On the Knowledge of Good and Evil

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"AND THE Lord commanded the man saying: Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desired to make one wise, she took the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her and he did eat.

And the Lord said, Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever. Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken."

This ancient story still stirs us because it exemplifies a perennial paradox. The knowledge of good and evil is something that both attracts and repels. Without the knowledge of good and evil, men have nothing to guide them in making choices. But this very kind of knowledge is frequently denied them. And if they persist in pursuing it by unlawful means the penalty is either physical or spiritual death. Why did the ancient Hebrews believe that the knowledge of good and evil was ominous, and why did they think that the acquisition of such knowledge could but point the the way to disaster?

The answers to these questions must derive from the way we construe the myth of the first temptation. In our day many elaborate schemes have been provided in the hope that they will enrich our appreciation of myth and ritual. These fertile schemes have been variously drawn from such disciplines as anthropology, depth psychology, language analysis, and the newly emerging science of myth criticism. The scholarly representatives from each of these sciences are eager to tell us their own version of the apple story. For example, it has been suggested that the story is the invention of a priest, who regarding the members of his own caste as the sole custodians of divine wisdom, wanted to warn the laity that its trespass upon the priestly domain would be at their own peril. Others have seen in this story a mere parable setting forth the grandeur and the misery that are so necessarily combined in human freedom, a freedom where knowledge of good and evil is at once both essential to us and denied to us. And, again, there are those who believe that the story reflects nothing more than the disillusionment of some ancient seeker after wisdom, who, growing weary of quest, finally convinced himself that it was folly to pass up all the other good things of life in this single pursuit of wisdom—this single and singular devotion to the fruit of one tree. I recall in this connection the statement made by one of my former colleagues who has since become a distinguished professor of psychology. Speaking before a group of young people in one of the Lincoln churches, he explained that the story about Adam and Eve partaking of the forbidden fruit illustrated the truth of Francis Bacon's very wise saying, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing". Eve's great mistake, he insisted, was in eating only one of the apples

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from the tree of knowledge. She should have eaten a bushel of them.

Around the motive or situation that inspired the apple story doubt hovers, but one thing we may be quite certain: it is at least a historical certainty that the deliberate eschewal of the knowledge of good and evil as being a bad thing for human nature is a notion highly repugnant to many thoughtful persons. No self-respecting Greek would have given it a second thought. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoic philosophers were in complete agreement on this point. They not only praised wisdom as chief among the virtues, but they were also alike in urging that knowledge of good and evil was the most precious of human possessions. Plato's statement recorded in the tenth book of the **Republic** may be regarded as typical. In the interpretation of the myth known as the **Vision of Er** he says, "And here, by dear Glaucon, is the supreme peril of our human state, and therefore the utmost care should be taken. Let each of us leave every other kind of knowledge and follow one thing if peradventure he may be able to discern between good and evil, and to choose always and everywhere the better life as has opportunity."

Many, if not most of the leading educators of the western world have been at one with Plato on this point however much they may have disagreed with him otherwise. From Socrates to John Dewey there has been a general acceptance of the idea that good conduct presupposes a knowledge of what is good and further that it should be the chief business of our educational institutions to enable one to secure that type of wisdom. Aristotle, for instance, tells us that those who know the character of what is signified by the term "good" will be like archers shooting at a mark. They may not always hit the target but at least they will be able to aim at it, and by so doing they will come closer than if they did not aim at all. When Francis Bacon declared that "knowledge is power" he had in mind the knowledge of what is morally good as well as that which is merely useful. Thomas Jefferson, along with the other founding fathers of our country, believed that knowledge of this type could be acquired by citizens who attended public or private schools and that such instruction as they would receive would be propaedeutic to the general welfare. The same sentiment has received an even more enthusiastic expression at the hands of John Dewey. The very title of his most popular book, **Democracy and Education** suggests that the growth of democracy can best be stimulated by the educative process.

In all of these instances, as well as in many others which might be mentioned, we find echoes of the dominant spokesmen for Greek thought and culture: so long as man follows his rational nature he will not only know what is good but he will act accordingly. Reason is that which distinguishes him from the so-called lower animals, and reason is always on the side of the good. The doctrine is neatly summarized in the well known words of Sakespeare, "Ignorance is the only evil, knowledge the wings wherewith we fly to heaven."

The clash of arms between those who, on the one hand, regard the knowledge of good and evil as the fruit of bitterness, and those in the opposite camp, who view it as an open sesame, has been raging since Greek met Jew and no armistice is in the offing. This is not, however, the main issue with which we are confronted at the present time. The bone of contention nowadays refers not to the knowledge of good and evil as something that is to be either desired or abhored, but rather to the logical issue of its real meaning. Instead of searching for the matter of the good, as traditional ethics had been doing for centuries, many of our con-

temporary philosophers have reached the conclusions that the idea of the good is void and that the sooner we stop looking for its fullness the better off we will be. In terms of the Genesis story, there is no fruit on the tree of knowledge. It only looks like fruit. When one attempts to eat it, he discovers it is merely an empty rind.

I now propose, accordingly, briefly to examine a few of the contemporary accounts of ethical theory, each of which purports to expose the vacuous state of any ontological pretensions about moral goodness. I shall begin with the emotive theory of ethics. Although is is not entirely new in the history of thought, it has gained a wide acceptance during the period immediately following the second world war. It is a narrow outgrowth of a wider empiricism that has dominated recent western philosophy. If you assume all reliable knowledge is derived from sense experience and that it can be verified only through experiments and observations, then it is claimed to follow from this assumption that knowledge of what is good or evil is a logical impossibility. Experience can tell us what is or what has been, and even what may be in the future, but it cannot tell us what ought to be. This claim has been made notorious by the English philosopher A. J. Ayer. In his book **Language, Truth and Logic,** he tells us why knowledge of good and evil is impossible. All genuine knowledge, he insists, consists of statements which are either analytic or synthetic and either kind of statement is equally mute on the subject of good and evil. You can't learn the meaning of good from analytic statements for they are mere tautologies I may say that the term "good" means a certain thing because I choose to define it that way. But since anyone else is free to define it some other way, the term can mean anything one wants it to mean and this will be equivalent to no meaning at all. Nor is the situation improved if I try to discover the meaning of good from synthetic statements, because statements of this kind are descriptive of experience and while experience may tell us what is or what has been, it cannot tell us what ought to be. You can't derive ought from is, nor can you assimilate values to facts, no matter how accurate your factual description may be. Hence, the conclusions seem warranted that the term "ought" has no descriptive function and that any ethical statement which affirms that something is good or ought to be done cannot be regarded as either true or false. In fact we are told that sentences of this kind are not statements at all. Instead, they are in the class of commands, exclamations, or expressions of the way one feels about something. They do not constitute knowledge in the sense that what is true for one person will at the same time be true for others. But this interpretation of ethical judgments is itself open to logical criticism. One such criticism relates to the fact that people do significantly disagree about what is good or what is evil. But how can people materially disagree about their respective states of mind? Certainly there is but very little disagreement about matters of mere taste and the area of tolerance is expanding. If ethical judgments are nothing more than expressions of taste there can be no sound basis for disagreement about what is good or evil. But the fact is that disagreements in moral matters are frequent. Therefore, either the disputations are senseless or something is wrong with Ayer's ethical theory.

Some of the emotivists have recognized this dilemma and have accordingly modified the theory in a way calculated to allow for meaningful disagreements but by the same logical stroke showing how these differences of opinion can contribute toward a more adequate understanding of the term "good". For example, it has been sug-

gested that the way one feels about the rightness or wrongness of any particular action is largely determined by what he believes to be the determinable facts related to it. To illustrate this point it is said that if someone believes that the habitual consumption of intoxicating liquors is an evil thing, the explanation of his belief can be traced to what he considers to be the facts concerning alcohol and its effects on the physiological and psychological processes that constitute human behavior. But what one person believes to be the facts about alcohol may be quite different from what some one else believes to be the facts about it. Thus these different appraisals give rise to different attitudes and for this reason what one person condemns as wrong another will condone as right or he may regard it as merely morally neutral. The real facts, however, about the effects of alcohol can be determined by scientific method. To the extent that the disagreement about what is good or evil is confined to the facts it can be resolved by patient and careful inquiry. And indeed, it is this very disagreement that prompts and promotes scientific investigation.

This method of resolving disagreements concerning good and evil is similar to, if not identical with the one proposed by John Dewey when he distinguished between the desired and the desirable, or the satisfying and the satisfactory. Dewey held along with the emotivists that the meaning of the term "good" refers to the subjective experience of desiring something. But "good", he said, cannot be identified with just any desire that occurs under any set of circumstances. What he calls the "desired" is defined to mean what anyone wants now, but ignoring the consequences that are likely to ensue upon its realization. The desires thus described are so numerous and they conflict with one another so often that the satisfaction of any one of them necessarily excludes the satisfaction of others. If, despite this psychological anarchy, one still wishes to identify goodness with human desires, he must find a way of distinguishing the specific desires to which the term "good" may be properly applied. It is to this purpose that Dewey invokes the term "desirable". He uses it to refer to those desires which remain after a person has taken into account the consequences presumably involved in different possible courses of action. Here then is a method for distinguishing good and evil. Both terms refer to what human beings desire. Evil desires are always desires of the moment considered without reference to the consequences that are likely to follow. Good desires are the ones that are experienced after the person has thought carefully about the consequences that are anticipated. In other words the intelligence is put to work. This is in line with the whole Greek tradition which habitually associated evil with ignorance and goodness with intelligence. But, unfortunately, human experience does not seem to support this theory of goodness. At any rate, actions which are usually regarded as evil are frequently performed by persons who possess a high degree of intelligence. Many of the worst crimes against society are perpetrated by persons of extraordinary mental ability. It is probably true that these persons do not desire the punishments which are consequent to their crimes, but if the good is to be identified with what any intelligent person desires, it is not the crime that is evil but rather the fact that the criminal has been apprehended. Granted that there is inevitably an element of the subjective lurking in the shadow of all ordinary uses of the term "good", it remains that the emotivists have gone to the extreme position of denying that goodness entails anything other than subjective factors. But happily some of the emotive school—the more cautious ones—have sought out a means by which they could impart to ethical

judgments something more than an arbitrary expression of the way one happens to feel about a particular course of action. Indeed, if one's sense of duty and obligation is to have any meaning at all there must be some objective standard against which his feelings and desires can be measured. But just what this objective standard may be is a knotty logical problem for all adherents of the emotive theory of ethics. Generally the emotivists are content to ignore these logical difficulties, but not so the cognitivists, a group that I shall next consider.

The cognitivists are those who hold that there is a known objective standard for distinguishing good and evil. Among them none have argued their position more vigorously than the formalists. To them the distinction between good and evil is regarded as being so crucial that it does not seem reasonable to believe that we have no safe way of knowing precisely what it is. Accordingly, they believe that the same kind of certainty that marks mathematics and logic ought similarly to characterize ethical studies. Hence, they argue that the difference between good and evil can be stated according to the prescribed rules. This is simple enough for anyone to understand and it might prove satisfactory if we could only be sure that we knew the right rules and if we could be equally certain that they are adequate to all conceivable circumstances. But these two conditions are precisely the ones which formalistic systems are apparently unable to meet. What are the rules that ought always to govern human conduct and from what authority do they proceed? It is just such questions as these that splinter the formalist group. Some have insisted that the laws are given by God. Others have held that they are inherent in the processes of nature. Kant believed that they could be deduced from the nature of reason. Hobbes maintained that they are created by the government that is in power. Still others have held that they are the product of the particular society of the moment. But no one of these accounts is quite adequate to justify the infallibility of moral rules.

Take, for example, the view that the rules of conduct are prescribed by God. How do we know that the claim made for divine authorship is genuine? All sorts of conflicting ideas have been supported by claims of this kind. Spinoza was no doubt right when he said of the ancient Hebrew prophets that when they talked about God they told us more about themselves than they did about the deity. This is not to deny that God had anything to do with the messages they proclaimed but merely to point out the inevitable human element that is invariably present whenever man reports the Divine speeches and volunteers his own interpretation of their meaning. We cannot mitigate the fallibility of human opinions merely by hoping that on this or that occasion a man truly understands the divine Purpose.

Nor is the situation improved when one appeals to reason as the authority for the rules of conduct. Stoicism was a philosophy which identified reason with God, and centuries later Immanuel Kant, in the spirit of rationalism, developed an ethics of duty based upon the principle of logical consistency which he took to be the essence of reason itself. But neither the Stoics nor Kant accomplished their claims. The Stoic formula "life according to reason" might have proved adequate as a guide to good conduct if the reason which is present in finite minds had been successfully identified with the world reason or with the mind of God. But unfortunately this identity is little more than a pious wish. Human reason is always influenced by the prejudices and desires of the agent. While we may not agree with those who assert that when we think we are being reasonable we are only rearranging our pre-

judices, the fact remains that the influence of these human limitations is never entirely eliminated by rational processes. It is always possible to find "reasons" to support whatever it is that we want to do.

Kant's formulation of the rules of conduct according to the celebrated "categorical imperative" or unconditional ought reveals another fatal flaw in the pretension to gain knowledge of good and evil merely by adhering to the canons of reason. The bare consistency of ideas may be a sufficient criterion of truth in the formal sciences, but human conduct is concrete and situational. It is bounded by the world of things and not by the world of concepts. In such a world consistency alone is not enough to tell us what we ought to do. The requirements of reason are universal in character and they remain constant no matter what the circumstances may be. Ethical decisions must be made in particular instances and the situations that confront us are never duplicated. Hence they cannot be covered adequately by the same rule. To be sure, the ethical situation is comparable in some respects to the use of the laws in the natural sciences. Nature never reveals two events that are exactly alike but yet we do not for that reason encounter any methodological difficulty in our universal application of the laws of nature. Why can't we do the same thing in the field of ethics? The reason we can't is this. In the natural sciences the differences among events belonging to the same class are conveniently ignored and without thereby obstructing the object of investigation. This is not true of human conduct. Here the differences are of the essence. Rules which would be proper and adequate under one set of circumstances will not do at all under a different set of circumstances. There are simply no ethical rules that ought to be obeyed under any and all conditions. Rules that forbid lying, stealing or even killing can scarcely be regarded as absolute. We can imagine circumstances under which we would want any one of them suspended. Who would say that it is right and proper to steal a loaf of bread if one could not otherwise save a child from starvation? Who would condemn anyone for telling a lie in order to save an innocent person from the hands of a merciless killer? Even the taking of human life as we do in times of war may be justified as the lesser of the evils between which one is forced to choose. Because human welfare is more important than any of the rules designed for its realization, there is no one of them that may not be set aside when the need for which it exists can be furthered more by its violation than by its observance. Formalism may appear at first sight to provide a means for knowing good and evil but its failure becomes transparent when its rules are actually invoked in test cases.

I pass now to the case of ethical intuitionism. Perhaps this method will succeed where the others have failed. Intuitionists have long maintained that such is the case. They insist that things which cannot be observed directly by the senses or derived from premises deductively may be known through the feelings. In other words we may experience an immediate awareness of truths which cannot be warranted in any other way, and these immediate truths may be our single source of the knowledge of good and evil. Certainly there can be no disputing that some things are known intuitively. How else would one ever know that a given object was beautiful or a person known that he was falling in love? If I known that I have a toothache or if I know that a given experience is pleasant or painful such knowledge is admittedly intuitive rather than inferred. Indeed it is not difficult to admit that intuition accounts for a great deal of what we call our knowledge. Scientists have honored the role of imagination in the

construction of new hypotheses, artists act on their intuitions, and in religion we hear a great deal said about divine revelation. Why then should it not be possible for the knowledge of good and evil to originate in this way?

Some intuitionists have held that the voice of conscience is entirely adequate for this purpose and that it speaks authoritatively. There are times when it seems to be nature's way of protecting human beings from the perils of what they call their intelligence. Nature equips the lower animals with instincts by which means they survive despite frequent unfavorable circumstances and it does not seen unreasonable to suggest that human beings have been given a conscience for a similar purpose. That conscience is an important factor in human life no one can deny. But to say that the content of one's conscience is restricted to objectively valid truths is quite a different story. The easy objection to this proposition derives from the simple fact that the dictates of conscience vary notoriously from person to person. Furthermore, an individual's own conscience will change from time to time depending variously on circumstances, reflection, or sometimes mere convenience. Anything as flexible as conscience can scarcely be regarded as true for all people and for all time.

It is but fair to say that contemporary intuitionists do not rely on conscience as an infallible guide in matters of conduct. They do, however, hold that the moral standards in our ordinary experiences of judging good and evil are known intuitively. W. D. Ross, for example, speaks of **prima facie** duties. These include the ideas of right and wrong which are usually taken for granted. They precede any reflection concerning their validity or their justification. Such notions as "stealing is wrong", "we ought to be truthful" or "one should treat others as he would like to be treated by them" belong in his classification of prima facie duties. These principles, he contends, are in some respects analogous to the axioms in mathematics. They are regarded as self-evident truths and as such they constitute the basis on which ordinary moral judgments are made. But empiricists dispute the thesis that these principles are known intuitively. They argue that they have been derived from social experience inasmuch as they are obviously similar to the ones previously held by parents and associates. But the intuitionists counter that the life situations which confront a new generation are nearly new and never exactly like the ones that faced the parents and hence the conviction arises that the rightness or wrongness of a particular action is known from the feelings rather than the application of some rule that has been handed down through the generations. At any rate the evidence would seem to indicate that there is an inuitive element in the usual type of moral judgment.

However, it must be admitted that the intuitions which are thus appealed to do not tell the whole story about what is good or evil. At best they are no more than a starting point for the moral decisions that must be made throughout one's life. The so-called self-evident notions may be useful in meeting many of the problems which arise in the ordinary course of things but sooner or later situations will occur where these notions are in direct conflict with each other and there will be no intuition to tell one which course to follow. Because life is an on-going process the problems one faces will always contain an element of newness and there are no rules of conduct that will be entirely adequate for each new set of circumstances. Even in those instances where one feels keenly that he ought to act in a certain way, it often happens that later events will indicate very clearly that his intuition was wrong. While it is undoubtedly true

that intuitions are an important factor in the making of moral decisions, it is equally true that they are not an infallible guide for conduct nor do they afford any reliable criteria for the determination of good and evil. At best, all that can be said in support of the intuitional theory is that intuitions are a fruitful source of new insights, the validity of which must be determined by the usual process of trial and error.

Formalists and intuitionists are not the only ones who have maintained that it is possible to know good and evil. Hedonists, self-realizationists, authoritarians, and others have made similar claims. An analysis of their arguments will, however, reveal that their respective claims have been no more successful than the ones we have considered. In spite of all the theorizing that has been done through the ages there is no indication that anyone has ever been successful in the development of a method that will yield certain knowledge of good and evil. "In the day that ye eat thereof, ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." If a finite human being knows good and evil such knowledge would entail that his mind is equal to the mind of God, and this is self-contradictory. Bertrand Russell has reminded us that most human beings would like to be God and many of them cannot resist the temptation to claim that they are God. But for the finite to claim itself to be infinite is the essence of idolatry, something that was universally condemned by the writers of the Old Testament. It is perhaps from this point of view that we can best surmise the meanings of the statement "In the day that ye eat thereof ye shall surely die."

Although we must recognize that perfect knowledge of anything is beyond the scope of human power, there remains a crucial distinction between the kind of knowledge that characterizes the natural sciences and the knowledge that we call moral philosophy. Scientific knowledge can be verified. And here processes of deduction experiment, and observation are of the essence. But this hypothetico-deductive method is not fruitful in moral philosophy. It is worse than fruitless. It is initially jejune. A physical law is said to be true when one can make successful predictions on its basis. But no prediction predicated on a moral decision will indicate whether the consequences will be good or evil. We may successfully predict that the consequences will be to our liking but that is a very different matter. What one likes is not necessarily identical with what ought to be.

There is another important distinction to bear in mind as we contrast these two types of judgment. It is the function of science to describe the world. In so doing we may as scientists be objective to the extent that our conclusions need not be influenced by our wishes or desires. We can do this because we have nothing to lose. The facts will remain whether we like them or not. We can only adjust ourselves to them. The case is different in our moral beliefs. Here we do have something to lose. The meaning and significance of one's entire life is at stake, and when this is true it is impossible to be entirely objective. As the existentialists have expressed it, truth in moral matters is subjective rather than objective. It involves a commitment on the part of the individual and his commitment is as much an act of will as of intellect. If a full and complete knowledge of good and evil could be imparted to the individual prior to his own effort to find out things, such a cosmic briefing would negate his freedom and nullify his sense of responsibility. The same result would obtain if perfect knowledge were achieved even after one had searched for it, for as soon as it has been achieved, at that moment all need for further inquiry as well as the risk of making wrong decisions will be eliminated. When this happens the significance of human free-

dom has been lost. Freedom of any kind necessarily implies responsibility. Even the freedom to think for oneself means the opportunity to make mistakes as well as the chance to think correctly. The consequences in either case must be regarded as the responsibility of the one who does the thinking.

It may be that this is the main reason why certain knowledge of good and evil is withheld from human beings. The story in the book of Genesis is a part of the religious literature of the ancient Hebrews. In religion, belief rests ultimately upon faith. This is not a peculiarity of the Jewish religion. It is a predominant characteristic of all the major religions of the world. Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam all repose in the finality of faith. They teach that the most vital beliefs in human experience are based on faith rather than reasoned knowledge. It is what a person believes rather than what he knows that determines his destiny. If it be true, as Christianity teaches, that "without faith it is impossible to please God", it may be equally true that without faith it is impossible to live the good life among men. In other words, faith may be as necessary in morals as it is in religion.

But faith as the basis for one's beliefs, like the freedom with which it is always associated, is not without its dangers. Addressing a group of young theologians, Alexander Miller is quoted as saying, "Beware of the doctrine of justification by faith. It is the biggest escape mechanism in the world." Certainly we know that faith can be used as an escape mechanism. It has very often been used that way. People have relied on faith as an excuse to keep from thinking. They have used it to rationalize their own desires and to support anything which they find convenient to believe. Obviously, faith used in this way serves no valuable end. It is merely a device for deceiving oneself. But faith need not be misused this way. Faith can go beyond the facts without going contrary to them. It can penetrate an area which lies outside of human experience without being obstructed by the facts lying within human experience. It can do even more than that. It can illuminate the totality of human experience by postulating a norm or standard according to which the meaning and significance of life can be judged. Faith used in this way is not contrary to reason. Rather it supplements and completes the work of reason. It is the expression not of a blind will but of a reason-guided will.

To speak intelligibly of good and evil entails some standard of judgment whereby the two may be distinguished. What this standard is, is the crucial problem in moral philosophy. So far as we can determine on the basis of mere evidence there is no reliable way of knowing what the correct standard is. For that matter we cannot even be sure that there is a standard. Whatever one accepts as a standard of goodness is necessarily an act of faith. If the faith is blind or purely arbitrary, it can postulate anything it pleases and this will be equivalent to no judgment at all. But a faith that is guided by reason will not postulate anything that is self-contradictory or contrary to good evidence. Furthermore, it will postulate something that gives the facts of human experience a more meaningful construction than they could enjoy under any purely rational interpretation.

From its inception moral philosophy has oscillated between two states of opinion about the ultimate standard of goodness. By one ancient version, as old as Plato's Thrasymachus, the standard is to be found in man who is but a biological organism struggling for surival and the acquisition of power. This is the naturalistic conception. Seen from this point of view man is a child of nature and self-preservation, physical comfort, and economic security, is the be-all and end-all of his existence. The

other sentiment finds the highest good in those qualities which differentiate man from other biological creatures. In religious language it is those aspects of his nature which enable him to become a child of God. This is the spiritual disposition. This temperament finds the highest values in the actualization of man's latent capacities for cultivating order, beauty, and harmony in a universe which would otherwise be a chaos. These two rival conceptions of goodness were dramatized in two pictures which appeared in a popular magazine some fifty years ago. Their appearance took place shortly after the disaster of the Titanic. Both pictures showed the stately ship broken by the iceberg and sinking under the icy waters of the Atlantic with its doomed human cargo. On one picture the caption read "The weakness of man, the supremacy of nature." The other picture was that of strong able-bodied men voluntarily standing aside to yield their place in the last life-boat to women and children. The caption under this picture read "The weakness of nature, the supremacy of man." Whether man is defeated by nature, or achieves by God's grace a truly victorious human nature will be determined by and only by the strength of his faith.