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On the Conservation of Force

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Titlepage](#)

[Text](#)

AS I have undertaken to deliver here a series of lectures, I think the best way in which I can discharge that duty will be to bring before you, by means of a suitable example, some view of the special character of those sciences to the study of which I have devoted myself. The natural sciences, partly in consequence of their practical applications, and partly from their intellectual influence on the last four centuries, have so profoundly, and with such increasing rapidity, transformed all the relations of the life of civilised nations; they have given these nations such increase of riches, of enjoyment of life, of the preservation of health, of means of industrial and of social intercourse, and even such increase of political power, that every educated man who tries to understand the forces at work in the world in which he is living, even if he does not wish to enter upon the study of a special science, must have some interest in that peculiar kind of mental labour, which works and acts in the sciences in question.

On a former occasion I have already discussed the characteristic differences which exist between the natural and the mental sciences as regards the kind of scientific work. I then endeavoured to show that it is more especially in the thorough conformity with law which natural phenomena and natural products exhibit, and in the comparative ease with which laws can be stated, that this difference exists. Not that I wish by any means to deny, that the mental life of individuals and peoples is also in conformity with law, as is the object of philosophical, philological, historical, moral, and social sciences to establish. But in mental life, the influences are so