LETTERS
ON THE LAWS OF
MAN'S NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT.

I.
H. M. TO H. G. A.

My dear Friend,
I rather think the reason why we have so much pleasure in talking over, and writing about, the powers and action of men, and the characters of individuals, is, that your observations proceed upon some basis of real science, and that I know that they do; and that thus we are talking to some purpose on those most interesting subjects, instead of theorizing without taking stock of our facts on the one hand, or merely amusing ourselves with desultory observations on the other. I want, however, to look closer into the matter. I want to know precisely what your scientific basis is, instead of merely profiting by your having one, and having a general notion how you came by it. I want you to tell me, with great particularity, (if you will,) how you would have one set about the study of the powers of Man, in order to
2 MAN’S NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT.

understand his nature, and his place, business and pleasure in the universe.

For thirty years past I have been disposed to this kind of study; and it is strange to think how many books I have read, and how often over, and what an amount of hours I have spent in thinking, and how many hundreds of human beings I have watched and speculated upon, without being ever, for one moment, satisfied that I knew what I was about,—for want, I suppose, of some scientific basis for the inquiry, and of some laws manifesting themselves in its course;—laws on which one might rest, and to which one might recur, when in perplexity how to proceed. I am sure I do not wonder at scientific men sneering at metaphysics, if the case be at all as I suppose it:—that Natural Philosophy and Mental Philosophy are arbitrarily separated;—that the one is in a regenerate state (thanks to Bacon), and the other in an unregenerate state;—and that we can no more get on in Mental Philosophy without an ascertainty of the true method of inquiry, than the men of the middle ages could get on with Natural Philosophy (except in departments of detail), till a man rose up to give us a Novum Organon Scientiarum. And why Mental Philosophy is not yet included among the sciences which are benefiting by the Novum Organon of Bacon is a thing that I am quite unsatisfied about. I do not mean that I at all wonder that the greater number of students have recourse to unsound methods; because we see that the fact is so with the greater number of physical inquirers,—
INQUIRY FOR A BASIS.

the true followers of Bacon being few indeed among Natural philosophers, as they are called. My wonder is,—not that there are few so-called Mental philosophers who use or even advocate any experimental method of inquiry into the science of mind; but that there seem to me to be none. If I am wrong as to the fact, tell me; and pray point out where I may find such, if you know them to exist.

I am well aware what the answer of metaphysicians to this difficulty of mine would be. They would plead the totally different and incompatible nature of the two regions of inquiry, and therefore of the method of penetrating those regions. But this is exactly what I am not satisfied about. When I look at the course of metaphysical inquiry from the beginning to this day, I see something very much like the course of physical inquiry from the beginning to Bacon’s day: and I am not sure that Bacon may not yet throw down the barrier between the two regions, and make them one. When I look back upon the two paths, it seems to me that I see the same Idols set up for worship on the way-side; and I hear the same excuses for wild theorizing in both departments,—that spiritual agencies are at work, which can be recognized only by each man for himself, by means of a special spiritual sense of which no one can give an account. Now, Science has disabused us of our blinding and perplexing notions of spiritual anti-types of material things, and of spiritual interference in material operations; and we have arrived at the notion of chance-excluding
4 MAN’S NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT.

Law in the physical operations of the universe. I want to know why it is not possible for us to pursue the same process in regard to Mental Philosophy;—why we are to take for granted that the two regions of science are so unlike, that the same principle of inquiry is not applicable to both;—and if so, what we are to do next; for we cannot remain for ever as hopelessly adrift on the sea of conjecture about the truths of Mental Science as we are now. I do not ask you, however, to make an express reply to every thing I may put in the form of a question,—as above. If you will tell me how you would set to work to ascertain the powers of Man, in order to understand his position and destiny in the Universe, that will include an answer to my speculations on past methods of inquiry.

Your ideas will descend upon this locality in curious contrast with some which are to be found here. I like to talk with the gardener, and the cowherd’s-wife, and any workman who may relish a bit of talk on Sundays, on their notions of how body and mind should be treated, and what they are living for, and what is wrong and right in morals. There is much amusement and instruction in hearing them lay down the law about health and duty. And then, when I meet a poet here, and a scholar there, and a Quaker or Swedenborgian religionist somewhere else, it seems to me that I have been carried back some thousands of years, to the time when science was composed of dreaming, and when men’s instincts constituted the mythology under which they lived.
It is all very interesting, however, and all worthy of respect. To us, who are in search of facts, there is no dream of any intellect, no dogmatic assurance, no stirring of any instinct, which is not full of interest and instruction. But I shall be glad of your answer to my question, as guidance in using the material furnished by my neighbours.

II.

H. G. A to H. M.

My dear Friend,

By all means let us go into this inquiry and explanation. Nothing will give me greater pleasure; for certainly it is most important that we should form a true estimate of man’s nature, and ascertain the real basis of a science of Mind. Men have been wandering amidst poesies, theologies, and metaphysics, and have been caught in the web of ideal creations, and have to be brought back again to particulars and material conditions; to investigate the real world, and those laws of being and action which are the form and nature of things, and the phenomena which they present, as they are here, within us and about us in reality and in truth, and not as we would fancy them to be. There are not two philosophies, one for Mind and another for Matter. Na-
MAN'S NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT.

ture is one, and to be studied as a whole. "There is nothing in nature," says Bacon, "but individual bodies, exhibiting clear individual effects, according to particular laws." Instinct, passion, thought, &c., are effects of organised substances: but men have sought to make out a philosophy of mind, by studying these effects apart from causes, and have even asserted that mind was entirely independent of body, and having some unintelligible nature of its own, called free will,—not subject to law, or dependent on material conditions; though a man has no more power to determine his own will than he has wings to fly. Of course, I need not say to you that these popular notions are mere delusion. I cannot tell you how odd it seems to me to have to assert such a self-evident fact. All the conditions of man and mental peculiarities are now traced to physical causes and conditions, exhibiting clear determining laws. The instinct of animals and the mental condition of men are all phenomena exhibited as a consequence of the bodily condition, and the influences which have been acting upon it. This is now as clearly understood as the physical conditions and cause of the rainbow and of the thunder storm. What men are for the most part believing now is a kind of insanity; but, as Bacon says truly, "those who resolve not to conjecture and divine, but to discover and know; not to invent buffooneries and fables about worlds, but

* Novum Organon, II. Aph. 2.
to inspect, and, as it were, dissect the nature of this real world, must derive all from things themselves.”

We know nothing fundamental of nature, nor can we conceive any thing of the nature of the primary cause. We know not, nor can we know, what things really are, but only what they appear to us; and the relations of their appearances. The form of these relations we term Law. Whatever is must have a form of being and action. It cannot be what it is not; but must be subject to the form or law of its constitution. Even supposing the mind was an entity separable from the body, and acting independently of body, it must still have a nature of its own, and be determined by the form of that nature; and this form of being and action we term Law. Nothing can be of itself, or change its condition, unless it be acted upon by something else. A man cannot of himself, or by his will, become a tree, any more than a triangle can by any means become a circle: nor are more causes to be admitted than are sufficient to produce any particular change or effect. Hence we require no supernatural causes when we can recognise adequate natural causes inherent in the constitution of nature. The phenomena of instinct and reason are no exception or anomaly in nature. The different characters of men arise from the differences in the substance and form of their being; just as it is with other animals, and with plants and stones. For every effect, there is a sufficient cause; and all causes are material causes, influenced by surround-
MAN’S NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT.

...ing circumstances; which is nothing more than matter being influenced by matter. I observe that drunkenness and madness, idiocy, genius, sleep, dreams, murder, charity, are effects, the consequence of material conditions; absolutely and wholly so. If I pour a bottle of wine down a man’s throat, he becomes drunk. If I press a splinter of bone into the brain, madness ensues. I want no devil to account for these effects. Again, if I place a naturally good disposition under favourable circumstances, goodness is invariably the result. If I place a naturally ill-disposed person under unfavourable circumstances, evil is necessarily the result. I want no good spirit in the one case, nor evil spirit in the other, to account for these facts, any more than to account for geese being geese, and green gooseberries being acid, and those which have ripened by exposure to the sun being of a delicious flavour. We now can perceive precisely why men think as they do; how they are deceived by their own thoughts and feelings: otherwise, their seeming total apathy,—their inability to comprehend the nature of science, and the necessity of universal law, would make us despair of progress.

The reason why you are interested in my thoughts and opinions is, not that I have more ability than others, but that I have endeavoured, under favourable circumstances, to renounce all idols and superstitions, and have drawn close to nature, to examine into causes. In material conditions I find the origin of all religions, all philosophies, all opinions, all virtues, and
PROPOSAL OF A BASIS.

"spiritual conditions and influences," in the same manner that I find the origin of all diseases and of all insanities, in material conditions and causes. I have followed Bacon’s method, because there is no other that can lead to any discovery and practical results, or represent nature. I have but one earnest desire in life, which is to acquire knowledge; and a knowledge of human nature in particular,—that being the most important and the most needed. And I would freely utter, on all occasions, what I know and believe, honestly and without reserve, or regard for the opinion of a world which is full of superstition and hypocrisy on the one side, while on the other we see the mental powers of men crushed by excessive labour, or excessive indulgence and indulgence.

Man is everywhere against his fellow-man, and every nation is ruled by the sword, or other symbol of force, and none by knowledge and virtue. No moral principle or religious system or belief will elevate men and set them free, except such as is based on a knowledge of causes, and the result of a true science of human nature. This position I think we may stand on, as upon a rock, “and thence observe the wanderings up and down of other men.” But I do not wish to dispute with any men, about their belief or their morals, or their laws of expediency; for I say that all the systems of the whole world are wrong;—they being all founded on error in the ignorance of natural causes and material conditions. I have nothing to say to any, but that
we must turn aside and begin afresh, from the beginning. What use is there in disputing with the Mohammedan about his prophet or his hareem? or with the Roman Catholic about his saints and his transubstantiation? or with the English Protestant about his dull formalism, his services, and his worldly pride, and vulgar regard for wealth? We must begin at the beginning, and exhibit the inherent causes of all the various beliefs and passions which have so long triumphed over truth and Man’s better nature. We must exhibit the real, fundamental and material causes of men’s thoughts: and out of a knowledge of human nature will grow a wisdom and revelation of principles which will revolutionize the world, and become the guide of man in legislation and education. Let us not assume anything, but interpret the book of nature. Thus may we lay hold of the Science of Human Nature: and till we recognise this science, we live in a barbarous and dark age, and have no health in us.