

CONSCIENCE, ITS ORIGIN AND AUTHORITY

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Conscience, its origin and authority by G. L. Richardson

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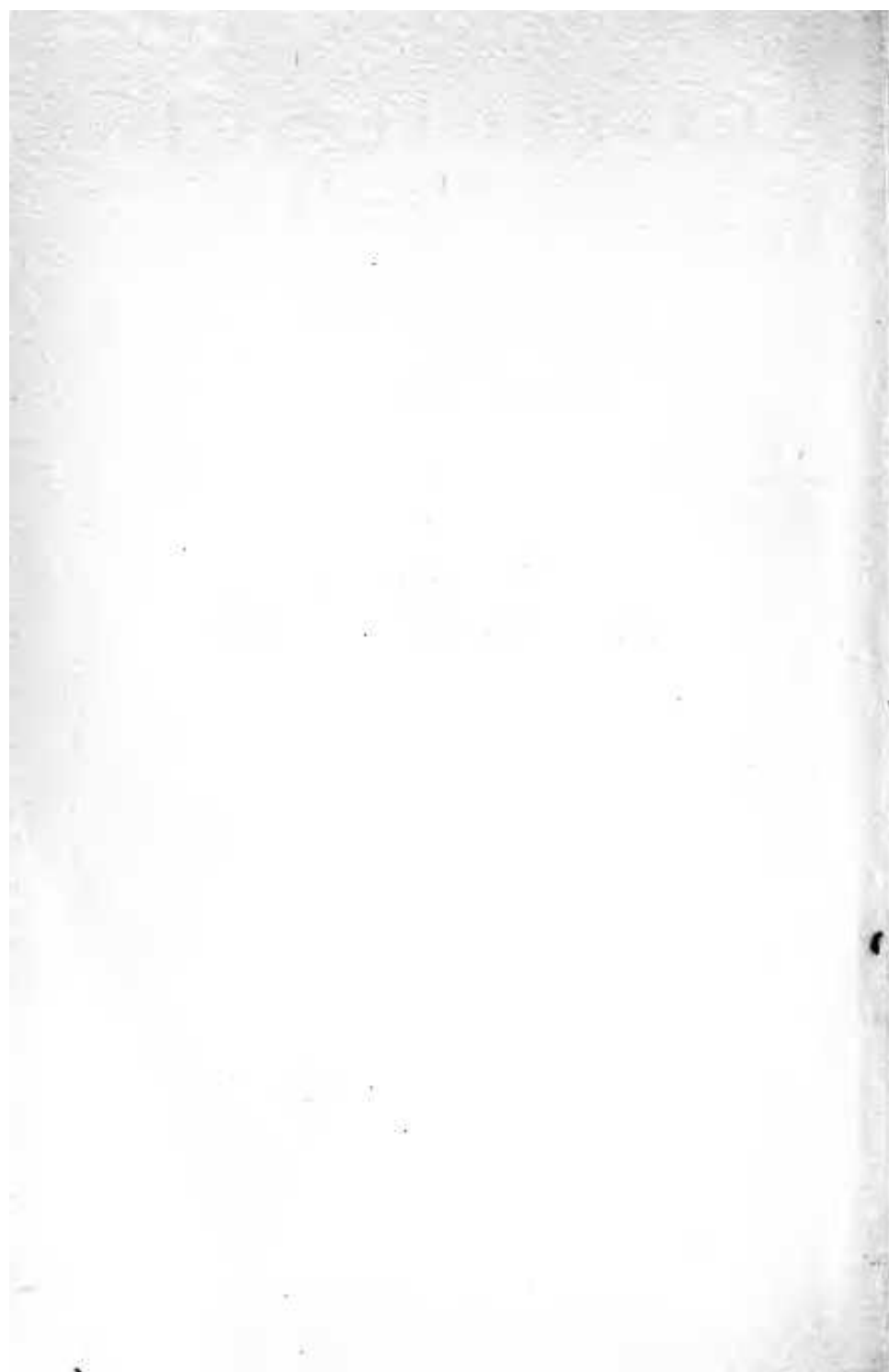
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G. L. RICHARDSON

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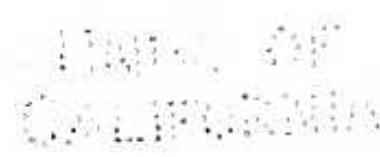
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CHURCH,' 'THE CHILDREN'S CHARTER,' 'OLD
TESTAMENT STORIES,' 'THE SUNDAY GOSPELS'

'Conscience is one of the most important subjects in the whole
of Ethics, and even in the whole of Theology.'—DORNER



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INTRODUCTORY

THOSE who are interested in the study of Ethics, and particularly Christian Ethics in relation to Christian Theology, must have been disappointed at the cursory treatment which the Conscience has received at the hands of English writers. For the most part Ethical writers have left it to the Theologians, and Theologians have referred inquirers back to Ethics.

From the year 1660, when Jeremy Taylor published his *Ductor Dubitantium*, to the time when Joseph Butler preached his famous Sermons at the Rolls—they were first published in 1726—no one seems to have devoted serious attention to what may be called the theory of Conscience. And, as far as I am aware—in spite of the immense change that has taken place since the eighteenth century in our way of regarding man, the world, and GOD—no one since Butler has given more than passing attention to the subject.

Many people would agree with Professor Fowler that 'the terms Conscience and Moral Sense are very convenient expres-

sions for popular use. . . . But the scientific moralist, in attempting to analyse the springs of moral action and to detect the ultimate sanctions of conduct, would do well to avoid these terms altogether.* Yet it seems somewhat unmannerly to dismiss with a bow a word which brings with it such venerable credentials—which, in fact, has played such a great part in human life.

Granting, then, that the word stands for something—that, as Dorner says, 'Conscience is one of the most important subjects in the whole of Ethics, and even in the whole of Theology'—there would seem to be an excuse for trying to see one's way in what is confessedly a difficult path.

This Essay is not addressed to professed students of Ethics, Theology, or Metaphysics, but to the general reader who finds that the difficult problems connected with such studies are brought to a focus in his experience in the question of the origin and authority of Conscience. But reference will be made to standard authors on these subjects, in whose works anyone who is interested may pursue his inquiries for himself.

* Thomas Fowler, *Progressive Morality*, p. 32.

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