

**A TREATISE ON
MAN'S
RESPONSIBILITY**

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A Treatise on Man's Responsibility by John Howard Hinton

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BY
JOHN HOWARD HINTON, A.M.

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P R E F A C E.

A FEW details, altogether unimportant in themselves, are necessary to the proper introduction of this little volume to the notice of the public.

Towards the close of the year 1839 I delivered to my congregation at Devonshire Square a series of discourses on the dominion of God; distinguishing his natural from his moral dominion, and exhibiting, with what clearness I could attain, some of the foundations on which the latter is established. Requests were presented to me from several quarters to print these sermons, which I promptly and resolutely declined, until importunity grew too serious to be trifled with. The force of it was increased by the following circumstances.

I had engaged to deliver on the 26th of December, on behalf of the Christian Instruction Society, one of a course of lectures to Socialists and others, and my subject was Human Responsibility. This subject was nearly identical with the theme of the discourses I had just been deliver-

ing to my own people ; and as it involved the use of almost all the same matter (of course, digested anew), and gave some additional importance to the publication of it, I determined not to resist what these combined elements seemed to render a call of duty.

Having mentioned the lecture to Socialists, I wish particularly to observe, that, although I hope this volume contains matter worthy of their consideration, the subject neither is now, nor was at that time, treated in a manner exclusively adapted to that class of persons. I did not then feel it necessary to adopt such a method, inasmuch as the lectures were announced as intended for Socialists and *others*; and I did not deem it wise to do so without necessity, because it would have given to the discourse an imperfect, a one-sided character, decidedly adapted to diminish its usefulness. I resolved, therefore, on treating the subject generally, and on encountering as much the erroneous theologian as the sceptic, or the infidel; and such as was the lecture in this respect is also this treatise.

The book, however, is far from being a publication of the lecture. The size of it will show at a glance that it contains much more matter. This arises from two causes. The first is, that the numerous and important topics which occur, and which, in the space of a single hour, were touched with a painful though necessary brevity, have been considerably amplified. The second is, that, for the sake of a more complete and satisfactory treatment of the subject, additional topics have been introduced. I hope the alteration is in both cases an improvement.

If the volume is not a publication of the lecture, still less is it a publication of the sermons I have been re-

quested to print. It exhibits, indeed, the same views ; but it contains much additional matter, and throws the whole subject into a different attitude. In my own pulpit I had to encounter no opposition to the sacred scriptures. Upon their authority, therefore, I established the fact of man's responsibility, and proceeded from thence to infer and trace out the features of the divine government. Lecturing to Socialists and others, my attitude was different. I had then to argue with men who set aside the bible, and to show that the elements of which the existence is affirmed or implied in the scriptures are extant and demonstrable in fact. In the former case I had responsibility to assert, and, with this undisputed, to explore the grounds of it ; in the latter, with responsibility denied, I had the nature and condition of man to examine, and to lay bare in them the foundations of moral government. I say this the more distinctly to account to the general reader for the manner in which the subject is treated ; begging leave to add, however, that I am far from supposing it, for this reason, to be treated less usefully.

I do not know that it is a common thing to try to prove the justice of man's responsibility. It is more usual, I think, on the one hand to assert it on the authority of the scriptures, and on the other to rely on the belief of it which is so readily imbibed and so tenaciously held by the human mind. To one who might inquire whether he was responsible, and how it could be shown, the more frequent reply would be, perhaps, ' The bible declares you are so ; and besides, you know it yourself, because your conscience tells you so.' I suspect the time is come, however, which calls for a different answer to this question. Unhappily,

the very name of the bible is made by many an occasion of ridicule and old habits of thought are becoming as powerless over men as the withy bands and hempen cords which for a moment bound the limbs of Sampson; religious truths, under the nickname of priestly dogmas, are trampled in the dust, while the teachers of religion are challenged to the exercise of reason, and dragged to the bar of common sense. I do not say that this challenge is always fair; but it is always plausible, and to a certain extent it is just. Neither do I mean to allow that reason, whatever may be called by that name, is the standard of truth, or that whatever cannot be comprehended by the understanding of man is therefore unworthy of belief; but, holding the direct reverse of all this, I may nevertheless affirm that mystery does not envelop *every thing* that is in the bible, that some of its declarations can be sustained by convincing arguments, and that others are not liable to effectual disproof or contradiction. In whatever cases this can be shown, it is surely of unequivocal value; and upon no subject can it be more important, or, as I think, more practicable, than on the subject of responsibility. It is this that I have attempted in the present work. If I have succeeded, I may have rendered some little service to the cause and the Master I love; if I have failed, the TRUTH is just where it was, and will not suffer, I hope, in the estimation of any, by the weakness of its advocate.

It may appear to some, that, in the conduct of my argument, I have admitted too much, and that, for the sake of establishing the responsibility of man, I have given up some portions of evangelical truth. On this point I beg permission to say, that I have given up nothing for the