

**SCIENTIFIC USE OF
THE IMAGINATION
AND OTHER ESSAYS**

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Scientific Use of the Imagination and Other Essays by John Tyndall

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JOHN TYNDALL

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ON THE
SCIENTIFIC USE OF THE IMAGINATION.

A DISCOURSE.

DELIVERED BEFORE THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION AT LIVERPOOL.

1854 *September*, 1870.

'Lastly, physical investigation more than anything besides helps to teach us the actual value and right use of the Imagination—of that wondrous faculty, which, left to ramble uncontrolled, leads us astray into a wilderness of perplexities and errors, a land of mists and shadows; but which properly controlled by experience and reflection, becomes the noblest attribute of man: the source of poetic genius, the instrument of discovery in Science, without the aid of which Newton would never have invented fluxions, nor Davy have decomposed the earths and alkalies, nor would Columbus have found another Continent.'—*Address to the Royal Society by its President* SIR BENJAMIN BRODIE, November 20, 1859.

I.

SCIENTIFIC USE OF THE IMAGINATION.

I CARRIED with me to the Alps this year the heavy burden of this evening's work. In the way of new investigation I had nothing complete enough to be brought before you; so all that remained to me was to fall back upon such residues as I could find in the depths of consciousness, and out of them to spin the fibre and weave the web of this discourse. Save from memory I had no direct aid upon the mountains; but to spur up the emotions, on which so much depends, as well as to nourish indirectly the intellect and will, I took with me two volumes of poetry, Goethe's 'Farbenlehre,' and the work on 'Logic' recently published by Mr. Alexander Bain. The spur, I am sorry to say, was no match for the integument of dulness it had to pierce. In Goethe, so glorious otherwise, I chiefly noticed the self-inflicted hurts of genius, as it broke itself in vain against the philosophy of Newton.

For a time Mr. Bain became my principal companion. I found him learned and practical, shining generally with a dry light, but exhibiting at times a flush of emotional strength, which proved that even logicians share the common fire of humanity. He interested me most when he became the mirror of my own condition. Neither intellectually nor socially is it good for man