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PERSONAL COMPETITION; ITS PLACE
IN THE SOCIAL ORDER AND EFFECT UPON
INDIVIDUALS; WITH SOME
CONSIDERATIONS ON SUCCESS, PP. 78-173**

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CHARLES H. COOLEY

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BY

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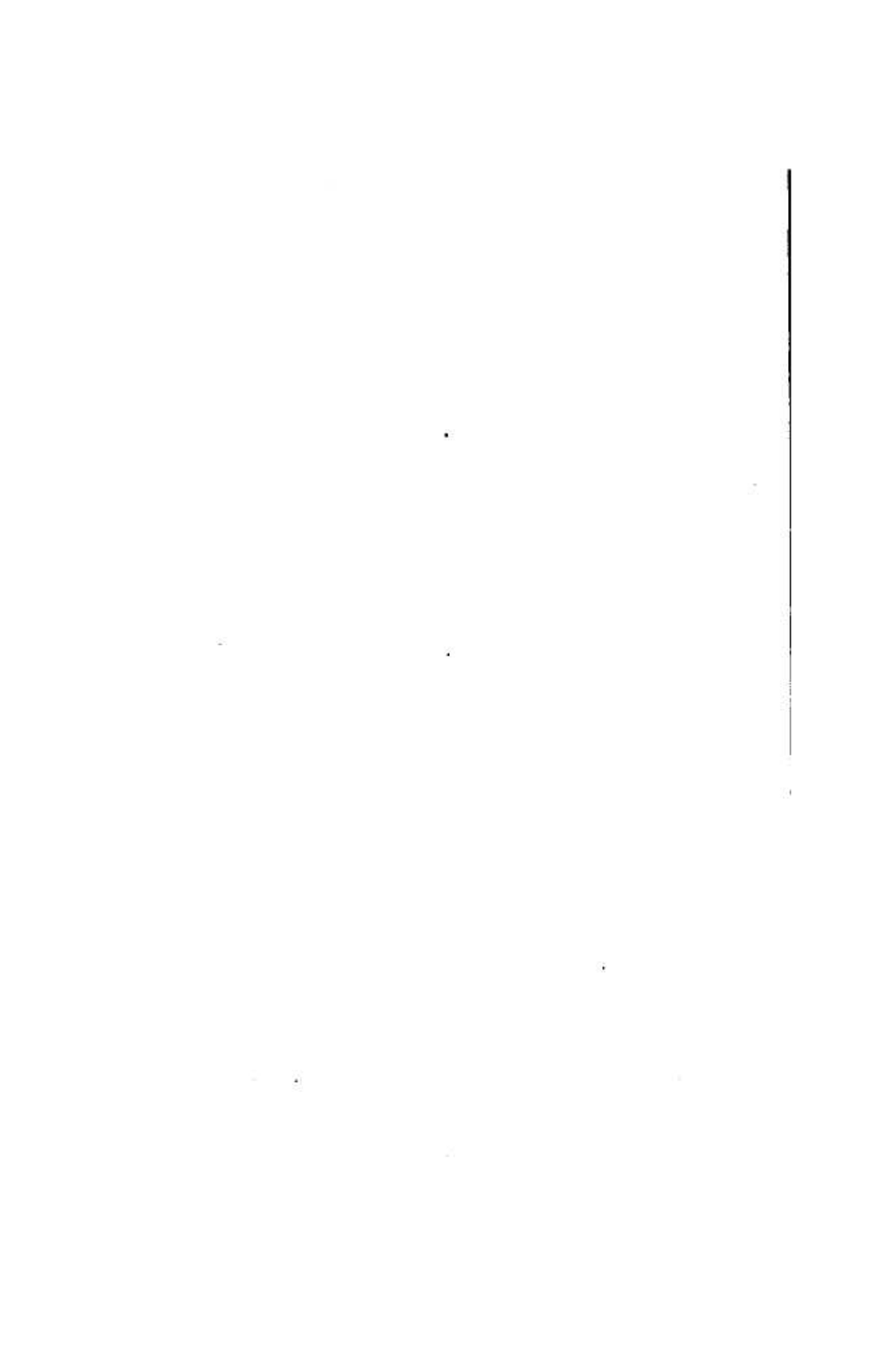
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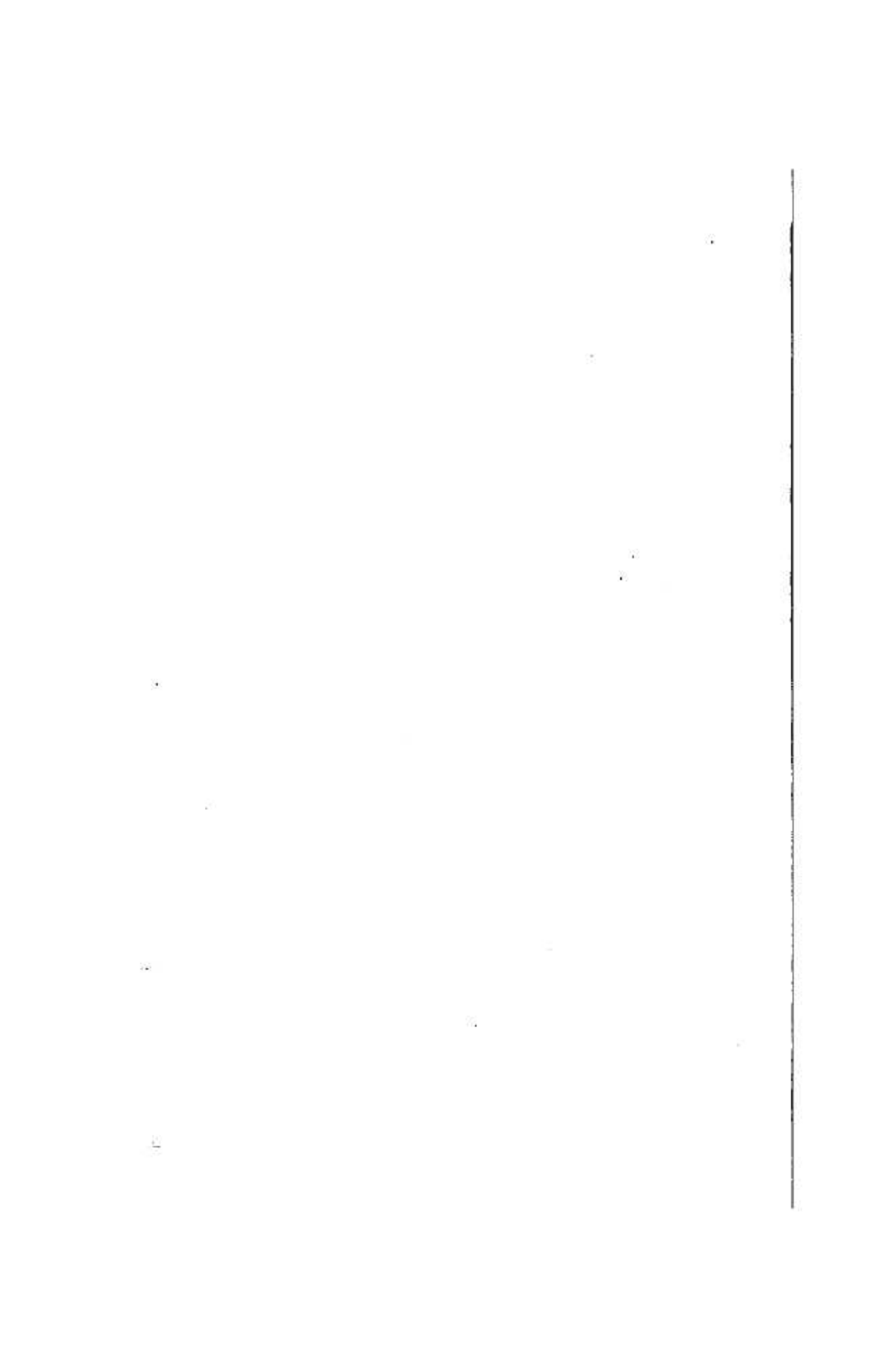
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PERSONAL COMPETITION.

Its Place in the Social Order and Effect upon Individuals; with some Considerations on Success.



PERSONAL COMPETITION.

I propose to discuss Personal Competition with no special reference to industry or commerce, but rather with a view to the part that it plays in social life as a whole, and to the effect it has upon the character and happiness of men. With this purpose I shall consider its function, its intensity, its relation to association, the conditions of personal success, the bearing of success upon morality, the effect of competition as regards sympathy, contentment and individuality; and finally, the standard of success. Of course the discussion of these subjects is very far indeed from exhaustive: my aim is to give a concise and connected view of principles and to suggest, at least, their application to existing social conditions.

Some of the matters treated are of a sort concerning which many people feel strongly, upholding conflicting views with a common vehemence. I cannot expect to reconcile these differences, which rest as much upon temperament and point of view as upon intellectual grounds; but I hope that discerning readers will find in what I say evidence of a painstaking desire to see the truth and to state it fairly.

I.

THE FUNCTION OF PERSONAL COMPETITION.

The function of personal competition, considered as a part of the social system, is to assign to each individual his place in that system. If "all the world's a stage," this is a process that distributes the parts among the players. It may do it well or ill, but, after some fashion, it does it. Some may be cast in parts unsuited to them; good actors may be discharged altogether and worse ones retained; but nevertheless the thing is arranged in some way and the play goes on.

That such a process must exist can hardly, it seems to me, admit of question: in fact I believe that those who speak of doing away with competition use the word in another sense than is here intended. Within the course of the longest human life there is necessarily a complete renewal of the persons whose communication and coöperation make up the life of society. The new members come into the world without any legible sign to indicate what they are fit for, a mystery to others from the first and to themselves as soon as they are capable of reflection: the young man does not know for what he is adapted, and no one else can tell him. The only possible way to get light upon the matter is to adopt the method of experiment. By trying one thing and another and by reflecting upon his experience, he begins to find out about himself, and the world begins