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ARTICLE I.

Right and Wrong; or, A Check to Atheism: Being a Review of a Work by Rev. ALBERT BARNES, entitled Faith in God's Word.

We were seated with a young ministerial brother one summer day, by a chalybeate spring on the side of a hill in Tennessee. While enjoying the pretty valley below, and the cold water trickling from its orange-like deposit into a marble basin, he said: "Doctor, is it not easier to believe, with the atheist, that all things have their nature, truth, and right, from the *law* of an impersonal power, than that there is an *eternal personal God?*" We answered: "No. The atheist is guilty of a blunder in this notion. First, he is *conscious* that he is a *personal self*. Secondly, he is equally *conscious* that his *ideas* of power, nature, law, truth, right, are the *creations*, (*before* they are *perceived*,) of *his personal mind*, under effort of his *will;* and that every thing he accomplishes, is merely giving outward expression to these *free conceptions;* and he knows that wherever he sees law, truth, right, in the things other men have made, these things had their

ARTICLE V.

WHAT IS CONSCIENCE?

1. *Dissertation on the Progress of Ethical Philosophy.* By Hon. Sir JAMES MACKINTOSH. Encyclopædia Brittannica.
2. *Elements of Morality.* By WILLIAM WHEWELL, D. D., Master of Trinity College, Cambridge.
3. *The Divine Government, Physical and Moral.* By JAMES MCCOSH, LL. D., Professor, etc., in the Queen's University for Ireland.

Curiously interwoven with human speech rests the conclusive evidence that God has not left himself without a witness in the human breast. Philosophers have observed, that there is no language in which we fail to find such terms as Right, Wrong, Ought and Duty: words expressing fundamental distinctions in conduct and character; which are invariably accompanied by the idea of responsibility; which, in all their uses, involve the idea that there are things which should be praised or dispraised, practised or avoided, loved or hated. These terms, the exponents of moral obligation, form a peculiar part of the necessary machinery of thought; where thought is most advanced, their vocabulary is fullest; it is only on the verge of barbarism, that they become few in number and of meagre significance. It is even said that the downward regress of a degrading nation may be marked by corresponding changes in their moral furniture of thought; by the gradual disuse and obsoleteness of those terms, without which, there are none of the corresponding ideas essential to true manhood.

These facts impart great interest to the study of conscience. They strikingly illustrate its character, vindicate its authority, and prove its universal presence. Its magisterial authority, at times, almost assumes an embodied personality; not merely in classic Greece, where the dæmon of Socrates "advises him what

was his interest;" but even in savage Africa, where "the little heart exhorts the big heart to do right, and dissuades it from doing wrong." So conscience has always stood, a sentinel faculty at the gateway of the heart, resisting the intrusion of falsehood and wrong, and keeping an open door for the entrance of "Him whose right it is to reign."

It is to revelation, however, that we are indebted for the information which enables us to understand these facts. The principles it furnishes show us how to classify and explain them. It clearly establishes the fact of Conscience. Under its light, that doctrine has become the prominent feature of every ethical system, and is universally regarded as the central doctrine of our moral nature.

Yet, among the leading writers who have given detailed accounts of this faculty, there is great diversity of opinion on many important topics which it suggests. It is so with the distinguished writers to whom we shall refer; and it will scarcely be considered presumptuous, if, in some particulars, we differ from those who differ so materially from each other.

While it is much to be lamented that their treatment of some of these questions is so unsatisfactory, it is perhaps better to spend our time in seeking to supply the omission, than in lamenting it. Those interested in this important subject will not be likely to regard with disfavor an attempt in that direction, which, though no doubt far beneath what the merits of the subject demand, may nevertheless serve to indicate such a path as shall lead a more fortunate thinker to a more complete success.

I. At the very threshold, we meet the question—

Is conscience an original faculty of our nature? The negative has been elaborately argued by Sir James Mackintosh, whose theory is as follows:

"There must be primary pleasures, pains, and appetites, which arise from no prior state of the mind, which, if explained at all, can only arise from bodily organisation. Most of the principles of human action are derived from a small number of pleasures, perhaps organic, transferred by the law of association to a vast variety of objects. We dare not utterly reject the analogy of the material world, on which the whole technical language of

moral science is necessarily grounded. The whole creation teems with instances where the most powerful agents and the most lasting bodies, are the acknowledged result of the composition, sometimes of a few, often of many elements. These compounds, in their turn, often become the elements of other substances; and it is with them that we are conversant chiefly, in the pursuits of knowledge, and solely in the concerns of life. It is impossible to confound them with any of the separate elements that compose them.

"The same thing is true of self-love, which is formed from the primary desires. The same thing is true of the secondary pleasures,—the social affections,—which are formed by the association of self-love with the primary pleasures. Now, when the social affections, sympathy, compassion, etc., are thus formed, they are naturally followed by the will to carry them into effect; hence arises habitual dispositions; these, again, become moral sentiments. Then other contributory streams present themselves, as courage, energy, decision. Conscience, then, is formed from the combination of the private desires and social affections. All those sentiments of which the final object is a state of the will, become intimately and inseparably blended, and of that perfect state of solution, the result is conscience, the judge and arbiter of human conduct. Whatever it approves is virtue, and we are justly considered under moral obligations to practise it.

"Association, by this theory, operates as follows: Association is the juncture of thoughts with emotions, as well as with each other. For example, in the case of the miser, who at first seeks money as a source of pleasure, afterwards for its own sake, and here a new sentiment is produced. In like manner, self-love, or the desire of permanent well-being, is gradually formed from the separate appetites. Sympathy is the result of a transfer of our personal feelings to others, and of their feelings to ourselves. Sympathy engenders the various social feelings, compassion, benevolence, gratitude, etc. Combined with these, it generates patriotism, and humanity. And combined with these results, it generates piety. Anger, in combination with sympathy, produces justice. The love of praise generates love of what is praiseworthy. The complacency inspired by a benefit, is transferred to a benefactor, and becomes gratitude. Then the perception of the propriety of such feelings is called into exercise, and the idea of duty is formed. In every stage of the progress, a new result appears, perfectly distinct from the elements which formed it, which may be utterly dissimilar to them, and may attain any degree of vigor, however superior to theirs.

"The gratitude, sympathy, resentment, shame, which are the principal constituent elements of the moral sense, thus lose their separate agency, and constitute an entirely new faculty. Here is the formation of the sentiment of moral approbation out of antecedent affections. The language of mankind implies that the moral faculty is *one*. Yet it is as common in mind as in matter for a compound to have properties not to be found in any of its constituent parts. The truth of the proposition is as certain in the human feelings as in any material combination."

But, however plausible this theory of the origin of conscience may seem, we feel justified in asserting that it is entirely untenable. For—

1. If it be conceded that new faculties are formed by mutual association and reflex influence of the primary desires; yet, as such association and influence must be indefinitely various in all possible cases, it is not possible to show that in all they would produce the same result. How, moreover, could all the various results be adjusted to a common standard? To have a conscience, is it requisite to have all these higher affections, and to have them harmoniously developed? If so, many who may have them, have not brought them to such development; others have them unharmoniously developed, some one affection preponderating; some few may be so happy as to have reached that standard, but the immense majority are scattered all around and below it, some seeming to have these qualities only in germ, others having them all darkened and perverted.

It is well known that every good or bad quality affects character in proportion to its activity and strength. On this theory, the conscience must be similarly affected. What a vast variety in gradation of character between the opposite poles of moral condition! Education, temperament, and circumstances, affect every opinion and feeling. Now, if the reciprocal action of the feelings of the noblest of our race is what produces conscience, the mutual influence of the feelings of the most degraded must produce something inferior. Or, if the lowest be the standard, the higher will as largely differ in the way of superiority; unless it be admitted that there are as many kinds of conscience as of men.

The analogy of nature reveals no such result as this theory claims. Chemistry, it is true, teaches that many elements may combine and produce a different result,—as in the case of gunpowder,—but it also tells us, that it is only when in fixed, exact and definite proportions, and in similar circumstances, that such combinations will afford similar results. But this theory implies that the combination of any or many of certain qualities, in any sort of proportion, of any degree of intensity, in any kind of circumstances, will always produce precisely the same result. Hence it must be admitted, that the argument from analogy as applied to explain the origin of conscience, entirely breaks down.

2. There is another question connected with the subject which this theory can never answer: Whence the authority of conscience to command? That it does command, and by virtue of authority, no one disputes. In chemical combinations, the different product is yet kindred with the constituent elements. It is not so here. Where can this quality originate? How account for its peculiar mode of activity? Desires urge us. Affections impel us, often with force, sometimes with violence. They influence us by motives which they suggest and endorse, but they never command. They bear no sceptre; they wear no crown; the calm veto of conscience is distinctly heard above their noisiest appeals, and they recognise its supremacy. The strongest desire is only impulsive. The intensest sympathy can carry us no farther. Add all the strength of all the private desires and social affections together; combine and re-combine them as you will; they wait the bidding of that faculty which often acts without their suggestion, which often carries out its authority by doing violence to their promptings.

If conscience, then, were originated by these qualities in combination, we should have blind and unintelligent impulses generating an intelligent faculty with indisputable capacity to control, and with such an inalienable authority to command, that to dispute its right is the same as denying the existence of the faculty itself.

3. How could this theory account for the uniformity of the

utterance of conscience? It has passed through all the confused scenes of man's perplexing history; yet no Babel has ever confused its speech. It speaks in the same tongue as it has ever done. Character is varied by innumerable circumstances, and there is an immense difference between the amount of light possessed by different members of the race; but there is no difference in the word which conscience speaks. No doubt there has been progress in ethical science. The nature, laws, and foundations of morality are more clearly understood,—strange! if it were not so, with the light shed by Revelation on man's nature and relations—yet, though as a science, under the teachings of Christianity, it is far more perfect, the facts and principles of morality existed and operated before the gospel came, and where it has never shed its light.

Mackintosh admits that the office of conscience is to enforce moral obligation. Its control is over our voluntary acts and dispositions. It says to the will, "Keep innocency and take heed to the thing which is right." It does not create standards of morality,—of this all are conscious. It simply enforces their authority. These standards may be like the law of the Lord, "perfect"; or they may be imperfect and corrupt; in either case, the sense of guilt attaches to disobedience. There must be a distinction between standards of morality, and the duty to conform to them. Whether the special requirement of conscience correspond or not to the demands of absolute rectitude, in either instance the office of conscience is the same: not to make a standard, but to enforce its claim.

In the opinion of some, there are states of moral degradation where conscience is a frightful monster, striking aimless blows by the mere explosive force of its own irrepressible energy; while there are other moral states where it is a sufficient substitute for the divine light of heaven. Hence the necessity for theories which can explain how it is at one time a blind guide, and at other times an infallible teacher. But if we regard the work of conscience as simply the enforcement of recognised obligation, it will be clear how, through the widest possible diversity of human experience, from the highest to the lowest, it

may remain identically the same quality, its function the same, its mode of expression unaltered. To all men, in all stages of moral progress or regress, it asserts one and the same fact, and there is no room for confusion or self-contradiction. It cannot be blind; it does not need to be inspired. The odium and the eulogy are equally undeserved. There is no need, then, to frame a theory to account for a great variety of phenomena in this case. The theory which does, is inapplicable to the subject. The steady blaze of conscience is not the product of all those flickering lights. The tone of its unvarying message marks it as not the everchanging result of everchanging combinations of unsteady and evanescent feeling, but as a principle which is original, simple, and indestructible.

4. This theory is self-destructive. It is admitted that the operation of conscience is indispensable to moral character. The dispositions, habits, and principles, before entering into character, must receive the impress of conscience by responding in one way or another to the claims of duty. But what is conscience? It is the final result of the development of the personal desires, through a complicated process of several different gradations; unborn till that process be completed. But these desires are blind impulses, and cannot guide themselves; and we are not creatures of instinct. Reason, then, must conduct this process of development. Hence, conscience must be regarded as a product of reason, and moral character, as a secondary product of reason. That is, there can be really no such thing as moral character, for moral character implies a moral standard, and this theory furnishes none.

But if it be said that there is here a moral standard which conscience recognises, then the question will recur, where is morality and moral obligation during the period when conscience is forming? For the forming process may be long before completed. In many cases it never can be completed.

But if it be asserted that morality is possible in such circumstances, then it will appear that conscience is superfluous. If, by the concurrence of private and social affection guided by reason, the idea of right and duty can be realised before the

formation of conscience, there can be no need of a faculty to do what can be done without it. If conscience is the principle of obligation generalised from these cases, then it is doubly superfluous; for the work of conscience would be nothing more than the application of a principle to a case already properly decided. To realise the idea of duty in this theory, one must pass the point aimed at, and then return to it. The concrete case out of which the principle is generalised, is decided by reason or instinct; the generalised principle then appears; then that principle must be applied back to the case already decided by instinct. The work of conscience would be merely to countersign, by its derived authority, what had been already decided by the original authority.

It certainly needs little argument to show that the moral condition which can create conscience, is a moral condition which has no need of conscience. This theory, then, besides embarrassing the subject with difficulties that do not belong to it, is self-destructive.

And we conclude "that from the impossibility of explaining conscience by more general laws, we are reduced to the necessity of considering it an original fact of human nature, of which no further account can be given."

II. We next meet the question, *Is Conscience a simple, or is it a complex faculty?*

Dr. Whewell (B. 3, chap. 14,) argues that it is a complex faculty, and illustrates this view by a variety of definitions:

"1. Conscience is the desires, affections, reason, and moral sentiments when cultivated. P. 359.

"2. Conscience is that faculty which judges our acts, with reference to a moral standard of right and wrong. 359.

"3. It is that cultivation of the reason which enables us to frame or accept rules agreeing with the supreme law. 361.

"4. It is our standard at the time, a fallible guide, and never fully formed; it is not a sufficient justification of conduct; it is not truly moral, but it is our duty to make it so; its object is to determine what is right. 366–8.

"5. It is the supreme law, so far as each one has been able

to discover it. Its decisions are to be obeyed at any risk or sacrifice; we must not waver. 372, 373.

"6. Conscience is a stage in our moral and intellectual progress. 361."

As to such of these definitions as would make conscience the product of the intellect, enough has been already said. Taken in the mass, they are too irreconcilable with each other to allow of their being attributes of the same faculty; besides being open to the objection which holds good against the last definition, which follows:

"7. Conscience implies a moral standard of action in the mind, as well as a consciousness of our actions. The one is the internal law, the other is the accuser, witness, and judge; it also punishes. 360–4."

The objections to this definition are numerous.

1. We know by experience that there is a conscience. We may be conscious of these operations taking place within us, but no one would be warranted in asserting that he is conscious that all these operations are performed by one and the same faculty. The definition is not sustained by experience.

2. Our physical capacities are associated with separate faculties: the sense of seeing with the eye; hearing with the ear. But there is no greater difference between the ideas of hearing and of seeing, than between the ideas of a witness and an accuser. There is no analogy between the distribution of our physical and moral capacities, if the definition be true.

3. Our intellectual nature affords no analogy. Comparison, memory, perception, and judgment, may be associated in contemporaneous activity; yet these different faculties are never confounded or blended. Their results are so different that they cannot be. But there is no greater difference between the ideas of memory and comparison than there is between the ideas of a witness and a judge. And the same principle which would assign them to different faculties of our mental nature, would ascribe the others to different faculties of our moral nature.

4. The idea expressed by this definition is incompatible with the terms it employs. The terms law, accuser, witness, judge,

properly imply that conscience is the exponent of a government according to law. The definition implies that it is an arbitrary and irresponsible power.

A government according to law, is realised by keeping all those different functions separate. Each one is associated with a different individual. It is agreed that the exercise of any two of these functions by the same individual is not compatible with the idea of a perfect government according to law. In other words, they cannot be blended. It is held that such a blending would tend to defeat the idea of such a government, which is the absolute supremacy of law over all. To unite all those functions in one individual, would be regarded as the destruction of such a government, and the creation of a despotism.

If conscience is the law, it is an arbitrary faculty, because it is its own authority. Its own will is its guide. If it is also the judge, it is irresponsible, there can be no superior to whom it can be accountable. If it is at the same time law, judge, witness, accuser, and executioner, it is an absolute moral despotism; for every conceivable element of moral power is lodged in its hand.

Nothing can be more opposed to the idea of a government according to law, than such a definition.

5. It does not alter the case that the government referred to is not a civil, but a moral government. If it did, we might expect to find a corresponding description in the inspired accounts of the proceedings of the moral Governor of the world. But the contrary is the case. The Judge is represented as sitting upon the throne. The law is represented as fully in possession of the assembled multitude. The testimony appears coming from another quarter when the records are opened. And the execution of the sentence introduces still another and a different agency. There is no blending here of different functions in the same individual. God is doubtless supreme, but his moral government is a government according to law, and is so administered. The question before us is simply a question of distribution of functions. In the divine government, to which conscience corresponds, these diverse functions are ascribed to a

diversity of instrumentalities. It is a matter of no consequence in reference to this point why it is so; whether, because there is an intrinsic propriety in it, or because we cannot have a right view of his government without it. The fact remains that it is so described; and that these different parts of the work of government are not only separate in idea, but they are kept separate in action; nothing suggests the idea that they are ever blended.

We deny that this definition is supported by experience, analogy, or reason. To say of any single faculty, and that, moreover, representing government according to law, that it is at the same time law, judge, accuser, witness, and executioner, is to present to the mind an idea, which is utterly inconceivable.

McCosh evidently aims to consider conscience as a simple faculty. (B. 3, ch. 1, sec. 3.) "Conscience is the faculty, or feeling, which, on contemplating the voluntary acts of responsible beings, pronounces them virtuous or vicious."

The definition is not a happy one. If conscience is a faculty, how can it be a feeling? A faculty is active, a feeling is passive. Pain is a feeling; endurance is a faculty. The two may coexist, but no one can say that these ideas are equivalent.

The attributes of a faculty are not the attributes of a feeling. The functions of a faculty are not the functions of a feeling. A theory, therefore, founded on such a definition, to be consistent with its fundamental position, must contradict itself; or can only be consistent with itself by being inconsistent with its definition.

But whatever the definition may imply, McCosh does not conceive of conscience as a simple faculty. In the next section, he describes conscience as including a revelation of law, a judicial power, and an emotional capacity. By this, then, it appears that conscience is not a faculty, *or* a feeling; but a feeling and two faculties,—the perceptive and judicial faculties, and the emotional element.

The fallibility of this conception is seen when he comes to define the mode in which conscience acts. (P. 304.) "The moral feelings, or conscience, can never be employed without

emotion. It is the master power of the human soul, and it is befitting that it should never move without a retinue of attendants. These feelings are its necessary train or accompaniment in all its exercises. The conscience travels like a court of justice, with a certain air of dignity, and with its attendant ministers, to execute its decisions, and this is needful, to give a practical interest and impulses to all its authoritative decisions."

If this statement were intelligibly expressed, it would amount simply to this—that the action of conscience is accompanied by the activity of the *corresponding* moral sentiments. But by McCosh's theory, it cannot be expressed intelligibly; because, if these emotions are the result of the action of conscience, how can they be a part of conscience? But if, as is asserted, they are a part of conscience, how can they be said to be a result of themselves?

Moreover, the idea of conscience exhibited in this definition is, we think, seriously incorrect. If it be a "travelling court," its natural end will be to try cases of breach of law. But if the only or the main function of conscience is to sit in judgment in a criminal court, where shall we look for the faculty by whose benign counsels we might have avoided transgression? If this itinerant faculty be simply an immaterial Saul of Tarsus, "making havoc and haling men and women to prison," our case is sad. For we have no other guide to direct and urge us to the paths of rectitude. And the only moral illumination which could possibly fall upon our path, would be the blaze of the executioner's torch.

On page 306, McCosh says, "Conscience has a triune nature, and serves a three-fold purpose." The obvious answer to this is, that it is an elementary truth, that no single faculty can originate three different kinds of activities.

The inevitable effect of attempting to fuse this conglomeration of ideas into unity, is to plunge the whole subject into inextricable confusion,—a confusion which belongs more or less to every theory which ascribes to conscience a complex nature.

III. Having satisfied ourselves that conscience is an original

and simple faculty, we are prepared to take up our main question, *What is Conscience?*

By the conception of conscience, two ideas are always associated in our minds, the idea of right and the idea of duty. Two things coëxist in every moral act, the perception of what ought to be done, and the sense of obligation to do it. Though always associated, these ideas are fundamentally different. The one is simply the perception of a fact, the other is the practical application of that fact. And the bearing of these faculties is different, for while one affects the understanding, the other bears directly on the will.

Inasmuch as the nature and functions of these faculties differ so widely, it seems to be a matter of necessity that they be separately considered. We shall call the faculty by which man perceives the moral quality of acts or dispositions, *Moral Perception.* We shall call the faculty by which he realises the sense of moral obligation, *Conscience*, or the *Moral Sense.*

Before proceeding to the use of a new phrase, let us remind ourselves that there are different kinds of perceptions. Two men look upon the same landscape, the one a utilitarian, the other a man of taste. The one sees it in the connexion of its constituent parts, the topographical outlines and its various practical relations. It is a mere perception of the intellect, and produces no emotion. The other regards it as a thing of beauty; the details blend together in loveliness, and his heart is stirred by emotions of pleasure. We recognise here an intellectual perception, and an emotional perception; and we see that they are entirely different from each other.

There is also a clear distinction between moral and intellectual perceptions. The one discerns speculative truth, the other exclusively regards moral quality.

My intellectual conception of virtue is the result of reflection. Virtue presents itself as the logical correspondence of certain ideas, the conformity to a certain standard, the fulfilment of certain conditions; it excites no more emotion than the idea of size, distance, or power; it belongs exclusively to the understanding. But my moral perception of virtue overlooks logic

and analysis; without the help of reflection, it fixes its regards on that quality in virtue which commands my approbation as a thing to be loved and cherished, and the emotion of pleasure is at once excited.

My intellectual perception of justice goes no farther than definitions; my moral perception of it is the recognition of its practical worth and moral excellence.

My intellectual perception of benevolence may be accompanied by no benevolent feeling; my moral perception of it touches the spring which necessitates its activity.

My intellectual perception of truth is a mere idea of consistency; my moral perception of it is attracted only by its righteousness, and the intrinsic odiousness of what is opposed to it.

Moral quality is evidently an object of direct perception. It is recognised as easily and as immediately as the quality of beauty. If so, there is the same reason for ascribing it to a separate faculty. That faculty we must call *Moral Perception.*

Moral perceptions vary in many respects. Those of the savage differ in clearness, precision, and intensity from those of the spiritually-minded Christian. They have varied in different ages of the world; in different countries; in different circumstances, in the same age and country; in different social conditions; and in different moral states of the same person.

They do not necessarily correspond with the activity of conscience. They may become clearer while the sense of moral obligation does not become more distinct; they may become darker, while the sense of moral obligation does not become more clouded. Superstition is a state where the moral perceptions are untrue, yet conscience is active in enforcing moral obligation. And there are other moral states where those perceptions are definite and correct, yet the sense of moral obligation seems powerless to apply them.

On the other hand, the sense of moral obligation does not change in character. It is the sense of obligation to do what is seen to be right. It may seem more or less powerful or active; it may base the obligation on widely different data; but its

character does not change. It sounds the same key-note in every age, and in every heart.

To suppose that these two different activities are manifestations of the same faculty, is to suppose that there can be a faculty, one part of which is as inconstant as the wind, while the other part is as immovable as the everlasting hills.

All the eminent writers quoted above, agree that the chief function of conscience is to enforce moral obligation. The difference between their view and this is, that what they regard as its principal function, we consider to be *its only function.* They hold that its highest quality is the judicial; we hold that it is *exclusively a judicial faculty.*

This view corresponds with Butler's celebrated description of it. (Serm. 1, on *Human Nature.*) "There is a principle of reflection in men, by which they distinguish between, approve and disapprove their own actions. This principle in man, whereby he approves or disapproves his heart, temper, or actions, is conscience." (Serm. 2.) "There is a superior principle of reflection or conscience in every man, which distinguishes between the internal principles of the heart, as well as external acts; which passes judgment upon himself and them; pronounces determinately some actions to be in themselves evil, wrong, and unjust; which, without being consulted, without being advised with, magisterially exerts itself, and approves or condemns him, the doer of them, accordingly. ***** This principle, from its very nature, claims superiority over all others, insomuch that you cannot form a notion of conscience without taking in judgment or superintendence."

The idea we have been endeavoring to define is still more exactly expressed in the language of Vinet, (*Outlines of Theology,*) "Conscience, that mysterious and divine element of our being, inseparable from our nature, which nothing explains, but which everything attests,—*conscience is that moral principle which urges us to act in conformity with our conviction, and condemns us whenever we act in opposition to it.*"

Mackintosh supposes conscience to be the result of the combined activity of all our various affections. This, it is thought,

will account for the presence of different feelings which are apparent in our moral conduct. The fatal difficulty of this theory is, that it makes moral character a product of instinct or intellect, and hence deprives moral character of moral foundation.

McCosh seeks to avoid this difficulty by making conscience an original faculty. He attempts to account for the various phenomena connected with our moral judgments by making conscience a congeries of incongruous faculties and functions; and when developed, his theory leads to self-contradiction.

The object in the mind of these writers was to account for all the moral phenomena of our experience by means of one faculty. They therefore sought to describe such a faculty as would be capable of producing them. Their maxim seems to have been, conscience must include everything, because conscience must explain everything. It is one of the most remarkable facts in the history of philosophy, that these distinguished writers failed to see that the major premise of that syllogism has never been and never can be established.

Who has demonstrated the necessity of believing that our whole moral nature consists of but one single faculty? Who can show that it is essential that all moral facts, principles, feelings, and dispositions should be referred to any solitary and all-inclusive quality? Is the faculty of conscience the sum total of our moral possessions?

Again, what is there to hinder our pursuing the same course in searching out the elements of our moral nature, which we have used in investigating our intellectual nature? In that case, all the phenomena of the intellect were investigated, classified, and referred to different faculties, under the rule that all phenomena essentially different were to be referred to different faculties. And consciousness was the guide in that investigation.

What does conscience tell us on this subject?

It tells us that all men possess the power of directly discerning moral quality as such, or moral perception.

It tells us that we are capable of certain emotions, as reverence or gratitude, elicited by moral qualities, or that we possess moral emotions.

It tells us that we possess certain affections, such as love of virtue, truth, benevolence, or moral affections.

It tells us that we have a form of consciousness which takes cognisance exclusively of moral states and dispositions, or a moral consciousness.

It tells us that there is in us a faculty whose peculiar office is to evoke the sense of moral obligation, or a moral sense, or conscience.

It tells us that there takes place within us a reflex action of consciousness, by which, in view of our conduct, we become affected with pleasure or pain, or a sentiment of moral approbation.

Any one may see how this list could be extended. The thing to be observed is, that these different experiences are not terminations of trains of thought, nor secondary results of any sort, but facts of consciousness. The same process and tests which resolve the intellect into different faculties, furnish as conclusive evidence of a varicty of faculties belonging to our moral nature.

We must therefore reject every theory which proposes to explain our moral nature by referring all its phenomena to any one faculty, whatever be its name. Our moral, like our intellectual nature, is complex, though all its faculties be simple. These faculties may combine, coöperate, and, with one exception, blend. But that faculty which cannot blend, must be regarded as the simplest of all. And inasmuch as that faculty, which is conscience, is the faculty of our whole nature which stands in closest and most efficient connexion with the will, we can consistently maintain that the moral nature of man is not a product of the intellect; that it stands related to it as a higher form of rational life; and that the intellect is necessarily subordinate, and merely the instrument of its activity and development of the moral nature, as it passes along its high career of moral obligation.

IV. And *what is moral obligation?*

This question involves more than one important inquiry. It cannot be fully answered without determining whether conscience is a representative or an autocratic faculty, and whether there can be a uniform standard for the race.

1. Conscience asserts duty. What is duty? Rectitude is duty. I appeal to my moral consciousness. Why is rectitude obligatory? The answer is, because it is right. We can go no further. My perceptions recognise the right; conscience announces the authority of right. There is no attempt to explain the facts which these faculties indicate. And reason cannot tell how we come by this sense of right and authority.

Duty and right, the great lights of our moral universe, shine with the steady brightness of the stars of the material sky; but they seem as high above our heads.

Evidently, conscience does not assign itself or its own volition as the reason of duty. Duty is something "due." It is a debt; a thing we are not at liberty to withhold. The language of conscience is, "I ought." I owe something. What, then, do I owe; to whom do I owe it? What is my debt, and who is my creditor? The answer is, you owe it to right to do right; that is your debt. Right, then, stands for law, and conscience represents the authority of law.

However moral law is originated, or by whomsoever imposed, there it stands, in relations as certain, as mysterious, as law for me. Incomprehensibly high above me, its radiance penetrates my nature's most hidden depths. The moment I wake to the knowledge of its existence, my whole being bows before its authority.

It does not avail to ask why this thing is so. That does not interfere with the reality, or destroy the validity of the fact. The same question for ages perplexed the philosophy of the intellect; and men finally concluded that things seem as they appear, because they are what they seem. Why do material things seem as they do? Because they are so. Why does right seem so obligatory, and moral obligation so conclusive? We are shut up to the same answer,—they seem so, because they are so.

2. The very language of conscience implies an external standard. And if conscience belongs to humanity, as such, we may expect to find a moral law coëxtensive with the race, and to which conscience every where stands in the same relation. Is there such a standard, which, shining with the same light, speak-

ing in the same tones, demonstrates that the character of moral responsibility is the same for all?

Upon this point, Butler well observes, that however men may dispute on minor questions, yet in reality there is and ever has been one universally acknowledged standard of virtue. "It is that which all ages and countries have publicly professed to love and practise; it is that which every man you meet imitates and claims to possess; it is that which the fundamental laws of all civil constitutions declare it their object and purpose to enforce; namely, justice, benevolence, and truth."

However mankind differ on other points, it must be admitted that they hold these general principles to be right and obligatory on all, and this concurrence is all the more remarkable from the wide diversity which prevails on almost every special question. How can it be explained but by admitting that these principles form the "common law" of the race?

Little attention is needed to see that these principles are enough to control and form moral character in all the relations of life, and in all conditions of society. The lowest forms of moral consciousness do not ignore them; the highest forms of moral cultivation do not transcend them. These are the three primary colors of virtue, which blend in the hue and complexion of every moral act and quality. In the personal and domestic relations, they form integrity; in our civil relations, they form patriotism; in our religious relations, they ascend to piety. All other virtues are but the modifications of these principles in various aspects. "And there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard."

What was the knowledge, righteousness, and holiness of our first parents, but the deep impress on their nature of these self-same principles? What is the general homage of the heathen world, but the acknowledgment of their supernatural claims? The Decalogue is the specific development of the terms and requirements of this anterior law. The gospel rule of duty, is the same law exemplified in the life of the second Adam, more amply stated, more luminously illustrated, but unchanged; and why unchanged, were it not that these principles are suffi-

cient to direct all moral progress and comprehend all its experience?

In this view, "Christianity is simply a republication of Natural Religion, with additional sanctions."

The verification of this fact is a part of human history. When Balak, the Moabite, inquired what were the principles of true religion, the answer was an appeal to his consciousness. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good. And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God?" When Socrates was asked why men should obey the requirements of virtue, he said, "These are the unwritten laws of the gods, which are impressed on every heart." When Jonah preached at Nineveh, the Ninevites at once acknowledged their accountability. And Dr. J. L. Wilson states that among the most benighted savages of Africa, where the face of a white man had never been seen, an immediate and unhesitating response was freely yielded to the claims and charges of the divine law. The farther we pursue this line of inquiry, the clearer it becomes that man has a law by which to be governed and judged; a law entitled to the most strenuous advocacy of conscience; that right is not a variable standard; that duty is not an ambiguous or arbitrary requirement. There is substantially the same law written on all hearts; the same kind of moral consciousness bearing witness. Of this law it may be said, that, by the very structure of our nature, "God hath shewed it to us." The moral attitude of mankind in all ages is substantially the same, and the question of moral responsibility is substantially the same question for the whole human race.

V. With these principles, it will suggest itself as a problem, *How shall we account for moral degeneracy*, if man possesses the elements of a perfect law, and a faculty which unchangingly enforces moral obligation? For though there are many influences operating on man to check the tendency, it is nevertheless a historical fact, that, left to natural causes, man's tendency is to degrade.

We do not undertake to solve this problem in the case of an unfallen being. If it were even possible to reproduce an exact

conception of the moral consciousness of a pure being, to set it before our own mind, and realise it as our own, and then to trace it through its downward movement till it descended to the level of our own moral condition, we should still be without the means of verifying the process; in our present state we could never prove our conclusions.

But it is obvious that a fallen creature begins his career under disadvantages. Sin tends to reproduce itself. In such a state as this earthly life presents, the merest proclivity towards evil would lead to the most ruinous results. If any principle of virtue is violated, the balance of character is destroyed and the moral condition changed. The idea of virtue, and the inclination towards it, are alike impaired; surrounded by ignorance and temptation and urged by passion, the first sin glides into the second, or precipitates it; and under the influence of the original bias, he enters upon the downward path, and cannot retrace his steps.

This bias may affect him, either through the perceptions, or through the will, or through both. Conscience stands midway between the moral perceptions and the will. There can be no degeneration through the perversion of conscience; there may be, by the frustration of conscience. The will may be affected by the evil bias. Such a bias may combine with appetite or passion to resist the authority of conscience. Conscience issues its command; but under this combination of influences, the will fails to respond. To do so once, creates the likelihood of repetition. Every failure is attended with a loss of moral power. The action of the will becomes sluggish. Habits of resisting are formed which control it, and by a well-known law, after repeated neglect to respond, it loses its sensitiveness to the impulse of conscience. The moral perceptions may be comparatively correct, but conscience is frustrated by paralysis of the will.

A similar combination may affect the perceptions. It is not the office of these perceptions to fix upon the rightfulness of virtue in the abstract, but in the concrete. The idea before them does not concern right in general. The idea is, what is right

in respect to this particular act or feeling? And what these perceptions may announce to be justice, truth, or benevolence, in this particular case, conscience must assert to be duty. Here a wide field is opened for the practice upon ourselves of every kind of self-deceit and moral dishonesty. By subterfuge, evasion, equivocating, misrepresenting the principle involved, overstating, understating, keeping back part of the view, or by adding foreign considerations, by partial views, or even by withholding due consideration, we may bring ourselves to see or to fail to see acts and things almost according to our desires. By this sort of conduct, habits of wrong moral perception are formed. Every act of self-deceit tends to form such habits. We at length cease to see things as they are. Our moral perceptions become perverted. By this course of conduct the faculty of discrimination between right and wrong becomes practically extinguished, and the light within us becomes darkness. In this case, consciousness is frustrated by the perversion of the moral perceptions.

Conscience is said to be torpid when the will is paralysed. But that fatal torpor is of the will.

Conscience is said to slumber when the perceptions yield no light. But at the time when those perceptions are practically extinguished, when, as in the language of Scripture, it is "seared," the searing is of the consciousness, and not strictly of conscience. It is only inactive because no question of right summons it into exercise. In point of fact, it never slumbers nor sleeps.

In the language of Butler, "Had conscience strength, as it has sight, had it power as it has manifest authority, it would absolutely govern the world."

Alas! who does govern the world? The miser hoards, and his plea is duty. The worldling neglects God under plea of duty. The swindler violates confidence under plea of duty. In the name of duty, virtue is clad in rags, and its beautiful robes are thrown over the form of vice. What right so plain as not to be violated in the name of duty? What crime so base that conscience has not commanded it? We deify pride,

and call it honor; we deck sensuality with garlands, and call it pleasure; we put a diadem on the brow of selfishness, and call it integrity; and then say unto conscience, "These be thy gods!" By the imposture of self-deceit, men come to believe a lie, and the whole character is cast in a mould of falsehood.

There is a sense in which conscience does rule the world. It lifts the bloody banner of fanaticism. It sounds the tocsin of civil discord. It drags the car of Juggernaut, and is the driving power of all the vast and complicated machinery of this world's ungodliness. It is Samson grinding for the Philistines, chanting the while ever of duty; singing the Lord's song in a strange land; till the moving finger of destiny rest on the appointed moment. Then the dishonored slave of every evil passion will lay hold of the pillars of his prison-house, and the colossal fabric of pride, folly, and ungodliness shall topple and fall in hopeless ruin.

VI. *Retrospective operation of Conscience.*

A probationary state cannot last forever. The moral condition just referred to must be temporary. If the sense of duty be inextinguishable, and only inactive now because the necessary conditions of its activity are withheld through the instrumentalities of a sinful life, then the unnatural condition of things which is maintained by a transient force must end. If the equanimity of an immoral life be sustained only by glossing over our conduct with falsehood, by putting deceit upon ourselves, by holding before the eye of conscience veils of delusion whose perishable warp and woof nothing can save from eventual decay, and if conscience be unchangeable, it is a matter of the plainest necessity that this moral apathy must one day have a rude awakening. Whether man desires it or not, a predestined moment is arriving when he shall see himself as he is, and know himself. He shall come to be conscious of the character of his moral nature; he shall see it in the light of the contrast with what it might have been, had he followed the way of rectitude; and consequently he shall doubly appreciate the yoke of the new law under which henceforth his nature operates. We may not admit that the sinner "shall awake to shame and everlasting

contempt." But we cannot doubt that he will awake to self-consciousness. The self-consciousness of an awakened sinner is remorse.

To many, remorse seems to be a figment of the imagination. The difficulty of conceiving of it arises from want of experience of its effects. We can conceive of physical pain, for we have felt it. Yet our idea may be very partial, for the fulness of the conception depends on the fulness of our experience. Pain has a wide range, from the trifling transient ache to the prolonged agony of excruciating suffering, where the whole organism is disordered, the functions of life diseased, the racked brain, the bursting eyeballs, the quivering nerves torn, the blood coursing through the veins like streams of fire, the heart collapsed, and the activities which filled health with joy, become factors of everchanging forms of suffering, sleepless, restless, unwearied, swift-winged ministers of misery.

Though no one can assure himself that he has an exhaustive conception of pain, experience has taught us what pain is. We know also that it is the result of injury. If I injure my person, pain is the result; if I injure another, there is produced a similar result. If the injury occur in wakeful consciousness, pain is an immediate result. If it occur in sleep or in unconsciousness, pain is a postponed result. Pain, in that case, waits till consciousness returns; waking to consciousness, is waking to pain.

Our moral is as real as our physical nature. It has its own forms of health and disease; its capacities of pleasure and of pain. Every good act is a source of health and pleasure, a benefit and blessing; in many ways we are conscious of its benign effects. Every evil act is an undoubted injury, and we are conscious of evil results flowing from it. If it be said that evil is often done without any pain, the reply is, that so may our physical nature, when asleep or unconscious, be injured without suffering. If, in the death-like slumber of a sinful life, man has no consciousness of pain from self-inflicted moral injury, so much the worse when the hour of awakening comes; when at one and the same moment he is seized by the accumulated results of a whole life-time of suicidal madness.

Plato says of the tyrant whose wealth, power, and pleasures, made him in this life the object of universal envy, that in the life to come, when his soul is seen, it is seen cut and torn by wicked passions, covered with welts, bruises, and scars, from the evil done himself by his crimes against others. It was apparent to the heathen philosopher, that, though from apparent causes these moral injuries might be unperceived and unknown, yet a time must come when they would be not only felt, but seen.

We are conscious of the effects of certain moral sentiments, called into exercise through the activity of conscience; and that with these effects our happiness is intimately connected. Right doing calls into being a feeling of satisfaction which sometimes rises to joy. Wrong doing elicits a feeling of dissatisfaction which sometimes amounts to wretchedness. Ingratitude gives birth to a sense of self-reproach. Injustice evokes a feeling of shame. A base or dishonorable act is linked with an uneasy feeling of self-contempt. Revolting wickedness produces feelings of loathing and horror. These feelings are not imaginary, they are feelings of real pain; and it belongs to these actions to generate them.

Yet, it is often apparent to observers that the doers of such deeds experience no such immediate feelings of pain; and that they even seem insensible to the wickedness of what is odious to every unbiassed mind. By various subterfuges they may have so perverted their moral judgments as to be unable to see or feel themselves to be blameworthy. But the question must arise, how will it be with them when this self-deceit has passed away, or has worn out? How will it be when, in spite of themselves, all the moral quality of all their conduct shall appear in its true light? We are told that "we must give account for all the deeds done in the body." This must certainly be the case, if conscience is indestructible. And then, when the wrong deeds of the past rise out of forgetfulness, and appear before conscience in their true light, what reason is there to suppose that these deeds shall be unaccompanied by the feelings which naturally attend them here? If such deeds may reappear, shall not the feelings proper to them be reproduced? There is reason to

believe that, as these things belong to each other as cause and effect, there is no moral condition in which they can be kept separate. And so it appears that the consciousness of sin must ever resolve itself into a sense of pain.

This principle of the retrospective operation of conscience is abundantly illustrated in the history of crime. There have been numerous and well-known instances where crime has been committed without compunction, and where years of impunity from self-reproach have passed away after the deed was done; yet, in some unlooked for crisis, the unhappy wretch is suddenly smitten down by remorse. There have been instances where some particular act would stand out with startling vividness from a life of crime, and goad the soul to phrensy, or haunt it with horror, till, under the pressure of a load too heavy for nature to bear, confession would burst forth in a great cry of anguish, and life become a hated burden. In such cases we notice that lapse of time does not lessen the distinctness of moral perception, nor the freshness of the moral consciousness, nor the intensity of the wretchedness. Those effects seem even to surpass in power and continuance all our ordinary experiences. They clearly indicate the possibility of a misery resulting from a wicked life, which no repentance can relieve, and no suffering exhaust.

The fact that, through self-deceit, a man may pass through this whole life, unconscious of his moral condition; the fact that conscience, in the probationary state, has been entirely frustrated,—so stultified as actually to enforce wrong as duty,—this in no respect proves that conscience shall not hereafter resume its rightful authority with a clear vision. Present unconsciousness is no pledge of future oblivion. And when all the forms of wrong-doing which occupy all the relations of an evil life shall reappear as forms of moral injury, no doubt the description of the apostle will be fulfilled, where he describes the wicked as "treasuring up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

Conscience, now gagged and shackled, will survive these indignities and restraints. It is indestructible; and when probation terminates, the finished life moves in review before its unban-

daged gaze. Conscience is the sense of duty to do right; and when the sense of duty takes account of an evil life, the sense of wrong must undergo a resurrection. In such a moral condition, the function of conscience is to evoke the consciousness of sin. An indestructible conscience must invest every evil act and thought with immortality. Man may scoff at the idea of retribution; but, unless we can divest ourselves of our nature, "evil pursueth sinners."

"Who can bear a wounded spirit?" Still, the most distressing forms of remorse, as we see them, are limited in many directions. Care, occupation, sleep, and many other causes, combine to divert the attention. Besides, no one now can know the entire wrongfulness of his wrong, in all its possible bearings. But when a probationary life has disappeared, and belongs to the finished past, these counteracting influences must pass away. Then the fulness of the wrong of sin may be seen; its immediate and remote bearings are traceable in every direction; the quality and intensity of its moral injury become palpable. Probation is over. There is nothing to distract our observation, nothing to interfere with the fixedness of our concentrated attention. The discovery will be complete, and that discovery is remorse. The idea of that corrosive fretting of a spiritual nature implied in this word is not imaginary. A life of wrong doing inevitably leads to a moral condition where the soul must ever gnaw upon itself, all its active energies combining to evolve shame, self-contempt, self-loathing, and horror.

Evidently there can be no escape from suffering to him who carries the world of woe in his own breast. There is no refuge for him who finds the bottomless pit in the depths of his own consciousness. There is a chord in our fallen nature which vibrates to the cry of Milton's fallen spirit:

> Me miserable! Which way shall I fly
> Infinite wrath and infinite despair?
> Which way I fly is hell: myself am hell;
> And in the lowest deep, a lower deep
> Still threatening to devour me, opens wide,
> To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven. (B. 4.)

To recapitulate—

Man's sense of right is spontaneous, and clear in proportion as we deal honestly by our power of moral perception. Man's sense of the duty to do right is also spontaneous, and is controlling in proportion as we deal honestly by our will. Conscience, in all moral conditions, binds man to law, and makes it either a symbol of probation or retribution. Here also is the seat of man's moral identity; it was the leading power of an unfallen estate; whatever taint came by the fall left it untouched; in all man's wanderings he has this same sign on his forehead; and when probation ends, the very idea of a retributionary state implies that it shall undergo no change.

Reason and analogy show that conscience is indestructible. The sense of "duty to do right" may be a crown of glory or of shame; but there is no moral condition possible to the human spirit which does not manifest the unchangeable identity of conscience. For if conscience, by perpetuating the sense of allegiance to a law of life which they have disqualified themselves from obeying, brings wretchedness to the lost, it must still be admitted that it is precisely the same faculty which affords impulse and guidance to the blessed life of heaven.