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Sect. IV. Principles of Duty and of Benevolence.

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At the same time, let not the moral system be misapprehended, as if it were our duty, or even lawful, to prosecute what upon the whole we reckon the most beneficial to society, balancing ill with good. The moral sense permits not a violation of any person's right, however trivial, whatever benefit may thereby accrue to another. A man, for example, in low circumstances, by denying a debt he owes to a rich miser, saves himself and a hopeful family from ruin. In that case, the good effect far outweighs the ill, or rather has no counterbalance: but the moral sense permits not the debtor to balance ill with good; nor gives countenance to an unjust act, whatever benefit it may produce. And hence a maxim in which all moralists agree, That we must not do ill to bring about even the greatest good; the final cause of which shall be given below (a).

## S E C T. IV.

*Principles of DUTY and of BENEVOLENCE.*

HAVING thus shortly delineated the moral laws of our nature, we proceed to an article of great importance, which is, to enquire into the means provided by our Maker for compelling obedience to these laws. The moral sense is an unerring guide; but the most expert guide will not profit those who are not disposed to follow. This consideration makes it evident, that to com-

(a) Sect. 7.



plete the moral system, we ought to be endued with some principle or propensity, some impulsive power, to enforce obedience to the laws dictated by the moral sense.

The author of our nature leaves none of his works imperfect. In order to render us obsequious to the moral sense as our guide, he hath implanted in our nature the principles of duty, of benevolence, of rewards and punishments, and of reparation. It may possibly be thought, that rewards and punishments, of which afterward, are sufficient of themselves to enforce the laws of nature, without necessity of any other principle. Human laws, it is true, are enforced by these means; because no higher sanction is under command of a terrestrial legislator. But the celestial legislator, with power that knows no control, and benevolence that knows no bounds, hath enforced his laws by means no less remarkable for mildness than for efficacy: he employs no external compulsion; but, in order to engage our will on the right side, hath in the breast of every individual established the principles of duty and of benevolence, which efficaciously excite us to obey the dictates of the moral sense.

As the restraining, as well as active duties, are essential to society, our Maker has wisely ordered, that the principle which enforces these several duties, should be the most cogent of all that belong to our nature. Other principles may solicit, allure, or terrify; but the principle of duty assumes authority, commands, and must be obey'd.

As one great purpose of society, is to furnish opportunities without end of mutual aid and support, nature seconding that purpose, hath provided the principle of benevolence; which excites us to be kindly, beneficent, and generous. Nor ought it to escape observation, that the author of nature, attentive to our wants and to our well-being, hath endued us with a liberal portion of that principle. It enforces benevolence, not only to those we are connected

ned with, but to our neighbours, and even to those we are barely acquainted with. Providence is peculiarly attentive to objects in distress, who require immediate aid and relief. To the general principle of benevolence, it hath superadded the passion of pity, which in every feeling heart is irresistible. To make benevolence more extensive, would be fruitless, because here are objects in plenty to fill the most capacious mind. It would not be fruitless only, but hurtful to society: I say hurtful; for inability to procure gratification, rendering benevolence a troublesome guest, would weaken the principle itself, and attach us the more to selfishness, which we can always gratify. At the same time, tho' there is not room for greater variety of particular objects, yet the faculty we have of uniting numberless individuals in one complex object, enlarges greatly the sphere of benevolence: by that faculty our country, our government, our religion, become objects of public spirit, and of a lively affection. The individuals that compose the group, considered apart, may be too minute, or too distant, for our benevolence; but when comprehended in one great whole, accumulation makes them great, greatness renders them conspicuous; and affection, preserved entire and undivided, is bestow'd upon an abstract object, as upon one that is single and visible; but with much greater energy, being proportioned to its superior dignity and importance. Thus it appears, that the principle of benevolence is not too sparingly scattered among men. It is indeed made subordinate to self-interest, which is wisely ordered, as will afterward be made evident (a); but its power and extent are nicely proportioned to the limited capacity of man, and to his situation in this world; so as better to fulfil its destination, than if it were an overmatch for self-interest, and for every other principle.

(a) Sect. 7.

