

**LIFE OF GODFREY WILLIAM
VON LEIBNITZ; ON THE BASIS
OF THE GERMAN WORK OF
DR. G.E. GUHRAUER**

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Life of Godfrey William von Leibnitz; on the basis of the German work of Dr. G.E. Guhrauer by
John M. Mackie

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JOHN M. MACKIE

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JOHN M. MACKIE.

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P R E F A C E.

The Life of Leibnitz, by Dr. Guhrauer,* upon the basis of which this work has been written, is the last and best of a large number of biographies of this celebrated mathematician and philosopher. The first of these, and the fountain from which all the later writers have, in a greater or less degree, derived their information, is a Memoir of Leibnitz by his secretary and assistant in historiography, John George Eckhart. After Eckhart, numerous German writers might be mentioned; such as Baring, Lamprecht, Christian Wolf, Feller, Rehberg, Ludovici, and Eberhard, who have made Leibnitz the subject of biographical notices more or less extensive and valuable. More important, however, were the classic

*Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr von Leibnitz. Eine Biographie, von Dr. G. E. Guhrauer. Zwei Bände. Breslau; Verlag von Ferdinand Hirt. 1912.

eulogy pronounced upon Leibnitz before the Academy of Sciences in Paris by Fontenelle; and the detailed history of his life and writings, published in Amsterdam, in the French language, by M. de Neufville, more commonly called Joneourt. In Italy, the Memoir by Lamprecht was translated by Barsotti, and also enriched with original additions. Whatever is interesting or important in any of these works, has been incorporated into the biography by Guhrauer, who has also availed himself of all the information which the course of time has brought to light respecting the character, the life, and the writings of his distinguished countryman.

I should have contented myself with simply translating the able and learned production of Dr. Guhrauer, had it not seemed to me, with all its merits, not entirely adapted to the wants of the American literary public. Like most German works of this kind, it is rather a collection of biographical materials, than a well arranged biography. It, also, contains much matter either wholly irrelevant, or possessing an interest only for the countrymen of Leibnitz. I have therefore re-written the Life, for the purpose of divesting it of its German peculiarities, and of presenting it in a more acceptable form to the English reader. In doing this, however, I have almost invariably re-produced the views and opinions, and, for the most part, as it suited my convenience, translated the language of the original author. Whenever it has been in my power to verify any of his results, or to correct any slight accidental error,

which came under my notice, I have done so. I have, however, added little, or nothing, to the German work; and have taken away from it nothing that could be appropriately introduced into a popular biography, or that might be considered as possessing any historical interest for readers without the confines of Germany. All the merit of this work, therefore, is strictly due to the author of the *German Life*, except the credit, if there be any, of having condensed the original materials and presented them in a new form.

The opposition in which the philosophy of Leibnitz stood to that of Locke, and, still more, the unhappy controversy carried on between the former and Newton concerning the discovery of the differential calculus, which for half a century involved the scientific men of England and the continent in a general war of words, have prevented the great merits of Leibnitz from being duly appreciated in England or in this country. But ancient prejudices have been to such a degree obliterated, that, at the present day, a monument may without offence be erected in the temple of English literature to this illustrious German genius. He was the great thinker of his age in continental Europe; he was the founder of modern German philosophy; he exerted no unimportant influence on the general civilization of his countrymen; and by his varied learning, together with his untiring zeal in the cause of letters, he gave a new impulse to every depart-

ment of useful study, and thus "yoked all the sciences abreast." I therefore indulge the hope that a Life of Leibnitz, in the English language, may prove an accession, however small, to the cause of letters and of science.

PROVIDENCE, R. I., OCT. 1, 1844.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

Birth and parentage of Leibnitz—His school-days—His precocity—He studies the ancient classics, and logic—His project of an alphabet of human thought—He studies the scholastic metaphysics and theology, - - - - - 15

CHAPTER II.

Leibnitz enters the University of Leipsic—Reads Descartes, and rejects the scholastic philosophy—Adam Scherzer and Jacob Thomasius—Pursuits and writings of Leibnitz at the University—He reads the writings of Lord Bacon, and other modern philosophers—Becomes a Nominalist—Enters upon the study of jurisprudence as a profession—Goes to the University of Jena—Vossius, and Erhard Weigel—Leibnitz returns to the University of Leipsic—Becomes master in philosophy—Death of his mother—He visits his relatives in Brunswick—Essays written by him—He is refused the degree of Doctor of Laws—Exiles himself from Saxony. - 26