

PREFACE.

It may perhaps be imagined that the principles contained in the present volume are of too abstract or too metaphysical a character to be capable of reduction to real practice.

Let us therefore, in the first place, endeavour to understand what is meant by metaphysics, and to inquire whether all rational hopes of human progression and human amelioration must not be based on the improved and amended condition of abstract moral science.

1st, The term metaphysics has two distinct significations; one subjective, the other objective. In a subjective sense (the popular vulgar and improper sense), it refers to the constitution of the human mind, to the mental faculties, to the *process* of thought, but does not involve the substantive element of thought itself; nor in this sense does it pronounce on the reality or non-reality of the objects of thought. In this sense, it is mere psychology, more or less imperfect; and however interesting or useful that science may be, it is plainly evident that the province of that science for ever

forbids that it should be made the foundation of political ethics, which, if possible at all, can only be possible by their assuming the form of an abstract science based on the primary and indisputable axioms of the human reason.

2*d*, In an objective sense, the term metaphysics applies to something incomparably more extensive, and incomparably more important. In this sense, it neglects the instrument that thinks, and lays hold on the concrete product, *thought*. The mind that thinks is no longer the object of contemplation, nor are the difficulties connected with the mere process of thought (except so far as *logic* is concerned) allowed for one moment to interfere with the legitimate development of truth. Here the objective* elements of knowledge are supreme, and when once the fundamental principles are announced and admitted, the only legitimate process is the application of a correct logic which shall lead us further and further to the development of the necessary consequences of our principles. In this sense, logic itself is a metaphysical science; and so is arithmetic, and so are all the mathematical sciences; and in this sense we have endeavoured to exhibit the elements of political science.

* The term *objective* is frequently used as applicable only to the external world. I consider, on the contrary, that all *knowledge* is objective,—that is, objective to the intellect that knows. The mathematical sciences are thus objective, although they contain no reference to the material world; and it is the quality of objectivity that renders them capable of demonstration by one man to another. Psychology is, in one sense, as objective as astronomy.

Every abstract science is based on some few primary propositions of the reason, which are brought to bear on one substantive element of thought. That element in arithmetic is number; in algebra, quantity; in geometry, space; in statics, force; and in politics, equity: and the greater or less perfection of these respective sciences depends on the relative completeness with which the suites of consequences flowing from the primary propositions happen at any period of time to be evolved and developed. In an objective sense, therefore, metaphysics is coincident with philosophy, the *scientia scientiarum*, the science of first principles, the science of the fundamentals of human credence. Without metaphysics in this sense, we could believe in nothing that was not visible, tangible, or appreciable by some one of the organs of sense; we could have no morals, no religion, no Deity, no principles of honour, no ideal of beauty, no longings after good, no shame and confusion for error. But let us consider that man is not only an intellectual creature who *knows*, but also, and as especially, an agent who *acts*, and who in all his courses has two directions ever before him,—a *right* and a *wrong*. Supposing him willing, at every period of his life, to choose the better path, and to avoid the way of error, what guide has he, what light to direct his steps? Nothing, we reply, but *true thought*. Wherever this true thought may be derived from, or whatever the process by which it may be obtained, it is the proximate guide by whose aid

alone correct action can be evolved. Without the true thought, the correct action is impossible; and though it may be true with regard to the individual that the true thought may be borne down and give way before the temptations to which humanity is subject, it may most assuredly be maintained that the true thought will ultimately evolve an amended order of action, and, in every department to which it refers, ameliorate the condition of man upon the globe.

True thought, in every department of man's voluntary activity, is the precursor and harbinger of improved action. Whether in mechanics, in agriculture, in navigation, in morals, or in religion, true thought, *correct credence*, is the foundation of all action that assumes itself to be correct. And with the perfection of the thought, there does follow, as one of the great phenomena of mankind, an amended order of human action, and consequently a product of continually improving character. Why, it may be asked, could no man, one hundred years since, construct a steam vessel or a steam cotton mill? The materials were all at hand; their properties were known; there was no lack of wealth to embark; and no lack of hands to labour. What was the wanting requisite, the element without which those prodigies of man's creation would not spring into active being. There wanted the *true thought*. No man had ever in thought laid together the elements of the mechanism. No man's *reason* had ever seen through the necessary combinations, and con-

sequently no man's hands had ever exhibited the concrete mechanism. Accident, it is true, may lay bare an important fact, and many of the most useful discoveries are owing to what is termed chance ; but accident could never construct a steam vessel, nor ever evolve any of those complex combinations which mark the progress of civilization, while, at the same time, they prepare the way for its further advancement. What is true in mechanics is true also in other departments of human design and human activity. Accident might lay bare the primary fact that two lenses placed in certain positions would aid the eye and vastly increase the range of observation. But accident teaches only an isolated fact, which the human reason requires to ponder on, and the human activity to work into perfection. The astronomical telescope of the present day is the embodiment of true thought, just as the steam-engine or the chronometer is the embodiment of true thought. Had not the true thought preceded the execution of the mechanism, the instrument would have worked incorrectly, or would not have worked at all. And so in navigation or in agriculture. What has driven the galley from the Mediterranean, or the antiquated implement from the field of labour ? An amended order of thought, expressing itself in an amended product of human activity. The true thought precedes and produces all the improvements that take place by human design in every department of life. The progress of civilization itself is nothing more than the improvement of the condition of mankind

under an amended order of thought. Let the thought remain fixed and immovable at any period of a nation's progress, and all other beneficial progress is instantly arrested.

To apply this principle to the question of political amelioration, let us only ask what is indeed the problem of politics.

“To construct a system of political society that shall involve no injustice in its theoretic constitution, and in its practical operation shall involve the minimum of political evil.” Such, we apprehend, is the problem; and we maintain, without the slightest hesitation, that this problem can only be solved by a new and amended order of thought, and by exhibiting clearly that certain political conditions are logically based on the primary and metaphysical axioms of the human reason. There is a TRUTH in politics as well as in astronomy, and so far as the abstraction *equity* is concerned, the principles of true thought, or, in other words, of *knowledge*, must be abstract principles, and therefore in one sense metaphysical, but not more metaphysical than the axioms of mathematics.

Political evils exist because political societies are not the embodiments of true principles. They are miscalculated machines, whose theory is erroneous, and whose practical working is consequently incorrect; and so long as this is the case, there is a perpetual danger that the mechanism of society will be disturbed by the elements of revolt. Europe is gasping for a true system of political dogma, and the

events of the last few years teach us that no difficulty and no danger will restrain the masses of the population from seeking to construct a new mechanism of political society, let the temporary evils of the change be what they may.

It is very questionable, however, *whether any man in the world* is at this present moment capable of constructing a system of society, that, were it established to-morrow, would not fail, and be recast, ere many years are over, merely through its own falsity and demerit. Institutions endure for a period, but the erroneous thought that prevailed in their construction is ultimately found to produce practical evils that require to be swept away. The institutions fall, and others arise in their stead; better, it is true, but still wanting in the elements of permanence. Credence is continually becoming more correct, and change succeeds change as the amended order of thought becomes embodied in the institutions of the nations.

But let us ask, Is there no absolute rule of right, no immutable principle of ultimate certitude, with which the most scrupulous reason may rest satisfied after the most calm and impartial investigation? Is the political progress of mankind only a perpetual experiment, and a perpetual attempt to correct evils which can never be finally obliterated? Or, on the contrary, is not that political progress a definite and continuous tending to an ultimate principle, and to an ultimate condition of society which shall require no further organic change? Is it not a progress

from the antagonism and diversity of error to the equilibrium and unity of truth? Is it not a progress from the reign of power,—that is, from despotism,—to the reign of reason,—that is, to absolute equality of rights and absolute freedom of condition. And if we only learn to read aright the past history of political progress, shall we not there discover its law and measure, and be able to satisfy ourselves that the changes yet to come are confined within definite limits, and that, amid all the diversity of circumstances and all the variety of changes, there is evolving an ultimate and perfectly definite form of society, whose theory presents no discrepancies, and whose practical operation shall be the best the earth permits of.

That society is advancing to an ultimate and definite form we believe both on the testimony of revelation and on the teaching of history. But before that ultimate form can be realised in practice, it is absolutely necessary that its theory should be so perfected as to stand before the most strict investigation of the impartial reason. Scripture informs us that there shall yet be a reign of righteousness (justice) on the earth; and as man is the agent employed in working out his own political regeneration, it becomes him to use his best endeavours to ascertain what the particular form of that justice is, and how it may best be carried into universal operation. The principles of that *justice* are necessarily philosophical (or metaphysical, for names are of no importance); that is, they are abstract *principles*, written

by the finger of God on the constitution of the human mind, and necessarily believed to be true, universally and unconditionally, whatever the *conduct* of the individual may be. So soon as the intellect of man clearly comprehends an axiom, the belief in its truth is in no sense a matter of option or a matter of opinion. It is, in fact, only the expression in language of a necessary form of human thought; and though in morals the primary and most indisputable axioms may be infringed in practice every day of a man's existence, his *intellect*, so long as it continues to comprehend, has no power to believe that an axiom is erroneous, or that an impossibility (a contradiction) is true.

So far, then, from attempting to repel metaphysical or philosophical axioms from the region of politics, it is our very first duty, if we desire the political regeneration of mankind, to ascertain what are indeed the axioms of justice, what are its primary and fundamental principles, what are its universal and necessary truths, which must indeed command the assent of the human intellect, wherever that intellect shall clearly comprehend them. On the evolution of these principles, and on their universal acceptance, the hopes of the human race are irrevocably hinged. Nothing can be more certain than that error produces evil as its necessary consequence, and that truth produces good. On the discovery of mechanical *truth* (correct thought) depends in every age the progress and improvement of mechanics; and on the discovery of political *truth* depends, as neces-

sarily and universally, the progress and improvement of the political well-being of mankind. The institutions of bygone ages are fast melting away before the progress of human thought; and the great problem of politics is to discover the final and fundamental principles or axioms on which societies should be constructed, so that no man shall be able to say with reason that he is deprived of any right to which as a *man* he is legitimately entitled.

If there be no truth and no falsehood in politics, every man may do what he has the power to do; but if there be a truth and a falsehood, that truth may be investigated on the same principles as any other science, and may be maintained before the world with as little hesitation as the truths of geometry, geology, or astronomy. Nor can we hesitate to believe that whatever interests may be involved, whatever privileges of class, whatever advantages of the few at the expense of the many, the progress of true thought will continue to roll on, and to entail with it the absolute and complete destruction of every privilege and every institution that will not stand the calm and resolute investigation of reason.

The masses of the population have now acquired a power that can no longer be governed by force, and that ought to be regulated by reason. A large portion of Europe has been recently insurged, and the continental governments have been taught that force is not the *only* element required to allow the mechanism of society to function with safety and regularity. The evils of Ireland are still uncured,

and the practical answer of statesmen is, that they are incurable. The labouring classes of England are gradually but resolutely preparing themselves to claim, and, if need be, to extort the rights which reason teaches them ought not to be withheld. From the Mediterranean to the Baltic, and from the Carpathians to the Atlantic, a universal necessity for political change and political amelioration is expressing itself in terms that can scarcely be misunderstood.

And yet, amid all the excitement and all the turmoil, amid the "wars and rumours of wars," it is plainly evident that the reactions against the governments and established institutions are only reactions under a pressure that can no longer be sustained. They are forcible attempts to correct unbearable evils; they are struggles of a class that suffers against another class that is supposed to cause that suffering; but in no case is there the clear and definite exhibition of the ultimate end that ought to be arrived at. The popular party is attempting to obtain as much as it can, and the ruling party to withhold as much as it can; but no rational judgment is pronounced upon what ought to be obtained. No definite standard is appealed to; no principle is laid before the reason of which it can be said, This is right, and always was right, and always will be right, under every possible condition of political association. Certain advances are, it is true, made in the right direction—that is, certain evils are cured; but the problem of politics does not consist in the mere

cure of those gross and flagrant evils which have become so apparent that, by the very laws of humanity, they must cure themselves. In the ardour of changing the form of administration, it seems to be forgotten or neglected that the true welfare of a country consists, not in the form of government, but in the essential laws which are administered. And though the form of government may ultimately react, in a most powerful manner, on the internal constitution of the state, it is of absolute and primary importance that we should bear in mind, that slavery and despotism, lynch law or licentiousness, may be as rife and detrimental under a republic as a monarchy.

So far from the definite principles of political science being generally known, the very boundaries of political interference or of government legislation are undetermined. The very nature of an act, which the government of a country (whatever its form, whether monarchical or republican) is *competent* to prohibit, or to shackle with impositions, is left undefined, and determined on no principle of reason that commands the assent of mankind. Notwithstanding all the political experience of the French, and all the intellect that has been directed in that country to the discussion of political theories, the broad line of demarcation that separates individual action from political action is overstepped with an apparent unconsciousness of its existence. The first and most essential questions of politics, "What are the ends of government?" and, "In what cases is government

interference (legislation) legitimate?" are left unanswered, and the chief attention is concentrated on the form of administration; while the higher laws by which every government should be restricted, and to which every ruler should be subject, are left for the most part in abeyance. To illustrate our meaning, let us consider for a moment the case of the blacks in the slave states of America. Let us suppose that these blacks were admitted members of the political association; that they were allowed universal suffrage, and that they were freely, so far as the state is concerned, allowed to vote for the ordinary members of Congress; *but that they were still held to be the property of their masters.* Let us suppose that they had free power to bring their case before Congress; that one of their representatives should move for their emancipation, and that he should be outvoted by the *majority.* Will it be contended that an improvement has taken place in the condition of the *slave* by his being allowed a political vote, or that any majority in the world is *competent* to take into consideration whether a negro shall or shall not be continued in slavery? It is plain that so long as he is continued in slavery, whether by individual violence *or by the most regular form of law,* he is a wronged man; and whenever he has the smallest chance of success, he has the undoubted right to stand on his defence, and obtain his liberty at all hazards and in all circumstances.

The truth we wish to inculcate is, that there are principles of immutable and never-changing jus-

tice, which by no government and no majority can ever be legitimately infringed. That these principles are capable of being ascertained and developed. That they are metaphysical or philosophical principles,—that is, axioms of the human reason, to which the human reason must give its intellectual assent wherever it clearly comprehends them. That the denial of the logical consequences of these principles by those whose pecuniary interests are involved, is no more a refutation of the principles themselves than the non-admission of the earth's motion by the Roman priests, or the non-admission of the circulation of the blood by the physicians of England.

That the political well-being, not only of Britain, but of every country on the globe—that is, of the whole race of mankind—depends on the definite ascertainment, universal acknowledgment, and universal reduction to practice, of these principles of equity. That however knowledge may increase, and, by its beneficial influence, gradually improve the condition of mankind, it is to the perfection of political *science* that we must direct our views if we wish to ascertain those laws of reason which, when carried into practice, would ensure a *stable*, because a *just* order of society.

Without justice (a mental abstraction) there can be no stability (a concrete and external reality); and whatever the ignorant and the unreflecting may be inclined to charge against “mere theories,” the whole world may be challenged to bring forth one single

product of human activity and human design whose real correctness in practice does not depend on the mental correctness of the thought that superintended its production. Correct *thought* is the only means given to man to enable him to evolve correct action. It is true, however, that in few cases (perhaps none) are the political institutions of a country the result of direct design; but this is no reason that they should not become so. The darker ages, in which power, and not reason, regulated the affairs of mankind, have transmitted to all countries a vast heritage of error and injustice, that requires to be corrected. Many evils have been swept away, many errors buried in oblivion; but the question still remains, Are the existing institutions of any country (and for us of Britain more especially) now based upon a clear principle of equity, which would dictate the establishment of exactly the same institutions, were we called upon to originate a new State, or had liberty to remodel the old? Every change that takes place is designed upon some theory or other, and every attempt to form new institutions is derived from the mental conviction that the new institutions will work in a given direction. But amid all the temporary and practical changes which appear to absorb so much of the attention, it should be fairly asked, "What is the clear and definite *end* at which we wish to arrive?" True, we cannot attain that end at once, and generation after generation may pass away before the process of change is completed; but still it is of the utmost importance to

set the end before us, as the ultimate though far off point of destination, towards which we are at present travelling, and towards which the generations that come after us will continue to travel, perhaps with a continually increasing rapidity. To know what that end really is, we allege that we may learn, partly from history, which gives us the abstract course of political change, seen through the concrete changes that have already taken place; partly from revelation, which assures us, on an authority the most stable of all, that there yet shall be a reign of righteousness and peace on the earth; and partly by drawing out from the depths of human belief those primary axioms or laws of justice which neither vary nor change, and which, when fairly stated and pursued by the correct rules of logic, will give us the particular form of the fundamental laws which ought to regulate the political relations of mankind. Scripture, indeed, informs us that justice *shall* prevail; and on the testimony of HIM who is TRUTH, we may assuredly rest satisfied that in His good time it shall prevail. But what is the particular form of that justice? what institutions are compatible with it? what laws of human enactment or enunciation will it admit, and what laws will it reject? Will justice tolerate *slavery*? If not, slavery is doomed to perish for ever. Will justice tolerate the taxation of those who are excluded from all voice in the legislature or its appointment? If not, this also must pass away. Will justice tolerate that the gift of a dead king should be title sufficient to as much land as would

support a thousand families in plenty, while, as it is, those families may be forcibly removed, not having an atom of that earth which God gave to the children of men? And if the theory of fair and even-handed justice to all mankind without respect of persons will not tolerate these things; if they are found to controvert the primary and fundamental axioms of the human belief, universal and homogeneous, then come what may, and be the concrete form of change what it will,—let monarchies stand or fall, or republics, or any form of administration whatever, most assuredly we may predict that these things shall pass away and be forgotten, and that truth shall yet be *realised* on earth.

Although it is true that in one sense our Saviour's kingdom is not of this world, and although we are bound to repel all priestly domination of men who presumptuously assume to be the special interpreters of the divine will, and thereby to attract *to themselves* a worldly power and dignity, yet the plain tenour of the prophecies contained in the sacred Scriptures would, we think, lead to the belief that ere the world's close there shall be a period of peace and rest, a sabbath of the world, a sacred finishing of man's labours upon earth, a blessed time when truth shall prevail, a holy day when error shall no longer deceive, and when the pure light of God's Word shall shine in greater effulgence, casting its benign rays into every region of the earth, and uniting the whole race of man into one common brotherhood, having one faith, one Lord, and one heavenly Father. And if such be

the case, it is no metaphor to say that the kingdom of our Lord shall yet come on earth, and that He who was crowned with thorns shall yet (whether in visible form or not we cannot tell) be installed the supreme Ruler and Governor of mankind, the King of that Israel into which all the families of men shall have received adoption, "the King over all the earth." *

* Zech. xiv. 9.