

THE  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

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ARTICLE I.

THE MORAL FACULTY AS DISTINGUISHED FROM  
CONSCIENCE.

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THERE is hardly any word in our language which is so convenient, and at the same time so inconvenient, that is, so difficult of satisfactory explanation to those who freely use it, as conscience. It is obvious, on a moment's reflection, that both the convenience and the inconvenience are owing to the same cause—its comprehensive meaning. Conscience is not a single faculty. It embraces exercises of the understanding, the reason, and the emotional nature; and expresses the result of their combined action in moral conduct. Now if all these powers were in their normal state, and the action of each absolutely correct, absolute correctness might be affirmed of the result of their united action; and a single word might exactly and truly express it. Or if, when the action of one of these elements of conscience is wrong, or in any way defective, the action of the others were also absolutely as well as relatively wrong, then the whole wrong might be predicated of the combined result without particular discrimination; and a single term might be used to express that result. But if one of the elements is always right in its action, while that of another is sometimes wrong, as is

the fact, it is not proper to regard their united result as wholly characterized by the action of either; as wholly right, when the action of but one is right, or wholly wrong, when the action of but one is wrong. We cannot, therefore, say that the decisions of conscience are *always in all respects right*; for the decisions of one of its elements are sometimes manifestly wrong. Nor, on the other hand, can we say that they are *ever in all respects wrong*; for the decisions of one of its elements, and the one too which is generally regarded as constituting all that is embraced in the word "conscience," are always right.

It is not strange, therefore, that confusion of thought should often take place in the use of this familiar word. More than this, practical evil here, as elsewhere, is likely to follow errors in judgment. If we take the ground, without very careful discrimination, that the judgments of conscience are not always correct, that it is liable to err in its decisions; our confidence in its authority is likely to be weakened. It will be regarded as essentially on a level with those impulses of our nature which are merely constitutional, and which often mislead us. It will not be recognized as the voice of God, but of man—of man, too, ignorant and fallible. Great practical evil is doubtless the result of this view of the subject. Attention is thus unduly fixed upon the element of conscience which is liable to err in its judgments. On the other hand, if the ground is taken that the decisions of conscience are always correct, that it never errs in its judgments,—meaning really a single element of it,—and that therefore it should always be obeyed; there is danger of evil in another direction. There is danger lest the decisions of the understanding, in respect to moral subjects, should be regarded as always right and clothed with the authority of an intuitive judgment. Just here will be found a fruitful source of most dangerous self-deception, and of fanaticism in its various forms and degrees.

It is a very important inquiry how the philosophical difficulties, and much more the injurious practical consequences,

which grow out of the use of this word, may be avoided. It would seem at first view, that a careful analysis of the different elements of conscience might entirely relieve the difficulty; so far at least, as regards minds of some degree of reflection. Much may doubtless be accomplished in this way for this class of persons. But more or less confusion is likely to follow the best attempts of this kind, as every teacher of Ethics can testify. In addition to this, the analysis, if well understood at the time, is liable to be forgotten or disregarded when most needed. Old and established habits of thought do not readily give place to new views, even though more correct. Were it not for the loss in other respects, and also were it possible, we should like to limit the meaning of the word "conscience" to what, in the minds of most men, is really expressed by it; and to assign other exercises of mind now embraced in it, to their appropriate faculties. This being impossible, as language is now constructed, the best method, we think, of clearing the subject of difficulty, and one which may be of some practical benefit, is to select the central element of conscience, that in it which is usually understood by the word, and assign to it an appropriate name, and use that name instead of the other, as often as occasion requires. This discrimination in the use of the word would gradually give it its proper place in written and oral discourse. Such a name stands ready for this use — the Moral Faculty. We are aware that this name is now generally used by ethical writers as synonymous with conscience. But the term is so suggestive of its exact meaning, so expressive of the precise idea contained in it, and no more, that it would be easy to recover it from the broader signification sometimes given to it, and limit it to this specific use.

Though the change which we suggest may never take place, — is not perhaps to be expected in any considerable degree, — there is an advantage in using the term "moral faculty," in discussing the general subject of conscience, in this limited and definite signification. In this way, better than in any other, we may be able to remove some of the difficulties that

beset this important subject. In this sense, therefore, we propose to use it in this Article.

By the moral faculty, thus limited, we mean the Reason when exercised upon subjects possessed of moral quality. On account of its great importance and frequent use as thus exercised, we give it a distinct name, and one significant of its precise office. Other exercises of the Reason or Intuitional Faculty, may have distinct and appropriate names assigned to them, when there is occasion, as in this case, to make very frequent reference to them. In this way we distinguish the different exercises of the emotions, the desires, and affections.

The distinguishing office of the moral faculty, is the perception of right and wrong in the character of moral agents. In connection with this perception, a sense of obligation is always felt to be, or do, what is seen to be right. But obligation and right are nearly, if not quite, identical. A better definition of a right action cannot be given than that it is something which a person is under obligation to do. An emotion also is experienced in perceiving the right, and still more distinctly in doing it. But this is no part of the moral faculty, and should no more be included in it than the emotion awakened by memory or the imagination should be included in these faculties. The moral faculty stands in an important relation to the emotions, and moves them as no other faculty does. But they are no part of it.

The subjects to which the action of the moral faculty is exclusively confined, are acts and states of the will. It takes no notice of external actions; no notice of acts of the intellect; no notice of the constitutional desires and affections; no notice of volitions, as executive acts of the will. It regards only deliberate choices of the will, and in accordance with them pronounces its judgments of character. Nor is it mainly of individual and specific choices of the will that the moral faculty takes cognizance; but rather of its settled states, its underlying, controlling principles, which give character to all specific acts. As moral quality is limited entirely to the state of the will, so also is the action of the

moral faculty. By bearing this constantly in mind, one of the principal difficulties connected with the subject will be avoided.

But the nature of the moral faculty, and its relation to other faculties must be learned, if ever learned to any good purpose, by noticing its operations in our own individual consciousness and experience. We can never be satisfied with any theory which we cannot verify in this way.

Let us, then, in the first place, notice what may be called the general law of the moral faculty, that is, the mode of its operation in connection with other mental faculties closely related to it; or, in other words, what is the order of mental action when we perceive the moral quality of states of the will, and experience the obligation consequent upon this perception. The moral faculty, like the other faculties of the mind, is never called into exercise except in conditions suited to its action. What then are those conditions, as shown by our own experience? It is to be particularly observed, that the moral faculty never pronounces its decisions directly upon the state of the will as seen by itself. Its judgments are not of the concrete, but exclusively of the abstract. It does not say that the will of a particular person is virtuous or sinful. It has no means of ascertaining the state of his will. It cannot see it directly, as consciousness sees it, nor has it any power of reasoning or inference by which it can come to a knowledge of the subject. For this knowledge it is entirely dependent upon another faculty—the understanding. There must therefore, first, be an exercise of the understanding by which the state of the will is ascertained. But here it should be carefully noticed, that the understanding does not decide whether the will is *virtuous* or *vicious*. It is not competent to this. It is not capable of a moral idea. It decides only as to the tendencies of the will; that is, whether it has a state, or principle that tends to the honor of God and the good of man, or the contrary. As soon as the understanding has thus decided upon the character of the will, whether its decision is correct or not, the moral faculty

gives its intuitive judgment. It says that a state of will which is obedient and benevolent is right. The case may be such that no further action of the moral faculty is required in respect to it. But if some expression of the state of the will thus approved, is to be made in external conduct, there must be another exercise of the understanding to decide in what manner this shall be done. On this point the moral faculty can say nothing. It has no knowledge of anything external. All that it does is to approve and require the exercise of a loving state of the will. Such a state, and such a state in exercise, it does require; but it leaves the will to learn for itself, how this state shall be expressed in action. This it does through the aid of the understanding, whose office it is to adapt means to ends. When the understanding has decided what appears to itself the proper mode of expression, there is another exercise of the moral faculty; if it should be called another, rather than the same one continued, which we have already noticed. Here the moral faculty *seems* to require a particular external action. But this is not the case. All that the moral faculty does at this point, is to urge the expression of love, in the scripture sense of the word. It does not indicate the mode in which it is to be expressed, and is in no sense responsible for it. That is left entirely to the will which obtains its light from the understanding. Should the understanding adopt a mode of expression which is improper, the moral faculty is not responsible for it. It does not indorse the action of the understanding; indeed, it does not know what that action is. But we shall have occasion to refer to this point again. In case the will is obedient and prompt to express its love in the way that the understanding suggests, there will be a still further exercise of the moral faculty. The will, in its acts of obedience, presents to the understanding a more decided and lively exercise of the moral affections than before. This is followed by a more decided approbation of the moral faculty in the conviction of personal merit and its attendant agreeable emotions.

In striking contrast with this is our experience, when the will is not disposed to obey at once the decisions of the moral faculty. If it is obedient, there is no experience of what some ethical writers call the "impulse of conscience." Such an exercise of the moral faculty takes place only when there is reluctance of the will to obey. The impulse, indeed, is only a repeated decision of the moral faculty that the state of the will is wrong, thus urging a different state. If obedience is still refused, the moral faculty pronounces its sentence of condemnation, which is accompanied by a sense of demerit and its attendant emotion, remorse. A brief illustration will embrace all the points of this analysis. A person in the neighborhood needs assistance. Our attention is directed to the case, and we experience certain feelings towards the person, prompting us to aid him. The understanding decides that these feelings are benevolent, such as tend to his good. The moral faculty at once says, such feelings are right. The understanding says again, give him food. The moral faculty says, the *state of will* which prompts to such an action is right and ought to be expressed — urges its expression. The lively affections of the will, called into exercise by obedience, receives a more decided approval of the moral faculty, which is followed by agreeable emotions. In this case, conscience would include what we have assigned to the understanding, the moral faculty, and the emotional nature. Such may be regarded as the general law of the moral faculty, which every one by a careful observation of his own consciousness may verify for himself.

We now turn to a more particular examination of those features of the subject, which are the occasion of more or less difficulty to most minds ; all of which, we think, can be satisfactorily explained in accordance with the principles which we have advanced.

It is a favorite argument of Paley and his school, that conscience is not an original faculty of the mind, but the result of education, because its decisions are often so very different in different nations and periods of the world ; and

even among different individuals in the same community. We must admit the charge. There is this diversity in the judgments of the conscience. The inference, however, by no means follows, that conscience is not an original faculty; or rather, that the faculties whose exercises are embraced under this name are not original faculties. Now the best way, if not the only effectual way, as respects common minds, to avoid the confusion and error incident to the use of the word "conscience" in such cases, is to adopt the preceding analysis, and show the exact office of the different elements of conscience. The specific office of the moral faculty, as we have seen, is simply to pass judgments upon states of the will; to decide that a state intending the good of another is right, and that the opposite state is wrong. It is not true of the moral faculty, however it may be of conscience, that its decisions are different in different ages and communities; that they are one thing in the first century, and another thing in the nineteenth century. They are always and everywhere one and the same. The different and contradictory voices complained of as coming from the conscience, come not from the moral faculty, but from the understanding. For the sake of perfect clearness, take a simple illustration. There is in the community a family in great distress by reason of extreme poverty. They are ready to perish for want of the necessaries of life. Attention is called to them, and a question of duty arises. Here a complex case in morals is presented, in which are involved, first, a certain feeling or state of the will towards the family; and secondly, the manner in which that feeling shall be expressed in action. Of the first only, the state of the will, does the moral faculty take cognizance, and its decisions will in every instance be the same; that is, it will approve in all cases a state of the will which is inclined to do the family good, to promote their well-being. There would be no exception to this decision, in a single instance, in any community or age of the world. The moral faculty approves of love, always and everywhere says it is right, and urges the expression of it. This is all

that it has to say in the case, or in any case that can be supposed. The proper mode of expressing love in action does not fall within its province. This belongs exclusively to the understanding; as much so as any case in which is involved simply the adaptation of means to an end. Here, of course, there may be a wide difference of opinion. One man may think that the best mode of aiding the family would be to give them money; another is of the opinion that they should be aided by giving them food and clothing; another is very decided in his judgment that the best expression of true benevolence would be to give them an opportunity to assist themselves by their own efforts. These different decisions of the understanding are perfectly consistent with one uniform decision of the moral faculty; for they have reference to an entirely different subject.

This simple analysis removes all difficulty in cases where the moral faculty, or conscience used in the limited signification which we have given to the moral faculty, seems not to speak with a uniform voice. Take the case, often referred to, of the Hindoo and Christian mothers in their treatment of their children. One conscientiously casts her child into the Ganges; the other conscientiously trains up her child for God. Here the decisions of conscience are very different. Not so, however, the decisions of the moral faculty. These mothers are both, we may suppose, actuated equally by love, by a sincere desire to benefit their children. The moral faculty gives the same approval of that love in each case. How the love shall be expressed by these mothers is the appropriate work of another faculty, whose judgments are often, as in this case, very different. In Sparta the moral faculty approved of that state of the will which prompted her citizens to seek the highest good of the commonwealth. So it did at Rome; and so it does everywhere. But how the highest good of the commonwealth can actually be secured, is a subject on which great difference of opinion may exist, and one which does not come before the moral faculty for a decision. The Spartans thought that it could be done, in part, by cul-

tivating in the young that shrewdness and skill which would be required to succeed in taking the property of others without being detected. They therefore encouraged theft. Another nation decides that the same object, namely, the good of the state, can be better secured in some other way. They agree as to what is right, namely, the intention to benefit the state; but differ in judgment as to the best mode of expressing that intention. The same analysis is to be observed in the great moral questions of the day, in respect to which there exists so wide a difference of opinion,—about which “conscience” has so much to do. On the subjects of war, slavery, temperance, union and disunion, and the like, the moral faculty of the nation and the world is one and the same; that is, it has nothing to say about them as modes of external action, as the embodiment of a living spirit. It is that living spirit itself, of love or the opposite, before it is embodied,—before it has assumed any form,—that is the subject of its decisions. What mode of expression the state of the will shall assume, it is not its province to decide.

A diversity exists, and always has existed, among mankind in their speculative opinions, as to the best mode of securing the ends which the moral faculty, without the least variation in its judgments, recommends. The reason for this diversity will be found in the difference of opinion as to what will best promote the good of man; and also in the difference of opinion as to the manner in which that good can be best secured. Enough has been said to show that the decisions of the moral faculty are in all cases uniform.

There arises at this point an inquiry of still greater interest in the discussion. Admitting, as we must, that the decisions of the moral faculty are uniform, are they also correct, always according to truth? Yes, we answer; they are absolutely correct. The moral faculty never gives a wrong decision. It is infallible. We admit that this cannot be said of conscience in the comprehensive sense in which it is used. In one of its elements the decisions of conscience are often

wrong. But in that element which we are now considering, and to which we give the name "moral faculty," there is no error. In its decisions it never reasons or comes to its conclusions indirectly by inference, but pronounces its judgments intuitively. It acts independently of any biasing influence of the will. It is the impersonal faculty, the voice of God rather than of man. We are so constituted that we cannot doubt the correctness of its decision. "If this is so, how does it happen," you ask, "that the moral faculty sometimes decides that a state of the will is right which is afterwards found to be wrong; which the same moral faculty afterwards decides is wrong? That such is the fact, is obvious in cases of self-examination. Otherwise how could a person ever be deceived in respect to his true character? If the moral faculty approve, and its decisions are correct, he must be a good man. But evidence is conclusive that such a person at the very time of approval may be a bad man. The same will sometimes be found true when the moral faculty passes its judgments upon the character of other men." This difficulty is apparent rather than real; and will disappear at once if we keep in mind the definition which we have given of the moral faculty, and what we have said of its mode of action. It is that faculty, we have said, which passes its judgments upon states of the will; which decides that a state of the will that intends good is right, and the opposite state wrong. In these decisions, we contend, it never errs. We have said also, and distinctly, that previous to such a decision there must always be an exercise of the understanding to decide what the intention of the will is. The moral faculty cannot take cognizance of external actions; nor has it the power of reasoning, of comparison, or inference, by which it can come to a knowledge of *actual* states of the will, either in ourselves or others. This, as we have seen, is the work of the understanding. In walking the street we see a man strike another a severe blow. We see him repeat the blow again and again, till the man who is thus beaten falls helpless to the ground. Instantly, with the quickness of intuition, we pronounce the

man who dealt the blows a bad man. The moral faculty condemns him as having a malicious state of heart. But how do we know what is in his heart? We do not know with certainty. But we have learned by observation that such conduct generally proceeds from a spirit of malice or revenge; and we accordingly conclude that this man has such a spirit. On that conclusion the moral faculty pronounces its sentence of condemnation. This process of reasoning is not the work of the moral faculty, but of the understanding exclusively, which decides that the man has a revengeful spirit. When this decision has been made, the moral faculty pronounces its judgment. It says, such a spirit is wrong. Now is this judgment of the moral faculty correct? Yes, it is an absolutely correct judgment; for it decides this, and no more: that a malicious state of the will is wrong. This is an intuitive conviction, in which there can be no error.

In this case the intellect has presented a state of the will—that is, is contemplating a state—which, according to its judgment, is malicious. The moral faculty has pronounced such a state, namely, a malicious state, wrong; as it always does, and truly. But upon inquiry, it appears that the man was not influenced by such a spirit; that he had no malice towards his neighbor, but was acting simply in self-defence. What does the moral faculty now say? It gives, of course, a very different decision from what it did before; and for the very good reason that an entirely different case is before it. In both cases the decision of the moral faculty was correct; that is, in perfect accordance with the premises, as furnished by the intellect. The moral faculty did not err in the first decision, and correct the error in the second: both decisions were correct. It said in the first instance that malice is wrong; and in the second, that a state of the will which leads a person to protect himself is right. It was the understanding that erred in the first case, in presenting a state of will that did not actually exist. Having obtained further light, it corrected this judgment, which was followed by an appropriate judgment of the moral faculty.

There is the same mental process in the decisions which the moral faculty pronounces upon ones self. We can no more obtain a knowledge of the actual state of our own will by means of the moral faculty, either by direct perception or by reasoning, than we can obtain a knowledge of the will of another person in this way. We are just as dependent on the understanding in one case as in the other. The understanding says of us, as it does of another, such is the state of the will; that is, its tendency to good or otherwise. The moral faculty decides accordingly. If we analyze carefully the processes of the mind in the moral judgments which we form of ourselves, we shall find them somewhat as follows: First, we are conscious of the exercise of certain feelings; secondly, we decide what is the tendency of these feelings; that is, whether they tend towards God, or the world; towards the well-being of our fellow-men, or the contrary. When the intellect has thus decided, whether correctly or not, then, thirdly, the moral faculty passes its judgment; not upon the state of the will as it *really is*, but upon the state of the will as *contemplated by the understanding*, which may or may not be the actually existing state. This view of the subject removes the difficulty suggested, and makes it apparent that the moral faculty is never in error in its decisions on the state of the will. It decides upon states, principles, intentions, in the abstract, not upon them in the concrete.

As the case now stands, the error in judgment, where one exists, is chargeable upon the understanding. But it should not rest there. The understanding is an honest faculty, and will always decide according to truth, so far as it has opportunity. Let us ascertain, if possible, where the responsibility of these erroneous decisions, so far as they are erroneous, properly rests. It is not in the least degree, as we have seen, upon the moral faculty. It is not upon the understanding, so far as any blame is implied. The fault is entirely with the will. We charge it wholly upon the deceitfulness and wickedness of that faculty. Through its influence the understanding is often deprived of the light which is necessary

for forming correct judgments, both respecting its character and the proper modes of expressing that character in action. The will, which may be called the principle of personality, knows that the understanding will tell the truth respecting its character, so far as it has opportunity; and that its decisions will be followed by a corresponding judgment of the moral faculty. Now if the will is in a bad state, the temptation is very strong to conceal it from the understanding, and thus avoid the reproof of the moral faculty. This it can accomplish in a good degree by bringing out fully, and giving great prominence to, all that is favorable to itself, and by keeping in the background, or perhaps entirely out of sight, all that is unfavorable. As the state of the will is inferred from the conduct which it prompts, by attending exclusively or unduly to certain parts of the conduct, a favorable decision may be secured when an unfavorable one is deserved. The Saviour recognizes this principle when he says: "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Instances of this are familiar to every man in his own experience, while others often come under his observation. Let us look at the workings of the mind in a case of doubtful morality. A young man who has been educated in the belief that theatrical amusements are injurious in their tendency, and that it is morally wrong for him to countenance them by his presence, visits a distant city. He learns by the advertisements that a favorite play of Shakespeare is to be acted on a particular evening. He has a strong desire to witness it. But the moral faculty stands in the way, tells him that it is wrong; that is, it tells him that a state of will is wrong which inclines him to do what his judgment has decided is injurious to the best interests of society. Now how shall he gratify his desire, and still avoid the reproof of the moral faculty? In other words, how shall he make his moral faculty approve what he desires? To accomplish this, he must secure from the understanding a

favorable judgment of his desire. It must pronounce the desire good—such as is fitted, if gratified, to do good to himself and others. But how can this be done? He reasons with himself somewhat as follows: If I attend the theatre my influence on others will not be injurious, as I am a perfect stranger in the city. The effect on myself in attending but once, cannot be unfavorable. My reputation also is safe, since what I do here will not be known elsewhere. Again, if I attend, I shall know better what a theatre is, and shall be able to advise others intelligently respecting it. Moreover, I may expect to derive advantage to myself in various ways: I shall better understand the great poet; learn something of human nature; be able perhaps to present truth more forcibly; know how to influence men more effectively for their good. Thus he reasons; and, by keeping all opposite views of the subject out of sight, it is not strange that his arguments appear conclusive to him, and that he comes to the full belief that attendance on the play is his duty. But why does he give this undue attention to some features of the subject, while he entirely overlooks those of a different character, which are equally important to a correct decision? Because the will is bent upon a particular course, and naturally influences the mind to take those views of the subject which will justify it in this course. The understanding, thus unduly influenced, presents the case, and the moral faculty pronounces its verdict. It says, *a state of will* which has such tendencies is right. But whether the individual has or has not such a state, it does not decide. The will has virtually made the decision itself by its unfair and dishonest treatment of the understanding.

It is not a difficult matter for a person thus to deceive himself; to secure such a judgment of the understanding as the will may desire. The will is so thoroughly educated in this deceptive work, that we are often unconscious of its influence.

We have here the explanation of a very important practical truth, namely, that the approbation of the moral faculty

is not conclusive evidence that the will is in a right state. This is obvious from what has been said. A full view of the state of the will, in all its relations, does not, in such cases, come before the mind. The understanding is left to infer the character from a single class of feelings and actions, which are naturally right, and which may be in part a proper expression of a virtuous state of the will, though not in themselves virtuous; while another class of feelings and actions from which a very different inference would be drawn, are kept out of sight. This will explain more fully such cases as that of the heathen mother to which we referred. We said that the moral faculty approves the state of will which prompts her to seek the good of her child. But she is not virtuous, not approved of God. The reason why the moral faculty decides as it does in the case, is, that only so much of the character of the will as is concerned about the child comes before the mind. The decision of the moral faculty is correct according to the case presented or contemplated. But let the other relations in which she stands come into view, her relation especially to God; let her feelings and conduct towards him be considered, and the decision respecting her character would be very different. A very different case indeed would be before the moral faculty.

It is on this principle that so many whom we call moral men, men of integrity, who are exemplary in all respects in their social relations, deceive themselves as to their true character. They infer the whole state of the will from conduct which is altogether suitable to human relations, and which would be essentially the same in that respect if all their relations were taken into the account. But as only a part of their relations are taken into the account, the conduct in which they are deficient is not considered. Their judgment of themselves, consequently, is incorrect.

On the same principle the moral faculty of the wrong-doer is much more active and troublesome, on the exposure of his crime to public view, than when it was concealed in his own bosom. The reason is, that the will can no longer keep from

the understanding a correct view of its real state. It is now thrust upon the mind from without, and kept constantly before it. Such being the case, the moral faculty has opportunity to do its appropriate work. We notice a similar effect upon the moral faculty caused by the presence of a person whom we have injured. While he is absent from us, the wrong we have done him is easily kept out of the mind, and the moral faculty is quiet. But as soon as he appears, all the efforts of the will to turn off the mind from the subject are of no avail. One reason, doubtless, and it is an important one, why we are so little disturbed by our sins against God is, that he seems to us a great way off. We are not forced to think of him.

But of what use, it may be asked, is such a faculty, if it neither tells us the actual state of the will, nor is a rule of conduct; if it is thus dependent for its action upon the understanding and the will? Of great use, we answer. It is only through the moral faculty that we obtain a knowledge of right and wrong, that we experience a sense of obligation; in this way only are we raised to the dignity of moral and accountable beings. This is its office, and a noble office it is; and surely we have no reason to complain of it, that it does no more than its appropriate work; that it does not do the work of other faculties, which they are perfectly competent to perform, and which, with a right state of the will, they would always perform correctly. We may as reasonably complain that the written law is of no use, because it only decides that a particular state of the will is right or wrong, without deciding who has such a state, without preventing a person's deceiving himself as to his own character. The law says that love is right. It requires it, and passes its approving judgment upon the man who has it. But it does not tell us who has love, or who that thinks he has it, is deceiving himself. Each man must do this for himself, in the exercise of his appropriate faculties. It is a part of his probation. There is danger of wrong judgment in this respect, and the scriptures warn us against it. No one finds fault with the

law because this is so. Now the moral faculty is that law so transferred to the mind, so placed within the soul, that it will execute itself, pronounce judgments intuitively, whenever a case comes before it. To expect more from the moral faculty than it was designed to accomplish, will only tend to shake our confidence in its appropriate work.

We have said that it is the exclusive office of the moral faculty to pronounce judgments upon states of the will, and that in these judgments it never errs. We have also said that it is the office of the understanding to decide in what mode the state of the will approved by the moral faculty should be expressed in action, and that in these decisions the understanding is liable to error. The inquiry may arise at this point: Does not the moral faculty so act in connection with the decisions of the understanding as really to indorse them as its own? In other words, if the decision of the understanding is wrong in respect to conduct, and the moral faculty requires a person to act when he has such views of conduct, does not the responsibility rest upon the moral faculty? It is the common impression, and the view presented by ethical writers generally, that the moral faculty does require the *particular action* which the understanding approves, and that we are morally bound to perform it for that reason. The moral faculty is thus made a rule of external conduct which we must obey; but which may lead us into sin if we do obey it. Thus Dr. Alexander says: "It is true, if a man's conscience [meaning evidently the moral faculty as we have explained it] dictates a certain action, he is morally bound to obey; but if that action is in itself wrong, he commits sin in performing it, nevertheless. He who is under fundamental error is in a sad dilemma. Do what he will, he sins. If he disobey conscience he knowingly sins, doing what he believes to be wrong; and a man never can be justified for doing what he believes to be wrong, even though it should turn out to be right. And if he obey conscience, performing an act which is in itself wrong, he sins, because he complies not with the law under which he is placed."

Now if Dr. Alexander means by this simply that all the conduct of an impenitent man is morally wrong, so long as he remains impenitent, whatever may be his intellectual or moral judgments of himself or his actions, we of course agree with him. But if he means that the moral faculty ever leads a person into sin, or requires him to remain in sin, or to perform a sinful act, we dissent from him entirely. We could by no means agree with him, even if we should include in the term "conscience" an exercise both of the understanding and the moral faculty. In order to a clear explanation of this point, we should notice the different senses of the word "wrong," when used as an epithet of an action. An action may be either morally wrong, or naturally wrong. It is morally wrong when it proceeds from a bad state of the will. It is naturally wrong when it is not suitable to the circumstances in which it is performed. A person may desire to injure another, and perform an action for that purpose. That is a morally wrong action because it proceeds from a bad state of the will. Again, a person may be sincerely desirous to benefit another, and perform an action for that purpose; but for want of sufficient knowledge, the action may be injurious, not fitted to benefit him. That action, though morally right, is naturally wrong. Now it is certain that the moral faculty never requires a person to do a morally wrong action, an action which he cannot do without sinning. For such an action proceeds only from a bad state of the will, from a bad intention, which the moral faculty always condemns.

Admitting for the present that the moral faculty requires a person to perform the particular action, which his judgment tells him is the proper expression of a good state of will, that it actually indorses that decision as its own; it does not follow that the action, though naturally wrong, must be a sinful action; that a person must commit sin in doing it. The moral faculty has required, in the case supposed, as it always does, the existence and exercise of a benevolent state of will. The understanding, under the in-

fluence of that state, decides what, in its judgment, is the best expression of benevolence in action. But for want of sufficient knowledge, of natural ability, it cannot tell what action is best suited to the circumstances, what is naturally right. It decides, we will suppose, in favor of an action naturally wrong. The action is performed. Now no one can blame the will in this case, for by the supposition its intention is good. Nor can the understanding be blamed, for it acted under the influence of a good state of will, and according to the light which it possessed. But if the will and understanding are blameless, no fault can attach to the moral faculty for urging the performance of the action dictated by the understanding; for the moral faculty has no means of knowing anything respecting external actions—if we suppose it to know them at all—except through the understanding. It follows then, of course, that if no blame attaches to any of these faculties in the performance of the naturally wrong action, no sin is committed in performing it. The man acts according to the best of his ability.

But it may be said that the want of natural ability to do better, to perform a more suitable action, is owing to previous misconduct, to the misimprovement of the means of knowledge with which he had been favored. If so, he is certainly to be blamed for that misconduct. He ought to have improved his means of knowledge. He is responsible for his wrong conduct in this respect. But he is not responsible for the consequences of it. By the supposition, he has now a different state of will, is a different person morally, and of course is responsible in the future only for what he has natural ability to do. If he does not know, and cannot know, a better expression of love than that which he makes, no blame will attach to him in respect to that action, though it be positively injurious.

If we admit, therefore, that the moral faculty requires a person to perform the naturally wrong action, an action positively injurious, it does not follow that he must *sin* in obeying the requirement. He acts under a sense of moral

obligation, and with the very best intention of doing what is naturally right. Such conduct will always be approved of God.

But the moral faculty does not require this naturally wrong action. It has no knowledge whatever of the decision of the understanding which dictates it, either when it is made or after it has been made; and of course it does not require the will to act in this particular manner; that is, it does not dictate this particular action. All that it requires, as we have seen, is the exercise of love. It throws the entire responsibility, as to the manner of expressing it in action, upon the will, which obtains all its knowledge from the understanding.

Still it may be asked, does not the moral faculty require the will to do in general what the understanding decides is best, though it may not know what the decision of the understanding is? In other words, is not a person morally bound to do the very thing which his judgment decides is, on the whole, best? Most certainly he is. This is an essential law of our mental constitution. The will has no rule of action but the dictates of the understanding. No light can come to it except through the understanding. If the will therefore act at all, it must act as the understanding dictates. Such being the constitution of the mind, if the moral faculty urges the will to express love in action, it must express it according to the judgment of the understanding, or not at all. Should the will refuse to act in this only way in which it can act, a new case would at once come before the moral faculty. The understanding would decide that a state of will which would not act in accordance with its decisions as to what is naturally right, is not a state intending good, and the moral faculty would immediately condemn it. But in all this no responsibility for one particular action, rather than another, rests upon the moral faculty. All that the moral faculty does is to hold the will to its normal action, to require it to do what God requires it to do, and what he has made it to do. It is God's ordinance that it shall conform to the decisions of the understanding, which, rightly used, is a safe guide. If the will exerts improper influence over the under-

standing, as it may do, though it is under no natural necessity of doing it, and thus secures an erroneous decision, God is not responsible for that decision. Nor is the moral faculty, which expresses the voice of God, responsible for it. This simply requires the will to act honestly and truly, as it was made to act. The responsibility for the erroneous judgment of the understanding here, as well as for the erroneous judgment respecting the state of the will, rests entirely with the will.

Again, suppose the state of the will really bad, while the person thinks it good, and under the influence of this deception decides upon a course of action which is naturally wrong. What is the relation of the moral faculty to that state of will, and to the action affected by it? Does it require either the state of the will, or the action affected by it? Neither; it requires a good state of the will, no other. But suppose the moral faculty is not obeyed in this respect, the will continuing bad; does the moral faculty require that the action which the understanding decides is a proper expression of a right state of the will should be performed? Yes, in the sense explained, but not with a bad state of will. What the moral faculty approves in the case of self-deception, is not the existing state of will, but a state which the understanding decides intends good; and what it requires in action is the, expression of such a state, according to the natural ability which the will possesses. This is an exact explanation of the case of Saul of Tarsus, whose conscience, some think, required him to commit sin: "I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Here "thought" expresses the exercise of the understanding, and "ought" the exercise of the moral faculty. Through an improper influence of the will, the understanding decided that the will was in a state of love to God and man. The moral faculty approved of such a state. Again, through an improper influence of the will, the understanding decided that persecution of the church was the proper mode of expressing love. The moral faculty urged the expression of love, leaving the responsibility for

the mode of doing it with the will, in the use of the means which God had given it. The sin of Saul therefore did not consist in his obeying the moral faculty; but it consisted wholly in his disobeying it. The moral faculty required of the will—of him, love to God and man. This he refused to exercise. He disobeyed the command. Again, it required of the will the expression of love in action to the best of its ability. Here again, he refused obedience. He might have known, and with a different state of will would have known, that persecution was not the proper expression of love in the circumstances.

It follows, as a logical inference from the main points of the discussion, that the moral faculty cannot be improved or injured directly by any particular treatment to which we can subject it. We say directly, for as this faculty is an essential part of our mental constitution, whatever affects the whole mind must necessarily affect this. The idea which we mean to advance is, that the moral faculty cannot be improved by particular cultivation, nor injured by particular abuse or neglect, any more than the law of God, which is written on the sacred page. This language, we are aware, cannot be used in respect to conscience, which in some of its elements is subject to the same laws as the other mental faculties. We speak of a tender conscience, an enlightened conscience, a perverted conscience. The scriptures use similar forms of expression, as a "good conscience," a "weak conscience," a "scared conscience," a "conscience void of offence." But such expressions, analyzed according to the principles which we have laid down, will show that these epithets do not belong to the moral faculty, but to other faculties closely connected in their operations with it. For example, "a good conscience" is not a conscience that has a good moral character; for conscience has no moral character, any more than memory. But by "a good conscience" we mean a state of the will which the moral faculty pronounces good. A "conscience void of offence" means a state of the will which does not offend the

moral faculty, that the moral faculty does not pronounce wrong. "A weak conscience" is not the moral faculty in a debilitated state; but a condition of the understanding which is hesitating, doubting, as to what is the best mode of expressing in action a right state of the will. A "seared conscience" is a state of the will which has long prevented the understanding from obtaining such a view of it as the moral faculty will condemn, and thus awaken, through the emotional nature, a feeling of remorse. The apostle Paul speaks of "commending" himself to "every man's conscience:" That is, he so preached and labored as to give evidence to the understanding of every man, of a state of will in himself which their moral faculty would decide is right. He also speaks of purging the "conscience from dead works" by the blood of Christ. But what effect could the blood of Christ, or the death of Christ, have upon the moral faculty directly? None at all. But the end is secured indirectly, in this way. It is the will, and not the moral faculty, that is impure and needs purging. The death of Christ renders it consistent for God to remove the corrupt state of the will by the agency of the divine Spirit, and to give it such a state as the moral faculty approves. The will is purged, and thus the action of the moral faculty in respect to it is changed. In this way may all similar expressions in the scriptures, and such as are used in common discourse, be analyzed. No effect is produced upon the moral faculty. The effect is entirely upon the will or the understanding as they stand related to the moral faculty.

In the same way we account for the workings of the moral faculty in very bad men. Even the pirate upon the high seas can pursue his course of terrible crime with little or no remorse. He will admit, perhaps, that he did wrong at first, but after society made an outlaw of him for his crime, there was no other mode of life before him; and consequently he reasons, if he cannot be fully justified for his conduct, he cannot be greatly blamed for it. In this way the understanding is kept in ignorance of the true character of the will, and the moral faculty cannot pronounce the decision that such a state of the will de-

serves. The moral faculty has not been injured. It is not asleep in all this course of wickedness. It is not weak or feeble. It is watchful, vigorous, and faithful. This is evident from what always occurs when the Spirit or providence of God reveals the true state of the will. No time is necessary for the moral faculty to awake, to recover strength. It lays hold of its victim at once, in an instant, with giant power; foreshadowing most clearly what it will do hereafter. In very good men, on the other hand, the moral faculty condemns with great severity the least deviation from rectitude, not because it has been improved by education, not because it is more vigorous and watchful than in the other case, but because the will, being less wicked and deceitful, is disposed to come to the light of God's law, that its true character may be known.

But while the moral faculty needs no improvement, and can receive none, the faculties closely related to it may be improved, and thus essentially affect its decisions. It is to the state of the will that we are directly to refer all that is morally wrong in conduct; and to this cause also must we indirectly refer, in a great measure, what is naturally wrong. It is owing to the depravity and consequent deceitfulness of this faculty, that the understanding is blinded and misled; and thus decisions of the moral faculty relatively wrong are secured. There can be no essential improvement of the will without a radical change wrought in it by the Spirit of God. Until this takes place full self-knowledge is practically impossible. Man will not know himself, if he can avoid it, when such knowledge must be followed by the most exquisite suffering which the human soul can experience. Nothing short of regeneration by the Holy Spirit will restore all the mental powers to their normal condition and action. But though there can be no essential improvement of the character till this great change is wrought by the Spirit of God, still much may be accomplished, as respects external conduct, by a careful training of the understanding while the will is unrenewed. It may receive such instruction as

to what is right in action, that it will be exceedingly difficult for the will to mislead it.

In this connection we see the great importance of correct and well-established principles and habits of action. They are not only safe guides if followed, but they exert great influence in constraining us to follow them. The explanation is this: If these principles are prominent in the mind's view, and have become established by long practical observance of them, it will be very difficult for the will, however deceitful, to persuade the understanding that it is in a right state, when it proposes to disregard these admitted and established guides of conduct — when it would lead the understanding to turn aside from these highways of virtue. The understanding thus disciplined has had experience on the subject, and knows better. It has learned by observation and long practice what is the proper mode of expressing right states of the will in particular circumstances, and cannot easily be misled. But if there are no such principles of action established by practice, if the understanding has not some support outside of the immediate circumstances in which it is called to act, a corrupt will can easily prevail over it and carry it captive at pleasure. We see this illustrated in student life. If a young man has fixed principles of study, of habitual attendance on required exercises, of obedience to every law, the will, whatever its state as towards God, cannot persuade him that the opposite course of conduct is wise, suitable, becoming, and therefore right. So in life generally. If the understanding is fully established in principles of truth, honesty, temperance, and other virtues, it will be very difficult for the will, though at times it may be very strongly inclined to do it, to justify to the understanding a different course of conduct. When the temptation is presented, the inquiry will at once arise: Why should I do this? Why should I not do as I have ever done? Or the recollection of some sad experience in the past, when this wrong course was pursued, will come before the mind. The light coming in this way through the understanding will expose the true character of the will,

which might otherwise be concealed, and the moral faculty will have opportunity to do its appropriate work. Here is the secret of the force, to a great degree, of early moral and religious instruction. The child is taught, in substance, that certain beliefs and actions are the true expression of a right state of will, that such a state cannot be expressed in any other way. The moral faculty is thus enlisted in behalf of this particular course. If there is any deviation from it, the understanding decides that it proceeds from a wrong state of the will,—a state, which the moral faculty instantly condemns. The fall of those who have been regarded as good men, men of integrity and uprightness, may be accounted for on the principle which we are now considering, though at first view it seems to contradict it. It will be found in all such cases, that the will has gradually undermined the general principle; we should say rather, has established another principle in its place, and confirmed it by habit, viz. that occasional indulgence in what is ordinarily considered wrong, a slight deviation at times from absolute integrity and purity, is proper in the circumstances. When this principle is established, as it may be, without any very distinct consciousness of the fact on the part of the individual, the fall, which astonishes every one as sudden, takes place. It was not sudden; nor any exception to the great law of our moral nature. It is a melancholy illustration indeed, of the fact, that however correct the intellectual view of what is right in external conduct, and however firmly established in it by practice, there is no absolute safety for this world even, but in a state of the will which is right in the sight of God. A house built upon the sand, though beautiful, and for the time useful, is liable at any moment to be swept away by the storms that may beat upon it. •

We learn from the view which we have taken of this subject, how alone true and permanent peace of the moral faculty can be secured. This, at first view, might seem impossible in case of a person who has once sinned. The decisions of the moral faculty, as we have seen, are according to truth, and consequently immutable. What it con-

demns to-day it must condemn through eternity. How then can a person who has ever committed sin avoid the condemnation of the moral faculty, and the consequent feelings of remorse, when all ignorance is removed from the mind, when deception can no longer be practised, when he must see himself as he is in the full light of truth? Here is a problem which philosophy of itself could not have solved; but which Christianity solves on strictly philosophical principles. It is true that the moral faculty will never cease to condemn a state of the will which is wanting in love to God and man. If we have such a state now, the moral faculty condemns it, if it has the opportunity; and it will condemn such a state forever, whatever change may take place in us. It will never say that such a state is right. How then, we may well ask, can there be peace, when the veil is stripped from the heart, and the clear light of truth falls upon it? Must not the sinner be wretched forever, whatever provisions may have been made for his happiness in the gospel? These, if accepted, cannot change the decisions of the moral faculty respecting the past. Wrong being and wrong doing must forever be condemned by it. They deserve condemnation. How then can he who has once sinned have peace, even if he has repented of his sin and believed in Christ? We have noticed that when the moral faculty condemns a wrong state of will in another person it is not attended with that peculiar feeling of remorse which is experienced when the bad state condemned is our own. The condemnation is as decided in one case as in the other, but the attendant moral emotions are not the same. In one, it is disapprobation simply, an indignant feeling towards it. In the other, there is, in addition to this, a feeling of remorse. Now, when the state of the will is changed by the Spirit of God; when, in the expressive language of scripture, we are born again, we become new creatures in Christ. We put off the old man. We are morally different persons, for we have a different character. While therefore the moral faculty condemns the state of the will which existed previous to the change, and will always

condemn it, as wrong; the moral emotions attending the condemnation will be the same as though the state of the will belonged to another person. It does really belong to another person, viz. to the old man which we have put off, with the affections and lusts belonging to him. We shall always disapprove of that state, feel indignant towards it. But it is no longer ours. The understanding now sees a state of will in us which has love to God and man. The moral faculty approves of that state, and its approbation is followed by a class of emotions which fill the soul with joy and peace.

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## ARTICLE II.

### THE RELATIONS OF GEOLOGY TO THEOLOGY.

BY PROF. C. H. HITCHCOCK, NEW YORK CITY.

(Continued from page 388.)

III. GEOLOGY gives additional force to the arguments for the truth and inspiration of the scriptures. The arguments for the truth of the historical statements of the Bible and its authority had been clearly stated and confided in by the church before the birth of geology. Not knowing that the history of immense periods anterior to man could be acquired, divines supposed the world began with man, and that only the existing animals and plants were produced in the creation. As soon as glimpses of the truth appeared, sceptics cried out that the Bible had committed itself to scientific error, and honest inquirers were bewildered. After decades of discussion, sceptics are silenced, the church adopts new interpretations of Genesis, and allows the conclusions of science to illuminate the sacred page. This feature of the connections between science and religion has been the most commented upon, though less important than some others.

Geology confirms the biblical account of the antiquity of the earth; the order of creation, particularly the compara-