

**THE HUMAN WILL: A
SERIES OF
POSTHUMOUS ESSAYS**

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The Human Will: A Series of Posthumous Essays by James Pollard Espy

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JAMES POLLARD ESPY

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THE HUMAN WILL:

A SERIES OF POSTHUMOUS ESSAYS ON MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY,
THE LEGITIMATE OBJECT OF PUNISHMENT, AND
THE POWERS OF THE WILL.

BY THE LATE

JAMES POLLARD ESPY,

Author of "The Philosophy of Storms," Member of the American Philosophical Society,
and Corresponding Member of the National Institute at Washington.

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MEMOIR.

JAMES ESBY was born on the ninth day of May, 1786, in Washington county, Pennsylvania. He was the youngest of ten children, and the seventh son, having been born when his mother was nearly fifty years of age. His parents removed to the State of Kentucky, when he was in his fourth year, and settled at Lexington. He was born an inquirer. During this journey with his parents westward, the boat was shoved suddenly from the Brownsville wharf, and little James as suddenly floored. During the rest of the trip down the Ohio, no novelty could distract his mind from a pertinacious resolution to find out the principle by which he had fallen; and when some one told him that his centre of gravity had been lost, his mind started at once on a voyage of investigation, which ceased only with his life. In his earliest school-days, a severe storm blew a large tree down on the top of the school-house, breaking the timbers and roof; into the brain of our boy-philosopher, as its proper crucible, the storm fell, and there remained until he had wrested its secret. His thirst for knowledge was from his childhood insatiable; and his means being limited, he began whilst yet in his teens teaching, during a portion of each year, to pay for the instruction received in the Transylvania University of Lexington, where he was graduated at the age of twenty-one. During the year following he was invited to Cumberland, Maryland, to take charge of a classical academy of that city, which had been newly endowed by the Legislature. His zeal for instructing the young was such that he soon made it a well-known institution, to which students came from every part of the country. Having saved something by this, he went to Bedford, and pursued the study of the Law.

At the age of twenty-seven he was married to MARGARET POLLARD, of Cumberland, whose maiden-name he assumed, and was ever after known as JAMES POLLARD ESBY. He took his bride, who was then only sixteen, to Xenia, Ohio, where he resided for four years in the practice of the law. But it became manifest to him that this profession did not accord with the literary and scientific tendencies of his mind; so he was quite ready to accept a call to the classical department of the Franklin Institute of Philadelphia. Thither he went in the year 1817, and that city became his home for twenty years.

His position here was excellently adapted to his intellectual wants. He was a man of science by nature; and here he found a centre where the facts upon which he wished to experiment could be easily obtained and classified. His mind had for some time been attracted to his specialty; and the world became suddenly aware how far he had gone toward changing meteorology from a speculation, but little more respectable than alchemy, into a positive science, by his

invention of the NEPHELOSCOPE, a very simple and accurate instrument by which the expansion of air attributable to latent caloric can be perfectly measured. At this time he published several pamphlets, reviewing and rejecting the theories of storms and currents which prevailed: these attracted notice because of their clear style and great power of analysis, and the savants of New England and Philadelphia began to look to Franklin Institute for some theory which should take the place of those which had been so remorselessly disposed of. By this time, also, Prof. ESRY had formed his own theory, and brought it practically to the test of many storms. Being convinced of its truth, he announced it in a series of lectures in Philadelphia. These lectures were soon called for in other centres of science; and at length it became necessary for him to abandon Franklin Institute, and devote himself to scientific pursuits alone.

We have not space here for an analysis of the Professor's Theory of Storms, which has now become the prevailing one. Its theme is quite simple: He supposes that when the air near the surface of the earth becomes more heated or more highly charged with aqueous vapor, which is only five-eighths of the specific gravity of atmospheric air, its equilibrium is unstable, and up-moving columns or streams will be formed. As these columns rise, their upper parts will come under less pressure, and the air will, therefore, expand; as it expands it will grow colder, about one degree and a quarter for every hundred yards of its ascent, as he demonstrated by experiments in the Nepheloscope. The ascending columns will carry up with them the aqueous vapor which they contain, and, if they rise high enough, the cold produced by expansion from diminished pressure will condense some of this vapor into cloud; for it is known that cloud is formed in the receiver of an air-pump when the air is suddenly withdrawn. The distance to which the air will have to ascend before it will become cold enough to begin to form cloud, is a variable quantity, depending on the number of degrees which the dew-point is below the temperature of the air; and this height may be known at any time, by observing how many degrees a thin metallic tumbler of water must be cooled down below the temperature of the air before the vapor will condense on the outside.

Professor ESRY'S account of the generation of winds at the time of a storm, was equally simple: the air rushes from all sides to the centre of the ascending column, and in conjunction with this, the air is depressed around the columns, and brings down the motion which is known to be greater as air is above the earth's surface. His theories of the annulation of clouds, the interior passage for winds through the cone-centre of tornadoes, are beautiful, and agree with the facts in the case. But we can not dwell upon them. No one interested in the subject will be without his great work, *The Philosophy of Storms*, published by Little & Brown, Boston, during the year 1841. Before its publication in this form, the new theory had caused a sensation in the principal cities of England and France, and Professor ESRY was invited to visit Europe, and compare his results with those which had been reached by Redfield, Forbes, Pouillet, Fournet and others.

He accordingly visited Europe, and in September, 1840, the British Association appointed a day to entertain the Professor's statement, which was made in the presence of Prof. Forbes, Mr. Redfield, Sir John Herschel, Sir David Brewster, and other eminent naturalists. The discussion which followed was one of the most interesting ever reported in the Journals of the Association. In the Academy of Sciences, at Paris, the interest was equally great, and a committee,

consisting of Arago and Pouillet, was appointed to report upon **ESRR's** observations and theory. They were satisfied of the importance of the theory at once, and so reported. It was in the debate which took place in the Academy at this time, that Arago said, "France has its **Cuvier**, England its **Newton**, America its **ESRR**." On his return from this satisfactory visit, Professor **ESRR** was appointed corresponding member of the Smithsonian Institute. From that time until his death he resided in Washington, beloved and honored by all who knew him. His more recent discoveries will be given to the world, doubtless, by those who have charge of them; one of them, relating to electricity, is quite interesting and important. We now turn to another side of his life, and one of paramount interest.

Mr. **ESRR's** parents were devout members of the Presbyterian Church, and as that Church had not in those days adopted the compliant system now in vogue, which aspires to carry the Westminster Confession on one shoulder, and the spirit and science of the age on the other, he received a quite strict and religious training. The Bible was his daily study, and he learned the New Testament by rote. But we have seen that he was a realist at birth. One day, having read in the Testament the words "whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that ye shall receive," he went out into the garden alone, and, extending his hand upward, said, "O God, give me a dollar!" His surprise and pain that the dollar did not drop into his hand from the clouds was great. Then Doubt quietly entered, took her seat, and henceforth every text must needs pass under her hand, and bear her questionings. Skeptic means, by etymology, 'one who considers a thing:' consequently skeptics are rarely orthodox. Professor **ESRR**, when he had passed through the waves of doubt, found himself on the strong shores where Faith marries Reason; and their progeny of high thoughts and holy aspirations arose within him. His mind at first, and entirely by its own operations, arrived at a complete faith in the existence and benevolence of God: then adieu, O parental Church, with thy doctrine of the angry God and the endless torments! But he did not pause with the speculative Epicurists, who care to follow an idea only so far as it makes things easy, and lays the fear-phantoms; he went farther than to reject the idea that endless torment awaited any immortal child of God; he developed the most perfect system of Optimism which has yet been announced. **THERE IS NO EVIL: GOD IS GOOD; GOD IS OVER ALL: ALL IS FOR THE BEST.** This was his theme, and he was wont with those who knew him to dwell on it with a convincing power and eloquence which easily arose to majesty. This storming, as he was called, had not gone forth to discover the pathways of the lightning and survey the inviolable channels of wind and storm, and returned to believe that the Chaos, driven from the external world forever, prevailed yet in the storms and winds of the inward and human world. He saw that the passions, the impulses, the motives, had their law, and that there was no chance-work but to empyrics, no Chaos but to the ignorant. These views gradually wrote themselves through his experience and life, and have bequeathed us the following work. In it his distinction, beyond the production of a clear, simple and logical essay on a much confused subject, is, that he shows that so far from Necessity annihilating responsibility, as is alleged, Necessity alone makes responsibility possible.

On the 17th day of January last, Professor **ESRR** was stricken with paralysis: he was nearly seventy-four years of age, and it was scarcely expected by his friends, that even a constitution so vigorous as his, a constitution which had never been

wronged by a bad habit of any kind, could vanquish the violent foe. When he was in pain, and could scarcely speak, he was heard to whisper, "I have tried to will to move that limb, and can not." No paralytic stroke could strike to the seat of thought and conviction! Never in such a condition have we known a mind to remain so active and so healthy in its tone to the last. As we looked upon the snowy locks of the pure old man, we felt how truly the ancient poet described such as "the white blossoms of eternal fruit." He died January 24th.

The character of Professor Esry was as pure and elevated as any which it has been our happiness to meet. His word, with those who met him, was truth itself; his innocence was like that of a child; he lived and died without ever being willing to suspect those whom others saw to be jealous of his position and influence. His benevolence was not only large and true, but it was equated by his affectionateness and tenderness toward those who were appointed in the order of God to minister and be ministered to in the circle of his life.

When the immortal old man was drawing near to his end, the writer of this memoir stood by him, amongst other friends, anxious for a last word. The old man could not speak a word, but presently moved his fingers as if he would write. Pencil and paper having been brought, he wrote some words in almost illegible scratches. It took us some hours to decipher them, but at last, letter added to letter, a sublime sentence shone with clear ray upon us; it ran: "I have found in human nature a principle superior to conscience. Conscience can be taught that it is right to burn heretic: Instinct can not be taught not to feel pain at the sight of suffering."

There it is, O reader! a voice from the mysterious boundary-line between the darkness of earth and the light of the superior world. We who received it, bear witness that by that principle a living and beautiful soul climbed to bloom and cluster in the light of God.

The will which he left does so perfectly repeat the practical aim and spirit of his whole life, that we record its opening paragraphs here:

"In the beginning of this, my last will and testament, I wish to express my most profound reverence for the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and my unwavering belief that everything which I have experienced during my whole life (as well the painful as the pleasant) has been so arranged by His infinite goodness and wisdom, as to result in good to me, by educating me to a higher state of knowledge, and to a more intense love of goodness, and so to prepare me for an eternity of happiness after death. If it is better for me to exist happy after death, I shall so exist, as certainly as there is a God of infinite goodness, wisdom and power; and if it is better for me to suffer some pain hereafter for the sake of further improvement, I doubt not that an infinitely wise and good Father has arranged that I shall so suffer.

"Heavenly Father, with unwavering confidence in Thy love, I commit myself and the whole human family, Thy children, to Thy holy keeping."

MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY.

SCIENCE has demonstrated that this earth was once fluid, from heat, to the surface; it follows that man has not existed on this earth from eternity, and it is manifest that the first man had not a man for his father, nor the first woman a woman for her mother; and as there is no known cause now in existence to produce man, but that of ordinary generation, and it is plainly impossible for him to have originated from any fortuitous concourse of atoms, we are constrained to believe that the first man and first woman were contrived and brought into existence by a being of superior wisdom, power and goodness. And as this same reason applies to all the animals and vegetables on the face of the earth, we may safely infer that the power, wisdom and goodness of this being are indefinitely great. This inference is greatly confirmed, when we discover innumerable contrivances, both in the moral and physical world, all tending to the well-being of man.

Now all these contrivances imply a contriver, and unless this contriver was himself contrived, he must have been eternal. For it is certain, that the first cause or contriver always existed, for if there was ever a time when nothing existed, nothing could ever have been brought into existence — *ex nihilo nihil fit*. This first self-existent and eternal cause or contriver is called God, whether the immediate contriver of the universe was the self-existent eternal first cause or not. But as nothing is gained by supposing that the contriver of the universe, and the former of man, was himself or itself contrived, it is unphilosophical to make the supposition.

When we examine the nature of man, we discover that he is so constituted or contrived, that the fundamental law of his nature is to be *fond of pleasure and averse to pain*. Indeed, as a sensitive being, it would seem he could not be formed otherwise. We find,

also, that he is so contrived as to be able to discover by degrees more and more the causes which produce pleasure, and the causes which produce pain. The sum of human happiness is much increased by the contrivance God has made, that one of the principal sources of man's enjoyment is doing good to others, or endeavoring to increase their happiness. We find, also, that doing evil to others, or even designing to do evil, is always attended with pain, and no doubt more suffering is felt by the evil-doer than by the one to whom the evil is done.

God has so formed the human race, that one man's true interest or well-being never clashes with another's; or, in other words, one man is never under the necessity of diminishing the well-being of another, to promote his own happiness.

If man was so constituted that he could promote his own happiness by diminishing that of others, the very constitution of man would then be a species of bribery in God, offering happiness as a reward for doing evil to others. If God is perfectly wise and perfectly good, he has not so constituted man. Indeed, if we allow that the great First Cause is without intelligence and incapable of design, and that man was formed by a fortuitous concourse of atoms, which is infinitely improbable, still by examining his constitution as it is we will be obliged to acknowledge that doing good to others is a source of pleasure, and doing evil to others is a source of pain. If man is never under the necessity of doing evil to others, or of diminishing their happiness to increase his own, *a fortiori*, God is never under the necessity of diminishing the happiness of one man for the good of another.

Pain of every kind which does not result in the ultimate good or well-being of the individual suffering it, is an evil to him, and, of course, it can not promote the well-being of others; and if inflicted by others, it will diminish their happiness, probably, more than it does that of the individual on whom it is inflicted. All punishment, therefore, ought to be inflicted with the intention of benefiting the individual punished; for if it results in diminishing the well-being of the individual punished, it certainly will diminish the well-being of those who inflicted it—more especially if the punishment is inflicted without regard to the well-being of the sufferer.

Punishment, therefore, to be just and useful (and it can not be just without being useful), should be prospective, and not retro-