

**ON PROTOPLASM, BEING AN  
EXAMINATION OF JAMES  
HUTCHISON STIRLING'S  
CRITICISM OF PROFESSOR  
HUXLEY'S VIEWS**

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# ON PROTOPLASM:

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AN EXAMINATION OF  
DR. JAMES HUTCHINSON STIRLING'S CRITICISM  
OF PROFESSOR HUXLEY'S VIEWS.

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# ON PROTOPLASM

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## CHAPTER I.

### DR. STIRLING'S DEFENCE OF THE LOGICAL CATEGORY OF DIFFERENCE.

THE first week of November of 1868 is a memorable one in the annals of philosophy in the city of Edinburgh. In that week the Archbishop of York delivered the introductory address of the winter session to the members of the Philosophical Institution. In this address his Grace attacked, as from his standpoint he might have been expected to do, the modern experimental school of philosophy, and traced its origin to Comte. It was not to be expected that the champions of what the Archbishop styled the "New Philosophy" would long remain silent. Professor Huxley had previously promised to deliver an evening address on the following Sunday in Edinburgh upon some non-theological subject; and his studies led him, as a matter of course, to choose some biological topic. But, as all inquiries into the nature of life unavoidably bring us face to face with the most perplexing philosophical problems, it was not strange that Professor Huxley took this opportunity to vindicate the

"New Philosophy" from the Archbishop's strictures. The title of this lecture, "Protoplasm, or the Physical Basis of Life," was in itself sufficiently suggestive; and after giving a plain statement of the interesting scientific questions involved in his subject, he proceeded to give his own solution of the philosophical problems which underlie all our knowledge; such as, the nature of matter, mind, causality, force, necessity, and law. He also took exception to the historical truth of the Archbishop in tracing the origin of the "New Philosophy" to Comte, and showed that its fundamental conceptions could be proved to have originated with Hume. So far we are dealing with historical facts, and have no wish to arbitrate between these two champions of rival schools of philosophical thought.

But soon after another opponent of the "New Philosophy" appeared on the scene. At a *conversazione* of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh on the evening of the 30th April, 1869, Dr. James Hutchinson Stirling read a paper entitled "As Regards Protoplasm," in which he commented in very severe terms upon Professor Huxley's lecture.

This paper was published about six months afterwards as a pamphlet. Interested as we were in the subject, we soon obtained this pamphlet, expecting to find the battle of the philosophies continued; but to our disappointment, instead of finding a truly *philosophical* discussion, we either detected, or we supposed we detected, fundamental misconceptions and misrepresentations of Professor

Huxley's *scientific* opinions. Professor Huxley did not make a direct reply to this attack, but in an essay "On Yeast," which appeared in the December number of the *Contemporary Review* for 1871, he strengthened his former position by a short historical résumé of the development of our ideas regarding protoplasm; and in a few words at the close he charged Dr. Stirling with misrepresenting his views. We quote this passage at length, because it gives us a bird's-eye view of the whole controversy; and because it was this passage which occasioned the issue of a second edition of Dr. Stirling's pamphlet. It therefore forms a fitting introduction to its examination.

"Dr. Stirling," says Professor Huxley, "winds up his paper with the following paragraph:—'In short, the whole position of Mr. Huxley, (1) that all organisms consist alike of the same life-matter, (2) which life-matter is, for its part, due only to chemistry, must be pronounced untenable,—nor less untenable (3) the materialism he would found on it.'

"The paragraph contains three distinct assertions concerning my views, and just the same number of utter misrepresentations of them. That which I have numbered (1) turns on the ambiguity of the word 'same,' for a discussion of which I would refer Dr. Stirling to a great hero of 'Aufklärung,' Archbishop Whately. Statement (2) is, in my judgment absurd; and certainly I have never said anything resembling it; while as to number (3), one great object of my essay was to show that what is