

VIII.—NOTES.

PROFESSOR BAIN.

BORN in Aberdeen on the 11th June, 1818, Professor Alexander Bain was in the eighty-sixth year of his age when he died, at Ferryhill Lodge, in his native city, on the 18th September, 1903. The length of his life was a marvel to those who knew him in earlier days; for he was then fragile and delicate in health, and few who were acquainted with him when he returned to Aberdeen in 1860 to occupy the Chair of Logic at the University would have predicted for him a life of more than a few years' duration. The secret of it was his indomitable spirit and his deliberate acceptance of a strict regimen, not to be interfered with save for the most cogent reasons and on the rarest occasions. His daily life, at any rate from the beginning of his professorial days, was portioned out in the most methodical manner. There was a time for work and a time for exercise, a time for diet and a time for rest, to which he adhered, not only when he lived at home, but when he travelled abroad and when he visited friends. A pure holiday, in the sense of absolute cessation for the meantime from the usual task, was unknown to him; and the fulness of his life was conditioned by the regularity and simplicity of his habits.

In boyhood he had a hard struggle. His father, who had been a soldier, was a handloom weaver, and the son, when he got beyond the message-boy stage, had to help him in his occupation. This continued even during Bain's student days at the University; and people still living remember the eager intellectual youth, after returning from Marischal College, doffing the red academic gown, throwing it on the loom, and proceeding with the manual duty, albeit having a book open before him. It is the story of genius asserting itself. When attending Gilcomston School as a boy, he attracted the notice of one of the Marischal College professors (Dr. Cruickshank), who was surprised, on examining him, to find the extent and accuracy of his knowledge. The result was that, somewhat later on, he was taken by the hand by Dr. Cruickshank, through whose encouragement and that of several other cultured Aberdonians young Bain was able to enter Marischal College at the age of eighteen, in 1836. Previously to this, however, he had given proof of his mental faculty to a band of aspiring youths with whom he associated, and who all recognised in him a leading spirit. The result was that, when a political dinner was given to James Adam, editor of the *Aberdeen Herald* (the local Liberal paper of the time), young Bain's reputation for able speaking was such that, although he had only just entered his first year at Marischal College (or, in northern academic phraseology, had become a "bajan"), he was selected to return thanks for the toast of "Principal Dewar and Marischal College," and did so in a speech (a

report of which is still extant) that gave no uncertain indication of the psychological and dialectical power that he was yet to display.

His University course was a brilliant one; and he graduated M.A. with highest honours, having carried off, in the previous year, the blue ribbon of the Gray mathematical bursary of £30, tenable for two years. Perhaps, however, the main significance of his student days lay here, that he came under the influence of two very strong men—Dr. Cruickshank, Professor of Mathematics, and Professor Thomas Clark, the Chemist,—to whom he often referred in after-life with much appreciation, and to whom he was not slow to acknowledge his indebtedness; and he derived also a lasting stimulus from Dr. William Knight, Professor of Natural Philosophy, in whose subject he excelled. He was, further, the first man of his time in the class of Moral Philosophy, under Dr. Glennie—for whom he was presently to act as substitute during four years of the Professor's illness. It was this combination of mathematical and scientific knowledge with philosophical acquirements that early laid the foundation of that ready faculty of illustrating logical principles and psychological processes from the departments of science that was to characterise his writings later on.

There is no need for me to pursue the narrative in detail. It was during his University course also that by a criticism of Sir John Herschell he was first brought into contact with J. S. Mill, through John Robertson, a fellow-Aberdonian, then joint-editor of the *London and Westminster Review*; and thus began an acquaintanceship which ripened into a close friendship that ceased only with death.

After various annual summer visits to London, Bain settled there for a time, having received an appointment under the Board of Health, where his chief was his intimate friend, Edwin Chadwick. He soon came into close contact with the leaders of thought, including George Grote and George Henry Lewes. He was now fully on the way to intellectual eminence. His first work—*The Senses and the Intellect*—appeared in 1855, and marked what may almost be designated an epoch in British psychology. Those who know what psychology was before the appearance of this treatise and what it by-and-by became, in great measure through this presentation of a new standpoint and the application of a new method, are aware of the immense debt that psychology owes to Bain. It was not only that he improved the subject—he revolutionised it. And when, four years later, *The Emotions and the Will* appeared, psychological workers in our country felt they had now got a real advance in a department of investigation whose methods had lain under the imputation of being loose and non-scientific. The effect was soon apparent. The principles enunciated were taken up and applied in many directions; and the abiding tribute to the worth of the treatises lies in this, that what is best in them has been assimilated by more recent psychologists, and that, even when the debt is unacknowledged, no psychologist at the present moment can free himself from the influence of them—he works, of necessity, in the atmosphere that they created.

But it is a mistake to suppose that Bain's psychology is confined to his two great psychological treatises. His educational volumes too are permeated by his psychological views. Not a few teachers have complained that his *Education as a Science* is dry and hard to master, and so have set themselves to decry it. They could scarcely have been expected to do otherwise. Only one of two courses was open to them—either to submit themselves to be taught scientifically on psychological lines or else to oppose. But the value of the book is not to be estimated by counting heads. The educational work has yet to be written that sur-

passes it in clear insight into the psychological principles that underlie education and in the masterly application of these principles to the case in hand. In like manner, psychology permeates his *Rhetoric*—more especially in the latest two-volumed edition. The analysis of the intellectual and of the emotional qualities of style is psychological to a degree; the very figures of speech are grouped under the two psychological headings of Similarity and Contiguity; and, if a full and adequate idea is to be obtained of Bain's handling of the Emotions, it is to be got only by adding to the presentation in *The Emotions and the Will* the analysis and treatment in this latest form of the *Rhetoric*.

Nor is Bain's psychology to be estimated solely by the earlier presentation of it. In some of the notices that have appeared since his death, his doctrines have been criticised on the basis of the first or the second edition of his writings; and some have even expressed their surprise that he had so little appreciation of the doctrine of Evolution. The best answer to any such criticism is to refer the critic to the third edition of *The Emotions and the Will*, and to the fourth edition of *The Senses and the Intellect* and the *Dissertations on Leading Philosophical Topics* (mainly reprints from *MIND*). It is there that Bain's fullest and maturest views are to be found; and it is by these that his teaching should be judged.

As a logician, Bain followed J. S. Mill; but not without many emendations, restrictions, and additions. His early intimacy with the writings of Comte led him to place stress on the classification of the sciences; and so he introduced a section in his *Logic* on this very subject. In like manner, his scientific knowledge and his wide scientific interest constrained him to view Causation in the light of the Conservation of Energy, and made possible the detailed handling of the logical aspects of the Sciences that we find in Book V. of the *Logic*. His dissent, on the other hand, from the claim that Mill's theory of reasoning had bridged the chasm between induction and deduction led him to expound his own views of the function and value of the syllogism.

But the logician comes out also in other of his writings than those devoted specially to logic. In particular, it is conspicuous in his treatises on Grammar. Indeed, his *English Grammar* has recently been designated "the only logical grammar in the English language". That certainly is its merit, though it will be regarded as its defect by those who maintain that logic has nothing to do with grammar. Logic has to do with every department of knowledge, according to Bain; and he revelled in the practical applications of logical doctrines. He was a master of method in the best sense of the term—not only preaching the theory but amply exemplifying the practice.

It was thus that he was able to revolutionise the teaching of English in the Northern Counties of Scotland—which he did in the "sixties" partly by his published writings and partly by his prelections in the Chair of Logic (for, in those days, English was taught, in Aberdeen University, by the Professor of Logic). Lennie and the contemporary authorities had to be superseded, and the wooden method of dinning into the pupil a number of rules to be learned by rote without perception of their real meaning, had to be replaced by the method of awakening in the pupil intelligent appreciation of the principles involved and of creating, through practice, a ready and accurate use of them. The plan and the procedure were distinctively logical, and they had their limitations; but testimony to their value is borne by the fact that hundreds of Aberdeen graduates scattered throughout the world, many of them occupying high educational positions, are forward to acknowledge their indebtedness to the English teaching that they received from Dr. Bain in their University days.

As a teacher in the class, Bain occupied a unique position. He was a strict disciplinarian (an inheritance, no doubt, from Professors Cruickshank and Knight); but his own personality commanded respect and obedience. His gestures, as well as his voice, were very significant, and told with effect upon his audience; and, as his expositions were always lucid and methodical and aided by unlimited supply of appropriate illustrations drawn from all the provinces of literature and science, the interest of the student was secured, and his attention easily maintained. Moreover, the impression that he made upon his pupils was that of a master of his subject. He was no mere follower even in his mode of lecturing: everything he did had a touch of individuality, and his examination papers (especially in English) were drawn up in a manner different from that of everybody else.

In University affairs, he was always in the van of reform. He had a keen appreciation of defects, and a definite perception of how they might be remedied. Nor could he rest satisfied till some attempt were made to remedy. Hence, he advocated strenuously in the *Senatus* and in the General Council (and, later, in the University Court), and at first almost alone, the necessity for a Royal Commission, which should legislate for the widening of the curriculum, making provision for certain options, and giving science and modern languages their due place (as against the practical monopoly enjoyed by the classics) in a University education. For years, he was a voice crying in the wilderness; but undaunted he went on, and, when the change actually came in 1890, on the lines that he had advocated, he had the satisfaction of feeling that he had all along been on the side of progress.

But his educational energy was not confined to matters academic. In his early days, when as a lad he was educating himself, he had found immense help in the Mechanics' Institute of Aberdeen, where lectures were given to youths struggling to improve their minds and eager to acquire some knowledge of science and its advance. To this Institution he attached himself and took active and practical interest in its welfare to the very last. Similarly, he was a moving spirit in the matter of Free Public Libraries, and continued a member of Committee of the Aberdeen Public Library from its beginning till advancing years rendered his attendance at evening meetings impossible. So also he was an active member of the first School Board of Aberdeen, on which was laid the task of starting the new system on right lines. The same educational zeal led him, not unfrequently, to deliver lectures to scholastic bodies—sometimes in England, sometimes in Scotland—usually with the view of initiating discussion, but also for the purpose of imparting guidance. In this way, his influence came to be felt in many directions and in diverse quarters. Often he discoursed on educational topics to the Aberdeen Philosophical Society (the successor of that which Thomas Reid originated in the eighteenth century), of which he was for many years president, and to which some of his earliest scientific contributions were made—going back to the year 1843.

Untiring energy was his characteristic. Possessed of original ideas, he lost no time in formulating them and spared himself no pains in spreading a knowledge of them and, if need were, in defending them. He had also a living interest in the ideas of others, and wished to have them duly discussed. Hence his noble act of originating this journal (*MIND*) and of remaining its sole proprietor during the first sixteen years of its existence. He was a born controversialist, and delighted in discussion. He was not seen at his best till he had an opponent directly to meet. It was then that the keen logical intellect showed its full strength and manifested a power of dialectic worthy of Aristotle.

But the usually unimpassioned nature had a fount of emotion in it. This was known only to a select few. It certainly could hardly be gathered from his writings. His was a manly nature, which scorned to do mean things; but it was also a generous nature, and a nature interested in the welfare and thoughtful even for the comforts of others. The few favourite pupils who came to have intimate relations with him know how untiring he was in promoting their interests, and how unselfish he was in helping them in their work to whatever extent they might draw upon him. Their success gave him unbounded satisfaction. But to his friends in general (always a limited number) he had an open heart. He entered alike into their joys and into their sorrows; and, though not demonstrative, his sympathy was always sincere.

In Dr. Bain's death, psychology has sustained a great loss; but so too has education and practical reform. It is rare to find a philosopher who combines philosophical with educational and practical interests, and who is also an active force in the community in which he dwells. Such a combination was here. Let us not fail to appreciate it.

WILLIAM L. DAVIDSON.

The above brief sketch will be followed in the next number of *MIND* by an article containing a full appreciation of Dr. Bain's pre-eminent services to Psychology and Philosophy, and a further reference to his "noble act of originating this Journal and of remaining its sole proprietor during the first sixteen years of its existence".

ED.—G. F. S.