Essays On the Intellectual Powers of Man

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EDITOR'S NOTICE.

The psychology generally taught in England and this country for the last fifty years has been that of the Scotch school, of which Dr. Reid is the acknowledged head. The influence of the same doctrines is also apparent in the improved state of philosophy in several of the Continental nations, and particularly in France. Sir W. Hamilton dedicates his annotated edition of Reid's works to M. Cousin, the distinguished philosopher and statesman "through whom Scotland has been again united intellectually to her old political ally, and the author's writings (the best result of Scottish speculation) made the basis of academical instruction in philosophy throughout the central nation of Europe."

The name of Reid, therefore, historically considered, is second to none among British psychologists and metaphysicians, with perhaps the single exception of Locke. His Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man have likewise intrinsic and peculiar merits, especially as a manual to be used by those who are just entering on the study. The spirit and tone are unexceptionable; the style has a freshness and an interest which betoken the original thinker; technicalities are also avoided to a great degree, by which means, and by the frequent use of familiar and sometimes
homely comparisons and illustrations, much of the obscurity and perplexity, commonly objected to in metaphysical discussion, is removed.

The notes are intended either to correct mistakes and supply defects in the text, or to bring down the history of the speculation to the present day. Most of them are from Sir W. Hamilton’s edition of Reid, mentioned above, and are marked by his initial. These, together with the extracts occasionally made from the supplementary dissertations, can hardly fail to convince the reader, that, when the whole of that work, as yet incomplete, is given to the public, it will constitute one of the most important contributions ever made to intellectual science.

In order to make room for these additions, and, at the same time, keep the volume within the limits proper for a text-book, it has been found necessary materially to abridge some portions of the original; but the omitted passages consist almost exclusively of repetitions, or of historical or merely critical digressions, in which the author did not excel. On account of these changes, the division and numbering of the chapters have been altered in several instances, and some passages have been transposed. To give greater distinctness to the argument or exposition, sections have also been introduced.

The references in the notes are generally for beginners, and not for proficients. They will be found convenient where students are required, under the form of dissertations or forensic, to collect and weigh the various opinions which have been entertained respecting the disputed question.

Cambridge, February 15, 1850.
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PREFACE.

I. Distribution of the Sciences.] Human knowledge may be reduced to two general heads, according as it relates to body or to mind; to things material, or to things intellectual.

The whole system of bodies in the universe, of which we know but a very small part, may be called the material world; the whole system of minds, from the infinite Creator to the meanest creature endowed with thought, may be called the intellectual world. These are the two great kingdoms of nature* that fall within our notice; and about the one or the other, or things pertaining to them, every art, every science, and every human thought are employed; nor can the boldest flight of imagination carry us beyond their limits.

Many things there are, indeed, regarding the nature and the structure both of body and of mind, which our faculties cannot reach; many difficulties which the

* The term nature is used sometimes in a wider, sometimes in a narrower extension. When employed in its most extensive meaning, it embraces the two worlds of mind and matter. When employed in its more restricted signification, it is a synonyme for the latter only, and is then used in contradistinction to the former. In the Greek philosophy, the word φύσις was general in its meaning; and the great branch of philosophy styled physical or physiological included under it, not only the sciences of matter, but also those of mind. With us the term nature is more vaguely extensive than the terms physics, physical, physiology, physiological, or even than the adjective natural; whereas, in the philosophy of Germany, Natur, and its correlates, whether of Greek or Latin derivation, are, in general, expressive of the world of matter, in contrast to the world of intelligence. — H.
ablest philosopher cannot resolve; but of other natures, if any other there be, we have no knowledge, no conception at all.

That every thing that exists must be either corporeal or incorporeal, is evident. But it is not so evident, that every thing that exists must either be corporeal or endowed with thought. Whether there be in the universe beings which are neither extended, solid, and inert, like body, nor active and intelligent, like mind, seems to be beyond the reach of our knowledge. There appears to be a vast interval between body and mind; and whether there be any intermediate nature that connects them together, we know not.

We have no reason to ascribe intelligence, or even sensation, to plants; yet there appears in them an active force and energy, which cannot be the result of any arrangement or combination of inert matter. The same thing may be said of those powers by which animals are nourished and grow, by which matter gravitates, by which magnetical and electrical bodies attract and repel each other, and by which the parts of solid bodies cohere.

Some have conjectured, that the phenomena of the material world which require active force are produced by the continual operation of intelligent beings. Others have conjectured, that there may be in the universe beings that are active without intelligence, which, as a kind of incorporeal machinery, contrived by the Supreme Wisdom, perform their destined task without any knowledge or intention. But, laying aside conjecture, and all pretences to determine in things beyond our reach, we must rest in this,—that body and mind are the only kinds of being of which we can have any knowledge, or can form any conception. If there be other kinds, they are not discoverable by the faculties which God has given us; and, with regard to us, are as if they were not.

As, therefore, all our knowledge is confined to body and mind, or things belonging to them, there are two great branches of philosophy, one relating to body, the
other to mind. The properties of body, and the laws that obtain in the material system, are the objects of natural philosophy, as that term is now used. The branch which treats of the nature and operations of minds has by some been called pneumatology.* And to the one or the other of these branches, the principles of all the sciences belong.

What variety there may be of minds or thinking beings throughout this vast universe, we cannot pretend to say. We dwell in a little corner of God's dominion, disjoined from the rest of it. The globe which we inhabit is but one of seven planets that encircle our sun. What various orders of beings may inhabit the other six, their secondaries, and the comets belonging to our system, and how many other suns may be encircled with like systems, are things altogether hid from us. Although human reason and industry have discovered, with great accuracy, the order and distances of the planets, and the laws of their motion, we have no means of corresponding with them. That they may be the habitation of animated beings is very probable; but of the nature or powers of their inhabitants, we are perfectly ignorant. Every man is conscious of a thinking principle or mind in himself, and we have sufficient evidence of a like principle in other men. The actions of brute animals show that they have some thinking principle, though of a nature far inferior to the human mind. And every thing about us may convince us of the existence of a Supreme Mind, the Maker and Governor of the universe. These are all the minds of which reason can give us any certain knowledge.

II. General Prejudice against the Study of Psychology. The mind of man is the noblest work of God which reason discovers to us, and therefore, on account

* Now properly superseded by the term psychology; to which no competent objection can be made, and which affords—what the various clumsy paraphrases in use do not—a convenient adjective, psychological. —H.