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DMESIS.

BY CHARLES S. PEIRCE.

THE mathematician Sylvester, (whose false accusation against me, hastily made and wickedly persisted in, is powerless to affect my estimate of his genius,) created, when he was in this country, a mathematical journal, which, by virtue of his fecundation, still makes a not quite insignificant figure in the thought-building business of this world; and upon the title-page of it he wrote for a motto that phrase of the Epistle to his people, *πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων*, "the evidence of things not seen." One wonders what he meant. Sure, mathematics only makes plain things that *are* seen, and less than any science is disposed to take anything on *faith*. But I guess the motto was covertly addressed to the thinkers of Europe, and meant to say, "you may jeer at the idea of fruits of pure intellect ripening in America; it is, indeed, a thing hardly yet seen; but the establishment of this journal is my testimony that a germinal capacity for higher things is here." No doubt, it amused the Jew that Christians should not resent his thus using one of their holiest symbols to serve the purpose of a calembourg.

How wonderfully Christian faith has been dissolving away since the appearance of the "Origin of Species"—especially among the clergy! Whether this is true or not of Christian faith considered as the acceptance of a formula, I am sure that it is if the phrase be taken in its more spiritual sense, for that attunement of the mind to nature which renders the truth of the beatitudes axiomatic. It is a trite remark enough that the general idea of those hyperbolic statements is the first principle of Christianity, from which the rest naturally flows. I am one of those who think this idea is also the heart of true philosophy;—an idea that ought to be carried out, right away, at all hazards, and to all lengths. But I find each year fewer people to agree with me in this.

In order to illustrate how I would conceive that the policy of the State ought to be governed by Christian Faith, let me ask upon what justifiable pretense do we punish criminals? They are secluded from everything beautiful and elevating, and are treated in the harshest

manner and the most tetrical spirit, and just as they are settling down to this mode of life, are turned out, to be caught again in a few months; and this is repeated over and over again, all their lives long. If they are capable of being made worse than they were when first taken, the imprisonment accomplishes it. The common run do not suffer, because they are utterly insensible. Even those who were respectable are relatively unfeeling persons,—and if they suffer at first, their imprisonment soon deadens all capacity for pain. The anguish and the misery is for their good wives and children and parents. This is the way we are treating criminals, to-day; and I do not ask what our real motive is; for I have no leisure to dispute with persons who choose to shut their eyes to the fact that we really punish criminals because we detest them. But I ask, what is our excuse for such behaviour? Some will allege the authority of the bible. But the bible is an accursed book if it can properly be used to justify iniquity. An unchristian maxim would be unchristian though the angel Gabriel were to descend to utter it. The very idea of Christian grace is that we can draw from within our own breasts the truth of God. We cannot shirk responsibility for wickedness by any bible-texts. Others will say, we must punish criminals because the State is under an obligation to preserve itself. It is true that such an obligation exists. Only, as Whewell well says, "we may speak of the duty of self-preservation as the *lower* duty of a state in comparison with other duties, such as the duty of rendering its subjects moral and intelligent, which are its *higher* duties."* But self-preservation, while not high on the scale of duty, is a forcible excuse for wrong-doing. Others, and they are very many, will hold that punishment is involved in the higher duty of the State to "maintain true religion and virtue." Still others, while repudiating any such duty, will maintain the opinion that punishment is justified by the principle of the greatest good to the greatest number.

Here, I believe, are all the reasons that are to be alleged for the justification of punishment; and there is many and many a mind who will conceive that the

* *Morality*, § 848.