

*Lectures on the Psychology of Thought and Action, Comparative and Human.* By W. D. WILSON, D.D., LL.D., Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in the Cornell University. Ithaca. 1871.

Coming from a Professor of Logic and Metaphysics, this book, which makes no claim to be a complete treatise, is somewhat remarkable. The first two chapters, which treat of the structure and functions of the nervous system, are striking evidence of the way which a physiology of mind is making in quarters where, perhaps, we should least look for such progress. The author lays it down as a fundamental position that Physiology and Psychology are so intimately connected that there is no possibility of understanding one without some knowledge of the other. We need hardly say that we agree with him; only we would extend the proposition, and say that there is no possibility of understanding psychology thoroughly without a thorough knowledge of the physiology of the entire bodily organisation. The danger now is lest writers on psychology should content themselves with a general knowledge of the structure and functions of the nervous system as this is to be obtained from manuals, and should not realise the fundamental facts of organisation. They must truly assimilate physiological views, must incorporate them into their habit of thought, if they would judge rightly how much of mental action they are capable of explaining. When one reads the criticisms which some psychological writers pass upon physiological views of mental function, it is with a feeling of something like despair of the possibility of persons who start from such different standpoints ever coming to a mutual understanding.

Dr. Wilson is not one of those against whom the charge of a merely superficial acquaintance with nerve functions can be justly made. It is quite clear that he has studied them with an earnest desire to understand them; and the result is that he is convinced that "many of the facts and phenomena of psychology which have hitherto been considered as belonging to mental science, do not belong to it at all. They are purely physiological." He perceives that "men and animals, while living with a mere nervous system and without mind at all, would be active beings and perform many at least of the actions which they now perform, and in a manner so nearly like the present that no mere outside observer could distinguish them one from another." Thus, then, there is in the

organism as a mere physiological machine a power, not mental, of accomplishing many complicated actions, and in a manner so closely simulating mental actions that the outside observer cannot detect the difference. We are not inclined to dispute that proposition, but we may fairly ask Dr. Wilson how he reconciles it with what he says near the commencement of the third chapter on the *Nature and Reality of Mind*?

Can mere matter think? Doubtless the sensory ganglia and the brain itself, as I have all along been saying, are the instruments and organs of thought, and in one sense, regarded as instrumental causes, they may be said to perceive and think. But they are mere instruments, and one might as well speak of his pen as writing his letters as of his brain as doing his thinking for him. The analogy is a close one, and the brain thinks in the same sense as the pen writes—as an instrument and nothing more. And as there must be a hand to guide and move the pen, so there must be something to move and guide the hand.

But if the brain be such a mere passive instrument in thinking, acting as mechanically as the pen in writing, how comes it to pass that it is ever capable by itself of originating and accomplishing actions so like those which mind dictates that they cannot be distinguished? The pen never indulges in a freak of writing without help of the hand—from the beginning to the end of its career it is the instrument and nothing more. And again, if the brain is capable of doing so much on its own account, how and where is it that of a sudden it bids farewell to its powers and becomes a mere passive instrument in doing for the mind what it had previously done without it? We fear that Dr. Wilson may be charged with the high crime and misdemeanour of having actually made the mind a superfluous hypothesis. He has certainly got himself into a big difficulty by allowing so much to the purely physiological action of the body.

The passage which follows strikes us as not a little strange—

It is common to speak of animals as thinking, reasoning, willing, &c., and if these acts imply mind (and if they do not, nothing that man performs does imply it), then those who ascribe these acts to animals ascribe to them, by necessary implication, mind also. But I doubt if we find proof of mind anywhere below man.

It is quite evident then that Dr. Wilson might properly doubt the existence of mind in man, seeing that thinking, reasoning and willing do not imply mind in animals, “and if they do not, nothing that man performs does imply it.”

However, he is very far from doing *that*, as will be easily understood when we say that after pronouncing unsatisfactory the theories that have been devised to explain the act of perception, he declares it to be "the simple, uncompounded act of an invisible agent." Is this psychology? may be fairly asked. When a matter cannot be explained on the basis of such knowledge as we have, it seems to us a great pity that men are not content to say so, and to leave it there for the present, instead of occupying the unknown ground with hypotheses that may or may not be true, or putting together words that are meaningless, so far as human conception goes. How the act of perception is to be explained in animals, which are without the invisible agent, does not appear.

The author maintains that he allows to animals in his views—

All that modern materialists of the school of Spencer, Maudsley, Darwin, Huxley, &c., allow to man. It is precisely reflex action, just that and nothing else, though they do not call it by that name. In fact, it could be nothing more without the existence of mind as a spontaneously acting substance, ontologically distinct and essentially different from matter or any material organ. They, therefore, cannot complain of this theory, however much they may object to the name I give it, or dislike the difference I make between man and animals.

There is not, of course, any novelty in his opinion that man has a soul, or spirit, or mind, and that the animals have not anything of the kind, nor, perhaps, in the argument from the existence of spontaneity in man, on which Dr. Wilson mainly bases it. Defining matter to be always and under all circumstances *inert*, he asserts that there is something in man which acts spontaneously, and which is not matter; and that we may properly call mind. "If these men choose to ascribe spontaneity to matter, it is their affair and not mine. I am content to leave them to arrange that among themselves. I shall, however, expect that they will tell us where inertia ends and spontaneity begins; and with the latter, we metaphysicians will content ourselves, and will ask to be permitted to call it 'mind.'" Inertia or spontaneity—on which horn of the dilemma choose ye to be fixed? We think it probable that they would not consent to be fixed on either horn; that they might maintain that there was no such real dilemma at all, only one of Dr. Wilson's dialectical fashioning; and might contumaciously assert that if he would extend somewhat his knowledge of matter he would extend his knowledge

of inertia, and if he would pursue deeper his investigations into mind he would modify considerably his notions of spontaneity.

However, we must refer those who wish to know how much Dr. Wilson has to say in support of his views to the book itself. Though there is much in it with which we cannot agree, there is much also that will be found suggestive and profitable. This brief notice must not be supposed to do full justice to its scope and character. It consists of twelve lectures, constituting as many chapters, the subjects of which are—The Nervous System; Sensation and Emotion; Nature and Reality of Mind; Sense-Perception; False Perception and Imagination; Insight and Reasoning; Appetites and Affections; Rational Emotions; Moral and Religious Sentiments; Volition and Instinct; Voluntary Action; Memory and Recollection.

If we might in all sincerity make a recommendation to Dr. Wilson, it would be that, before publishing the next work which he has in hand, he would read such a physiological book as Helmholtz's "Handbuch der physiologischen Optik."

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*On the Relation between Science and Religion.* By GEORGE COMBE. Fifth Edition. Maclachlan and Stewart. 1872.

We are glad to see a fifth edition of this useful book, which we have just read for the first time. Like many other persons, probably, we have been prejudiced against it on account of the phrenological views which its distinguished author was known to entertain so strongly. While still thinking it a pity that he should have accepted such a division of the faculties of mind as phrenology inculcates, we cannot but express the gratification which its perusal has afforded, and a sense of something like shame and regret that we had not sooner profited by its sound philosophy and varied information. The large circulation which Mr. Combe's works have had may, we trust, be accepted as evidence of the good influence which they have exercised. The relation between science and religion is now a great question of the day; much discussion must inevitably take place upon it; we may consider, therefore, the appearance of a fifth edition of Mr. Combe's work to be opportune, and recommend it to the attention of those who have not hitherto made themselves familiar with its contents.