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THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF MORAL OBLIGATION.

THE consciousness of moral obligation is the central problem of modern, as the notion of virtue or the good was that of ancient ethics. The Decalogue and Roman law have graven "Thou Shalt" upon the mind of Christendom, so that the natural human sense of obligation has been, amongst us, greatly intensified. The mysteriousness of the feeling of duty has been an inspiration alike to moralists and to men of affairs. It filled Kant with awe like that awakened by the spectacle of the starry heavens. When Daniel Webster was asked what was the most sublime thought he had ever had, his answer was, "the thought of man's responsibility."

By the sense of obligation we mean the response of our nature to the recognized authority of moral law. It is what Butler emphasized as the supremacy of conscience, considered from the subjective point of view, over the other principles of action implanted in our nature. More particularly, it is the feeling of an imperative addressed to the will and ordering it to adopt the right and to eschew the wrong. It is relative to a law and an ideal which is recognized as having absolute worth for us. The nature of this objective norm must be left for later consideration. Meantime it concerns us only to note that though the norm is an unconditional imperative — "Do this" — the person under obligation is free to obey or disobey it. Moral obligation is not necessitation. The moral law commands but does not coerce us. When we say that duty constrains (or restrains) us, we mean, not that it compels, but