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## The Doctrine of Conscience.

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George Washington's well-known exhortation to his fellow countrymen, "to keep alive that little spark of celestial fire called conscience," was a modern version of the wise man's statement that "the spirit of man is the candle of the Lord." Conscience stands for justice, pure, absolute, inviolable justice. Conscience stands for right, right which cannot be challenged, and will not be bribed. Conscience stands for truth, truth at all hazards, truth which must not be trimmed and clipped and accommodated to serve base ends and purposes. Conscience stands for duty, that which is due, that which ought to be done, and must be done, always done. Conscience declares that the soul of the universe is a soul of justice, right, truth and duty. God's great tribunal of judgment is erected in man's soul and is called conscience. Conscience must be instructed and educated.

Conscience is the minister of justice in man's soul, but the minister of justice has no right to exercise his office according to whim or prejudice or ignorance, but according to enlightenment, sound judgement, right and truth. Conscience is a new-borne babe in its most elementary and rudimentary state. It is usually years before conscience wakes up and assumes its office in the child's life. Meanwhile the child has to be governed, and sometimes through its physical sensation by parents and tutors. No man can be acquitted for what he has said or done on the plea that he was acting according to conscience unless it be shown that his conscience was enlightened by reason, intelligence and sound judgment. Conscience, while supreme in its sphere, is not irresponsible. It must take counsel with reason and truth and God. If it fails to do so, if man wrests conscience from its proper relationship to the other powers of the soul, then conscience becomes a minister of cruelty, injustice, and savagery. The history of an unenlightened conscience sharpened and fired by fanaticism, hate, sectarianism and partisanship is a history of blood and tears and suffering and broken hearts and crushed lives. There has hardly been any instrument of torture in human history more cruel than an unenlightened conscience, a madened, relentless conscience blinded by fury and ignorance. In the name of conscience some of the darkest crimes in the history of Christianity have been perpetrated.

In the name of conscience many-tongued scandal and slander have tripped forth to disrupt families, break up homes, sow discord in churches and cleave society into warring camps. Wherever you find the bigot, the fanatic, the wild-eyed, fiery stout-lunged crusader, in the majority of instances you find a person whose conscience has escaped the guidance of wisdom and has run amuck in the community to the peril of the commonwealth. Such a conscience is out of place; it is morbidly abnormal; it is unreasonable and uncharitable; it is fired not with the inspiration of the Almighty; but with the fuel of the pit. In the realm of ethics it corresponds to Holmes' description of the red Indian: "A bundle of nerves, dancing about, and flourishing a tomahawk." It matters not, except to aggravate the offense, that such a conscience protests that it is acting in the name of religion or good morals. A good cause never justifies the use of infernal weapons. A conscience wrested from its lawful God-designed service as the enlightener and director of moral conduct, is a grievous affliction, an intolerable nuisance.

What we need is the enlightened conscience, the conscience quickened, educated and instructed by reason, truth and judgment. And in all history there is no finer illustration of an enlightened conscience than is to be discerned in the life of Jesus Christ. Because we so often associate conscience with guilt we suppose that conscience played hardly any part in the life of the Son of Man. This supposition is groundless in fact. A more conscientious man than Jesus Christ never breathed. He put conscience into all that He did. In his perfect soul the power of conscience was illuminated by the wisdom of God,

the eternal truth for right living, which made his life peerless and unique. Measured by the standard of an enlightened conscience Jesus strides the narrow world of men like a Colossus. With a sublime disregard of the religious puerilities and pedantries of his time, ignoring the social caste system of his day, Jesus lived out his divine life freely, broadly and humanly, his master passion being to do the Father's will whether people praised him or blamed him, crowned him or crucified him. This is the quality of conscience which Christian people need to cultivate, a full-rounded, intelligent, clear-eyed conscience, the lamp of God, the soul, enlightened by the Divine Spirit, not a easy conscience which excuses itself from manifest duty by saying, "We don't like that kind of work," not a microscopic conscience like that of the Pharisees, "tithing mint and anise and cumin," scrupulous and exacting, fussy and vexatious about little things, while omitting "the weightier matters of the law."

## The Abuse of Conscience.

We hear sometimes of "a stifled conscience," a "seared conscience," the "remorse of conscience." All of these phrases express certain conditions of conscience, for conscience may be juggled with. A man may know the truth, know his duty, know what is right and, at the same time resolutely refuse to do it. His conscience is enlightened but by an act of the will he determines to fly in the face of conscience and do otherwise. His conscience pleads with him to do the right thing, to do the true thing, to do his duty, and by so doing to become the true man, the godly man he should be, but he heeds not the merciful voice of conscience; he "stifles" conscience. That is the first step in the abuse of conscience.

Let a man habituate himself to his attitude towards conscience, let him habituate himself to the thinking of those things and the doing of those things, against which conscience protests, and in time he will have what is called a "seared" conscience. He will take delight in doing the forbidden things; he will become a bandit and a pirate socially, commercially and politically. The light that was in him has become darkness and how great that darkness is! That is the second step in the abuse of conscience.

Of such men it is sometimes said that they have no conscience. That is not true. Their conscience is abused but not annihilated. The candle of the Lord is still in the soul. It is not extinguished, and it is one of the awful mysteries of our soul life that man never can extinguish it, try as he may. Having refused to allow the candle of the Lord to shine in the soul as the lamp of truth and goodness and love and righteousness, the seared conscience, like a smoldering fire breaks out in the nature and fills the soul with the lurid terrors of hell! Hell! Hell! Hell! the torments of the damned, damned by their own choice, damned by their own efforts, damned by their own willful persistency against light and truth and better knowledge that is the terrible outcome of an abused conscience. That is "the worm that dieth not," that is "the fire unquenchable," that is the "outer darkness where is weeping and gnashing of teeth." They cannot get away from it in this world or in any world. He may seek to escape from its fury by fleeing to Alaska or Australia, but he takes his abused conscience with him wherever he goes.

He may seek to escape from it by committing suicide, but he cannot cut away his abused conscience; he cannot shoot that out of existence.

Remorse of conscience. That is hell. That is the hell which Richard III. knew, who had butchered and killed all who might dispute his occupancy of the throne, and who on the night before his final conflict with the claimant for the crown, had his sleep disturbed by the ghosts of all his victims who crowded into his soul, shrieked their detestations at him for his inhumanity, and sent him forth to the battlefield on the morrow a cowed man, with no strength in his arm, no judgment in his brain, no courage in his heart, a defeated and slaughtered man before the fight began!

Man can never be a fugitive from divine justice. The claims of God's justice are never outlawed by lapse of time.  
Anamosa, Iowa.

## Christ's Gift of Himself.

"He gave himself for us," that he might win us for himself "for a possession." Yes, in the commerce of love, nothing but a heart can buy a heart nothing but a heart can pay for a heart. Jesus gives himself to me, that I may give myself to him. That is the only gift that satisfies him. The only result which he recognizes as being the fruit of the travail of his soul, which is sufficient for him, is that we poor men, broken down from our selfishness, emancipated from our sins, with our wills set free, should go to him and say, "Lord, Thou art mine, and I, poor as I am, little as the gift is, I am thine."

We shall only be this in the measure in which we are "purified." And it is his love that purifies us, and his gift that purifies. For that gift sets in operation within us a whole multitude of new motives and new desires. And, more than that, he gave himself that our sins might be taken away. But there is the present gift, as well as the past one, for he is giving himself still moment by moment, and hour by hour, to every one that cleaves to him. And that gift of himself comes into our hearts as, according to Luther's old metaphor, the Elbe was turned into the stable to sweep out all the filth, and make all things clean.

So, dear friends, let us cleave to that Lord. Let us see to it that we have fathomed, and not only fathomed, but accepted, the great gift of himself in its most transcendent form, in its mightiest efficacy, the gift by which, by his death; he has taken away the guilt, and by his life within us breaks the power of our sins, and makes us eager zealots, enthusiasts for all manner of "good works."—Dr. Alexander McLaren.

## Sympathy.

"Be ye kind one to another—tender-hearted." (Eph. 4:32).

A child needs sympathy as much as he does love. "Ten are loved where one is sympathized with." Lack of sympathy on the part of parents in a cause of great unhappiness in families, and yet there is no surer way of gaining the ear of your children than by sympathizing with their joys and sorrows, lessons and play; every true child needs it.

Parents, if you feel that sympathy is not easy to show, cultivate it diligently; remember, if you lose opportunities of showing it, your children will turn to strangers, for sympathy they will have. By this bond of sympathy mothers can gain their girls' confidence, fathers can enter into the life of their boys; and difficult ways are made smoother.

Have sympathy with your children's tastes. If they have a bent for any one thing, do not try to quench it. If your boys or girls come to you for advice, enter as far as possible into their wishes; if impracticable, sympathize with their disappointment. If religious doubts arise, do not try to stamp them out by severity; talk matters over, and show your sympathy with difficulties.—Frances S. Hallows.

Man must work. That is certain as the sun. But he may work grudgingly, or he may work gratefully; he may work as a man, or he may work as a machine. He cannot always choose his work, but he can do it in a generous temper, and with an up-looking heart. There is no work so rude that he may not exalt it; there is no work so impassive, that he may not breathe a soul into it; there is no work so dull, that he may not enliven it.—HENRY GILES.

The three highest titles that can be given a man are those of martyr, hero, saint.—W. E. GLADSTONE.