

A PRIMER OF PSYCHOLOGY

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A Primer of Psychology by Laura Brackenbury

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LAURA BRACKENBURY

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PSYCHOLOGY**

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BY

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PREFATORY NOTE

To my teachers at Cambridge, Professor Ward, Dr. Stout, and Mr. W. E. Johnson, I express my grateful acknowledgments. The extent of my indebtedness to Professor Ward will be immediately apparent to those who have shared the privilege of being taught by him, and I have been under continued obligation to the published works of Dr. Stout for stimulus and suggestion. To Mr. W. E. Johnson, Sidgwick University Lecturer in Moral Science and Lecturer in the Theory of Education in this College, I owe a special debt of gratitude for help and advice in the preparation of this book. I am under a deep obligation to him for his permission to make use of his suggestive method of treatment of the Analysis of Mind, and, throughout the work, but more particularly in the chapters on Cognition, I have freely availed myself of his generous help.

References are given at the end of each chapter to the works of these writers as well as to those of Professor James, to whom I am also much indebted.

L. BRACKENBURY.

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INTRODUCTION

SUGGESTIONS TO THE STUDENT

THE subject of Psychology will most probably appear, at first, difficult and unattractive, possibly even repellent. Not that the subject itself presents any extraordinary difficulties—like all other sciences it demands only relevant and adequate conceptions, precision in the use of terms, accurate observation, and cautious generalization—but, as the reader will discover, the psychologist is required to take up a new standpoint from which to view that which is already exceedingly familiar to him from other standpoints, and it is not easy to get this new point of view. After some months of study of the subject, an intelligent student, grappling with the problem of how we come to perceive a world of external objects, was discovered in the attempt to get a chair inside his head, and, naturally, he found the operation both difficult and painful. The first thing that the student must do is to get rid of—to dissolve—both chair and head; that is to say, he must learn to look at material objects from a new point of view. He must have regard to what is in his mind, not to what is outside, though he may go on believing, if he will, that there *are* things outside his mind. He need not abandon the commonsense, “dualistic” theory that the universe is made up of mind and matter; but, as psychologist, he must remember that he is not dealing with matter as matter, but only with the effect of matter on mind, and that this is mental, not material.

As the student endeavours to resolve material objects into mental facts, he will do well to try to forget that he has a head. We frequently speak of “getting things into our heads” and of “working with our brains,” and by the use of such phrases the association between

brain and mind has grown so strong that it has become difficult to us to avoid using the terms interchangeably. There is, of course, a reason for these common forms of speech, yet it is true to say that when we set ourselves to think of our mind, we get as much help from thinking of our foot, or of our lungs, as from thinking of our head; that is to say, no help at all, but only hindrance. If the student will not take the trouble to dissolve or resolve his brain, as well as the rest of his body and all other material things, into mental effects, he can make no progress in the science of Psychology. Students have been known not infrequently to cling to their brains when they have consented to the dissolution of everything else, and obviously, as long as a student does this, he has not attained the psychological point of view.

It is hardly possible by one effort to put oneself into this new attitude to the universe. Familiar associations cannot be broken by mere force of will. The student is advised, therefore, to take to himself the thought that he has to reach a new outlook, and then gradually to feel his way thither. His chief difficulty will lie in grasping the mental processes that the psychologist deals with under the name of Perception, and, unfortunately, these must be considered early in any systematic, logical treatment of the subject. We all of us probably have noticed the working of our mind as far as our emotions, our resolves and purposes, are concerned; in these matters, therefore, the beginner has something to go upon. The student, consequently, will find the chapters on the Emotions and the Will easier to read than the chapters on, say, Perception and Ideation. Nevertheless, he must have some knowledge of perceptual and ideational processes if he is to grasp the more complex processes we call emotional and volitional. It may, therefore, be advisable for him, if he finds much difficulty in getting the psychological point of view, to read through the earlier chapters of the book; to read, more thoroughly, the last two chapters; and then, with increasing thoroughness, to work his way backwards through the book; and, finally, to re-read the chapters in the order in which they stand. The "General Questions" at the end of the book will be of service in testing this final revision. If the student works in this way, he will

probably find that his hazy notions gradually acquire clearness and definiteness, and that he has attained the psychological outlook.

Another reason for the initial difficulty of the subject, besides that of the new mental attitude required, is the necessity of taking a number of partial views of mind before we can apprehend mind as a whole. This seems to divorce psychological investigations from our actual experiences, and to give the whole subject an air of unreality. It is nevertheless inevitable. All sciences deal with abstractions, and if we ever gain a view of the whole concrete world of things, it will be by the combination of our abstractions. This statement applies not only to the universe, but to each of the realms of matter and of mind. Mind is found to be no simple thing; our first task, then, is to discover its various aspects, to consider them one by one, and then to deal with their relation to one another, whereby the whole is one. This means that we have first to consider abstractions—we call them Cognition, Feeling, and Activity—before we can trace the sequence of actual mental events. When we have grasped our abstractions, it is comparatively easy to detect their presence and to trace their relations in actual mental experiences. The difficulty of working with abstract conceptions can only be overcome by persistent intellectual effort.

Some may find another difficulty in the unfamiliarity of the terms that psychologists use, and perhaps even more in their use of familiar terms with specialized meanings. The psychologist, more than most scientific workers, has contented himself with terms in common use; but no progress can be made in any branch of science without careful definition and precise use of terms. In fact, psychological analysis has been aided by the continued attempt to formulate distinctions between mental occurrences to which the plain man has given different names; only rarely has the psychologist coined words for his own purposes. A glossary of the more important technical terms will be found at the end of the book, and continual reference to it may help the student who tends to be misled by familiar associations or baffled by strange words.

There are, no doubt, people able to overcome all these difficulties who yet find the subject distasteful. This is