

**THE OPEN COURT SERIES OF
CLASSICS OF SCIENCE AND
PHILOSOPHY, NO. 2, SELECTIONS
FROM THE SCOTTISH PHILOSOPHY
OF COMMON SENSE**

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The open court series of classics of science and philosophy, No. 2, Selections from the Scottish philosophy of common sense by G. A. Johnston

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G. A. JOHNSTON

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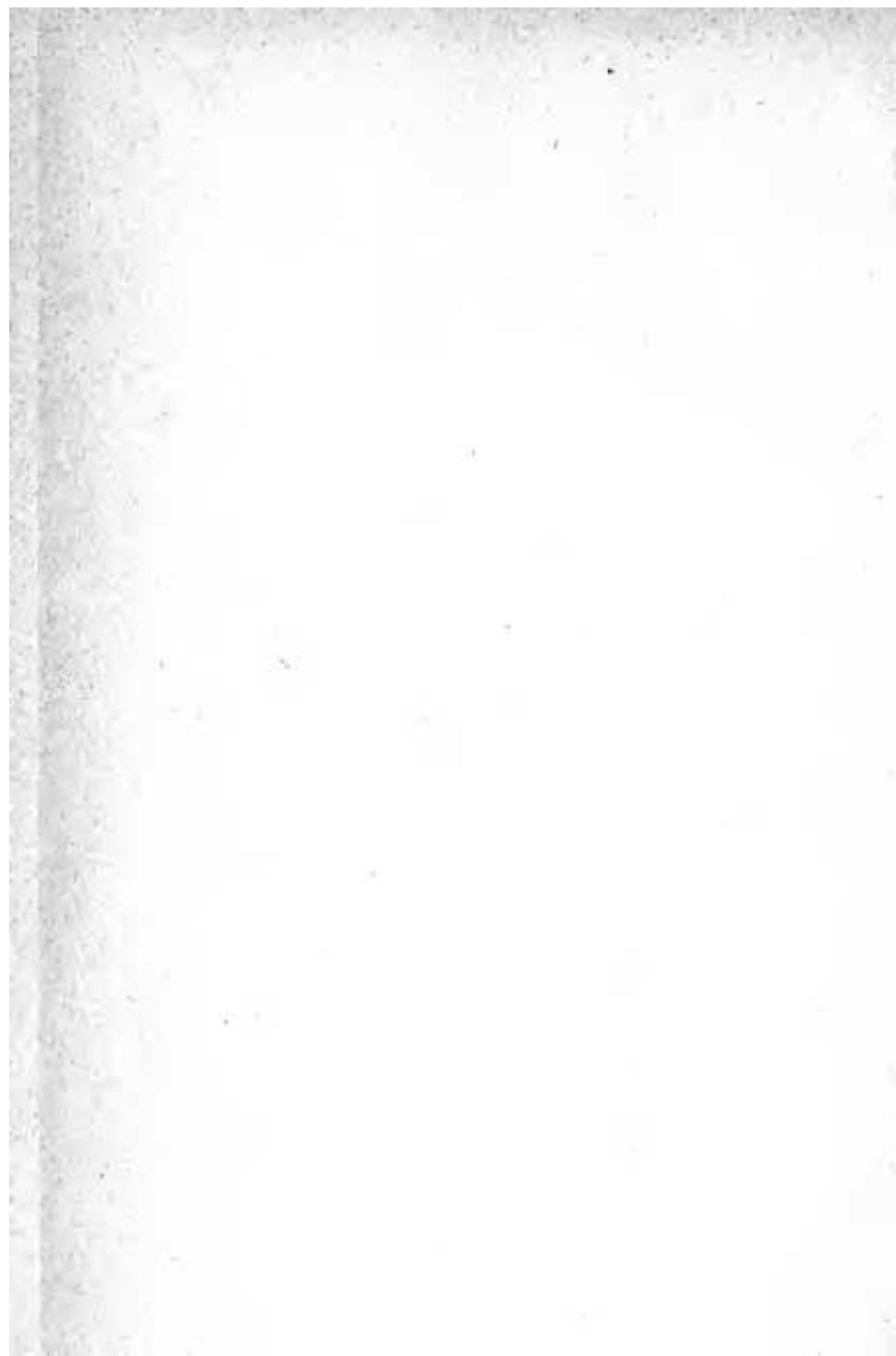
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SELECTIONS FROM THE SCOTTISH PHILOSOPHY OF COMMON SENSE

INTRODUCTION

THE Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense originated as a protest against the philosophy of the greatest Scottish philosopher. Hume's sceptical conclusions did not excite as much opposition as might have been expected. But in Scotland especially there was a good deal of spoken criticism which was never written; and some who would have liked to denounce Hume's doctrines in print were restrained by the salutary reflection that if they were challenged to give reasons for their criticism they would find it uncommonly difficult to do so. Hume's scepticism was disliked, but it was difficult to see how it could be adequately met.

At this point Reid¹ stepped into the field. He

¹ Thomas Reid was born in 1710 at Strachan in Kincardineshire. His father was minister of the parish. At the age of twelve, Reid entered Marischal College, Aberdeen, but did not profit much by the teaching. After graduating in Arts, he studied Divinity, and was licensed to preach in 1731. In 1733 he was appointed Librarian of Marischal College, and in 1737 was presented by

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was the only man of his time who really understood the genesis of Hume's scepticism and succeeded in locating its sources. At first sight it would seem that this discovery required no peculiar perspicuity. It would seem that nobody could help seeing that Hume's sceptical conclusions were based on Locke's premises, and that Hume could never be successfully opposed by any critic who accepted Locke's assumptions. But this is precisely one of those obvious things that is noticed by nobody. And in fact Reid was the first man to see it clearly. It thus became his duty to question the assumptions on which all his own early thought had been based. The result of this reflection was the conclusion that, since the "ideal theory" of Locke and

King's College to the living of New Machar, near Aberdeen. At first his parishioners were very hostile, tradition saying that his uncle had to guard the pulpit stairs with a drawn sword. But their prejudices were gradually overcome by Reid's practical benevolence, though to the end they were dissatisfied with his sermons, which they regarded as not sufficiently original. In 1751 Reid was appointed a regent at King's College, and became "Professor of Philosophy," his lectures including mathematics and physics. He was one of the founders of the Aberdeen Philosophical Society ("The Wise Club"), which included among its members Beattie and Campbell. It was in this society that Reid developed his philosophy. His point of view was made known to the club in several papers, which were systematised in the *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*. This was published in 1764, the year in which Reid succeeded Adam Smith as Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Glasgow. The next sixteen years were fully occupied with the duties of his chair and University business. In 1780 he retired from his active University work, in order to complete his philosophical system. In 1785 appeared the *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, and three years later the *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*. The last years of his life were devoted to mathematics and gardening, and in 1796 he died.