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## THE METHOD OF INSTRUCTION IN METAPHYSICS IN HAMILTON COLLEGE.

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The instructor in intellectual philosophy who accepts Sir William Hamilton's dictum that philosophy is "the best gymnastic of the mind—a mean principally and almost exclusively conducive to the highest education of our noblest powers," assumes the very grave responsibility of verifying the dictum in his own sphere of labor. He will necessarily renounce his belief in the saying, or he will look for signs of the stimulating, broadening, elevating, enkindling tendencies of the study upon the minds of his own pupils. He will never be content with a dull and dry round of questions and answers in the class room. He will not make his chair a cold and inaccessible summit, wrapped in the fogs of speculation, with no tie of sympathy and with no possibility of action and reaction between the students' minds and his own. This, indeed, is not allowable in teaching in any department. The common duty of all academical instructors is the cultivation of the student through the awakened exercise of his faculties. But this obligation, says Sir William, "is specially imposed upon a Professor of Intellectual Philosophy by the peculiar nature of his subject and the conditions under which alone it can be taught. In the science of mind we can neither understand nor be convinced of any thing at second hand. \* \* \* Here testimony can impose no belief; and instruction is only instruction, as it enables us to teach ourselves. \* \* \* A fact of consciousness, however accurately observed, however clearly described, and however great may be our confidence in the observer, is for us as zero, until we have observed and recognized it ourselves; instruction can do little more than point out the position in which the pupil ought to place himself, in order to verify, by his own experience, the facts which his instructor proposes to him as true. The instructor therefore proclaims *ου φιλοσοφία ἀλλά φιλοσοφεῖν*; he does not profess to teach philosophy but to philosophize. It is this condition imposed upon the student of doing every thing himself that renders the study of the mental sciences the most improving exercise of intellect."

The means and methods of instruction in Hamilton College are

various, comprising text-books, lectures, essays, conversations and debates. Of these, the text-book is chief and the others subsidiary. The text-book is our chief reliance for the regular drill of the class room. It gives a specific direction to the students' thoughts, prevents vague and desultory efforts, and saves time which, if lectures were substituted, would be needlessly expended in the lecture room. It puts in the hands of the student the sifted and tested conclusions of the wisest of mankind, and brings him into intimate communion with "the great of old, the dead but sceptred sovrens that still rule our spirits from their urns;" it exercises their memories in a way which lectures cannot do.

Dr. Chalmers, as Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburg, gained an extraordinary reputation as a lecturer on that theme. His hall was crowded with outside hearers as well as with students. At the same time he was teaching Political Economy from a text-book. Enjoying this double experience, he writes: "I find that coming to close quarters with the juvenile mind, upon subjects which they have previously read upon, is a very effective method of teaching them, insomuch that were I furnished with an unexceptionable set of text-books on Moral Philosophy, I should feel strongly tempted to observe the same method, [*i. e.*, as in political economy] in that class too."

In Boswell's Johnson there is a talk about Education. "People have now-a-days," said Dr. Johnson, "got a strange opinion that every thing should be taught by lectures. Now I cannot see that lectures can do so much good as reading the books from which the lectures are taken. I know nothing that can be best taught by lectures, except where experiments are to be shown."

We hold by Sir William Hamilton, as furnishing the best material extant for a text-book. His bold, vigorous style, the life and vivacity of his controversies, the noble personality, the genuine manhood which appears everywhere in his treatment of the subject, the lofty estimate which he puts upon his science, his appeals to consciousness; his direct and luminous statements and happy antitheses, furnish an exhilarating atmosphere in which the student unawares imbibes the philosophic temper. He philosophizes because he must; he philosophizes as he lives. He may philosophize well or ill, but he will philosophize.

Hamilton is far from faultless, far from systematic; far, too, perhaps, we ought to say, from ranking with the greatest of thinkers. He is far from right in his dangerous doctrine of relativity; far from consistent in combining natural realism with this doctrine of relativity; far from consistent with himself in all the stages of his thinking. Professor Bowen, in his edition of Sir William Hamilton's metaphysics, inserts extracts from the later works of Sir William; these

are with difficulty recognized as belonging to the same author as that of the body of the work. Nevertheless, the tone which animates the whole is eminently stirring and healthful; and the false and evil is so readily distinguished from the good, that we cannot give up Sir William. He is the best instructor, for the student of average age, in metaphysics. His own mode of teaching, as narrated in his life by Veitch and as exemplified in his lectures, illustrates so well what the students' work ought to be that he is *normal*, if I may so speak, not only in the department of intellectual philosophy, but in every branch of the teacher's work.

Admitting the defects of Hamilton to be too serious to be remedied altogether by class-room comments, we use in part President Porter's elements, as a completing and counterbalancing force. In the doctrine of Perception, our American author has carried the analysis still farther than Hamilton. His treatment of the acquired perceptions supplies a great want in the former author. His statement of the theory of Organic Perception, whether accepted as true or not, lays open to the student the approaches to those modern views which bear the doubtful title of Physiological Psychology, and enables the instructor to explain the attempts at harmonizing the two spheres of thought indicated by the phrase. His treatment of the Imagination is far more satisfactory than that of the Scotch philosopher. But above all, the historical summaries in Porter open before the student, in brief, the whole course of human speculation, and might almost be held worthy of Marlowe's mighty line :

Infinite riches in a little room.

These two authors occupy the greater part of our time during the 26 weeks or the 116 recitation hours of the fall and winter terms. As the time wears on, lectures are introduced and subjects for voluntary essays given out. But from the beginning of the course, the student is directed to the sphere of his own experience, and is encouraged to compare with that, the positions taken by his author on the facts of psychology. The questions in the class-room, never absolutely restricted to the text-book, take, therefore, a constantly widening range; comments, criticisms, fresh illustrations, are both added by the instructor and encouraged on the part of the students; the lesson of to-morrow, especially if presenting peculiar difficulties, is elucidated and important passages pointed out; until toward the last, on at least two or three occasions, the exercise becomes almost a conversation, in which any one in the class may offer questions, or be called upon to help solve his classmate's difficulties. Care is taken, however, to prevent the course from degenerating, at any point, from the character of a close and genuine study. The author or text-book is never quite out of sight. The regular drill of the class room is never long suspended.

Where lectures are introduced, notes must be taken and recitations must be made, based upon an analysis prepared and furnished to the student in advance.

The regular course of lectures, twelve in number, comes in the second term. They are designed to familiarize the student with the most recent phases of speculation. The first is devoted to the development of Hamilton's own views, as shown in part by Professor Bowen's extracts from Hamilton's later works, and by direct reference to the Discussions and to the Notes to Reid. The next three are upon Mill and Hamilton; the fifth, sixth and seventh are upon the various phases of materialism and semi-materialism, ranging from Büchner to Professor Bain; the eighth and ninth on Comte; the tenth, eleventh and twelfth attempt to systematize the movement of thought from the middle of the century to the present time, commencing with Joule's law and Humboldt's Cosmos, and closing with Herbert Spencer.

But the feature which, perhaps, excites the greatest interest in the class room is the debates on metaphysical topics. In these, the usual rules for debates in the rhetorical department are followed, with the exception that subjects are assigned by the professor, instead of being left to the choice of the student. All the members of the class are expected to participate in them. The debaters are chosen in alphabetical order in divisions of six. The sides are determined by lot. The debates are *ex tempore*; seven to eight minutes are allowed to each debater, and remarks and criticisms are made at the close by the professor. A comparatively general topic is assigned for the first debate; for example: Is philosophy the most useful of studies? References to works in the library are given in connection with each subject — Morell's History of Speculative Philosophy, Butler's Lectures on Ancient Philosophy, Porter's Human Intellect, the Journal of Speculative Philosophy, Lewes' History of Philosophy — are some of the works to which the debaters are referred on this topic.

Other questions are such as the following:

Is all human knowledge relative?

Have we an immediate knowledge of the external world?

Is sight or touch the more important in gaining a knowledge of the external world?

Is all human knowledge derived from experience?

Is the infinite an object of knowledge?

Does Hamilton's argument conclusively establish the being of a God?

These and similar questions arouse a lively interest, and the debates are well sustained, and bring out a versatility of talent and a vigor and readiness of thought, and show the results of a degree of research, which render them a healthful and profitable exercise. Each student

participates in two such debates during the two terms devoted to this study. We need scarcely offer a defense of this part of our method. Says Sir William Hamilton, in his invaluable discussions on Educational subjects: "Disputation is in a certain sort the condition of all improvement.

"In the mental, as in the material world, action and reaction are ever in proportion. And, as Plutarch well observes, that as motion would cease, were contention taken out of the physical universe, so all human progress would cease, were contention taken out of the moral. Academical disputation calls out the most important intellectual virtues—presence of mind, dominion over our faculties, promptitude of recollection and of thought, and withal, though animating emulation, a perfect command of temper. It stimulates also to a more attentive and profounder study of the matter to be thus discussed; it more deeply impresses the facts and doctrines taught upon the mind; and finally, what is of peculiar importance \* \* \* it checks all tendency toward irrelevancy and disorder in statement, by restricting the disputants to a pertinent, and precise, and logically predetermined order in the evolution of their reasonings. Accordingly, in the best of the older universities, nothing was taught by prelection in the fundamental faculty, which was not also gone over in the exercises of disputation and examination. Lord Bacon, in fact, was so deeply persuaded of the value of the practice of disputation, that he proposed the establishment of what he called a College of Controversies."

The regular work is concluded by a written prize examination, the funds for which were very recently provided by General S. D. Hungerford, of Adams. The first prize in the first examination was taken by the valedictorian of the class of '79, George F. Crumby, of Newport; the second by Charles D. Hitchcock, of Binghamton.

The regular course being thus ended, in the Third Term, Senior, a class is formed for the study of Plato's Phedo, with the view of leading the student back to the headwaters of the science. That jewel of Greek literature is studied in its own tongue. So high is its dramatic interest, so touching its pathos, so far-reaching are its prophetic intimations, so lofty and yet so near to every thoughtful mind is its blended theme of the nature of true knowledge, and the proof of immortality, that it may well contribute to form the last stage in the college curriculum. The translation presents few difficulties, and the mind is easily directed to the truths and speculations in-woven in the dialogue, as well as to the rhetorical perfection, as I might say, of its structure and development. Here Socrates appears with the halo of a saint and a martyr around his head. Here, in his thirty days' reprieve, enjoyed providentially through the intervention of Apollo, the god of music

and philosophy, he sits as one half transfigured in a kind of intermediate state, betwixt heaven and earth. Here, arguing for immortality by his doctrine of ideas, he also supports his doctrine of ideas by his expectation of immortality, thus exalting the spiritual philosophy into a theory of personal existence after death, and denying the name of philosopher to one who did not aspire to a life with God beyond the grave. At this highest point of speculation, where the finite blends with the infinite, where philosophy becomes a consolation, as well as an illumination, we may say, with Milton, in *Comus* :

How charming is divine philosophy !  
Not harsh or crabbed as dull fools suppose,  
But musical as is Apollo's lute ;  
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,  
Where no crude surfeit reigns.