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THE INFLUENCE OF CUSTOM ON CONSCIENCE.

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THE question, "What doth the Lord require of thee?" every man whose reason and conscience has been at all developed, is every day in one form or other proposing to himself. For the most part, however, among those classes in whom religious sanctions have not taken a firm hold, the idea of an appeal to the will of the Supreme Lawgiver is omitted, and the question is proposed in such forms as these,—What is right and proper for me to do in the particular emergence?—How ought I to conduct myself?—By what rule ought I to be guided? How shall I secure the approbation of my own mind, and the approbation of those around me whose good opinion it is desirable to secure? In the more serious and important actions of his life a reflecting man will not fail to propose these questions to himself, and to answer them by the adoption of some rule or custom that shall direct his conduct.

To this course of enquiry we are prompted by the moral constitution of our nature,—the power of conscience within us. Reason puts the question, what is true? Conscience puts the question, what is right? Or their equivalents, what ought I to be-

lieve as consistent with science?—What ought I to do as consistent with morality?

And as the entire system of true propositions in every department of science is dependent upon those relations that have been established by God, and our knowledge, if true, must be conformable to these—so morality is dependent upon our moral relations, as these have been established by God, and the right rule of human conduct cannot be variable or capricious, but must be conformable to these established relations. The rule of right, therefore, is as much a divine ordinance as the measure of truth. The truth-loving enquirer into the workmanship of God investigates what God has done, and in so far as this is ascertained, he comprehends truth: the lover of moral rectitude enquires what God has commanded, and in so far as he attains to a knowledge of this, and to a practical conformity to his knowledge, he is in possession of a good conscience towards God.

But, for a long period, as we may learn from the history of science, men who were called philosophers or students of nature, did not attempt to