

**THE INTERNATIONAL
SCIENTIFIC SERIES. MIND
AND BODY. THE THEORIES
OF THEIR RELATION**

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The International Scientific Series. Mind and Body. The Theories of Their Relation by
Alexandre Bain

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ALEXANDRE BAIN

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MIND AND BODY.

THE THEORIES

OF THEIR

RELATION.

BY

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MIND AND BODY.

CHAPTER I.

QUESTION STATED.

MANY persons, mocking, ask—What has Mind to do with brain substance, white and grey? Can any facts or laws regarding the spirit of man be gained through a scrutiny of nerve fibres and nerve cells?

The question, whatever may be insinuated in putting it, is highly relevant, and raises great issues.

The conceivable answers are various:—

First. Granting mind and body to be in our present life inseparable, yet the two might be supposed to have their modes of existence altogether distinct, the one being wholly unaffected by the other. Consequently, each would have to be studied in its own way, and for its own sake alone. On this supposition, the study of brain matter might be interesting as Physiology and for applications

to Medicine and Surgery, but would be quite beyond the province of the mental philosopher.

Although no intrinsic improbability attaches to this supposition, it is scarcely in accordance with what we find in the usual course of things. There is no example of two agents so closely united as mind and body, without some mutual interference or adaptation. Still, the union of our incorporeal and corporeal parts is a case quite peculiar, not to say unique; and we are not entitled to pronounce beforehand as to the behaviour of two such agents in respect of each other.

Secondly. There might be certain mental functions of a *lower* kind, partially dependent upon the material organization, while the highest functions might be of a purely spiritual nature, in no way governed by physical conditions. For receiving impressions, in the first instance, we need the External Senses; we are dependent on the constitution and working of the Eye, the Ear, the organ of Touch, and so on; yet the deeper processes named Memory, Reason, Imagination—may be pure spirit, beyond and apart from all material processes. In such a case, the enquirer into mind would do well to study the mechanism of the Senses; but, for the purpose he has in view, it would be needless to go farther.

Thirdly. There may be an intimate relation and dependence of mind and body all through, every mental act having a concurrent bodily change; yet the two

modes of operation may be so different as to throw no light on each other. No great laws may be traceable on either side, or the laws may be couched in such heterogeneous terms that we can make no comparison of the two. A pleasure and a nervous current are found to arise simultaneously; but the concurrence (we may suppose) signifies nothing, suggests nothing. There is something to be gained by connecting pleasure with a repast, a concert, or a holiday; but the mention of nerve currents gives no information of a practical kind, and does not add to our knowledge of the laws of pleasure.

Fourthly. While allowing it to be possible that a thorough understanding of the brain would contribute to a knowledge of the mind, one might deny that anything yet known, or in immediate prospect of being known, is of value in that way. Thus the obtrusion of physiology at the present stage would be superfluous and impotent.

Fifthly. The position may be taken that a knowledge of the bodily workings has already improved our knowledge of the mental workings, and, as we continue our researches, will do so more and more.

Which of these suppositions is the truth could be seen only after examining the actual state of the case. On a theme so peculiar and so difficult, the only surmise admissible beforehand would be, that the two distinct natures could not subsist in their present intimate alliance, and yet be wholly indifferent to one another;