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Principles of Mental Physiology

William Carpenter (1813–85) was trained as a doctor; he was apprenticed to an eye surgeon, and later attended University College London and the University of Edinburgh, obtaining his M.D. in 1839. Rather than practising medicine, he became a teacher, specialising in neurology, and it was his work as a zoologist on marine invertebrates that brought him wide scientific recognition. His Principles of Mental Physiology, published in 1874, developed the ideas he had first expounded in the 1850s, and expounds the arguments for and against the two models of psychology then current – automatism, which assumed that the mind operates under the control of the physiology of the body for all human activity, and free will, 'an independent Power, controlling and directing that activity'. Drawing on animal as well as human examples, his arguments, especially on the acquisition of mental traits in the individual, are much influenced by Darwin.

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MENTAL PHYSIOLOGY,

WITH THEIR APPLICATIONS TO

THE TRAINING AND DISCIPLINE OF THE MIND,

AND

THE STUDY OF ITS MORBID CONDITIONS.

BY

WILLIAM B. CARPENTER, M.D., LL.D.,
F.R.S., F.L.S., F.G.S.,

REGISTRAR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON;
CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE INSTITUTE OF FRANCE,
AND OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY;
ETC. ETC.

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TO THE MEMORY OF

THE LATE

SIR HENRY HOLLAND, BART., D.C.L., F.R.S.,

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL INSTITUTION,
ETC. ETC.

This Volume is Dedicated,

AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE AUTHOR'S GRATITUDE

FOR BENEFITS DERIVED FROM

HIS SCIENTIFIC WRITINGS,

HIS WISE COUNSELS,

AND HIS CORDIAL ENCOURAGEMENT,

DURING A FRIENDSHIP OF THIRTY YEARS

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PREFACE.

THE following Treatise is an expansion of the Outline of Psychology contained in the Fourth and Fifth Editions of my "Principles of Human Physiology" (1852 and 1855), but omitted from the later editions of that work, to make room for new matter more strictly Physiological. The appreciation of that Outline expressed at the time by several friends to whose opinions I attached great value, made me contemplate the separate reproduction of it, at some future date, in an enlarged form: but the fulfilment of that intention has been delayed, in the first instance, by the pressure of Official duties; and, since this has been lightened, by the diversion of all the time and thought I could spare into an entirely different line of Scientific investigation. That investigation, however, having been taken in hand by Her Majesty's Government for systematic prosecution by the "Challenger" Expedition, I found myself free to entertain a proposal made to me by the projectors of the "International Scientific Series," to republish my Outline in an enlarged form, as one of their Popular Treatises.

Not having seen reason to make any important change in

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my own Psychological views since I first put them forward, but, on the contrary, having found them confirmed and extended by the experience and reflection of twenty years, I set myself to revise my former exposition of them, with the idea of simply introducing such illustrations as might lead to the more ready apprehension of the principles I aimed to enforce, and of filling-up such deficiencies as it might seem most desirable to supply. But, as I proceeded with the work, I found it grow under my hands; and it has at last so far exceeded the limits originally contemplated, as to become unsuitable to the Series for which it had been designed, from which it has been accordingly withdrawn, for issue as an independent Treatise.

I now send it forth as a contribution to that Science of Human Nature, which has yet (as it seems to me) to be built-up on a much broader basis than any Philosopher has hitherto taken as his foundation. To the character of a System of Psychology, this treatise makes no pretension whatever; being simply designed to supplement existing Systems of Physiology and Metaphysics, by dealing with a group of subjects, which, occupying the border-ground between the two, have been almost entirely neglected in both. Hence, in treating of Sensation, I have not entered into those details on the Physiology of the Senses which are readily accessible elsewhere; but have especially applied myself to the elucidation of the share which the Mind has, not only in the *interpretation* of Sense-impressions, but in the *production* of Sensorial states not less real to the Ego who experiences them than are those called-forth by external objects,

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—a topic of the greatest importance in reference to the value of all Testimony given under a Mental preconception. And, in like manner, I have done no more than enumerate a large proportion of those principal modes of Mental activity, which are commonly designated as Intellectual Faculties, Propensities, and Emotions; in order that I might have space to bring into clear view that distinction between their *automatic* and their *volitional* operation, which has long appeared to me the only sound basis, on the one hand, for Education and Self-discipline, and, on the other, for that Scientific study of the various forms of *abnormal* Mental activity, which, rightly cultivated, is probably the most promising field of Psychological inquiry.

Although the doctrine of *automatic* Mental activity is here presented in a Physiological form, it may be fully accepted, and turned to practical account, by such as repudiate *in toto* the idea that Thought and Feeling can be regarded as the expression of Brain-change. This is evident from the entire accordance which exists between Sir William Hamilton and Mr. John S. Mill as to the phenomena which I have grouped together under the term "Unconscious Cerebration;" though the former states them in terms of Metaphysics, and the latter in terms of Physiology.

It will, I doubt not, be considered by many, that there is a palpable inconsistency between the two fundamental doctrines which are here upheld;—that of the dependence of the Automatic activity of the Mind upon conditions which bring it within the *nexus* of Physical Causation; and that of the existence of an independent Power, controlling and

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directing that activity, which we call Will*. I can only say that both are equally true to my own consciousness; as I believe they are to the common consciousness of Mankind. I cannot regard myself, either Intellectually or Morally, as a mere puppet, pulled by suggesting-strings; any more than I can *dis*regard that vast body of Physiological evidence, which proves the direct and immediate relation between Mental and Corporeal agency. The same difficulty (if it be a difficulty) is experienced by some of the greatest thinkers of the day. Thus even John S. Mill, the most powerful advocate of Automatism, found himself brought by his own Mental experiences to what is virtually an acceptance of the independence of the Will:—"I saw," he says (*Autobiography*, p. 169), "that though our "character is formed by circumstances, our own desires can "do much to shape those circumstances; and that what is "really inspiriting and ennobling in the doctrine of free "will, is the conviction that *we have real power over the* "*formation of our own character;* that our will, by influencing

* The two doctrines seem to me to have been more clearly presented by Hartley, than by any other Writer:—"By the Mechanism of human Actions, I mean that each action results from the previous circumstances of Body and Mind, in the same manner, and with the same certainty, as other effects do from their mechanical causes; so that a person cannot do indifferently either the action A, or its contrary *a*, while the previous circumstances are the same; but is under an absolute Necessity of doing one of them, and that only. Agreeably to this I suppose, that by Free-will is meant a Power of doing either the action A, or its contrary *a*, while the previous circumstances remain the same."—(*On Man*, Conclusion to Part I.) This simple and definite issue has been greatly obscured by the attempts which have been made on both sides to evade it; but it is one which had much better be faced openly and directly. Are we, or are we not, altogether what "circumstances" make us?

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"some of our circumstances, can modify our future habits "or capacities of willing." On the other hand, Archbishop Manning and Mr. Martineau, who may be considered as typical Metaphysicians, and who hold the Freedom of the Will as a fundamental article of their Religious and Ethical creeds, seem not less satisfied than myself, that our succession of Thoughts and Feelings is in great degree determined by antecedent conditions, which are intimately related to those of our Physiological Mechanism.

That these two Agencies must both be accepted as fundamental facts of Man's composite nature, which can only be viewed aright in their mutual relation, is, I believe, a conclusion towards which there is now a general convergence amongst intelligent thinkers, whose minds are not trammelled by System, or obscured by the dust that has been so continually raised in philosophical discussion. A better type of such thinkers could be scarcely found than the late Charles Buxton; who, looking at the subject from a point of view very different from mine, expressed himself in language almost identical with that which I had used (pp. 2, 3), as to the necessity of no longer attempting to keep apart in our Scientific investigations that which Nature has so inseparably united:—"Irresistible, undeniable facts demonstrate "that man is not a den wherein two enemies are chained "together; but *one being*—that soul and body are one—one "and indivisible. We had better face this great fact. 'Tis "no good to blink it. Our knowledge of Physiology has "come to a point where the old idea of Man's constitution must be thrown aside. To struggle against the

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"overwhelming force of science, under the notion of shield-
"ing religion, is mere folly."—(*Notes of Thought*, p. 266).

These well-considered conclusions of a deeply-religious mind may be specially commended to the consideration of those, who may be disposed to condemn without examination anything that savours of a "Materialism" which they have been accustomed to regard as philosophically absurd and morally detestable. And those who assume that a Physiological Psychology strikes at the root of Morals and Religion, may be fearlessly asked to show in what a system which leaves the Will of Man free to make the best use he can of the Intellectual and Moral capacities with which his Bodily Organism has been endowed by his Creator, and which gives him the strongest and noblest motives both for Self-discipline and for Philanthropic exertion, is unworthy of the nature and destiny of the being whose creation "in the image of God" can have no higher meaning than his capacity for *infinite progress*.

It would be ungrateful were I not to take this opportunity of renewing the expression of the special obligations I owe, in the original construction of my "fabric of thought" on this great subject, to the writings and conversation of my valued friends the late Sir Henry Holland, Professor Laycock, Dr. J. D. Morell, and Dr. Noble.—To the first of these it had been my intention to dedicate this Treatise, the title of which he had kindly permitted me to borrow from one of his own; and I have gladly, therefore, complied with the wish of his Family, that I should dedicate it to his

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Memory. No one can know the wonderful *suggestiveness* of Sir H. Holland's scientific writings, who has not had the occasion (which has often occurred to myself) to trace back to them some of the best of the thoughts which he had honestly believed to be his own. This I have found particularly the case in regard to the subject of Attention; the fundamental importance of which in relation to the Will, I first learned from him to appreciate.

Other obligations to later writers on Psychology are noted in their proper places: but all the general doctrines of importance herein set forth, will be found, I believe, either explicitly stated or clearly indicated in my original Outline; and in their fuller development I have preferred to draw either upon my own mental experience and that of others, or upon that very large group of *abnormal* phenomena, which has not yet (so far as I am aware) been discussed by any professed Psychologist, but of which the careful study seems to me absolutely essential to a due understanding of the relation of the Will to the Automatic activity of the Mind, and of both to the Physiological Mechanism. Some apology may be thought due for the introduction of so many old and familiar illustrations; and especially for such numerous citations from the well-known work of Dr. Abercrombie on "The Intellectual Powers." But I have not hesitated to bring in old stories whenever they were specially to the point; and I believe that in many instances I have been able to give them an entirely new application.

In conclusion I venture to ask for a fair measure of indulgence for such errors and shortcomings (especially on

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the Psychological side) as will doubtless be discovered in this Treatise; on the ground that it has been impossible for me to devote to it that *continuous* thought, which is especially required for the systematic prosecution of any inquiry of this kind, and for the exposition of its results. Had I kept the work back longer in the hope of a more favourable opportunity for its production, I might have altogether lost, with the advance of years, the power of producing it. Such as it is, I offer it, on the one hand, to those who are interested in the progress of Psychological Science, and are disposed to widen its area of investigation; and, on the other, to those who desire a definite basis and aim in the Intellectual and Moral training either of others or themselves;—with the hope that I may at any rate stimulate some other investigator to follow-out the path I have tried to open, who shall bring to the Scientific interpretation of Physiological phenomena a knowledge of Metaphysics to which I can lay no claim, and a Mind better trained in abstract thought.

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