



OUTLINES
OF THE
HISTORY OF ETHICS
FOR ENGLISH READERS

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PREFACE

THE nucleus of this little book is formed by an article on "Ethics" which I wrote some years ago for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. I found that, in the opinion of persons whose judgment had weight with me, this article appeared likely to meet the needs of English students desirous of obtaining a general knowledge of the history of ethical thought: I have, therefore, by the permission of Messrs. Black, the publishers of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, reprinted it in this separate form. In so doing, I have considerably altered and enlarged it: but, after some hesitation, I determined to adhere to the main outlines of the original article, according to which the chapter (IV.) dealing with the modern period is mainly confined to English Ethics, and only deals with foreign ethical systems in a subordinate way, as sources of influence on English thought. I adopted this resolution, partly because it seemed to me that the merit of my article—if it had any—lay in a certain compact unity of movement which would

inevitably be lost if I tried to include a treatment of French and German moralists on a scale corresponding to my treatment of English moralists: while at the same time a considerable portion¹ of what I thus omitted appeared to me to have a distinctly subordinate interest for English readers as compared with what I included. I ought further to explain that, for somewhat similar reasons, I have taken pains to keep Ethics as separate as I conveniently could from Theology and Metaphysics, and also from Politics: this separation, however, is naturally less complete in some parts of the subject than in others;—*e.g.*, in dealing with the mediæval period the relations of Ethics to Theology are necessarily more prominent than in the modern period. Finally, I may perhaps say that I have aimed throughout at the greatest possible impartiality and “objectivity” of treatment; and in order better to attain this result I have not attempted to deal with contemporary modes of ethical thought—with which I have been engaged controversially—except in a very brief and summary way.

In the greater part of the book, *i.e.*, in by far the larger part of Chapter II., in almost all Chapter IV.,

¹ I draw attention to the words “a considerable portion” because they were overlooked by a reviewer who selected this sentence for severe criticism. The omission of them substitutes an opinion which I should regard as indefensible for one which I still think almost incontrovertible.