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AN ENQUIRY

INTO

HUMAN NATURE.

BY

JOHN G. MACVICAR, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF "THE CATHOLIC SPIRIT OF TRUE RELIGION," ETC. ETC.

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M.DCCC.LIII.

TO THE READER.

To explain the following work, it may perhaps be allowed the Author to state, that about fifteen years ago, when his duties led him to move much among the masses of several of our large towns, and to gather the opinions which were in the ascendant among them, he was very much struck with the numbers whose opinions, based upon an exaggerated estimate of the value and the perfection of scientific views, and on very pretending but very shallow schemes of the human mind, were falling fast into materialism and fatalism, with the dreadful consequences of such tenets,—renunciation of religion, and moral and political recklessness. Shortly afterwards he left Europe for a field of action in the East, but the state of things which he had witnessed at home continued to haunt him, and led to the question whether it might not be possible to vindicate the spiritual nature, the liberty, and the responsibility of man in a manner which might be scientific in form though popular in substance, and so find readers among those who—idolising science all the while—were falling so fast, and in such numbers, into the contrary opinions—opinions which, whenever they have become popular, have proved no less fatal to the well-being of society than to that of individuals

when held in private. Circumstances having proved favourable in the East for making the attempt, some chapters were written, and these form the earlier part of this volume, as also the essays on "Science and Philosophy," and on "The Science and the Philosophy of Common Sense," which, not to break the thread of the analysis, have been thrown into an appendix. But in the progress of thought the subject proved so deeply interesting in itself, and seemed to be so imperfectly explored, at least under the regime of an exact method, such as that set forth in the essay on "Method" (also in the Appendix), that the spirit of philanthropy had for a time to give way to the urgency of curiosity,—the uneasiness to know some things of importance about the soul which could not be learned by reading. Hence long delay in accomplishing what was at first proposed, as also a growing unfitness for doing it in a popular style, of which the greater part of this work, it is feared, will give abundant proof.

On his return to Europe this autumn, the Author finds, as it appears to him, no less need for works vindicating in a scientific way, the grandeur of human nature, than when he left, and for rescuing Psychology from its threatened absorption into Physiology. He therefore ventures the volume now in the reader's hands as a contribution, slender indeed, but earnest, towards this end; and though with certain fears, yet not without a hope also, of being encouraged before long to follow it up, by a more scientific, and probably also a more extended treatise, in which the Psychological views that are but incidentally and hurriedly indicated in this, are fully expanded in scientific connection.

CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION.

	Page
CLAIMS OF THE STUDY,	1

[Human nature in a manner sacred, 1. Our all-important instrument, 2. Incidental observation not sufficient, 3. Reading, deep, reflective, critical, required, 3. Fatal consequences of neglect in this respect—M. Comte, 4. The right method of informing one's self—Socrates, Bacon, Descartes, 7. Advantages of a scientific acquaintance with human nature, to social institutions, to education, to passing enjoyment, 8. "Knowledge is power," the Asiatics say, to attain to perfect bliss, 9. Study of human nature difficult—causes of this, 10. Yet mind may be known more fully than matter, 12. And is in point of fact better known, 14. The *mechanique celèste* of mind is still waiting its Newton, 16. A hint as to method, 17.]

CHAPTER I.

THE CHARACTERISTIC OF HUMAN NATURE,	19
---	----

[The analysis of the psychologist and of the naturalist quite different, 19. The characteristic of human nature is self-directive power, 20. This, the first word of the philosophy of Europe, proved by biography and history, childhood, language, conscience, consciousness, all social institutions, newspapers, imprisonment, 25. Preceding thought indispensable to self-directive power, 26. But the doctrine of necessity does not follow, 27. The eminence of self-directive power is indicated by the entire animal kingdom, 28. Popular education, which is all in favour of physics, is unfavourable to the admission of self-directive power, 31. If only one primary substance is to be admitted, it ought to be spirit, not body, 32. Both are to be maintained, 34. Nature presents all things in couples, 34. Spirit and body the first couple; self-directive power and inertia the second, 35.]

CHAPTER II.

THE UNITY AND IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL,	37
--	----

[Analysis of our characteristic gives as its contents, 1st, unity; 2d, activity; 3d, a sense of relation or belief, 37. Unity as here considered is different from any that body can have, 38. Its existence in man is proved by the existence of its

idea, the affirmation of consciousness, the character of the intellectual processes, 39. An unity in the cerebral centre also; but this inadequate to account for mental phenomena, 40. Intelligence, and therefore a true unity, must have existed before organisation, 41. The unity of the soul secures its immortality, 42. Immortality is bespoken also by the issues of life generally, 43. And is a constitutional belief of the whole human family, 44. But revelation is desirable, especially to inform us as to the immortality of consciousness and personality. This deeply affecting kind of immortality is not, however, without psychological evidence also, 46.]

CHAPTER III.

THE ACTIVITY AND LIBERTY OF MAN, . . . 48

[Our inability to conceive liberty distinctly is no argument against its existence if common sense affirm it, 49. The condition of self-directive action is preceding thought, closing in a volition, 50. The term motive is ambiguous, implying both intention and inducement, 51. Not the strongest motive determines the man, but the man determines the strongest motive, 52; as also his volitions, 55. All languages, as well as common sense, proclaim that there is liberty for man, 56. But with modesty, affirming, in the same breath, Divine prescience and the infallibility of Providence, 57. The argument for necessity grounds on the law of causation; which, however, applies only to the mental phenomena, not to the soul their fountain, 58. The consequences of holding necessity are terrible. There is no reason why we should not accept the testimony of consciousness as to liberty, 61. THE GRAND LAW OF SUGGESTION of this work secures liberty, 64.]

CHAPTER IV.

OF BELIEF AND THE LIMITS OF INTELLECT IN MAN, . . . 66

[Belief is indispensable to a self-directive species, 66. Sensibility is a species of belief; is of the greatest value—two feelings, and no more, might be sufficient to guide a species in the way of its well-being, 67. The knowledge of the type of intelligence would be very valuable, 68. It implies the whole possible as well as the whole actual, in one orderly simultaneous panorama, with all-embracing attention, 70. Such a mode of intelligence wholly unsuitable for man, 72. In man intelligence requires to be limited as we find it, 73. It is very foolish to deny existence because it lies beyond the reach of the senses, 74. But the views which the senses give are truthful, so far as they go, 75.]

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF MORALS, . . . 77

[When a self-directive being has been constituted a member in a system modifiable by him for better or for worse, his first part must be uniformly right conduct, veneration for law, regard to order, not private advantage, 78. In certain circumstances the pursuit of private happiness is lawful as a primary object, 80. Nay, it is the point of duty, 81. But great caution is necessary here, 83. When the senses are put to pleasure, and not to use, ruin follows, 84. By being embodied, the soul is placed in a state of probation. Materialism fails to explain why pleasure may be fatal, 85. The nervous system is provided against predominant inertia in nature only. Hence the fatal effects of artificial stimuli, 86.]

CHAPTER VI.

OF MAN AS A MEMBER IN THIS WORLD, AND THE ORGANISATION, 87

[Unity, activity, and intelligence in a being, with nothing more, give the idea of a Spirit, 87. A self-directive being, destined for life amid a material system, must be embodied, 88. Hence a key to a system of rational anatomy. The organisation, in its principal point of view, is a locomotive apparatus. Hence for machinery, levers, fulera, muscular system, with skeleton and integuments; and for supply of force, organic life, nervous system, alimentary and respiratory apparatus, etc., 89. The desirableness of our *feeling* rather than our *seeing* how the organisation is working, 90. There may be great variety of self-directive beings, 91. The rule of life may be equally various, 92. But sensibility must lie at the root of every system of embodied activity, 93.]

CHAPTER VII.

OF INSTINCTS, APPETITES, HABIT, CUSTOM, 95

[The demand for sleep,—what are its conditions, and the mode of mental action in sleep? 97. The demand for muscular action; travel; industry, 100. The demand for food and drink, and a congenial temperature, the first sources of avarice, 100. The appetite of sex; the law of population teaches emigration; colonisation ought to be a standing institution in populous states, 102. It is for young people to emigrate, 103. The act of settling establishes certain rights; rights of primogeniture; of postumogeniture, 103. Aborigines have rights; hence voluntary service; apprenticeship; slavery a violation of the first rights of humanity, 105. The demand for company, or the social instinct. Sympathy, the imitative instinct, gives harmony to society once constituted; is the parent of docility; fashion; custom; habit, 109. Opinions due to custom simulate in a remarkable degree convictions due to conscience, 110.]

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EMOTIVE SYSTEM IN HUMAN NATURE, 112

[Conditions of emotion, 112. The first and lowest is alarm or fear, 114. Its function is to restore order by hurrying the timid to their homes; its products; prudence; attention, 115. The counterpart of alarm is a general daring or ambition. Its function, the development of the individual; its forms, emulation and anger, 117. From anger allying itself with reason arises a claim of right, a sense of justice. Hatred is the impotency of alarm and anger, 118. In a state of moral order these emotions exist only as potencies. A state of order is universally social, 119. Sociality implies mutual assimilation; this THE GRAND LAW OF BEING, this under God the COSMOTECTONIC LAW, 120. The emotions proper to order are love and the complacency of being loved. A principle of rectitude is indispensable to regulate the course of loving or of assimilation. The destiny of the universe under this constitution is progress and ascent for ever, 122. Desire, what is it? hope, and despair. Forms of Love, Benevolence; Gratitude;

Conjugal and Maternal, Parental, Filial Love and Loyalty ; Adoration, Wonder, Admiration, Friendship, Patriotism, Philanthropy, The Church, The Army, 128. Forms of the desire to be loved, Glory, Honour, Affability, Plausibility, Flattery, Modesty, Shame, Coquetry, Vanity, Ostentation. The genesis and constituents of Jealousy, Envy, Revenge, The broken heart, 131.]

CHAPTER IX.

OF VOLITION AND PERCEPTION, . . . 139

[Volition and belief are the only unanalysable principles in the human mind. The will is the essence of the soul, belief is a phenomenon of relation, 140. The only law of a principle of volition is self-deployment, 141. Will is primarily constitutive of all things, 142. The Divine will is the deepest fact in the Divine nature. Belief is the recognition, by a principle of volition, of another, or of the product of another, in response to evidence, 143. God being the Infinite Will manifests himself to the human family. Hence religion. The world being a product of His will manifests itself; hence its visibility; hence the discovery of powers only; and the demand of reason for a design in all things, 144. The soul as a principle of volition whose demand is to be free resists every intrusion, and therefore calls upon all that intrudes to stand out; hence object and subject; and belief is exalted into perception. In the contents of a perception there is substance or cause as well as attribute or phenomenon. The condition of clearness and distinctness in objects of thought is their aptitude for mental deployment upon them in analysis and synthesis. The genesis of Attention; of the Ideas of Direction and of Time, 145. Perceptions are of three classes as to distinctness, 146. Joy and sorrow are the flow and the suspension of the spontaneous activity, 147.]

CHAPTER X.

OF PERSONALITY AND REASON, . . . 149

[The noblest powers result from the soul's relationship to God, 149. The immutability of an ever-present God impresses an identity upon the soul, which is the ground of reason. God's personality causes personality in man, 151. From God, as the Infinite One, the soul has the idea of the Infinite. Hence the Ideas of Eternity, Immensity, Space, The spirit of deep analysis and Imagination, 153. Analysis itself is from the soul herself; synthesis is from her relations. Hence analysis is liable to fatigue, and precipitate judgments are to be apprehended, 155. The logical powers are no more but analysis and synthesis variously operating and combined. Hence Comparison, Generalisation, Judgment, Demonstration, Analogy, Remembering, Syllogism, 157.]

CHAPTER XI.

OF THE MEMORY AND SUGGESTION, . . . 159

[The memory is the activity, when not engaged with something new, repeating its own former states under the law of identity. Hence the memory is personal, not rational, 159. The idea of the Infinite embracing any finite idea that is given produces THE GRAND LAW OF SUGGESTION, or of apparent negation, of this volume, 161. This law illustrated in the development of the ideas of plurality and totality out of unity, 162. To this law chiefly the categories are owing. By

it the soul is enabled to appreciate differences, 162. These, therefore, the inferior animals are unable to mark. Hence their ridiculous blunders, along with a seemingly transcendent reason. Still more important is this great law in reference to action, securing liberty and reflectiveness to man; this illustrated in reference to Dr Gall's organ of murder, 163.]

Page

CHAPTER XII.

OF TASTE AND CONSCIENCE, . . . 164

[While PERCEPTION gives *actuals*, both in forms and movements, REASON gives *ideals* of the same, 164. These ideals, as it were, underlie the data of perception, and are confounded with them in consciousness. But they give enjoyment when the actuals and the ideals are judged to agree, and uneasiness when they are judged to differ. Hence the emotion of beauty and the reverse, 165. There are also ideals of actions and intentions, and especially of humanity itself. These are built chiefly on the idea of cause. When they and the actuals which pretend to represent them in the world touch the principle of order or happiness, they evoke all the emotions. They awake a most simple joy and love in the contemplation of the action and the actor, when they are judged to agree; they awake anger and alarm when they are judged to differ. Hence moral complacency, moral approbation, and the doctrine of reward; also indignation, remorse, conviction, and the doctrine of punishment. Responsibility. Recourse should be had to revelation, 170. Conscience is the expression of the entire of man's spiritual nature in the relations to God and the world in which he constitutionally exists in view of an intention or an action or a state of humanity which has bearing upon order or happiness, 171.]

APPENDIX.

A.—SOCRATES ON FINAL CAUSES,	173
B.—ON METHOD,	175
C.—OF SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY,	190
D.—ON THE PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE OF COMMON SENSE,	204
<hr/>	
INDEX,	225

INDEX.

- Action, instinct for bodily, 99; voluntary, its conditions, 26, 50.
- Activity, the characteristic of human nature, 20, 48.
- Admiration, 130.
- Adoration, 130.
- Æsop, 31.
- Agricultural apprenticeship, 105.
- Alarm, 114.
- Ambition, 116.
- Analogy, 158.
- Analysis, spirit of, 154; fatiguing, 155; its place in method, 181.
- Anatomy, rational, its construction, 88.
- Anger, 117.
- Animal kingdom manifests self-directive power everywhere, 28.
- Anticipation, 156.
- Appetites, 95.
- Applause, 131.
- Application, 154.
- Approbation, 169.
- Army, 131.
- Assimilation, the grand law of, 120.
- Attention, its nature, 115, 145; its rhythm, 97.
- Avarice, nature's only excuse for, 101.
- Bacon, 7, 185, 202.
- Beauty, 165, 171.
- Beasts, no synthetic power in, 156.
- Being, the grand law of, 120.
- Belief, its nature and function, 37, 139.
- Benevolence, 127.
- Body and Spirit, the first couple in nature, 34.
- Books, value of, 3.
- Capacity of knowledge must be limited, 72.
- Cause, 166; final, 197.
- Centre of force, 34.
- Certainty different from distinctness of perception, 144.
- Character, what it is, 20.
- Characteristic of human nature, 20.
- Childhood, self-will its characteristic, 21.
- Church, 131.
- Chemistry, 194.
- Colonisation, 102.
- Comedy, 133.
- Common sense, 204, *et seq.*
- Company, demand for, 105.
- Comparison, 157.
- Complacency, 121; moral, 168, 170.
- Comte, A., his pretensions, 4; his fatal views, 5; his unfitness for discussing sociology, 6.
- Conception, 144.
- Confidence, 124.
- Conscience, 124, 171.
- Consciousness affirms self-directive power, 23.

- Conviction, 170.
 Coquetry, 132.
 Courage, 116.
 Cousin, V., 213.
 Creation, 142.
 Curiosity, 181.
 Custom, 108.

 Daring, 116.
 Demonstration, 158.
 Descartes, his love of study, 7;
 Method, 185.
 Design, and therefore intelligence,
 anterior to organisation, 41.
 Desire, what, 98, 123; to be loved,
 126.
 Despair, 124.
 Distinctness in ideas, 145; Three
 classes, 146.
 Differences, brutes cannot mark,
 163.
 Dignity, 132.
 Direction, idea of, 145.
 Dreaming, in, does not the mind lose
 its analytic habit? 63, 97.
 Duty, right conduct, 78; when the
 pursuit of happiness becomes duty,
 81.

 Emigration, 102.
 Emotion, conditions of, 113; Emo-
 tive system, view of, 136.
 Emulation, 117.
 Enjoyment not a function of the
 organisation, 85; its cause, 147.
 Envy, 134.
 Equilibrium of object and subject,
 112.
 Eternity, idea of, 153.
 Evidence, 143.

 Family, 103.
 Fashion, 108.
 Fear, 115.
 Feeling, 147.
 Filial love, 130.
 Flattery, 132.

 Fool, 105.
 Form, science a thing of, 191.
 Freedom, 49.
 Friendship, 131.
 Future state, 42.

 Geometry, 162.
 Generalisation, 157.
 Glory, love of, 130; of God, the
 last word of philosophy, 129.
 God, the soul's calling to bear his
 image, 47; relation to the crea-
 tion, 122; the Almighty, 142;
 His presence essential to reason,
 149.
 Good, 137.
 Grace, 132.
 Gratitude, 128.

 Habit, 109.
 Happiness, 147.
 Harmony, 120.
 Hatred, 118.
 Heart (The Broken), 134.
 Honour, 131.
 Hope, 124.
 Human nature—its characteristic
 self-directive power, 20.
 Hume, 209.
 Hunger—its occasion, 100.

 Idea of the Infinite, 153.
 Ideal, 164.
 Identity, personal—its source, 150.
 Ignorance necessary, 72.
 Imagination, 154.
 Imitation, 107.
 Immensity, Idea of, 153.
 Immortality implied in the soul's
 unity, 43; indicated by the course
 of nature, 44; is a postulate of
 the whole human family, 44.
 Impenetrability, 34.
 Indian philosophers—their belief as
 to the extent to which "know-
 ledge is power," 9.

- Indignation, 169.
 Industry, the provision for, 100.
 Infanticide, 102.
 Infinite, Idea of, 153.
 Inspiration, 214.
 Instinct, 95.
 Intelligence, its type, 71.
 Interest, 96.
 Intention, its import, 51.

 Jealousy, 134.
 Joy, 147.
 Judgment, 158.
 Justice, sense of, 118.

 Kant, 207.
 Knowledge, incidental—its value, 2 ;
 its fault, 17 ; historical—its value,
 how becomes conviction, 3 ; Ne-
 cessarily limited in man, 72.

 Laughter. (*See Wit.*)
 Law of Being, 120.
 Liberty is the *punctum saliens* of
 human nature, 60 ; the term
 proves the fact, 55 ; conscious-
 ness, 56. The Divine prescience
 equally certain, 57 ; law of
 causation does not apply, 59 ;
 secured by the grand law of sug-
 gestion, 64, 160.
 Locke, 208.
 Love, 120 ; prospects of the universe
 under, 121 ; its language, 123 ;
 conjugal, parental, filial, 130.
 Loyalty, 130.

 Man is an embodied spirit, 88 ; is
 free, 59 ; is under law, chap. vii.,
 et seq.
 Maternal love, 130.
 Materialism, its inadequacy, 86.
 Matter, its characteristic is inertia,
 35.
 Memory, its genesis, 46, 159 ; its
 transit over the grave, 45.

 Method, on entering, 17 ; an essay
 on, 177.
 Modesty, 132.
 Morality, 78, 167.
 Motive, ambiguity of the term, 51 ;
 the man makes the strongest
 motive, 52 ; action by motives
 proves liberty, 53.

 Number, development of doctrine
 of, 162.

 Object, 144.
 Obligation, physical, 110 ; moral,
 170 ; their analogy, 111.
 Omniscience, 71 ; suitable to God
 only, 72.
 Order, 80.
 Organisation, 89.
 Ostentation, 133.

 Pain, its nature, 85.
 Pantheism, 143.
 Patriotism, 131.
 Perception, its nature ; contents of
 a, 144.
 Personality, 151.
 Philanthropy, 131.
 Philosophy, 190 ; of mind, its mo-
 tives, 2 ; its difficulties, 10 ; better
 prospects than that of matter, 12.
 Piety, 143.
 Plausibility, 132.
 Pleasure, 147.
 Poetry, 180.
 Population, law of, 102.
 Power, true, possessed by man, 49 ;
 its normal development, 50.
 Prescience of God, 71.
 Prostitution, 102.
 Prudence, 115.
 Punishment, 169.
 Pyrrhonism, 200.

 Reason, 153.
 Reid, 207, *et seq.*

- Religion, 143.
 Remembrance, 159.
 Remorse, 169.
 Revelation, 171.
 Reward, 137.
 Right, conduct our first part, 78 ;
 laws of rectitude and sensibility
 agree, 80 ; claim of, 118.
 Rights of primogeniture, 103 ; of
 savages, 103.

 Sagacity, 18, 188.
 Scepticism, 187, 200.
 Science, 190.
 Self-interest not a principle of
 action but a product of others,
 96, 129.
 Sensation not the only inlet to
 knowledge, 74 ; *passim*.
 Sensibility, a form of belief, 66 ; its
 great importance, 67 ; not a fit
 guide for conduct, 78 ; lies at the
 bottom of all acting, 92.
 Sex, 101.
 Shame, 132.
 Slavery, 105.
 Sleep, demand for, 96.
 Society, instinct of, 105.
 Socrates, his love of reading, 7 ; on
 final causes, 173.
 Space, 153.
 Spirit, what, 87.
 Substance, 144.
 Succession, idea of, 145.
 Suggestion, the grand law of, 160.
 Superstition, 130.
 Syllogism, 158.
 Sympathy, 107.
 Synthesis, 155, 185.

 Taste, 165.
 Temperance, 110.
 Time, idea of, 145.

 Travelling, the demand for, 100.
 Thirst, its occasion, 100.

 Vanity, 133.
 Veneration, 130.
 Volition, its true place is to close
 a train of thought, 50.

 Uneasiness, 147 ; in taste, 165.
 Unity implied in self-directive
 power in the soul, 38 ; its nature,
 39 ; cerebral inadequate, 40 ;
 implies immortality, 43 ; develop-
 ment of idea of, into totality, 162.

 Warmth, demand for, 101.
 Watching, 115.
 Whole, 162.
 Will, ground of human nature, 139 ;
 discipline of, 188.
 World, why visible, 143.
 Wit, a combination of thought to
 move *laughter*, which is an or-
 ganic emotion designed to destroy
 the rhythm of attention when
 an object eminently not belief-
 worthy is presented for belief ; as,
 for instance, a word which sug-
 gests two ideals that are incon-
 gruous or incompatible with each
 other (a pun). It is not merely
 the counterpart of *the emotion of*
 the sublime, as commonly sup-
 posed, but of *earnestness* or the
 emotion of the belief-worthy, and
 is of great intellectual and moral
 interest and importance. But at
 the date (1845-49) when this
 treatise was composed the author
 did not understand the theory of
 laughter, and thus omitted it.