

**ESSAYS ON THE FORMATION  
AND  
PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS:  
AND ON OTHER SUBJECTS**

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Essays on the formation and publication of opinions: and on other subjects by Samuel Bailey

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**SAMUEL BAILEY**

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“If a man could be offered the paternity of any comparatively modern book that he chose, he would not hazard much by deciding, that next after the ‘Wealth of Nations,’ he would request to be honoured with a relationship to the ‘Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions.’ It would have been a glorious thing to have been the father of the mathematics of grown gentlemen—to have saved nations from fraud, by inventing the science of detecting the pillage of the few upon the many \* \* \* \* but next to this, it would have been a pleasant and honourable memory, to have written a book so *totus teres atque rotundus*, so finished in its parts, and so perfect in their union, as ‘Essays on the Formation of Opinions.’ Like one of the great statues of antiquity, it might have been broken into fragments, and each separated limb would have pointed to the existence of some interesting whole, of which the value might be surmised from the beauty of the specimen.” *Westminster Review.*

Speaking of the Essays on the Pursuit of Truth, the same Review says,

“Another book from the same author must have a powerful claim to the attention of those who have been delighted with the first. It is in fact but a prolongation of the other; or relates to subjects so closely joined, that it may be a question whether the two make two existences, or one.”

**ESSAYS**

ON THE

*F. Lieber*

FORMATION AND PUBLICATION

OF

**OPINIONS,**

AND

ON OTHER SUBJECTS.

*[Samuel Bailey]*

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From the last London Edition.

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PHILADELPHIA—R. W. POMEROY.

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1831.

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

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IT has been frequently objected to metaphysical speculations, that they subserve no useful purpose ; and it must be allowed, that there are many inquiries in this department of intellectual exertion, which lead, in appearance, and even in reality, to no practical result. This is however a defect inherent in every pursuit, and can be brought as no specific objection against the philosophy of mind. How many substances are analysed by the chemist, which can never be rendered useful ; how many plants are minutely described by the naturalist, which might have remained in obscurity without the least possible detriment to the world ; and how many events are narrated by the historian, from which no beneficial inference can be drawn ! It seems to be a necessary condition of human science, that we should learn many useless things, in order

to become acquainted with those which are of service; and as it is impossible, antecedently to experience, to know the value of our acquisitions, the only way in which mankind can secure all the advantages of knowledge is to prosecute their inquiries in every possible direction. There can be no greater impediment to the progress of science than a perpetual and anxious reference at every step to palpable utility. Assured that the general result will be beneficial, it is not wise to be too solicitous as to the immediate value of every individual effort. Besides, there is a certain completeness to be attained in every science, for which we are obliged to acquire many particulars not otherwise of any worth. Nor is it to be forgotten, that trivial and apparently useless acquisitions are often the necessary preparatives to important discoveries. The labours of the antiquary, the verbal critic, the collater of mouldering manuscripts, the describer of microscopic objects, (labours which may appear to many out of all proportion to the value of the result,) may be preparing the way for the achievements of some splendid genius, who may combine their minute details into a magnificent system, or evolve



from a multitude of particulars, collected with painful toil, some general principle destined to illuminate the career of future ages. To no one perhaps are the labours of his predecessors, even when they are apparently trifling or unsuccessful, of more service than to the metaphysician: and he who is well acquainted with the science can scarcely fail to perceive, that many of its inquiries are gradually converging to important results. Unallied as they may appear to present utility, it is not hazarding much to assert, that the world must hereafter be indebted to them for the extirpation of many mischievous errors, and the correction of a great part of those loose and illogical opinions by which society is now pervaded.

The principal Essays in the following work are attempts to throw the light of metaphysical investigation on subjects intimately connected with the affairs and the happiness of mankind. The importance of the topics discussed in the two Essays to which the volume owes its title will be acknowledged by all, and will be perceived by the attentive inquirer, that the principles which the author has there attempted to establish, lead to the most mo-

mentous conclusions, many of which he has contented himself with leaving to the sagacity of his readers. If any one will take the trouble of rigidly pursuing the main principle of the first Essay to all its consequences, he will find them of a magnitude and importance of which he was originally perhaps little aware.

In venturing upon these remarks, the author would not be conceived as making any undue claims to originality. Most of the principles, which he has advanced, have been repeatedly asserted, and have had an influence on mankind of which they themselves were probably unconscious. It often happens, that an important principle is vaguely apprehended, and incidentally expressed, long before it is reduced to a definite form, or fixed by regular proof: but while it floats in this state on the surface of men's understandings, it is only of casual and limited utility; it is sometimes forgotten and sometimes abandoned, seldom pursued to its consequences, and frequently denied in its modifications. It is only after it has been clearly established by an indisputable process of reasoning, explored in its bearings, and exhibited in all its force, that it be-

comes of uniform and essential service; it is only then that it can be decisively appealed to both in controversy and in practice, and that it exerts the whole extent of its influence on private manners and public institutions.

February, 1821.