

**AN ETHICAL SYSTEM
BASED ON THE
LAWS OF NATURE**

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An Ethical System Based on the Laws of Nature by M. Deshumbert & Lionel Giles & C. W. Saleeby

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BY

M. DESHUMBERT

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

LIONEL GILES, M.A., D.Litt.

WITH A PREFACE

BY

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"We live only by the general harmony of our
acts with the Laws of Nature."

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PREFACE

THE author of this patient, sincere, and searching work has done me the honour to ask for a preface from my pen. The task of writing it comes when I am almost overweighted with other work on behalf of the physical and moral protection of the men who are now giving their all in order that the principles of doing justice and loving mercy shall prevail and rule the coming world. Therefore I am more than ever inadequate for the present theme, and I apologise accordingly to M. Deshumbert and the reader.

It needs no special study nor discernment, however, to see that this book is a real contribution to the didactic literature, as yet so scanty and inchoate, of the Religion of Life. The days when evolution—an idea as old as the Buddha and Heracleitus—was thought to be new, and therefore fit for fashionable argument, are long past. The twentieth century is making history so rapidly that we are in danger of forgetting the colossal record of the nineteenth in destroying lies and establishing truth. But the line of Spencer and Darwin is not extinct. In France M. Bergson, in Sweden

Miss Ellen Key, are making contributions to the theory and the practice of that Religion of Life which is founded in its modern form upon the evolutionary ethics of Spencer and Darwin. It is in this high company, clearly, that M. Deshumbert must be placed. "To the solid ground of Nature," said Wordsworth, "trusts the mind which builds for aye."

At a date when a world-tragedy offers an opportunity for the abuse of such words as "good" and "right," M. Deshumbert quietly offers us genuine study and thought, in the service of that ever-increasing number of thoughtful persons who know that good is good and evil evil, and who know that such tremendous realities must have bases no less tremendous and real—bases which make all recited creeds appear trivial.

When the young generation, whose mind, no less than its body, is in our care, comes knocking at the door and anxiously or mockingly asks us for the sure foundations and sanctions of right and wrong, seeing that not even the professional teachers of theological morality now believe the things they say, we must be ready with an appeal to the Supreme Court of Nature, and with proofs that the laws of right and wrong are the very laws of life and death.

C. W. SALEEBY.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

WHEN M. Deshumbert's book, *La Morale fondée sur les Lois de la Nature*, first fell into my hands, my interest was aroused by the quotations from Chinese philosophers which appear on the first page. Having made some slight study of Taoism, I was especially struck by certain points of resemblance between that system and the doctrine so clearly expounded in the present treatise.

On closer examination, indeed, it appears that the *aims* of Taoism are practically identical with those professed by the author of *La Morale*, namely, the rejection of artificial codes of morality and the following of Nature herself as our only trustworthy guide. It is Lao Tzū's chief title to fame that he regarded man as forming one with the universe, and therefore advocated what was, in effect, a "return to Nature," and a life which should be in complete harmony with its environment. At a time when the respect for antiquated forms and ceremonies was carried to an extreme, this bold breaking with convention and indication of the true criterion of human conduct was an epoch-making step in advance.

But there still remained the all-important question: "What is the real aim or tendency of Nature as manifested in her works?" And to this question it is hardly surprising that the early Taoists should have been unable to furnish an adequate answer. Contemplating the universe around him, Lao Tzū seems to have been chiefly impressed by its unobtrusive tranquillity and the absence of effort which characterises its workings. Hence his message to mankind is summed up in his famous paradox: "Do nothing, and all things will be done." He saw, truly enough, that it is futile and wrong to strive in opposition to Nature, and he did well to insist that we should adapt ourselves to her laws. But it is not on that account necessary to lead a life of utter passivity, to "attain complete vacuity, and sedulously preserve a state of repose." It is hardly fair, perhaps, to criticise Lao Tzū or his successors on the strength of isolated sayings, but in general it may be said that they failed to grasp the significance of the facts in Nature which they wished to take as their model. Modern science has enabled us to penetrate more deeply beneath the surface of things, and we find that the smoothness and calm apparent in the operation of natural laws serves only to cloak a state of intense and unceasing activity, no particle of matter throughout the universe being at rest for a single moment. And the course of evolution, but dimly apprehended by the Taoists, shows that the grand