

**THE LAWS OF
THOUGHT, OBJECTIVE
AND SUBJECTIVE**

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The Laws of Thought, Objective and Subjective by Alexander Robertson

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BY
ALEXANDER ROBERTSON.

"Thy Law is the Truth."—PSALM 119.

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T H E
L A W S O F T H O U G H T.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

I. Although there was probably no period in the world's history when at least some attention was not paid to the truths of Philosophy, yet it was only about two thousand five hundred years ago that the Science of Mind began to be cultivated as a separate branch of human knowledge. Since that time, however, it has received more or less attention in every country, and among every people claiming even a moderate degree of civilisation. Still, if there has been a time in the world's life when mental science was neglected, there is certainly no reason for apprehending that such ignorance will again darken the human mind; because, if Philosophy do not lead and guide mankind in their onward and upward progress, it will at least keep pace with their advances, however rapidly they may be made. One may well think

it absolutely impossible to conceive of a period when mankind will be so elevated and purified that the study of philosophy can be laid aside as unnecessary. On the contrary, the probabilities are, that as humanity progresses in true civilisation; so will philosophy be held in greater estimation, and also that many of the pursuits and gratifications which are now so eagerly followed, and absorb so much attention, will assume their true colours, and, in comparison with its lofty and pure enjoyments, appear evanescent and worthless.

II. It is not difficult to account for the disregard which has been paid to Mental Philosophy for a considerable time. The Inductive method of BACON, which applied to physics, has wrought such wonders, that the more valuable portion has been comparatively thrown into the shade.

In ancient times, every crude notion that entered the brain of a poet, recluse, or statesman, was dignified with the name of Philosophy, and the Deductive method, as applied to physics, did so little for the advancement of knowledge, that it came to be cast aside as comparatively useless. It may, however, be doubted whether Induction, so useful in discovering the materialistic laws of nature, is equally serviceable

in developing or applying the laws by which *moral* truth is regulated. Admitting all that can be claimed on behalf of Induction for advancing one branch of science, it may be possible that, in regard to the higher branch, viz., that which concerns man's moral existence, it may have had a bad effect in superseding the other method of enquiry—the Deductive.

III. Philosophy, which literally means the love of wisdom, has been held to include, among other subjects of investigation, the science or method by which man can ascertain the first principles of moral truth. A treatise on the whole subject would necessarily be very comprehensive; but the present essay will be devoted to a particular section, or department of enquiry, rather than to a discussion of the whole science. That there is in the minds of all men a notion or conception of some difference between right and wrong, will scarcely be controverted, although many affirm that such difference can only be found in the *á posteriori*, or the *results* of certain actions, rather than in the thing itself. There is, therefore, *some truth* to be found in the breast of man, either to a greater or less extent; and it is to ascertain in what this difference between right and wrong consists,—whether in the thing itself, *á priori*, or whether in the con-

ceptions of it, or both put together, that the following pages will be devoted. If it be admitted that there is an inherent, eternal, and immutable difference in nature between virtue and vice, then the question immediately suggests itself, What makes right to be right, and wrong to be wrong? Further, admitting that men have certain conceptions or ideas regarding these two terms, where is the *standard* by which they fall to be tested, and their accuracy ascertained? In other words, is it possible to narrow the enquiry into a few primary and essential truths, or axioms, which will guide the mind aright in its search after knowledge, and form a touchstone by which all subsidiary notions may be corrected; or, to supply a few guiding points by which the helmsman can safely steer in his path through the ocean of life?

IV. The distinct object to be here kept in view is practically the answering of these questions,—to show, if possible, wherein man's chief good is to be found,—to unfold those conditions which are indispensable to a successful life; or rather the duty required of man in order to secure the highest, and indeed only real ends of his existence. It may be that, circumstanced as man is at present, he cannot yield perfect obedience to the

laws by which he is governed ; but, admitting all this, it does not follow therefrom that he is removed from the sphere of their operation, or that he is at liberty to cast them aside altogether. Although man may not now be able to enjoy a state of pure happiness, that can form no sufficient reason why he should deviate further from the right way, and thus render himself more and more miserable.

V. That there is some rule for human guidance, or, in other words, some law or laws in existence by which man is governed, is in the highest degree likely, judging from the analogy afforded by external nature. We see that the heavenly bodies are kept revolving in their several spheres by a fixed law. We find the same law operating in the suspension of a drop of dew on a summer evening. Even a flake of snow is not formed without the operation of its laws. So, then, it is reasonable to conclude that the most noble and the most valuable production to be found in this world—the human soul itself—is not left to chance, nor cast adrift on the wide ocean, like a derelict ship. There is thus a strong *prima faciæ* case made out for an investigation into the law or laws of intellect, though whether we can discover them rightly is another question.