedom, in his view, excludes the possibility of willing evil.

only the same love to God in different aspects or exercises. The severe uncompromising mysticism of this view may be at once compared and contrasted with the philosophical severity of Stoicism. Love of God in the former holds the same absolute and unique position as the sole element of moral work in human action, which, as we have seen, was occupied by knowledge of Good in the latter; and we may carry the parallel further by observing that in neither case is this severity in the abstract estimate of goodness necessarily connected with extreme rigidity in practical precepts. Indeed, an important part of Augustine's work as a moralist lies in the reconciliation which he laboured to effect between the anti-worldly spirit of Christianity and the necessities of secular civilization. For example, we find him arguing for the legitimacy of judicial punishments and military service against an over-literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. And, more generally, by adopting and giving currency to the well-known distinction between evangelical "counsels" and "commands," he defended the life of marriage and temperate enjoyment of natural good against the attacks of the more extravagant advocates of celibacy and self-abnegation; although he fully admitted the superiority of the latter method of avoiding the contamination of sin.

The attempt to Christianize the old Platonic list of virtues, which we have noticed in Augustine's system, was probably due to the influence of his master Ambrose; in whose treatise *De officiis ministrorum* we find for the first time an exposition of Christian duty systematized on a plan borrowed from a pre-Christian moralist. It is interesting to compare Ambrose's account of what subsequently came to be known as the "four cardinal virtues" with the corresponding delineations in Cicero's *De officiis* which has served the bishop as a model. Christian Wisdom, so far as speculative, is of course primarily theological; it has God, as the highest truth, for its chief object, and is therefore necessarily grounded on faith. Christian Fortitude is essentially firmness in withstanding the seductions of good and evil fortune, resoluteness in the conflict perpetually waged against wickedness without carnal weapons—though Ambrose, with the Old Testament in his hand, will not quite relinquish the ordinary martial application of the virtue. "Temperantia" retains the meaning of "observance of due measure" in all conduct, which it had in Cicero's treatise; though its notion is partly modified by being blended with the newer virtue of humility; while in the exposition of Christian Justice the Stoic doctrine of the natural union of all human interests is elevated to the full height and intensity of evangelical philanthropy; the brethren are bidden to regard all things useful as the common property of all. Ambrose, we should observe, is thoroughly aware of the fundamental union of these different virtues in Christianity, though he does not, like Augustine, resolve them all into the one central affection of love of God.

The combination which Augustine introduced between these four cardinal virtues and the triad of Christian graces, Faith, Hope, and Love, determined the ground-plan of the treatment of systematic ethics for subsequent ecclesiastical writers generally. In antithesis to this list of virtues, an enumeration of the chief deadly sins obtained currency. These were at first commonly reckoned as eight; but a preference for mystical numbers characteristic of mediæval theologians finally reduced the received list to seven. The statement of them is somewhat variously given by different writers.—Pride, Avarice, Anger, Glut-

<sup>3</sup> Cicero's works are unimportant in the history of ancient ethics, as their philosophical matter was entirely borrowed from Greek treatises now lost; but the influence exercised by them (especially by the *De Officiis*) over mediæval and even modern readers was very considerable.

tony, Unchastity, are found in all the lists; the remaining two (or three) are variously selected from among Envy, Vain-glory, and the rather singular sins Gloominess (Tristitia) and Languid Indifference (Acidia or Acedia, from Greek ἀκρδία). These latter notions show pretty plainly, what indeed might be inferred from a study of the list as a whole, that it especially represents the moral experience of the monastic life; which for some centuries was more and more unquestioningly regarded as in a peculiar sense "religious." It should be observed that the (also Augustinian) distinction between "deadly" and "venial" sins had a technical reference to the quasi-jural administration of ecclesiastical discipline; which grew gradually more organized as the spiritual power of the church established itself amid the ruins of the Western empire, and slowly developed into the theocracy that almost dominated Europe during the latter part of the Middle Ages. "Deadly" sins were those for which formal ecclesiastical penance was held to be necessary, in order to save the sinner from eternal damnation; for "venial" sins he might obtain forgiveness, through prayer, almsgiving, and the observance of the regular fasts. We find that "penitential books" for the use of the confessional, founded partly on traditional practice and partly on the express decrees of synods, come into general use in the 7th century. At first they are little more than mere inventories of sins, with their appropriate ecclesiastical punishments; gradually cases of conscience come to be discussed and decided, and the basis is laid for that system of casuistry which reached its full development in the 14th and 15th centuries. This elaboration of ecclesiastical jurisprudence, and indeed the general relation of the church to the ruder races with which it had to deal during this period, necessarily tended to encourage a somewhat external view of morality; but a powerful counterpoise to this tendency was continually maintained by the Augustinian doctrine, transmitted through Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville, and other influential writers of the philosophically barren period that intervened between the destruction of the Western empire and the rise of Scholasticism.

The great effort of the scholastics to philosophize in harmony with the Christian dogma attained its completest result in the teaching of Thomas Aquinas. But before giving a brief account of the ethical part of his system, it will be well just to notice the salient points in the long and active discussion that led up to it,—the dogmatic construction of Anselm, the bold questions and suggestive paradoxes of Abelard, the subtle distinctions of Petrus Lombardus, and the novel Aristotelian erudition of Albertus Magnus; nor must we overlook the Neo-Platonic mysticism of Johannes Scotus (Erigena), though separated in time and thought from the main course of scholasticism. In the pantheistic system of this earliest of the great mediæval thinkers (*circ.* 810-877), the chief philosophic element is supplied by the influence of Plotinus, transmitted through an unknown author of the 5th century, who assumed the name of Dionysius the Areopagite. Accordingly the ethical side of his doctrine has the same negative and ascetic character that we have observed in Neo-Platonism. God is the only real Being; evil is essentially unreal and incognizable, and the concrete world of individuals only real in so far as it partakes of the divine nature; the true aim of man's life is to return to perfect union with God out of the degraded material existence into which he has fallen. This doctrine found no immediate acceptance, and was certainly unorthodox enough to justify the condemnation which it subsequently received from Pope Honorius III.; but its influence, together with that of the Pseudo-Dionysius, had a considerable share in developing the more emotional orthodox mysticism of the 12th and 13th centuries; and Neo-Platonism remained a distinct element in mediæval thought,

though obscured by the growing influence of Aristotle, until its revival in the age of the Renaissance. Passing on to Anselm (1033-1109), the first real scholastic of importance, we observe that the Augustinian doctrine of original sin and man's absolute need of unmerited grace is retained in his theory of salvation; he also follows Augustine in defining freedom as the "power not to sin;" though in saying that Adam fell "spontaneously" and "by his free choice," though not "through its freedom," he has implicitly made the distinction that Petrus Lombardus afterwards expressly draws between the freedom that is opposed to necessity and freedom from the slavery to sin. Anselm further softens the statement of Augustinian predestinationism by explaining that the freedom to will is not strictly lost even by fallen man; it is inherent in a rational nature, though since Adam's sin it only exists potentially in humanity,—like the faculty of sight in a dark place,—except where it is made actual by grace. In a more real sense Abelard (1079-1142) tries to establish the connexion between man's ill desert and his free consent; boldly asserting that the inherited propensity to evil is not strictly a sin, which is only committed when the conscious self yields to vicious inclination. With a similar stress on the self-conscious side of moral action, he argues that rightness of conduct depends solely on the intention; at one time pushing this doctrine to the paradoxical assertion that all outward acts as such are indifferent.<sup>1</sup> In the same spirit, under the reviving influence of ancient philosophy (though as yet imperfectly known), he argues that the old Greek moralists, as inculcating a disinterested love of good—and so implicitly love of God as the highest good—were really nearer to Christianity than Judaic legalism was. Nay, further, in the Christian "love to God" he distinguishes the disinterested love of God for Himself from the affection of which the real object is the happiness which God gives, and regards the former alone as pure. The general tendency of Abelard's thought was suspiciously regarded by contemporary orthodoxy;<sup>2</sup> and the over-subtlety of the last-mentioned distinction provoked vehement replies from more than one of the orthodox mystics of the age. Thus, Hugo of St Victor (1077-1141) argues that all love is necessarily so far "interested" that it involves a desire for union with the beloved; and since eternal happiness consists in this union, it cannot truly be desired apart from God; while Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) more elaborately distinguishes four stages by which the soul is gradually led from (1) merely self-regarding desire for God's aid in distress, to (2) love Him for His loving-kindness to it, then also (3) for His absolute goodness, until (4) in rare moments this love for Himself alone becomes the sole all-absorbing affection. This controversy, as well as others, Petrus Lombardus endeavoured to compose by the scholastic art of taking distinctions, of which he was a master. His famous treatise, *Libri Sententiarum*, though not systematic or profound, deserved the place it long held as a text-book of Catholic theology, by its combined comprehensiveness and minuteness of view, and its sobriety of judgment. It is mainly based on Augustinian doctrine, though we find in it a distinct softening of the traditional antithesis between nature and grace; somewhat anticipating the remarkable union of Aristotelian and Christian thought, which, in the succeeding century, when the study of Aristotle had been revived by the influence of the great Arabian commentators, was initiated by Albert the Great and completed by Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>1</sup> Abelard afterwards retracted this view, at least in its extreme form; and in fact does not seem to have been fully conscious of the difference between (1) unfulfilled intention to do an act objectively right, and (2) intention to do what is merely believed by the agent to be right.

<sup>2</sup> He was condemned by two synods, in 1121 and 1140.



The moral philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is Aristotelianism with a Neo-Platonic tinge, interpreted and supplemented by Christian dogma. All action or movement of all things irrational as well as rational is directed towards some end or good,—that is, really and ultimately towards God Himself, the ground and first cause of all being, and unmoved principle of all movement. This universal striving after God, since He is essentially intelligible, exhibits itself in its highest form in rational beings as a desire for knowledge of Him; such knowledge, however, is beyond all ordinary exercise of reason, and may only be partially revealed to man here below. Thus the *summum bonum* for man is objectively God, subjectively the happiness to be derived from loving vision of His perfections; although there is a lower kind of happiness to be realized here below in a normal human existence of virtue and friendship, with mind and body sound and whole and properly trained for the needs of life. The higher happiness is given to man by free grace of God; but it is only given to those whose heart is right, and as a reward of virtuous actions. Passing to consider what actions are virtuous, we first observe generally that the morality of an act is in part, but only in part, determined by its particular motive; it partly depends on its external object and circumstances, which render it either objectively in harmony with the "order of reason" or the reverse. In the classification of particular virtues and vices, we can distinguish very clearly the elements supplied by the different teachings which Thomas has imbibed. In dividing the "natural" virtues into intellectual and moral, giving his preference to the former class, and distinguishing in it the "intellect" that is conversant with principles, the "science" which deduces conclusions, and the "wisdom" to which belongs the whole process of knowing the sublimest objects of knowledge, Thomas follows Aristotle closely; his distinction among moral virtues of the justice that renders others their due from the virtues that control the appetites and passions of the agent himself, represents his interpretation of the Nicomachean ethics; while his account of these latter virtues is a simple transcript of Aristotle's, just as his division of the non-rational element of the soul into "concupiscible" and "irascible" is the old Platonic one. In arranging his list, however, he defers to the established doctrine of the four cardinal virtues; accordingly, the Aristotelian ten have to stand under the higher genera of (1) the prudence which gives reasoned rules of conduct, (2) the temperance which restrains the passions, and (3) the fortitude that strengthens the soul against them. But before these virtues, which belong to the nature of man as a rational creature, and can be acquired, though not perfectly, as a mere natural result of training and practice, are ranked the three "theologic" virtues, faith, love, and hope, supernaturally "instilled" by God, and directly relating to Him as their object. By faith we obtain that part of our knowledge of God which is beyond the range of mere natural wisdom or philosophy; naturally (*e.g.*), we can know God's existence, but not His trinity in unity, though philosophy is useful to defend this and other revealed verities. Faith is the substantial basis of all Christian morality, but without love—the essential form of all the Christian virtues—it is "formless" (*informis*). Christian love is conceived (after Augustine) as primarily love to God (beyond the natural yearning of the creature after its ultimate good), which expands into love towards all God's creatures as created by Him, and so ultimately includes even self-love. But creatures are only to be loved in their purity as created by God; all that is bad in them must be an object of hatred till it is destroyed. In the classification of sins the Christian element predominates; still we find the Aristotelian vices of excess and defect, along with the modern divisions into "sins

against God, neighbour, and self," "mortal and venial sins," &c.

When from the essentially jural notion of sin we pass to the discussion of law, we observe another element in Thomas's doctrine, drawn from a different part of the renaissance intellectual activity of Europe,—from the study, namely, of Roman jurisprudence, which attained in the 12th century so rapid and brilliant a revival in Italy. This side of Thomas's system is specially important to notice, since it is just this blending of theological conceptions with the abstract theory of the later Roman law that gave the starting-point for independent ethical thought in the modern world. Under the general idea of law, defined as an "ordinance of reason for the common good," promulgated by him who has charge of the community, Thomas distinguishes (1) the eternal law or regulative reason of God which embraces all His creatures, rational and irrational; (2) "natural law," being that part of the eternal law that relates to rational creatures as such; (3) human law, which properly consists of more particular deductions from natural law adapted to the circumstances of particular societies; (4) divine law specially revealed to man. As regards natural law, he teaches that God has firmly implanted in the human mind a knowledge of its immutable general principles, although the applications of them may sometimes be obscured and perverted by bad education and custom. Human law is required, not merely to determine the details for which natural law gives no clear guidance, but also to supply the force necessary for practically securing, among imperfect men, the observance of the most necessary rules of mutual behaviour. A further force is supplied by the revealed code of the decalogue and the gospel combined, which again goes beyond natural law in directing the way to eternal life. We have, however, to distinguish in the case of the gospel between (1) absolute commands and (2) "counsels," which latter recommend, without positively ordering, the monastic life of poverty, celibacy, and obedience, as the best method of effectively turning the will from earthly to heavenly things. Finally, to express the manner in which the moral law operates in the mind, Thomas uses and defines the specially Christian notion of conscience, distinguishing the "synderesis" (*συνείρεσις*) by which moral principles are permanently retained from the "conscientia" by which they are applied to particular cases.

But how far is man able to attain either natural or Christian perfection? This is the part of Thomas's system in which the cohesion of the different elements composing it seems weakest. He is scarcely aware that his Aristotelianized Christianity inevitably combines two different difficulties in dealing with this question: first, the old pagan difficulty of reconciling the position that will is a rational desire always directed towards apparent good with the freedom of choice between good and evil that the jural view of morality seems to require; and, secondly, the Christian difficulty of harmonizing this latter notion with the absolute dependence on divine grace which the religious consciousness affirms. The latter difficulty Thomas, like many of his predecessors, avoids by supposing a "co-operation" of free-will and grace, but the former he does not fully meet. It is against this part of his doctrines that the most important criticism, in ethics, of his rival Duns Scotus (1266-1308) was directed. He urged that will could not be really free if it were bound to reason, as Thomas (after Aristotle) conceives it; a really free choice must be perfectly indeterminate between reason and unreason. Scotus consistently maintained that the divine

<sup>4</sup> The "synderesis" of the Catholic mystics is a different notion; it is the "apex mentis," the highest faculty of the mind, by which the most perfect communion with the Divine nature is realized.

will is similarly independent of reason, and that the divine ordering of the world is to be conceived as absolutely arbitrary,—a point on which he was followed by the acute intellect of William of Occam (d. 1347). This doctrine is obviously hostile to all reasoned morality; and in fact, notwithstanding the dialectical ability of Scotus and Occam, the work of Thomas remained indubitably the crowning result of the great constructive effort of mediæval philosophy. The effort was, indeed, foredoomed to failure, since it attempted the impossible task of framing a coherent system out of the heterogeneous data furnished by Scripture, the fathers, the church, and "the Philosopher"—equally unquestioned, if not equally venerated, authorities. Whatever philosophic quality is to be found in the work of Thomas belongs to it in spite of, not in consequence of, its method. Still, its influence has been great and long-enduring,—in the Catholic Church primarily, but indirectly among Protestants, especially in England, since the famous first book of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* is to a great extent taken from the *Summa Theologiae*.

Partly in conscious antagonism to the erudite labours and dialectical conflicts of the schoolmen, yet with close affinity to the central ethico-theological doctrine which they read out of or into Aristotle, the mystical manner of thought continued to maintain itself in the church. Philosophically it leant upon Neo-Platonism, but always blending the Christian element of love with the ecstatic vision of Plotinus, and sometimes giving the former a decided predominance. In its more moderate form, keeping wholly within the limits of ecclesiastical orthodoxy, this mysticism is represented by Bonaventura and Gerson; while it appears more independent and daringly constructive in the German Eckhardt, advancing in some of his followers to open breach with the church, and even to practical immorality.

In the brief account above given of the general ethical view of Thomas Aquinas no mention has been made of the detailed discussion of particular duties included in the *Summa Theologiae*; in which, for the most part, an excellent combination of moral elevation with sobriety of judgment is shown, though on certain points the scholastic pedantry of definition and distinction is unfavourable to due delicacy of treatment. As the properly philosophic interest of scholasticism faded in the 14th and 15th centuries, the quasi-legal treatment of morality came again into prominence, borrowing a good deal of matter from Thomas and other schoolmen. The best known *Summa Casuum Conscientie*, compiled for the conduct of auricular confession, belong to the 14th and 15th centuries. As the chief of these we may mention the *Astesana* (14th century) and the *Angelica* (15th century) by two Franciscans, Astesanus and Angelus de Clavasio respectively. It was inevitable that, in proportion as this casuistry assumed the character of a complete and systematic penal jurisprudence, its precise determination of the limits between the prohibited and the allowable, with all doubtful points closely scrutinized and illustrated by fictitious cases, would have a tendency to weaken the moral sensibilities of ordinary minds; while, again, the more industry and ingenuity were spent in deducing conclusions from the diverse authorities accepted in the church, the greater necessarily became the number of points on which doctors disagreed; and the central authority that might have repressed serious divergences was wanting in the period of moral weakness<sup>1</sup> that the church went through, between the death of Boniface VIII. and the counter-

<sup>1</sup> The refusal of the council of Constance to condemn Jean Petit's advocacy of assassination is a striking example of this weakness. — Cf. Milman, *Lat. Christ.*, book xiii. c. 9.

Reformation. A plain man perplexed by such disagreements might naturally hold that any opinion maintained by a pious and orthodox writer must be a tolerably safe one to follow; and thus weak consciences might be subtly tempted to seek the support of authority for some desired relaxation of a moral rule. It does not, however, appear that this danger assumed formidable proportions until after the Reformation; when, in the struggle made by the Catholic church to recover its hold on the world, the principle of authority was, as it were, forced into keen competition with that of private judgment for the guidance of men's consciences. To the Jesuits, the foremost champions in this struggle, it seemed indispensable that the confessional should be made attractive; for this purpose ecclesiastico-moral law must be somehow "accommodated" to worldly needs; and the theory of "Probabilism" supplied a plausible method for effecting this accommodation. The theory proceeded thus:—A layman could not be expected to examine minutely into a point on which the learned differed; therefore he could not fairly be blamed for following any opinion that rested on the authority of even a single doctor; therefore his confessor must be authorized to hold him guiltless if any such "probable" opinion could be produced in his favour; nay, it was his duty to suggest such an opinion, even though opposed to his own, if it would relieve the conscience under his charge from a depressing burden. The results to which this Probabilism, applied with an earnest desire to avoid dangerous rigour, led in the 17th century were revealed to the world in the immortal *Lettres Provinciales* of Pascal.

In tracing the development of casuistry we have been carried beyond the great crisis through which Western Christianity passed in the 16th century. The Reformation which Luther initiated may be viewed on several sides, even if we consider only its ethical principles and effects, apart from the political and social aims and tendencies with which it was connected in different European countries. It maintained the simplicity of Apostolic Christianity against the elaborate system of a corrupt hierarchy, the teaching of scripture alone against the commentaries of the fathers and the traditions of the church, the right of private judgment against the dictation of ecclesiastical authority, the individual responsibility of every human soul before God in opposition to the papal control over purgatorial punishments, which had led to the revolting degradation of venal indulgences. Reviving the original antithesis between Christianity and Jewish legalism, it maintained the inwardness of faith to be the sole way to eternal life, in contrast to the outwardness of works; returning to Augustine, and expressing his spirit in a new formula, to resist the Neo-Pelagianism that had gradually developed itself within the apparent Augustinianism of the church, it maintained the total corruption of human nature, as contrasted with that "congruity" by which, according to the schoolmen, divine grace was to be earned; renewing the fervent humility of St Paul, it enforced the universal and absolute imperativeness of all Christian duties, and the inevitable unworthiness of all Christian obedience, in opposition to the theory that "condign" merit might be gained by "supererogatory" conformity to evangelical "counsels." It will be seen that these changes, however profoundly important, were, ethically considered, either negative or quite general, relating to the tone and attitude of mind in which all duty should be done. As regards all positive matter of duty and virtue, and most of the prohibitive code for ordinary men, the tradition of Christian teaching was carried on substantially unchanged in the discourses and writings of the Reformed churches. Even the old method of casuistry was