THE EDINBURGH LECTURES ON MENTAL SCIENCE

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BY
THOMAS TROWARD

1909

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Published by **Beyond Books Hub**
www.beyondbookshub.com

Title: **The Edinburgh Lectures on Mental Science**
Author: **Thomas Troward**

Price: `250/- (Two Hundred Fifty Only)
Edition: 2021 (First)

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Typesetting: **Beyond Books Hub**

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FOREWORD

This book contains the substance of a course of lectures recently given by the writer in the Queen Street Hall, Edinburgh. Its purpose is to indicate the Natural Principles governing the relation between Mental Action and Material Conditions, and thus to afford the student an intelligible starting-point for the practical study of the subject.

T.T.

March, 1904

SPIRIT AND MATTER

In commencing a course of lectures on Mental Science, it is somewhat difficult for the lecturer to fix upon the best method of opening the subject. It can be approached from many sides, each with some peculiar advantage of its own; but, after careful deliberation, it appears to me that, for the purpose of the present course, no better starting-point could be selected than the relation between Spirit and Matter. I select this starting-point because the distinction--or what we believe to be such--between them is one with which we are so familiar that I can safely assume its recognition by everybody; and

I may, therefore, at once state this distinction by using the adjectives which we habitually apply as expressing the natural opposition between the two--*living* spirit and *dead* matter. These terms express our current impression of the opposition between spirit and matter with sufficient accuracy, and considered only from the point of view of outward appearances this impression is no doubt correct. The general consensus of mankind is right in trusting the evidence of our senses, and any system which tells us that we are to do so will never obtain a permanent footing in a sane and healthy community. There is nothing wrong in the evidence conveyed to a healthy mind by the senses of a healthy body, but the point where error creeps in is when we come to judge of the meaning of this testimony. We are accustomed to judge only by external appearances and by certain limited significances which we attach to words; but when we begin to enquire into the real meaning of our words and to analyse the causes which give rise to the appearances, we find our old notions gradually falling off from us, until at last we wake up to

the fact that we are living in an entirely different world to that we formerly recognized. The old limited mode of thought has imperceptibly slipped away, and we discover that we have stepped out into a new order of things where all is liberty and life. This is the work of an enlightened intelligence resulting from persistent determination to discover what truth really is irrespective of any preconceived notions from whatever source derived the determination to think honestly for ourselves instead of endeavouring to get our thinking done for us. Let us then commence by enquiring what we really mean by the livingness which we attribute to spirit and the deadness which we attribute to matter.

At first we may be disposed to say that livingness consists in the power of motion and deadness in its absence; but a little enquiry into the most recent researches of science will soon show us that this distinction does not go deep enough. It is now one of the fully-established facts of physical science that no atom of what we call “dead matter” is without motion. On the

table before me lies a solid lump of steel, but in the light of up-to-date science I know that the atoms of that seemingly inert mass are vibrating with the most intense energy, continually dashing hither and thither, impinging upon and rebounding from one another, or circling round like miniature solar systems, with a ceaseless rapidity whose complex activity is enough to bewilder the imagination. The mass, as a mass, may lie inert upon the table; but so far from being destitute of the element of motion it is the abode of the never-tiring energy moving the particles with a swiftness to which the speed of an express train is as nothing. It is, therefore, not the mere fact of motion that is at the root of the distinction which we draw instinctively between spirit and matter; we must go deeper than that. The solution of the problem will never be found by comparing Life with what we call deadness, and the reason for this will become apparent later on; but the true key is to be found by comparing one degree of livingness with another. There is, of course, one sense in which the quality of livingness does not admit

of degrees; but there is another sense in which it is entirely a question of degree. We have no doubt as to the livingness of a plant, but we realize that it is something very different from the livingness of an animal. Again, what average boy would not prefer a fox-terrier to a goldfish for a pet? Or, again, why is it that the boy himself is an advance upon the dog? The plant, the fish, the dog, and the boy are all equally *alive*; but there is a difference in the quality of their livingness about which no one can have any doubt, and no one would hesitate to say that this difference is in the degree of intelligence. In whatever way we turn the subject we shall always find that what we call the "livingness" of any individual life is ultimately measured by its intelligence. It is the possession of greater intelligence that places the animal higher in the scale of being than the plant, the man higher than the animal, the intellectual man higher than the savage. The increased intelligence calls into activity modes of motion of a higher order corresponding to itself. The higher the intelligence, the more

completely the mode of motion is under its control: and as we descend in the scale of intelligence, the descent is marked by a corresponding increase in *automatic* motion not subject to the control of a self-conscious intelligence. This descent is gradual from the expanded self-recognition of the highest human personality to that lowest order of visible forms which we speak of as “things,” and from which self-recognition is entirely absent.

We see, then, that the livingness of Life consists in intelligence--in other words, in the power of Thought; and we may therefore say that the distinctive quality of spirit is Thought, and, as the opposite to this, we may say that the distinctive quality of matter is Form. We cannot conceive of matter without form. Some form there must be, even though invisible to the physical eye; for matter, to be matter at all, must occupy space, and to occupy any particular space necessarily implies a corresponding form. For these reasons we may lay it down as a fundamental proposition that the distinctive quality of spirit is Thought and

the distinctive quality of matter is Form. This is a radical distinction from which important consequences follow, and should, therefore, be carefully noted by the student.

Form implies extension in space and also limitation within certain boundaries. Thought implies neither. When, therefore, we think of Life as existing in any particular *form* we associate it with the idea of extension in space, so that an elephant may be said to consist of a vastly larger amount of living substance than a mouse. But if we think of Life as the fact of livingness we do not associate it with any idea of extension, and we at once realize that the mouse is quite as much alive as the elephant, notwithstanding the difference in size. The important point of this distinction is that if we can conceive of anything as entirely devoid of the element of extension in space, it must be present in its entire totality anywhere and everywhere--that is to say, at every point of space simultaneously. The scientific definition of time is that it is the period occupied by a body in passing from one given point in space

to another, and, therefore, according to this definition, when there is no space there can be no time; and hence that conception of spirit which realizes it as devoid of the element of space must realize it as being devoid of the element of time also; and we therefore find that the conception of spirit as pure Thought, and not as concrete Form, is the conception of it as subsisting perfectly independently of the elements of time and space. From this it follows that if the idea of anything is conceived as existing on this level it can only represent that thing as being actually present here and now. In this view of things nothing can be remote from us either in time or space: either the idea is entirely dissipated or it exists as an actual present entity, and not as something that *shall* be in the future, for where there is no sequence in time there can be no future. Similarly where there is no space there can be no conception of anything as being at a distance from us. When the elements of time and space are eliminated all our ideas of things must necessarily be as subsisting in a universal here

and an everlasting now. This is, no doubt, a highly abstract conception, but I would ask the student to endeavour to grasp it thoroughly, since it is of vital importance in the practical application of Mental Science, as will appear further on.

The opposite conception is that of things expressing themselves through conditions of time and space and thus establishing a variety of *relations* to other things, as of bulk, distance, and direction, or of sequence in time. These two conceptions are respectively the conception of the abstract and the concrete, of the unconditioned and the conditioned, of the absolute and the relative. They are not opposed to each other in the sense of incompatibility, but are each the complement of the other, and the only reality is in the combination of the two. The error of the extreme idealist is in endeavouring to realize the absolute without the relative, and the error of the extreme materialist is in endeavouring to realize the relative without the absolute. On the one side the mistake is in trying to realize an inside without an outside,

and on the other in trying to realize an outside without an inside; both are necessary to the formation of a substantial entity.

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