

to the conscience, we shall take the Apostle's appeal as the foundation of our remarks.

The chief subject of his declaration was the conscience, which is called the moral sense, and whose office it is to distinguish between what is good or evil in character, and right or wrong in conduct, exciting feelings of joy and complacency on the one hand; and pain and remorse on the other. Men possess notions of right and wrong. They possess a belief that they ought to do one thing and refrain from another. This may be called a conscientious belief, and when such a belief exists in a man's mind in reference to a number of actions, we would call the sum of his notions respecting what is right and wrong his conscience.

In avowing his integrity in this appeal Paul could not mean absolute sinlessness. We know by his own testimony that he was far short of perfection, though no man had ever a brighter prospect of attaining it, or more deeply felt his distance from it. He elsewhere ingenuously says, "In my flesh dwelleth no good thing."

The value of conscience as a director of individual conduct cannot be overestimated, but it must be well informed and enlightened, for it may be silenced through ignorance and delusion, and decide erroneously, calling sweet bitter, and bitter sweet; saying peace, when there is no peace. That which one man may regard as a crime, another may regard with indifference. Both may be equally sincere, but sincerity cannot alter the nature of things. A conscience void of offence is that which is in conformity to the will of God, which is perfect and unchangeable as his own essence, and prescribes the only standard of truth to which all human systems must bow, the rule of duty by which all human actions must be tried, and which sincerity cannot alter or change. Idolatry does not cease to be criminal in consequence of being conscientiously practised. The conscience, therefore, that does not condemn the conduct is not necessarily a sound guide. There are some whose conscience is seared, who have proceeded so far in sin, that it has ceased to rebuke, and the condition of the sinner is never so alarming as then. When he has been so familiarised with scenes of vice, as to be hardened to the deceitfulness of sin, dead to reproof, and insensible to fear, he shows that he has been given over by God to a reprobate mind, as was the case with Ephraim when God said, "Let him alone," like calms on the sea, this is the prophet and forerunner of the gale.

It does not follow that conscience is void of offence, merely because it approves of conduct. The experience of Paul himself may be appealed to in proof of this. He did many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, reviling his character, blaspheming his holy name, and persecuting his people; yet in all these crimes he had the sanction of

his approving conscience. He supposed he acted a most meritorious part, imagining he did God service, but no sooner had the Spirit opened his eyes, than he confessed himself the chief of sinners. When his conscience had been illuminated it reprobated his former course, and admired and adored the object of his former hatred. Under the guidance of mistaken zeal, how often have the most fearful passions been let vent to! What crusades have been organized, and sanguinary persecutions enkindled!

In order to a sound conscience, two things are requisite. It must possess an inherent knowledge of the rule of duty, and act habitually with a sense of duty. The decisions of conscience are only valuable when they accord with the infallible standard, which is the law extending to the affections of the heart as well as the affections. The law is exceedingly broad, reaching unto the whole man. It is also deep, penetrating unto the recesses of the soul, being a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The conscience was placed within us to be our proper governor, acting as the delegate of God, in the place of God, and should therefore speak with the voice of God set forth in the law.

"And I will place within them as a guide My umpire conscience, which if they will hear, Light of the light, well used, they shall attain."

He who prescribed the law, explained and exemplified it in His Word. "He hath shewn thee, O man, what is good, and what the law requireth of thee: to do mercy, to love righteousness, and walk humbly with thy God." Ignorance of the divine rule of morality, therefore, cannot fail to lead to the violation of that rule, and as this is dangerous, so it is inexcusable. If conscience approves when it ought to condemn, the guilt is thereby increased. Men often judge amiss because of their own faults. Some take little pains to ascertain the truth, and most men would possess more accurate perceptions of the moral law if they sufficiently endeavored to attain them; and therefore, though a man may not be punished for a given act which he ignorantly supposes to be lawful, he may be punished for that ignorance in which the supposition originates, and there is a degree of wickedness to the agents of which God at length sends strong delusion, that they may believe a lie.

We have said that in order to a sound verdict, the conscience must act habitually with a sense of duty, doing all as in the presence of God, and with a single eye to his glory. To follow it dictates whithersoever they might lead, regardless of consequences, to consult its testimony on all occasions in regard to what is lawful and expedient, by acting in every case according to our convictions of truth, is the high attainment to which we should aspire.