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LITERATURE.

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THE BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"Structure and Growth of the Mind." By W. Mitchell Hughes, Professor of Philosophy, University of Adelaide. London: Macmillan & Co.

One turns with interest to the work of a thoughtful and independent mind like that of Professor Mitchell, whose intellectual energies have never been exhausted in the retailment of the contents of textbooks, but who has made himself a thorough master of one of the most difficult of all branches of philosophy. We shall not say that his book is easy reading. A psychological treatise can never be that. Nor shall we say that it is likely to popularise the subject with which it deals. It would need the training of an expert journalist, whose function it is to write for every order of mind, to present in a fashion adapted to the comprehension of the multitude, the arguments and conclusions drawn by Mr. Mitchell from a study of Descartes and Spinoza, Locke, Hobbes, and Condillac, and a long string of German philosophers, and such writers as Reid and Stewart, Hamilton, Mill, Spencer, and Bain, reinforced by the fruits of his own very considerable powers of reflection. But the author's end is achieved when he has enlisted the interest of the thoughtful, and this end he has accomplished to a quite exceptional degree. There is a tendency to depreciate the importance of psychology, and to consider it as treating of problems in their very nature insoluble. There can, it is said, be no science of human nature. Yet lawmakers and divines, and those doctors whose function it is to deal with the phenomena of the nervous system, are compelled to treat human nature as subject to laws, as inflexible as those which govern the tides. "Tell me a man's circumstances," said Robert Owen (including in the term heredity and environment), "and I will tell you his character;" and we need not believe with Dr. Henry Maudsley that human beings are mere phenomena in order to understand the value that attaches to a knowledge of the "structure and growth of the mind." What question could be vaster in the significance of the issues affected than that of the existence or non-existence of free-will? Our attitude towards the drunkard or the criminal will be determined according as we think his conduct voluntary or predetermined.

Common opinion may be said to believe in free will, not clearly enough perhaps to deny its opposite, but clearly enough to be ready with the two arguments for it when it is challenged. One is the moral argument, the other our feeling of freedom in choosing. The objection usually taken against the existence of such a property, is that it contradicts the principle of causality which must be assumed in our knowledge of a real world. The objection is met by confessing to a mystery, or by pointing to other contradictions of the kind in our beliefs, and either attacking the foundations of our ordinary logic, or giving them a further foundation that would make them a little more flexible.

Science knows of no natural effect without a natural cause, and though an effect may seem to arise from the spontaneous effort of the will, every effort of the will itself springs from a natural cause, if it could be ascertained. If it were otherwise, there would be a breach in the endless chain of cause and effect, and of such a breach science knows nothing. It is true that we seem to be free when making a choice. In the small matter, say, of lifting a finger, we feel that we are at liberty to please ourselves. But though the action seems spontaneous, it is really involuntary. It presupposes, for example, a state of mind which may be the outcome of many causes. Why have we been impelled to raise the finger at all? The answer may be found in the chance perusal of a book, or the remark of a friend, or the possession from birth of a speculative temperament, itself explicable by the laws of heredity. The proof that in the act referred to we may be influenced by causes of which we are not conscious might be carried further if it were worth while. But dealing with broader questions of conduct it is easy to see how small is the part which the will plays. For example, to quote Mr. Mitchell, a brave man is not free to do what he despises, nor is an intelligent man to believe what he knows to be false. The will, indeed, is popularly treated in the moral sphere as evil, as something to be abolished. All the efforts of the lawmaker tend in the direction of abolishing the will. No man has now the power to choose whether he will enter or pass by the door of a public-house after 11 o'clock at night, or will bet in the streets, or indulge in certain other practices which violate the law. The disposition everywhere is to make people good by Act of Parliament; and on the principle that "the sight of means to do ill deeds makes ill deeds done," the existence of obstacles in the way of going wrong does very frequently make men go right as nothing else will. And men who form the habit of going right will at last reach the stage when they have no option but to continue in that path. They will do so without a struggle. This opens up a curious problem. If, as Browning contends, the essence of virtue consists in the choice of right when there was a temptation to choose otherwise, can virtue be said to exist when a man is so good that he takes the right path without any conflict at all? We can imagine a perfect man in whom there would be at all times this absence of conflict. He would be good without an effort, which means because he could not help it; and we may well ask whether a goodness of that kind is very creditable. Leaving such subtleties, we may note some valuable remarks of the author's on the importance of self-discipline. It is essential, he tells us, to right living that a man should be taken out of himself by having elevated ideals constantly before him. But such ideals, though they may fortify the will, are no substitute for the right exercise of the will, which, like the muscles, requires systematic training. A man is not likely to be cured of a vicious habit except by treating the capacity for resistance as something that needs to be cultivated. If a man is to be cured of theft or lying, he must carefully practise the art of avoiding theft or lying and above all he must not "think too precisely on the event:"—

We frequently seek to strengthen ourselves by ideals and considerations, whereas the only appropriate consideration is that there is nothing to prevent our acting, but our thinking about it. Even if all our thoughts went in the direction of strengthening the better side in the conflict, the mere delay is a risk, and if the thinking is long there begins the indulgence of a futile bemoaning and desiring, like Hamlet's. You will find it a useful exercise in analysis and enlightening in many ways, to follow the course of the conflict in order to assign the origin of the "fiats of the will," arbitrary and reasonable, in which the conflict ends, and to see why the fight may fizzle out. As regards the point that concerns us, it is obvious that any success or strength that is got by broadening our ideals, deliberating and making resolves at the moment for action, is like that of the weak and timid, who cannot do what they want till they whip themselves into a passion. It is better strength than none, but it is not the best form of inspiration that has to work like liquor, or a war-dance, in face of the enemy.

Still, ideals have enormous value, whether they have their base in stoicism or religion. They raise the soul to heights where alone exists an atmosphere of freedom. A man who obeys the dictates of self-respect is to that extent free from slavery to his viler passions. If he has no religious belief then he will do well to make the utmost of his self-respect, as the Stoics did of old. He will have this reward—that his self-respect will grow with its successful invocation. Religion again has given man freedom to laugh effectually at old vicious habits.

Instead of parleying and a conflict of desires, we see our habits as when children we saw them in our elders, with amazement and disgust. They have no power over us except we like. But, of course, it is to behave as children to think that we cannot act on this level again, and it is ignorance, and not merely arrogance, to suppose that we can never like again the object of our present disgust, and that we can regain our devotion, enthusiasm, self-respect, by recalling them, and the thoughts which have been their base in the past. They are no more certain to come with a kindling thought than appetite with an appetising meal. To expect otherwise is the erroneous view of "freedom of the will" in practice. We are free against any of our likes if we like to do something better, just as we are free against error and prejudice if we know better. But the better liking, like the better knowledge, needs learning.

Valuable, too, are the author's remarks on the necessity of cultivating intellectual interests if happiness is to be attained in later life. In youth the instinctive appetites which need no learning suffice. There is then the novelty and promise of everything. But if the mind looks only to novelty for its happiness the result will be disastrous.

This is apparent in people—their number is growing with the lightening of muscular toil, and with the increase of leisure and means of amusement, who rely on novelty, and are bored if they are not distracted. We cannot expect to enjoy life as well as ever unless we live for something, and for something of our own achieving, for which we can thereby have a deepening interest.

Nor is the one-idea'd man quite as mistaken in his philosophy as some have supposed.

A life devoted to one pursuit may not merely feel a deeper interest, but find a greater variety of interest within its pale than many a life that looks many-sided. It is so in regard both to serious interests and amusements. If an appetite does not crave, but must always be tempted, it may lay the whole world under contribution, and find it insipid for all its variety. It is only depth that commands variety in the long run.

On the much-vexed problem of whether unselfishness is possible the author has some pregnant remarks. From the days of the Greek philosophers it has been held that since the good delight in doing right, they are no more deserving of commendation than the bad who are similarly following the instinct of self-gratification. Their tastes may differ, and so may the consequences of their indulgence, but each is doing what he would most prefer to do, and therefore the claim of unselfishness cannot be made in one case more than the other. The difference, however, is fundamental. It is a difference of aim. The selfish man is aiming exclusively at his own pleasure, but though the unselfish man may incidentally be giving himself pleasure, this is not his aim.

A good man must delight in his goodness, but if he has to think of his goodness in order to taste the delight, we do not think much either of his delight or his taste. The "highest sort of happiness" is subtly defined at the end of "Romola" as that which "often brings so much pain with it that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we should choose before everything else."

Our space, we regret, is too limited to do justice to this brilliant and suggestive work, or even to indicate the contents of the chapters devoted to æsthetics and the emotions. To read it carefully is to secure an enlargement of the mental horizon, while it must be a poor spirit that will not derive from its luminous pages some stimulus to right thinking and action even in the moral sphere.