

Accountability to God.

For it is written, As, I live, saith, the Lord.  
 every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue  
 shall confess to God,

So then every one of us shall give account  
 of himself to God.

Romans. XIV - 11-12

Brooklyn Nov 16, 1873

As the deity has been, & still is, imagined as  
generally a magnified individual - so the relations  
between man & his maker - as set forth by  
popular religions, are those existing between a  
subject and his earthly prince. - God, it has been  
said, is a projection of man's own nature. - -

It is as though men worshiped their shadows  
in the clouds. - - Though no theist can ~~concede~~<sup>concede</sup>  
that the idea of God, is merely a creation of  
the human mind - corresponding to no outward  
reality. - Still it is apparent that the mind  
has always dressed divinity in its own  
colors. - - As intelligence is commonly associated  
with the human form, - <sup>people</sup> ~~men~~ very naturally  
think of an intelligent creator under the same  
form. - As their minds are combinations of  
different notions, emotions, & desires - they  
have supposed that there could be no mind  
unless it were made up of thoughts &  
feelings like their own. - - In the effort

to make God appear real - men have  
 been led to form a picture of him in  
 their imaginations - and because the imagination  
 can only construct of the materials which  
observation has supplied - theology has ~~been~~  
 necessarily <sup>been led into</sup> ~~been~~ Anthropomorphic  
 more or less gross - God has been a great  
 King - differing from earthly potentates in  
degree - rather than in kind - The only infinite  
 attribute really ascribed to him - has been  
 omnipotence - and <sup>not so much by</sup> ~~that~~ ~~only~~ by a negation  
 of any limit to his power - as the confessed  
 inability of the mind to fix any definite limit -

For the rest his attributes have been only  
human traits - idealized and magnified -

Thus he is represented as having loved and  
 hated - praised and condemned - as rewarding  
 and punishing - assisting and avenging the  
 rights & wrongs - of his subjects - precisely as a  
perfect King - might be supposed to do -

If we may trust the thought of Jesus, <sup>as he</sup> ~~as~~ as St. John represents it. - He was not thus formed by his imagination. - The idea of God as embodied in the oft repeated saying - "He in me & I in Him" - cannot be that of the most righteous & powerful among individual spirits. Rather was the Father - to Jesus - a being not to be at all grasped by the imagination. - but to be perceived by the intellect - & felt by the affections.

Yet from the ~~fact~~ <sup>fact</sup> the first gospels - we discover that he often sought to express the methods of Providence under the figure of an Eastern Court. - Doubtless he was obliged to adopt such a method of illustration - in addressing the common people. - for they could not conceive of God without the aid of their imaginations. Indeed the ~~fact~~ <sup>fact</sup> that, <sup>neither</sup> Matthew, Mark, <sup>or</sup> Luke recorded ~~any~~ <sup>any</sup> of the philosophic sayings, peculiar to the fourth gospel. - shows that they were chiefly impressed by their own attempts at

4  
symbolizing the Deity. - -

Now I know not why an image of God formed in the mind - is not as truly an idol - as when that mental image - is hewn out of wood or stone. - I cannot see wherein this talk about God as a King - sitting upon a great white throne - differs from the eastern custom of regarding the God Juggernaut - except in being a more refined species of idolatry.

Certainly in each method of representing God there is the same fatal defect. - that of making Him entirely superior to man. - & failing to show any other than purely artificial relations between them. - This God who occupies a throne - cannot be in me, <sup>nor</sup> I in Him. -

We are forever apart. - A mediator becomes a necessity. - and the laws which God ordains for the government of the world - <sup>as well as the</sup> ~~are such~~ special cases brought before his tribunal for decision - are not determined by the righteous

perfection of His own nature. - but by what this  
Mediator can start from a despot. - living  
alone for his own pleasure and gratification. -

What I particularly wish to call your  
attention to - is the conception of an entirely  
arbitrary Providence - which has grown up  
under this habit of dressing the idea <sup>of God</sup> in human  
limitation: - which is indeed the necessary and  
unavoidable consequence of that habit. - -

The Moral law is simply the will of God;  
and it is not permitted to ask why is it God's  
will? - Of his own good pleasure - he has marked  
out certain paths in which men should walk -  
and He is pleased to grant happiness & life to those  
who comply with his ordinances. - But let those  
who disobey - draw his anger. - Sooner or later  
it will come upon them like a whirlwind. -  
and it cannot be predicted how complete the  
disaster may prove. - Thus their <sup>have</sup> ~~may~~ walked  
before the Almighty in such fear - as in feudal

days - removed the hearts of the serfs of some  
 lawless Baron - They knew not what to expect  
 from Him, - As in the one case there was  
 no charter or Constitution - by which the noble  
 was bound in dealing with his subjects, - ~~and not~~ <sup>no</sup>  
 trial accorded to one, against whom his masters  
 wrath was kindled, - <sup>and</sup> the reigning power  
 was equally dreaded by both innocent & guilty, -  
 so in the other case, - everything being thought  
 to depend upon the arbitrary will of God -  
 and there being no conception of Universal  
 laws, - by which he holds himself bound, - men  
 know not at what moment his anger may  
~~kindle~~ <sup>kindle</sup> against them, - nor ~~are they~~ <sup>conceive</sup> free  
 from dread of the direst calamities, - For  
 under this conception - there ~~is~~ <sup>are</sup> no fixed  
 penalties for offences against him, - He  
 who is conscious of guilt, - is not only ignorant  
 of the time when punishment shall come  
 but of what ~~sort~~ <sup>the</sup> punishment shall be, -

7  
It may be loss of his own health. - it may be  
the death of a friend. - it may be disaster in business -  
or whatever of the thousand reverses in life - the  
victim must dread: - but he knows not what  
awaits in reprobation of the worst. -

All this results from the literal conception  
of God as a great King. - to whom we are  
only related through our dependency. - and  
whose dealings with us - are not so much  
controlled by our ~~own~~ deserts - as by his varying  
mood. - To day he is angry. - & smites the crowding  
people with terrible plagues. to quit some  
trifling offence. - Tomorrow he is compassionate  
and winks at grievous wrongs. -

The whole condition of thought - & feeling  
under such a suppositious government - is  
illustrated by the Jewish treatment of disease. -

The Jew regarded sickness as a penalty  
inflicted for some violation of the moral  
law. - - and this as it tended to turn his



8

attention away from the physical cause of disease. - made disease more frequent and loathsome. - And on the other hand - as the Lepers grew more numerous. - and cripples multiplied - ~~the~~ the people addressed themselves to more penitential observance of their situation. - and set their faces harder against those whom heaven's Justice had already stricken. - but by some little neglect of his requirements. - or by harboring their enemies - they too should provoke God's fury. - Thus their superstition - their fears & their plagues - all fed upon each other - & grew upon. - - Who did see, ask the Disciples - This man or his Parents that he was born blind. - And Jesus by referring the affliction to other causes than the transgression of the moral law. - gave evidence that however much he might descend to teach the people in high wrought pictures. - <sup>he yet</sup> knew the whole superstitious system to be false. -

Now I am not prepared to say that childish  
 as this conception of Providence is - it has not  
 been of value to the world! - for undoubtedly the  
 idea that intelligence <sup>could belong</sup> belonged to an omnipresent  
~~power~~ <sup>spirit</sup> - without-form or shape, - or that ~~in~~ <sup>to</sup> any  
 intelligence past & future should like exist  
 in the eternal present - would be unintelligible  
 to many of our own <sup>day</sup> ~~time~~, - The mind is so  
 tyrannized over - by its conceptions of time &  
 space, - it is no wonder that it surrounds God  
 with the same limitations, - And better it is to  
 worship such a <sup>Duty</sup> ~~God~~ - than ~~none~~ at all, -

Neither am I prepared to say - that the  
 excessive dread of almighty power - which belongs  
 to this condition of mind, has not been  
 instrumental in holding the world to its  
 conviction of duty. - But this I am  
 prepared to say - that among intelligent  
 people - the world over - this whole theory of  
 our accountability to God - is now out of date, -

not even a modification of it will longer  
 seem, - and we are actually driven to seek  
 some new interpretation of these words: - "Every  
 one of us shall give account of himself to God." -

The Catholic Church - whether alarmed for  
 its own safety - or moved by regard for public  
 morals: - is taking advantage of the prevalence  
 of crime & the unsettled state of the public mind -  
 to urge with new zeal & specious arguments -  
 a return to her authority, - - But however  
 desirable such a return might be - it is now  
 impossible, - Rome may now cease until she  
 is block in the face, - and the world cannot work  
 itself into <sup>a</sup> worse, - People have found that one  
 can exist - & even enjoy life, - though every part  
 of his body from the crown to the sole -  
 has been given over categorically to eternal  
 torment: - It is idle to talk that that church  
 can ever again reinstate its theories, -

Equally idle is it to thunder out the

old fashioned notions of our responsibility to  
 God; - to call, earthquakes, & fires - & plagues -  
 Judgements of heaven upon sabbath breakers  
 & blasphemers; - or to hold up the death of a  
 friend as a warning to the afflicted family - to  
 attend more faithfully to church ordinances; -  
 all this is worse than idle - it is pernicious; -  
 for it makes people think they can violate  
 the moral law with impunity; - The curse of  
 the Protestant is no powerless to reach terror  
 as the curse of the Pope; - and the contempt  
 of the people does not stop with those who thus  
 affect to speak with voice of heaven - but  
 extends to heaven itself; - Because after men  
 have learned to refer their disasters to natural  
 causes - rather than to a special act of the  
 divine will - in retribution for offenses with  
 which they are totally disconnected - the religious  
 world must go on flourishing its stringless loom; -  
 people are asking - what sort of a Providence

to this - which deals so largely in bombastic  
threats - & is so slow in the performance, -

It is all very fine to talk about Chicago's  
awful Judgment - but how about Boston? &  
why should New York go unscathed? - A God  
who is represented as dealing with us after  
this fashion - very soon loses our respect -

So I say we are forced to seek some new  
idea of our responsibility to a higher power -  
and when all is said & done - we shall find  
that the sum of <sup>that</sup> ~~our~~ responsibility to be within  
more or less - than the necessity of  
~~abiding by~~ <sup>taking the natural</sup> ~~the~~ ~~consequences~~ consequences of our  
own action, - We need neither hope nor  
fear anything which is not a legitimate effect  
of the course which we set in motion -  
Whatever <sup>may be</sup> that legitimate effect - we cannot  
hope to escape ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> - Anything more than  
that responsibility the facts of life will  
not show, - and we woefully deceive ourselves

when we think to escape with anything less.

On the one hand we have to learn that a sin against the moral law - is not as such punished by any deprivation of friends or estate; - and on the other, that it has its own appropriate penalty - which if not so easily seen, will be just as keenly felt; -

Then we to make the discovery - that God works through cause & effect - in the moral realm - as well as the physical; - and whatever they may thereby lose of superstitious terror - will be compensated for by the certainty of retribution; - I may not so much fear the penalty of my little offenses - as did my Ancestors; - but I shall never trust to some loophole of escape from that penalty; - -

Business success is one thing; - literary success is another; - physical health is still another - & mental health - makes a fourth; - Each of these is a want admired by

fidelity to one particular class of laws - and is lost by disobedience of those laws. - -

A man who abuses his physical nature is not punished by bankruptcy, - but by gout; why should we expect the violation of spiritual laws to be followed by anything other than spiritual disease? - It is true that failure in one sphere - often involves failure in another; - The man who destroys his health - is apt to so ruin his capacity for business - as to involve commercial defeat; - <sup>as well</sup> But still there are certain laws of trade - which made use of by ~~the~~ a man of <sup>the</sup> requisite ability, - will infallibly lead him to affluence be he ~~not~~ saint or sinner, - The old proverb that honesty is the best policy is sometimes understood to mean - that the honest man is always on the high road to financial prosperity, - ~~but a bit of it,~~ <sup>and that the scheming</sup> villain is only ~~not~~ digging the grave for his own hopes, -

The facts of life however warrant no such Protest:-  
 But you say it ought to be so!- Not a bit of  
 it;- Why should honest industry hope to  
 outstrip unscrupulous cunning? - or expect a <sup>that under</sup>  
 a Just Providence to its virtue will be accounted with  
 for copiousity!- God's laws seem to the wisest  
 know nothing, - as well as to the ~~most~~ <sup>man of sterling</sup>  
 integrity, - a plentiful honest - if he but  
 properly tills the ground, - and if he be a better  
 farmer - he gets a better crop, - for all the others  
 virtue, - How do not again ask - what  
 advantage then has the honest business man  
 over the scoundrel? - lest you betray by the question  
 that the popular mania has led you to  
 suppose, that man's tenderest feelings lie in  
 his purse, - If we live to get rich, - 'tis very  
 like we dread above all things, poverty, - and not  
 self surprising that we come to think wealth  
 a sovereign balm for afflicted consciences, -

Thus if the end cannot sanctify the means, -



it is supposed that the end attained will  
 confer such priceless benefits - as to atone for  
 any <sup>little</sup> damage incurred to the soul, - - There  
 lies the mistake, ~~and~~ in supposing that the  
 Divine Justice is only vindicated - in taking  
 away ill gotten gains, - or that such deprivation  
 is the only punishment which the Kneave can  
 feel, - - These so called Judgements, which  
 are seen of men, - are really among the  
 lightest <sup>of all</sup> penalties, which that our responsibility  
 brings us under, - - What millionaire - broken  
 in mind & body, - racked by <sup>the</sup> pains & oppressed  
 by the mental gloom - which result from the  
 physical sins of himself or his ancestors, -  
 but would gladly exchange - every dollar  
 he possesses - for the perfect health and  
 vigorous spirit, of the <sup>child</sup> ~~boy~~ who clings upon  
 his knee, - And by as much as the laws  
 of physical health are more important to  
 us than the principles of trade, - by so

much do the laws which govern the mind  
~~and~~ spirit of man - excel all others - in their  
 power to confer blessing or inflict misery. -

It is with our souls as with our bodies; -  
 This health depends upon the fulfillment of  
 certain conditions. - and with the neglect of  
 these comes some form of insanity. - All crime  
 is insanity. - though whatever that plea may avail  
 in earthly courts. - it by no means ~~defends~~ responsibility  
 before the Tribunal of Heaven. - All mental  
 gloom & despondency - are species of insanity. - All  
 the tortures of remorse. - all conjuring up horrors  
 out of shadows - give evidence of mental disease. -  
 which arises from disobedience to some law  
 of our being. - - This is just as certain, as that  
 the science of medicine. - so far as it discovers  
 & applies these laws - has been able to restore  
 in some measure the mental balance. -

Whether ignorantly or willfully. - he who  
 who violates or neglects these conditions upon

which the welfare of his soul depends - suffer  
 in consequence from deranged - or enfeebled  
 faculties, - and that is exactly - our responsibility  
 to God. - But you ask - whether we punishment  
 for moral guilt! - and ought not one to  
 suffer more for wronging his neighbor. - than for  
 wronging himself? - I answer that one can  
only suffer from his own wrongs. - but that  
 the laws of God make us accountable for  
 our conduct toward our fellows; - by making  
 it impossible for us to wrong another - without  
 inflicting a deeper wrong upon ourselves. -

Of course - all this cannot be made to  
 clearly appear - within the limits of a single  
 discourse; - but I only seek to impress, that though  
 the divine laws do not impose fine & imprisonment,  
 they vindicate themselves, <sup>by</sup> not less - but more  
 awful penalties, - Let me give one  
 reason, which may put before us more clearly  
 the chief importance of those laws which

17  
19

governs the well being of the mind. - It is, that happiness depends more upon the state or condition of the soul - than upon our surroundings. -

Whoso has the capacity for enjoyment - which comes of a healthy mind. - will find something to give pleasure. - in any outward condition. -

Whoso lacks that capacity. - will extract pleasure from no outward condition. -

The appreciation eye sees beauty everywhere. - but the color blind, can find nothing of interest in the ~~choicest~~<sup>choicest</sup> painting. - what should we say of the man who gave his eyes to purchase a museum of fine arts. - and yet in effect that is just what thousands are to day doing. -

~~They~~ To surround themselves with beautiful and enjoyable things they are sacrificing ~~their power~~<sup>their faculties</sup> of the mind - which can alone enable them to take delight, in any surroundings. -

They are selling their souls to gain the world - & what shall it profit them? -

and must not we all plead guilty - to like if not so conspicuous foolishness. - ~~There~~

There are a code of laws governing the mind. - holding us all to rigid account. day after day. - and we not only know next to nothing about them. - but make no effort at discovery. - We content ourselves with the moral law as it was written thousands of years ago. - trusting almost entirely in that <sup>paper</sup> for the development of our higher natures. - when we know that this was only a little beginning upon the domain of spiritual law. - under which we live - & by which we must be judged. - - We institute long & tedious research - to discover how the stars are held in their places. - upon what forms all organized life is based. - and this is well! - We study the principles of political economy - that we may know - why for what purposes governments exist - & how those purposes may be advanced:

we familiarize ourselves with business rules  
 & customs, - that we may attain the means of  
 gratifying our higher tastes; - And yet when  
 all this is done - the world does not seem to be  
 much better or happier, - & we ourselves are  
 discontented - dissatisfied - and disappointed with  
 life. - What is the difficulty? - Why - in all this  
 we have been but studying & improving our  
 surroundings, - forgetting that we ourselves need  
 studying and improving. - How many a life  
 ends in the sad discovery, - that just when one  
 thinks <sup>he</sup> ~~they~~ can begin to enjoy it, - he must  
<sup>commence</sup> begin at the beginning once more & learn how  
 to enjoy it. - Let us learn first, that accountability  
 to God is the same for both soul & body. -  
 & is expressed in the logical & necessary relation  
 between cause & effect, - knowing that, we  
 shall know that spiritual health is the  
 basis of all satisfactory success, - and that  
 no success whatever - can compensate for the

loss & suffering brought upon us by  
spiritual debility or disease. --

And now again I recur to the general  
statement. - that our responsibility to God,  
is, that under his Providence - we must take  
the <sup>volunt</sup> consequences of our own acts. - - I  
am accountable to him in that his laws -  
hold sway over my whole life. - and reward  
or punish - every thought - every motion  
every desire - & every deed. - by making each  
a cause. - to work out effects after its own  
nature. - This is a responsibility, which  
is in no wise affected by a decision one way  
or the other of the long mooted question between  
fate & free-will. - How! it has been said. deny  
the freedom of the will? then man is not a  
responsi<sup>ble</sup>~~ble~~ being. - There can be no such  
thing as guilt. - & virtue is an empty name.  
if ~~man~~ <sup>man</sup> is only a puppet - to be pulled  
hither & thither by unseen wires. - as fate or

chance or Providence may direct. - But with all due respect to the great authorities whence these arguments come, - Man is equally responsible in either case, - as whether or no there is some power behind him - <sup>governing</sup> ~~directing~~ his will. - the fact remains that after his will is decided and records itself in deed, - he - & no other in his place must take the consequences, - Just or unjust we know <sup>this</sup> to be true, - and if we cannot make our Theology consistent with the fact, - then so much the worse for our Theology. -

But I think I can see - & hope to be able to help others to see - that in this rigid accountability to which we are held, - lies the crowning evidence of not simply a just - but a Merciful Providence. -

I know the many objections which may be made to the position I have taken, - I know that at first - these laws seem to banish God, - & how the mind revolts from seeing these cold unfeeling laws of nature usurp