

SIN AND CONSCIENCE.

BY REV. FRANCIS E. MARSTEN.

There are two forces that are destined to trouble the unregenerated man. The one is sin and the other conscience. Be sure your sin will find you out is Bible language—a gaunt and pitiless foe to meet at an unexpected turn in the road. One of the great works of the Spirit is to convince of sin. He works on the conscience.

A man may imagine that because his conscience is hardened now that it will always be so, but in an hour when he thinks not his moral nature may assert itself and overwhelm him with remorse and confusion in view of his transgressions.

The old Hebrew looked upon sin as a madness. Was he not right? Does it not distort, falsify and paralyze? Because the moral nature is asleep or dead, is it any reason that it may not awake sometime like a giant in his might. We have known persons who seemed to lose all their moral nature when dreaming. We recall

A REMARKABLE INSTANCE,

which will illustrate our point:

A friend of ours, now an elderly lady, had a dream in her youth so vivid and weird, and yet powerful in its teachings, that she retains it as a life long remembrance. At the time of its occurrence she was in Rome, with a young female, taking in, as American tourists are wont to do, the wonders of the eternal city.

After an arduous day of sight-seeing she went to bed and dreamed she and her niece were nursing a sick miser. They were together in the sick man's chamber. His vast wealth was displayed around him. The time came to administer the usual medicine. She coolly deliberated with her niece on the feasibility of giving her patient a dose of poison, and taking all the money and valuables for themselves.

She mixed the poison—gave it to him. In her dream she saw herself watching its effects. He was to fall asleep and slowly cease to breathe. His changing features were carefully scrutinized by her. The potion worked well. She felt of his limbs as they grew colder. When dead she prepared him for burial.

I have killed him, she thought, but nobody will know it. She actually exulted in her deed. Her moral nature was obliterated. She took his wealth with the aid

of her accomplice to her lodgings. Not a pang of compunction crossed her mind. With the utmost of composure she thought of her deed and the joy her newly found wealth gave her.

The scene changed. She was in church, but gratified and happy in what she had done, and in her foully acquired possessions. The music rolled through the vast cathedral arches. The service proceeded. The choir chanted:—"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."

Up to this time no shadow of ill-desert rested upon her. Suddenly, as lightening out of a clear sky, conscience asserted its prerogative. She saw her ghastly deed in its true light. Her moral nature revolted at her act when she came to herself. Overwhelmed with shame, remorse and despair, feeling that the eyes of the universe were burning into her soul, she tried to utter in one despairing shriek the torment that consumed her. She awoke never to forget that dream—never to have effaced from memory the joy that thrilled her when she realized that she was not the lost, guilty creature, branded with the curse of Cain, that her dream had depicted her to be. Why may not this conviction of sin, this angry blaze of conscience come at any moment in time or in eternity?

In such awful revulsion of the inner life upon itself, in the revelation of its moral rectitude marred and stained by its own wilful act, what prevents torment, remorse and despair seizing upon their prey?

"When thou awakest," says the Psalmist, "thou wilt despise their image." Will not the sinner at her own guiltiness also? And this leads us to remark in conclusion, how happy the soul confident that some day he shall awake, not to be confronted by the horrible image of his sin, but to be in the likeness of his Redeemer. "I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness."

A Catholic legend says that the devil gave a hermit the choice of three great vices, one of which was drunkenness. The hermit chose this as being the least sinful. He became drunk and he committed the other two.