AN ENQUIRY

INTO

HUMAN NATURE.

BY

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M.DCCC.LIII.
TO THE READER.

To explain the following work, it may perhaps be allowed the Author to state, that about fifteen years ago, when his duties led him to move much among the masses of several of our large towns, and to gather the opinions which were in the ascendant among them, he was very much struck with the numbers whose opinions, based upon an exaggerated estimate of the value and the perfection of scientific views, and on very pretending but very shallow schemes of the human mind, were falling fast into materialism and fatalism, with the dreadful consequences of such tenets,—renunciation of religion, and moral and political recklessness. Shortly afterwards he left Europe for a field of action in the East, but the state of things which he had witnessed at home continued to haunt him, and led to the question whether it might not be possible to vindicate the spiritual nature, the liberty, and the responsibility of man in a manner which might be scientific in form though popular in substance, and so find readers among those who—idolising science all the while—were falling so fast, and in such numbers, into the contrary opinions—opinions which, whenever they have become popular, have proved no less fatal to the well-being of society than to that of individuals.
when held in private. Circumstances having proved favourable in the East for making the attempt, some chapters were written, and these form the earlier part of this volume, as also the essays on "Science and Philosophy," and on "The Science and the Philosophy of Common Sense," which, not to break the thread of the analysis, have been thrown into an appendix. But in the progress of thought the subject proved so deeply interesting in itself, and seemed to be so imperfectly explored, at least under the regime of an exact method, such as that set forth in the essay on "Method" (also in the Appendix), that the spirit of philanthropy had for a time to give way to the urgency of curiosity,—the uneasiness to know some things of importance about the soul which could not be learned by reading. Hence long delay in accomplishing what was at first proposed, as also a growing unfitness for doing it in a popular style, of which the greater part of this work, it is feared, will give abundant proof.

On his return to Europe this autumn, the Author finds, as it appears to him, no less need for works vindicating in a scientific way, the grandeur of human nature, than when he left, and for rescuing Psychology from its threatened absorption into Physiology. He therefore ventures the volume now in the reader's hands as a contribution, slender indeed, but earnest, towards this end; and though with certain fears, yet not without a hope also, of being encouraged before long to follow it up, by a more scientific, and probably also a more extended treatise, in which the Psychological views that are but incidentally and hurriedly indicated in this, are fully expanded in scientific connection.
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