ON

Human Responsibility.

A Lecture

DELIVERED IN THE NEW HALL OF SCIENCE,
OLD STREET, CITY ROAD, UNDER THE AUSPICES OF
"THE CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE SOCIETY."

BY THE
REV. A. C. ROW, M.A.,
AUTHOR OF "THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF DIVINE INSPIRATION,"
"THE JESUS OF THE EVANGELISTS,"
"THE MORAL TEACHING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT," ETC.

London:
HODDER AND STOUGHTON,
27, PATERNOSTER ROW.
MDCCCLXXIII.

Watson and Hazell, Printers, London and Aylesbury.

On Human Responsibility.

THE questions, Are we responsible for our actions, and if responsible, to whom are we responsible? or are our actions the inevitable results of certain laws, over which we can exert no more control than we can over the law of gravitation? are of the most surpassing interest. The whole course of human conduct must be profoundly influenced, in proportion as we view ourselves responsible to a Being external to ourselves, who has the right to enforce obligation on us; or as we consider ourselves entitled to regulate our actions, in conformity with our idea of what best subserves our own interests, irrespective of every other consideration.

If the universal testimony of mankind possesses any value as a witness to truth, it proves that we are responsible for our actions. It has been asserted that there are barbarous tribes, who possess no idea of religion. Whether it be so or not, is not my present business to inquire. But it is a fact that even the most savage members of our race admit a responsibility of some sort. Men nowhere exist but in a state of society; but the man who acted on the principle, I will do whatever I choose, without regard to any other person, would be incapable of being a member of either family, clan, or

tribe. It follows therefore that a feeling of responsibility of some sort is a necessary part of our mental constitution.

To the truth of human responsibility, the whole structure of language bears a clear and decisive testimony. It is impossible to write perspicuously without using words which contain the ideas of ought, duty, and obligation. The first principles of grammar prove that mankind have ever viewed themselves within certain limits to have been voluntary agents. The various moods of the verbs expressed by such terms as "I might," "I could," "I would," "I should," "I ought," and "let me," imply that we feel that we have a power over our actions, and a duty in the performance of them. The most strenuous deniers of human freedom are compelled to use language which is a real concession of the point of issue.

I rest the proof of our responsibility on the instinctive feelings of man. From them we cannot divert ourselves. It is easy in this, as well as in many other questions, to urge intellectual difficulties. It is even quite possible to produce plausible arguments in favour of necessity. But after a man may have persuaded his intellect that his actions are the results of necessary laws, his instinctive feelings are too strong for his logic. Every believer in necessity or fate is compelled to act on the principle that freedom is true, and necessity is false. If a thief were to urge that he could not help picking our pockets, we should at once treat his plea as unworthy of consideration. All of us *know* that no overwhelming necessity constrained him to do so.

My next point is, that if we are responsible, we must be free agents. On this subject a number of fallacies

have been scattered widely. Before I can advance a step, I must clear them away.

First then, let us inquire what we mean when we assert that men are free agents; or as the same thing is expressed in books, when we affirm the doctrine of the freedom of the will.

When we assert that we are free agents, we by no means intend what our opponents charge us with affirming, that the human will is unfettered by conditions, or that a man can call up any feeling he pleases, by merely willing to do so. Still less do we assert that freedom is the same thing as caprice. On the contrary, I readily admit that our freedom is limited by a variety of conditions. We are only able to love a thing which our moral nature feels to be lovely. What it pronounces to be right, holy, and good, no bare act of our wills can enable us to think wrong. Also, within certain limits, the acts of our intellects are necessary. We have no freedom to choose whether we will believe that two and two make four. Yet, notwithstanding this, ignorance is sometimes wilful, and therefore voluntary. Education, mental constitution, and various other things, exercise a modifying influence on our responsibility.

Nor is it true that the assertion of the freedom of the will is equivalent to the affirmation that we are capable of acting independently of reasons or motives. A being who acts without reason, renounces his rationality.

What then do we mean when we affirm that we are free agents? We assert that we possess a power of choosing between the various reasons which present themselves to our minds; that these do not exert a necessary influence on us in compelling us to action; and that motives differ from each other, not only in degree, but in

kind. We mean therefore, when we assert that we are the free causes of our own actions, that we are capable of exerting a rational choice on the various motives presented to us, that we can select those which our judgment approves, and banish the rest from our consideration.

Secondly: the next point of my proof is, that where there is no freedom to act or to forbear, there can be no responsibility. The proof of this rests on our instinctive feeling that we cannot be responsible for an action or an event over which we can exert no choice. We measure responsibility by the praise or blame which we attach to actions. We are incapable of praising or blaming what we cannot help. Who ever blamed a stone for falling, or a fire for burning? It is true that when a stone unexpectedly hurts us, under the influence of passion we may give it a kick; but the moment we recover our rational self-possession we free it from all responsibility. In one word, we bestow praise or blame in exact proportion to the voluntariness of the action.

Let us take another illustration. If some one were to hit either of us a blow on the face, we should feel indignation at the person who inflicted it. But if another were to take hold of his hand, and use it as an instrument for striking us, our indignation would be aroused, not at the person whose arm struck us, but at the person who used it. It follows, therefore, that voluntary actions only are the subjects of praise or blame, and involuntary ones of neither; and that responsibility attaches only to voluntary actions, and that for those which we cannot help doing we are not responsible.

From this a further conclusion follows, that for an act to be either virtuous or vicious it must be voluntary. An

action which we cannot help doing may be our sad misfortune—it may be even the subject of our regret—but it cannot be our crime. It is necessary, before we can feel an action to be a crime, that we should feel the consciousness that we might have avoided doing it, if we had so chosen. For actions of this kind only are we capable of feeling repentance. In the same manner its voluntariness is essential to the virtuousness of an action. No amount of mere utility will make it such. Many things may be highly beneficial, but this can make them neither moral nor virtuous. Thus the Thames is highly beneficial to the inhabitants of London, but no one would think of praising it for its good qualities. But when Captain Knowles stood at his post of duty at the sacrifice of his life, we at once recognize the grandeur of the act, although it seems to have been attended with no beneficial result. Why this difference between the cases? The Thames cannot help bestowing the benefits which it confers. Captain Knowles, by playing the coward, or, as some might say, by a wise self-love, might have saved his life. But he voluntarily chose to sacrifice it at the post of duty. Shall we affirm the position of the atheist, and say that the Thames will continue for centuries to be the unconscious benefactor of the inhabitants of London, and that all which was great and noble in Captain Knowles was in the space of five minutes reduced to nothing in the ocean waves? Yet such must be the result, if there be no God, and for man no hereafter.

It follows, therefore, that if man is impelled by a set of impulses, over which he can exert no choice, his actions can possess no moral quality. The highest act of self-sacrifice, the most unselfish promptings of benevolence, the most disinterested pursuit of truth, would have no

more value than the falling of a stone. The instinctive promptings of our moral nature refuse to assign to the fall of a stone in any particular way the idea of virtue. Why is this? Because the stone cannot help falling as it does. It might have fallen within half an inch of our heads, and by this we may have escaped the fracture of our skulls. The atheist would say, How lucky it was that it fell thus; or the Christian, By what a merciful providence have I escaped; but neither would assign praise or virtue to the stone. When, however, we contemplate an act of self-sacrifice, like that of Captain Knowles, we at once assign to it the highest praise, as pre-eminently great and noble. Why the difference? Because what Captain Knowles did was a pure act of his free choice. He had before him the alternative of following the dictates of his lower nature, and thereby saving his life; but he chose to obey the higher law of duty, and to sacrifice life in obedience to its demands. He has thus realized the language of Jesus Christ, "He that loveth his life shall lose it, but he that hateth his life for my sake shall save it to life eternal."

My argument therefore stands as follows: Mankind have asserted with unanimous voice that certain actions are virtuous and vicious. But they can be neither, unless men are voluntary agents. All voluntary agency involves responsibility. Men therefore feel themselves to be responsible. Its modifications I will consider presently.

Thirdly: it is an essential principle in the teaching of Atheism, that there existed nothing in the original state of the universe but matter, force, and law, and that neither mind nor rational volition had in it any existence, or have exerted any in its formation. Its laws are necessary,

and never have been and never could have been otherwise than they are. How then have these been able to evolve the phenomena of moral action? How can necessary laws evolve the power of choice, the essential idea of which is an ability to act independently of their control? It follows, therefore, if man is the necessary outcome of matter, force, and law, and nothing more, that he must be incapable of virtue or vice, praise or blame. But we know as a fact that he is capable of these. Therefore we infer that the theory that man has originated out of these, and nothing more, must be untrue; and that there must be a fallacy either in the premises with which we have started, or in the inferences which we have drawn from them.

But it has been objected, Our powers of willing and of choice are only the results of particular arrangements of particles of matter, and that the brain secretes volition like a gland does saliva. I own that I am incapable of comprehending what those who make this suggestion really mean, or whether they mean anything at all. What! laws which cannot be otherwise than they are, matter devoid of sensation and of thought, and force devoid of reason and of will, produce by their self-evolution, that which is capable of the highest acts of self-sacrifice and all the phenomena of rational will! Gentlemen, I cannot really bring myself to believe that any one in this room seriously thinks that the timbers which compose this platform, by any varied arrangement of their particles, by any application of motional forces, or by the blind action of dead laws, could generate a being who would be capable of sacrificing his life to save our own. Intelligence must originate in intelligence, and not in non-intelligence; rational acts cannot flow from unreason,

voluntary actions from necessary law, or self-sacrifice from self-love.

But it will be objected, How do we know that we are voluntary agents? I will answer this question, for it is a reasonable one.

The evidence is not far to seek. To prove it requires no long course of logical inferences. Our free agency is a matter of our direct knowledge. There is no truth of which we have greater certainty. Our consciousness directly testifies to the fact. Whenever we act, we know that it is in our power either to do it or to forbear. Nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand of mankind habitually assert this in the language which they use. If there is an odd one in a thousand who does not (which I greatly doubt), he may full well be ranked with those who are born either blind or deaf. Even the man who by the aid of a number of intellectual puzzles has persuaded himself into a belief in necessity, acts on the principle that he and all other men are free.

Let me illustrate the argument by an example. We are each of us certain that it is by a simple act of our choice that we have come here this evening. We are certain that after each step on the road it was in our power to have turned back. By a mere exertion of my will it is in my power not to deliver another line of this lecture, or to make any substitution I please in the words and sentences. Each of you feels certain that it entirely depends on yourselves, whether you will sit here and listen another minute. There are no facts of which we are more certain than these. The table here before me cannot help being what it is, and doing what it does. We can. In this power a man differs from a machine. A machine exerts no control over its own actions; we,

within certain clear and definite limits, can. Certain functions of our being are placed, for wise purposes, by the great Creator, entirely beyond our control, as, for instance, those on which our lives depend, as the motion of our hearts, etc. Had these been made dependent on our wills, the functions of life would have been impossible. For these we have no responsibility. Not so with our moral actions.

It is impossible that we can have stronger evidence of anything than the testimony of our consciousness. When I see a thing before me, I am as certain that I see it, as I am that two and two make four. How do I know that I see this or that particular thing? I have the testimony of my consciousness. I am therefore certain of it. I have a similar testimony that I am able to do or to forbear doing a particular action. I am therefore certain that I am a free agent.

I am aware that a number of objections are all ready at hand to be adduced against the fact of our free agency, and the consequent doctrine of our accountability for our actions, in the same way as they can be adduced against any other class of facts. They are all sets of metaphysical puzzles. But all reasonings which contradict palpable facts must be fallacious somewhere. We accept the facts, and reject the reasonings. I will attempt to deal with some of these difficulties.

First: it has been urged that the testimony of consciousness to a fact does not make that fact certain. Thus some persons would tell us that we have no certain evidence of the existence of this material table before us, because we think that we see it. You do not, say they, see the table. All that you perceive by the senses is a certain colour, form, hardness, etc. Nay, more; this form is nothing more than

a painting on the retina of your eyes; and even this painting undergoes a further modification by the percipient power of the mind. It is a mere delusion, therefore, that you see a material table. All that you are really conscious of is a mental perception, and it is quite uncertain whether there is any outward reality corresponding thereto.

I reply that after all this reasoning, some portions of which may be difficult to answer, we instinctively return to the conviction that this table is a materially existing thing, quite independent of our preceptions of it; and as such, the kicking of our bare toes against it will be attended with discomfort. The objector will say the sensation is only an idea. Still I return to the instinctive belief in the reality of the existence of the material table, although I cannot answer all the difficulties with which the fact of its existence is attended. But this difficulty is powerless against the fact that our consciousness is a true witness to our freedom. The objector fully admits that our minds really perceive certain qualities which we suppose to exist in the table. The only doubt raised is as to whether the external table corresponds to these mental perceptions. It is not attempted to be denied that we actually perceive them, and so far they are true facts. In the same manner it is an equally true fact that we are conscious that we are free agents. We therefore must be free.

This objection may be made to assume a more specious form. It is urged that our consciousness is frequently mistaken as to the reality of facts. Thus it by no means follows because men think that they have seen a ghost, that they have really seen one. Again, one man says that his consciousness tells him that a particular

object is red; another says that it bears witness to the fact that it is yellow. The truth is, that in this latter case a man has the jaundice. The inference which is drawn is, that our consciousness is not reliable.

I answer first, that the testimony of 999 out of every thousand of mankind must be taken as representing the truth; and that of the one thousandth, if in opposition to it, as false. If this is not so, we may as well give up the inquiry into truth altogether.

But secondly: the objection is founded on a palpable fallacy. It confounds between our consciousness and the fact external to it. While our consciouness may not be an adequate witness of the truth of an external fact, it must be so as to the truth of its own perceptions. The man who affirms that he is conscious of seeing a ghost states a true fact, that his mind perceives one, although he may be under a delusion as to its external reality. The man who mistakes a red object for a yellow one, actually perceives it yellow. In a similar manner, when the mind testifies to the fact of its own freedom, it testifies to the truth of an internal perception which in this case has nothing external corresponding to it, respecting which deception is possible. As therefore we are conscious that we are free, and this consciousness testifies to a fact, we must be free.

The next objection which I have to answer is that men are actuated by motives; that these vary in power; that in the struggle between them, the most powerful must prevail; and therefore the assertion that we are masters of our own actions is an absurdity.

First: the objection involves the following fallacy. It presupposes that our motives are separate things from ourselves, and can exert in us a power of compulsion.

But they are not separate from, but a portion of ourselves. A motive means a reason which acts on the mind, and nothing else.

Secondly: the assertion that motives vary in power, and that the most powerful must invariably prevail, contains a multitude of fallacies.

I fully concede that whenever we act, we have some reasons or motives which urge us to action; but these cannot be put into a pair of scales, and weighed one against the other. A mass of iron of a certain weight we cannot lift; but it by no means follows that an impulse of a certain character we cannot resist.

The fallacy arises from confounding together our motives and the pleasures with which particular kinds of actions are attended. But even here it is impossible to weigh the force of different kinds of pleasure by a common measure. Pleasures differ in quality as well as in quantity. The pleasure which attends a great intellectual exertion, and that of drinking oneself drunk, differ wholly in kind. If estimated by its intensity, the pleasure which a man can attain by a combination of gluttony and drunkenness in a single day may greatly exceed what he would derive from any mental occupation. Still there exists a power within us of choosing the higher pursuit, and despising the lower.

The assertion that we are necessarily impelled by the amount of pleasure with which our actions are accompanied contradicts the most palpable facts. It is absurd to say that the martyr is impelled to his acts of self-sacrifice by considerations of pleasure. I appeal to your common sense. A man gives his body to the burning flame, sooner than deny the dictates of his conscience. Another drinks himself drunk, to gratify the lowest

appetites of his nature. In what scales will you weigh the motives of these? Who will presume to say that the pleasure of the martyr exceeds that of the drunkard? It is obviously impossible to measure the motives which impel them by any common standard of quantity; or to say that the martyr is impelled to his martyrdom by a self-love over which he could exert no control. The truth is, that the philosophy which teaches that we are the mere creatures of physical law, and that virtue is only a modification of selfishness, leaves little room for martyrdom.

It will be objected that the martyr is animated by the hope of being compensated for his sufferings in the world to come; and that he suffers to obtain a greater good or to avoid a greater pain. I shall not dispute that hope helps to support him in his agony. But mightier support than distant hope—every motive which can be summoned to bear on the mind—is necessary to support him in this deadly struggle. It is certain that the numbers of those who have died in torture to testify their belief or atheism have been few.

Let us take a case nearer home. An artisan wishes to elevate his condition, and to see his wife and family happy and comfortable. To effect this he submits to various acts of self-sacrifice. Another, intent on self-indulgence, expends everything on his own bodily gratification. Will any one tell me that the former of these is the necessary prey of a set of motives which he cannot resist? Could not the prudent man be imprudent, if he so willed, or the reverse? It is clear that if a man is the slave of his strongest impulse, to talk of resisting a temptation is an absurdity. How can I resist it, if I do not possess the power of self-control? The power which we unquestion-

ably possess of resisting and struggling against temptation, although in many men it may be weak, proves that we are in possession of freedom, and that therefore we are responsible.

I by no means wish to deny that many men have become the slaves of habits, which in a certain sense are irresistible. There is a state of degradation into which human nature is capable of sinking under the influence of habits of long and confirmed vice. To take a very telling instance: Of all vices, perhaps none is more difficult to cure than confirmed drunkenness. In a very advanced stage of it, the power of moral self-restraint seems to be almost, if not entirely gone. The sight of the bottle, nay, even the thought of it, acting on a state of miserable restlessness and *ennui*, inflames his whole being to madness. Something similar takes place in all stages of advanced vice. Will it be pretended from this that man has no responsibility? I admit that, in the case before us, the power of self-command has become almost destroyed. But how came this state of things about? Has it not been the result of the drunkard's own voluntary agency? Has he not made himself what he is by the gradual formation of evil habits? Is he not therefore responsible for their formation?

An old heathen moralist could tell us that no man became sunk into a state of utter baseness on a sudden. I by no means deny that it is possible for a man to sink into a state in which he almost says, "Evil, be thou my good." Certain it is that habitual vice can so lower the moral principles, that degraded man fails to see the evil of wickedness and crime. The power of habit is mighty in man, in its influence both for good and for evil. It elevates him high; it causes him to sink low. But the

question is, how does he get thus? Is it by any inevitable necessity which man is powerless to avert?

I fully admit that a state of confirmed evil is a thing terrible in its consequences, and that the force of habit exerts a modifying influence on responsibility, though it cannot supersede it. Human nature is mysteriously and wonderfully made. Men, by an indefinite progress in goodness, can become elevated to a height which can almost set the power of temptation at defiance. By progress in evil they can sink to a state of degradation, in which their powers of resistance are reduced almost to nothing. Under the influence of acquired habit, an action which was once very difficult, can be performed, not only easily, but almost instinctively. You who are engaged in any kind of mechanical occupation are well acquainted with the nature of this power, in the dexterity which it confers on you in the use of your instruments. Under its influence complicated actions are performed instinctively, with almost the rapidity of thought, and with an ease to which an unskilled workman is a stranger. I do not think that any of you suppose that the possession of this power is at all inconsistent with your free agency.

It does not, however, lie within the scope of the present lecture to consider whether the power of habits is or is not a desirable one. I accept it as a fact, and readily admit that when a man has formed habits of evil, his powers of resistance have become greatly impaired: *e.g.*, when a man has yielded himself to the dominion of rage, he is frequently hardly responsible for his actions. But the real question at issue is, what has brought him into this state? Is he not himself the cause of his own degradation? If so, he is still responsible.

But it will be objected that a great number of men

are born with bad qualities, perhaps with hereditary tendencies to particular vices as, for example, some are born with naturally bad tempers: others are born with, or at least very early develop, opposite tendencies, whereby the pursuit of what is good and noble is comparatively easy. I think it indisputable that there is a great variety in the mental constitutions of different men; or at least, that it displays itself from the earliest dawn of their reason. So far this modifies, but does not destroy responsibility. These evil qualities, as they first display themselves in human nature, are within our power to restrain, and it is the duty of each of us to do so. When passion becomes ungovernable, it is always the result of a formed habit. I never saw a boy whose temper was so naturally bad as to be ungovernable. Nay, in cases where the habit has acquired considerable strength through indulgence, it can be restrained by a strong exercise of the will. I have known a man, whose bursts of passion in his own family were excessive, who was as smooth as oil before the world.

Another objection has been urged, that we are so completely the creatures of our birth and our education, that we can be responsible neither for our characters nor our actions. I will put the case as strong against responsibility as I can, and perhaps I shall do so more clearly if I adduce a particular case, rather than put it in an abstract form. We will suppose that a child is born a native of Bengal. I take this particular instance, because Lord Macaulay tells us in one of his Essays, that the Bengalese, as a race, are the greatest liars on earth. What, says he, the Greek is to the European, the Asiatic is to the Greek, and the Bengalese to the Asiatic. We will suppose that a child is born and educated in the moral and intel-

lectual life of this race; can he be responsible for his character?

Or take another instance. A child is born in a family of thieves. The family associate only with persons of the same description, and he lives in the moral atmosphere of plunder, and ultimately becomes a thief; can we hold such a one responsible?

I answer that, in both cases, responsibility, though greatly modified, is not destroyed. The effects of habitually breathing an impure moral atmosphere, and of an evil education, are frightful to contemplate. Still it is not a fact that every one who is born and brought up under vicious influences inevitably becomes a bad man. It sometimes happens that the sense of the evil conduct of parents, and of the society in which one has lived, turns a man strongly in the opposite direction. In not a few cases men have seen their fathers' sins, and have turned from them, and have not done after their abominations. If this were not so, the reform of society, after it has attained a certain stage of corruption, would be hopeless, and the only means of staying its progress would be to cut it off from the earth.

What effect have these considerations on individual responsibility? They modify, but do not destroy it. The Judge of all the earth will hold a man accountable for what he has, and not for what he has not. Nothing but His all-penetrating eye can thoroughly disentangle the complicated web of human actions, and estimate the exact good or evil in human conduct. I think this is one of the strongest arguments for the being of a God; for if there be none, and if there be no hereafter, neither the individual nor society can estimate at their right value the various circumstances which modify our respon-

sibility. It follows that difficulties such as I have considered cannot over-balance the primary consciousness of freedom, which is inherent in human thought. Even in the most demoralized states of society man has some power—it may be a small one—of discriminating between right and wrong. Until he has attained a most advanced stage of moral recklessness he is not wholly insensible to the evil which surrounds him. The man who has been educated a thief may have a very imperfect sense that it is wrong to rob another. But how does he feel when an attempt is made to rob him? The lowest amount of moral perception affords room for responsibility.

It has been urged that the effects of food, climate, peculiarities of the country in which men live, and, in general, their outward surroundings, bring them under the law of physical necessity. Among the writers of eminence who have urged this difficulty, the late Mr. Buckle holds an important place. Many of the points taken by him afford the strongest proof that men of high reputation can be guilty of pre-eminent rashness of assertion. I will adduce a single example, selected from a great number of others. He is endeavouring to account for the difference of mental constitution between the Greeks and Hindoos, and he does so by means of the local characteristics of their respective countries. Among other things, he assigns an important influence to the gigantic character of the mountains of India, compared with those of Greece. We all know that the Himalayas are the highest in the globe; but Mr. Buckle forgot to take into account the most important fact, that before mountainous scenery can influence the character of a people, it is necessary that they should be able to catch sight of it. Now it so happens that an overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of India have,

in all ages, inhabited the valleys of the Ganges and the Indus, and thus have never had the opportunity of seeing the mighty mountains of India. What should we say of a writer who would ascribe the character of the inhabitants of Cornwall to the scenery around Ben Nevis? Until facts are correctly stated I need not occupy your time in refuting theories founded on them. The influences of climate, etc., exert a modifying influence on man; but to assert that they make him what he is, or that they nullify his responsibility, is absurd.

A great number of writers in the present day call on us to believe that our freedom is crushed beneath the pressure of a number of hard invariable laws, which we are powerless alike to modify or control. These invite us to renounce our belief in the freedom of our actions, at the bidding of what you may have heard called the science of statistics. Staticians tell us that numerous classes of actions recur in nearly the same numbers year by year, in proportion to the total number of the population. Thus the numbers of murders committed year by year are said to vary in this proportion. The same is asserted of suicide and various other crimes. Nay, we are told that the great principle of marriage is subject to the same law. In the name of such facts we are invited to believe that human actions are governed by as necessary a law as that of gravitation.

This objection presents at first sight so great an amount of plausibility, that I must give it a careful consideration.

1. I observe that the word "Law," as used in the objection, is ambiguous. The Duke of Argyle, in his work entitled "The Reign of Law," tells us that this term is used by philosophers in five different senses,

e.g., we say that a weight falls in accordance with the law of gravitation, which is impressed on all matter. A statician tells us that a murder took place in accordance with the law of averages. It is quite evident that there is nothing in common between these two expressions, but the word "law." To infer that an action that occurs in conformity with a law of averages is necessary, because one which takes place in conformity with that of gravitation is, requires only common sense to see that the reasoning is fallacious.

2. The objection that we can predict an action by the aid of statistical tables, and therefore that such actions must obey a necessary law, involves a gross fallacy. What is meant is, that if we take large numbers of men, we may be tolerably sure that a certain number of them will do a particular act. But if we were to apply this principle to any particular man, and say that he would do a particular act, it would only turn out true by a lucky guess. Thus, it is tolerably certain that twenty-five out of every thousand men will die in any given year. But it is in the highest degree uncertain whether this or that particular person will. I ask you to observe that no such uncertainty prevails in the results of the laws of nature. We are not tolerably certain as to these results, but absolutely so. We do not conclude that nine hundred and seventy-five stones out of a thousand will drop to the ground, if we let them fall, but that each one will. There is therefore no parallel whatever between the two cases.

3. The so-called laws of averages are not invariable. Strictly speaking, therefore, they are not laws at all. It is not true that the same number of murders are committed year by year in proportion to the population in

this country. All which can be asserted is, that they are nearly the same. I ask your attention to this word *nearly*, for on it the whole force of the argument depends. If they were the result of any necessary law, they must always be the same under similar circumstances.

4. The statistics do not count actions separately from the results produced by our wills, but include these, and those of every impulse which can be exerted on the mind. It is quite possible to reduce a number of the most fortuitous events to a statistical table. If any one were to throw up a penny piece 5,000 times, and ask me to guess heads or tails, there is no doubt that I should be right in my guessings about 2,500 times, even though I might invariably say heads. Nothing, however, could be more absolutely fortuitous; and to say that my right guesses were the result of any necessary law, which controls human actions in any proper sense of that term, is absurd.

5. Let us look into this matter with the eyes of common sense. Mr. Buckle tells us "that murder is committed with as much regularity, and bears as uniform a relation to certain known circumstances, as the movements of the tides, and the rotation of the seasons." What are the facts? Taking a large number of years, the number of known murders perpetrated in England amount to a certain average, or to express the same fact in other words, they will amount to one out of so many thousand of the population. Now observe what this means. Not that the number of murders which will be committed next year, or any other year, will be exactly the same as this average number; but will be not very far off from it. Where then is the invariable law which proves that the actions of men are governed by influences as

necessary as the ebbing and flowing of the tides, and the regular succession of spring, summer, autumn, and winter?

6. But what about the alleged uniformity of the law of suicides? Does not this prove that when we talk about the freedom of human actions it is all nonsense. Here again I might apply precisely the same argument, but it is needless to repeat it. But the case of suicide is particularly ill chosen by our opponents. It only avails on the supposition that we mean by freedom a power to act capriciously. On the contrary, we connect it with the highest acts of our rational judgment. Now the verdict of juries tells us, that in nearly every case where a suicide takes place, the person who kills himself is under the influence of unsoundness of mind. In one word the rational will, which ought to hold the sovereignty in man, is dethroned, and mere passion and caprice has taken its place.

7. I must now draw your attention to a position far more startling than any which we have considered. We are told that everything connected with one of the most delicate affairs of human life, courtship and marriage, is necessary, and that neither our wills, our whims, nor our caprices have anything whatever to do with this important matter, but the average price of corn and wages. Lest you should think I misrepresent him, I will quote Mr. Buckle's own words; he says:—

"Even the number of marriages annually contracted is determined, not by the temper and wishes of individuals, but by large general facts over which individuals can exercise no authority. It is now known that marriages bear a fixed and definite relation to the price of corn; and in England the experience of a century has proved that, instead of having any connection with per-

sonal feelings, they are simply regulated by the average earnings of the great mass of the people; so that this great religious and social institution is not only swayed, but is completely controlled, by the price of food and the rate of wages."

Ladies and gentlemen who are contemplating marriage, I am a bearer to you of a piece of unexpected news. You need not take any pains whatever about this matter; it is simply waste of time to make any efforts to be mutually pleasing—it is all determined for you by a power over which you can exert no control. As to us married people, we have been under a fond delusion in thinking that personal influences, attractions, or even caprices have exerted any influence in bringing this matter about. To think that love has exerted any influence over it is all delusion. We have been the hopeless prey of corn averages and rates of wages.

I am quite ready to allow that every prudent person, before he thinks of marriage, ought to consider whether his horse will carry double, and to look forward to the possible contingency of its having to carry five or six. Still, many people are not prudent. Ireland has been a remarkable instance, which proves that prudential considerations have far from exerted a potent force on marriage in that country. In the days of its greatest misery, marriages were contracted with the greatest recklessness. But when, in the name of the fact that marriages ought to be contracted with an eye to prudential considerations, and that many are so, we are asked to believe that we ourselves, our rational wills, our affections, nay, our sentimentalities, and even our caprices, have exerted, and can exert, no influence over this matter, but that all has resulted from the iron law of

necessity, we are asked to believe what exceeds the powers of even the most credulous of mankind. I will not assert that there are not certain hard-headed men who consult the tables of averages during every month of their courtship. Whether this was the case with the writer whose opinions I am combatting, I cannot tell, but he ought not to have assumed that it was so with ordinary men and women. I am confident that if any of you will go into the confessional with me, you will affirm that Mr. Buckle's premises and conclusions contradict your experience.

I think that I need not spend any further time in proving that the question of our free agency, and consequently of our responsibility, is unaffected by such considerations. It rests on distinct evidence of its own, so commanding that it is less influenced by them than the mighty rock is by the ripples of the silent ocean.

There is one question of supreme importance which remains to be determined. If man is responsible, to whom is he responsible ?

If the principles of atheism are true, the universe contains nothing but matter, force, and law, and modifications of them. How, out of any combination of these, moral affections, or even life, can have grown, is quite beyond my comprehension ; for no atheist would affirm that any of the original constituents of the universe possessed either personality, life, moral affections, or freedom. Yet these exist.

If man consists of nothing but matter, acted on by blind forces, and dominated over by blind laws, he must be incapable of morality or self-sacrifice, and as unworthy of praise or blame as the table before me.

But many atheists are far better men than their prin-

ciples. Overcome by the stern logic of facts, they admit that man possesses a responsibility of some sort. Although they affirm that there is no evidence that God exists, to whom man is accountable; they do not deny that he is responsible to society and himself. They endeavour to erect a system of responsibility, on the assumption that man is capable of a reasonable self-love. They next endeavour to show that every other principle of morality is nothing but self-love transmuted into some other form. From this it follows that the grandest acts of self-sacrifice are nothing more than transmutations of selfishness. To say the least of it, this is a most startling position.

If there be no God, to whom I am responsible because I am indebted to Him for my existence and every good thing which I possess, it follows that I can only be responsible to myself or to society, as far as it possesses a power to act on my self-love. The expression, "being responsible [to oneself," is to a certain extent a misnomer; for it must mean a debt to oneself. Such debts resemble taking money out of one pocket, and putting it into another. When it is said by atheists, that man is responsible to himself, it is intended that there are certain lower principles in human nature which ought to be obedient to the higher. But this idea of "ought," concedes the whole question. Why ought it to be so? If there is nothing in the universe but matter, law, and force, whence came this idea of ought or duty? Our conception of it is the opposite to that of necessary law.

But, assuming for argument's sake a position which I believe to be utterly untrue, that all moral obligation may be resolved into self-love, I ask what possible evidence can I have that I am bound to sacrifice myself for the

good of others? If I am only bound to love myself, what right can society have over me, except the law of the stronger? What right can it have to demand self-sacrifice at my hands? It will be replied, that you will best provide for your own happiness by all kinds of virtuous conduct, especially by disinterestedly seeking the happiness of others. It may be so; but supposing that I cannot be made to see this. If virtue is only another form of seeking my own happiness; and if, by defective intellect or other causes, it seems to me that self-indulgence will make me more happy than self-denial, how is any act involving the smallest self-sacrifice to be enforced on me otherwise than by society making me miserable? If this principle be correct, the most virtuous man is he who has the clearest intellect to calculate his own interests.

A great philosopher adduced an illustration of this principle more than 2000 years ago, which proves that it is hopelessly untenable. The ancients feigned that a man named Gyges possessed a ring which, whenever he wished, rendered him invisible to every one, while he retained his powers of vision. Socrates, according to Plato, supposes a man to be in possession of this ring. What influence would it have on his moral conduct if virtue is nothing but self-love? It is obvious that it would free him from all the restraints which society imposes on him; and if there be no God and no hereafter, he would be in a position safely to give the most unrestrained indulgence to his own appetites and passions. It would convert moral obligation into a bugbear, and render society impossible.

But I shall be told that the principle which I am contending against really means that we are bound to seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and thereby

to insure our own. You see that it is impossible to make a single assertion on this point without contradicting the whole theory. I ask, How am I bound? why am I bound to do this? You say, *we are bound.* Yes, to our own self-love, if there is nothing in the universe but matter, force, and law; though it is incomprehensible how we can be bound over to that. It will be replied, You are bound to other men. Then I reply, There must be something which binds me higher than myself, or than anything originating in myself. If I am bound by a sense of right, then rectitude must be a thing higher than I, who am bound by it; it must exist in something higher than, and independent of, my self-love, and to which it ought to offer itself a willing sacrifice. It is, in fact, I who am bound, which includes my self-love and my entire being. I recognise, therefore, a moral law, which must exist independently of myself, and is invariably and unalterably the same. But I cannot be bound by an abstraction. Abstractions have no existence, except as attributes of concrete things. I infer, therefore, that there must be a personal being, not subject to the changes of my mutability, who is unalterably the same, in whom rectitude and holiness dwell—the living God, the great Creator, who gave me being and a moral nature capable of feeling the obligations I am under to Him.

Atheistic morality affirms that man is responsible to his brother man. I accept the affirmation with all thankfulness. It is the recognition of a great fact, that whether man can reason the matter out clearly or not, a feeling of obligation exists. It is a declaration coming from the inmost recesses of the human heart, which is stronger than all theories, and than all reasonings founded on abstractions. It is inconsistent with the affirmation that virtue

is a mere form of self-love, and that man is not a free agent. Yes; man is responsible to society. I accept the truth. Is a stone responsible to society? Does a cat owe obligation to its brother cats? No; therefore there must be something in man which is neither in stone nor cat. But we feel that it is righteous in society to punish those who grossly violate their obligations. It does so daily, either by formal law or by a law equally mighty, though enacted by no Parliament. Is it right to punish a man for what he cannot help? The universal conscience of man answers emphatically, No. Man must, therefore, be a free agent.

It follows that man must be bound by an obligation higher than and external to himself. Consider the expression, *We ought to do so.* What does it mean? The meaning of *ought* is, that a man may leave a thing undone, if he pleases; but that he *ought* not to do so. There is something within him which will reproach him if he does, and say, you *ought* not. There is an obligation before which you *ought* to bow, higher than you. To matter, force, or invariable law the sense of duty or obligation is utterly inapplicable. What owe I to them? There is something within us which points to something outside us, which cannot be generated by their united force.

"*I ought.*" The idea is as universal as man. Even he who in theory denies responsibility, is compelled to use the unwelcome word. To what then does it point? To matter, force, or law, or any of their modifications? Meditate on the mysterious word, for it reaches to the profoundest depths of our being. What does it affirm? *It is right; it is fitting; it is proper; it is your duty.* It may even raise to the greater elevation of the senti-

ment, "*It is noble, it is lovely so to do.*" When I say, "*I ought*," I affirm the presence of a power before which everything else, even self, should bend. The feeling, "*It is expedient*," will not satisfy its demands. It affirms a duty. Must not that duty be *owed* to some one in whom obligation centres, and who has a right to demand self-sacrifice at our hands? Some being therefore must exist who has a right to lay me under obligations. Does such a right exist in my brother man? I may be indebted to my parents. I may be indebted to my educators. I feel under obligation to all who have done me good, and to all in whom holiness and goodness exist. But how can I be under obligation to a man, who is neither good himself, nor has done me good? Yet I feel the obligation. It must therefore centre somewhere. The only foundation on which it can be made to rest, is the Being who has made me, to whom all gratitude is due, whose moral perfections demand my humblest reverence and most devoted love. I can fully recognise the right of Him that made me to say, I demand self-sacrifice at thy hands in behalf of thy brother man, whom I have made also. We can feel that obligation is due to men, because we are all the children of a common Father; but we cannot feel it because we are the children of a common ape.

The feeling, "*I ought*," proves the existence of *One* outside ourselves, to whom it corresponds, in whom obligation centres, and to whom duty is due. To Him we are all responsible. "*I ought*"—how imperfectly do we succeed in realising the fulness of the conception, and embodying it in practice! I infer from this, that there is a period coming, under the moral government of the Creator, when we shall embody it in a higher

and more perfect form. If I am responsible, He will judge me. But He does not judge me here. There must therefore be an hereafter.

Human conduct, viewed by the eye of man, is an entangled web. We cannot determine the precise measure of the responsibility of others. None but He who knows all things can estimate the exact character of our motives, the exact limits of our freedom, or the exact guilt of our conduct. Under every difficulty with which this subject is attended, we may rest assured that the great God will demand of each individual only as much as He has given; and that the Judge of all the earth will certainly do right. Let us remember that to Him we are bound by the highest obligations; that we are His by creation; that we are His by providence, and His by redemption; that these bind us to Him by a moral law, which is recognised by our inmost hearts, and through Him to our brother man; that the Author of our being has the right to call us to account, and that His perfections require Him to do so.

It follows, therefore, that the facts of consciousness and the deepest intuitions of human nature prove that man is responsible to God, and that his responsibility to God causes him to recognise his responsibility to man. Man is a free agent, the voluntary cause of his own actions; and as far as they are voluntary he is accountable for them. "Each of us must give account of himself to God."