

Michał Wyszniowski [*James William Whitecross*] (1794–1865)
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SKETCHES AND CHARACTERS
OR THE NATURAL HISTORY OF HUMAN INTELLECTS [1853]*

A MICHEL PR. DE WISZNIEWSKI
AUTEUR DE
Sketches and Characters, or the Natural History of human intellect.

Plongeant dans un puits de science
Votre plume, avec sagesse,
Vous esquissez les traits divers
De notre intelligence humaine,
Et votre livre nous promène
De ses grandeurs à ses travers,
Sous votre loupe diligente,
Nous exhibant tous les revers
De notre médaille changeante.
Là, d'échelon en échelon,
Remontant l'échelle infinie,
L'on va du crétin au génie
De Kant et de Napoléon.
Votre œuvre est un vaste musée,
Ou l'attention amusée
Rencontre partout des croquis
Et des portraits bien réussis,
Qui, de votre plume féconde
Fidèles illustrations,
Peignent de l'un et l'autre monde
L'homme et les populations;
Dans votre magique lanterne
Défile au long l'humanité,
Et, sous son rayon jamais terne
Vous l'éclairiez de tout côté.
De ce savoir que lui prodigue
Votre esprit docte, en vous lisant,
Jamais lecteur ne se fatigue,
Par vous instruit en s'amusant.
Profond, plaisant, rempli d'images,
Sagace et savant Polonais,
C'est surtout quand je lis vos pages

* Le texte repris est celui de: J. W. Whitecross, *Sketches and Characters or the Natural History of Human Intellects*, Saunders and Otley, Conduit Street, London 1853, pp. iii–iv & 1–40. Les quelques corrections sont notées: [aaa] lettres à supprimer, <aaa> lettres à ajouter.

Sur un point que vous m'étonnez.
 Vous que la Vistule a vu naître
 Loin de la Tamise et son bord,
 Vous écrivez l'anglais en maître
 Et semblez à fond le connaître
 Aussi bien qu'un recteur d'Oxford!
 De Théophraste imitant l'exemple,
 Vous apportez, Polonais lettré,
 A la science, pour son temple,
 Ce savant bloc par vous ouvré!
 On dit que ce n'est qu'une assise
 Première, un vaste fondement.
 Qu'à votre gloire elle suffise!
 Ce bloc est presque un monument:
 Oui! votre œuvre, attrayant mélange
 D'éloquence et de vérité,
 Est une lettre de change,
 Qu'accepte la postérité.

A. DABADIE.

Nice, Carabacel, juin 1860. ••

CHAPTER I. •••

The present Essay is composed of gleanings on the field of mental philosophy, and is but a natural history of human intellects.

The obvious disparity in the intellectual powers of men pointed out.

The influence of diet, of the game of draughts and chess and of whist; the influence of daylight, of the weakness or excellence of the senses, or of the want of one of them; the influence of passions, of society, of parliamentary life, of education, and of music, upon our intellectual faculties.

The influence which different deficiencies, as well as excellencies, capacities, and bias[s] of our intellect, are exerting upon our morals, passions, and judgment.

Sources and modifications of mental disparity.

An account of the motives, occasions, and sources of the observations, displaying the diversity and disparity of mental characters.

•• Ce poème se trouve placé avant la table des matières, pp. iii–iv.

••• Dans son introduction à la réédition polonaise de *Charaktery rozumów ludzkich* (Naukowe Towarzystwo Pedagogiczne, Warszawa 1935) Stefan Szuman essaie de démontrer que l'œuvre de Wiszniewski pourrait – et devrait – être prise comme point de départ dans les examens expérimentaux des différences quantitatives de l'intelligence humaine parce qu'elle précède de presque cent ans les analyses scientifiques dans ce domaine. S'il n'en est pas ainsi, c'est surtout parce que le livre de Wiszniewski sur la typologie de la mentalité est paru trop tôt, à l'époque où la typologie et l'intelligence ne suscitaient pas encore un tel intérêt dans la psychologie.

I. THERE is nothing that astounds and transports us so much, and fills the mind with an ever new and ever rising admiration, as the starry heaven above and the structure of our intellect within us. If the vast distances and mighty bulk of the heavenly bodies, their infinite number, and the prodigious velocity of their motions, fill the imagination with awe, a close survey of the structure of our intellect excites equal wonder and astonishment. Even at the outset there is something interesting, if not marvellous, in the quantity of different organs of apprehension: we have got five fingers, five senses, and five distinct faculties of the intellect. If the structure of the eye, considered as an optical instrument, with its crystalline lens, its adaptation to the properties of light, and its varieties suited to the different necessities of each animal, never fails to rouse our admiration, nothing startles and amazes us more than the organization of our inward spiritual eye, of our conscience and understanding, of which the former, “the still small voice,” warns us of the least deviation from the straight line of moral duties, and though unasked and unlooked for, judges of the goodness or wickedness, not only of our actions, but even of our most secret motives; whereas the latter is fitted out with the wonderful organ of causation, and the faculty of reasoning by induction and analogy.

Beholding for the first time the internal organization of our mind, we cannot help admiring the infinite wisdom of our Creator, who, forming it in a manner so perfectly adapted to its destination, endowing it with such powers, faculties, and propensities, as are necessary to preserve our life, to ascertain all our moral duties, even the highest, to know ourselves and the thousands of worlds rolling and blazing above, has reared up the noblest emblem of his omnipotence.

Looking at the human understanding, we are wound up to a pitch of ecstasy at the spectacle of the ingenious contrivances, which characterize the structure of mind, and of the wonderful fitness of means and aim, exhibiting most striking proofs of design. What things indispensable to our conservation and happiness we are unable to know, we cannot help believing. It is very essential for men to be apt of early ascertaining and arriving at a positive knowledge of their duty, but the human understanding is very slow in its development. Obviating that serious inconvenience, Providence has made moral powers susceptible of a high degree of culture even in the infant mind, long before the powers of intellect are developed for the investigation of truth.

Consciousness arrests the flow of thought, and thus enables the intellect to compare ideas, draw conclusions, and form judgments. The first act of consciousness is the result of voluntary attention; the last three is reasoning. But attention, or the arresting of the flow of thoughts, is a painful and difficult act of our mind; it is, therefore, not left barely to its own exertions, but is roused by curiosity, aided by association, which brings new ideas within its range, nourished by memory, which supplies its stores, and is rendered more easy by practice and habit.

The human intellect is, besides, outfitted with a mathematical organ, whose wonderful and far-reaching powers were gradually developed out of the simple ideas of space and time, and from the times of *Thales* were brought almost to perfection by *Newton*, *Euler*, and *Lagrange*, as we see in “conic

sections, the theory of gravitation, the differential calculus, and the solution of the problem of three bodies.” These magnificent and splendid creations of the mathematical organ of the human intellect, giving out the laws which bind the universe in eternal order, though mere creations of pure abstract thought, when applied to the material worlds rolling in infinite space, were found to dovetail exactly, to explain the celestial mechanism, illustrate the most stupendous mysteries, and enable us even to anticipate by ages the discovery of truths the farthest removed above ordinary apprehension – as, for instance, the solar and lunar eclipses, or the re-appearance of comets after the revolution of centuries.

The first discovery of the disparity in the intellectual powers is prompted by the striking inferiority of our domesticated animals, with whom we are familiarly acquainted from our infancy. It never fails to strike even the most superficial observer, upon the most cursory glance, that they possess but a few fragments of soul and tatters of understanding; that, though not wholly devoid of curiosity, they have but a very slight degree of that faculty; that not only their inferiority to men, but even their relative differences, remain stationary. A horse, a cat, a dog, never show any progress, or display any relative superiority over each other, but always remain within the same limits allotted to them by Providence. In general, animals seem to have no organ of causality; they are blindly conducted by instinct, – a substitute for human reason, – and attain in a short time their utmost perfection, beyond which they are never able to advance. Bees and beavers, though ingenious, build always on the same plan. In their observations and reasonings they appear to be limited to a few simple and local objects. They seem to have no foresight; exceptions in bees, ants, and beavers, though bearing little more than a shadow of forecast, excite our astonishment as something out of the way, something lying beyond the limits of their apprehensive and reasoning faculties; whereas men carry their researches into the most distant regions of the globe, even beyond it, to heavenly bodies; are enabled to ascertain the weight of bodies at the surface of the most distant world; to investigate the laws that govern their motions or mould their forms, and calculate to a second of time the period of their reappearance; they may turn their thoughts backwards into the darkness of primitive ages, to the cradle of the human race, and have succeeded in constructing ancient history out of such scanty relics as decaying monuments, mouldering records, fabulous legends, and the sybilline leaves of tradition; and, what is more, they discovered within the bowels of the earth the hieroglyphics of primeval annals during thousands of years before it was occupied by their own race. Besides, men are capable of casting their eyes forward, to predict the influence of their actions or legislation on posterity; to trace causes and effects to a great length; to extract general principles from particular appearances; to correct their mistakes, improve upon their discoveries, draw profits even from their blunders, and to reason by induction and analogy – two powerful instruments of ascertaining truth, savouring of fiction and improbability – which led *Newton* to predict from the refraction of light the inflammable quality of the diamond, and the decomposition of water.

The chequered pattern of the intellectual capacities of men, no less stri-

king, though more difficult to ascertain, than the difference of mind between men and animals, did not fail to attract the early attention of men in general, as we are enabled to infer from the terms used for their designation, terms to be found in all languages, ancient and modern, which give an unequivocal evidence that men's minds were not only struck by these psychological phenomena; but even, judging by their great quantity, it appears that men of different degrees of culture were early engaged in ascertaining even the most minute shades and inflections of those differences; that, notwithstanding some assertions to the contrary,* there prevailed such a general opinion and conviction of the existence of a native disparity in the capacities of men, as not to require any farther arguments, and as bearing on its face the evidence of facts, which may easily be verified by experience.

We see, moreover, that men have been led to reflect upon some external signs, upon several striking coincidences, supposed to indicate the natural bent, strength, and bias of the human intellect, as well as of certain qualities of the mind – viz., certain features or lineaments of the face, or some dozen of bumps on the skull, were believed of being able to furnish a tangible clue for forming a just estimate, *a priori*, of the intellectual and moral abilities and propensities of every individual. *Lavater*, *Dr. Gall*, and *Dr. Spurzheim* were seriously engaged in the search of those signs upon the human face and skull, and having given to certain qualities of the mind a local habitation and sometimes a new name, reduced too rashly their observations into a system, and under the names of *Physiognomy* and *Phrenology* brought them forward as complete and exact sciences. But, eager to elicit the coincidence and correlation of mental powers with certain external and visible signs, they neglected to make a particular study of the disparity in the abilities and of the different casts of human intellects, and thus founded their systems upon obvious observations, which, made at random, were never examined, compared, and completed, quite against the rules of inductive method sketched out by *Lord Bacon*. This appears to be one among many other reasons that, though the literature of *Phrenology* amounts in bulk to a respectable library, the truth of the phrenological theory is far from being established, though it has not been proved to be false; in fact, *physiognomy* is now become an agreeable pastime of those who delight in prints; whereas *phrenology* maintains its ground only with those who have a large capacity of belief, or obstinacy in maintaining their notions.

* I am perfectly aware that there are some literary men, and of the highest authority, too, denying flatly those differences. *Mr. Edgworth* says, that “many of the great differences of intellect which appear in men, depend more upon the early cultivating the habit of attention, than upon any disparity between the powers of one individual and another.” Now, upon reading this, I wonder whether the attention of our author was early cultivated. The sententious *Dr. Johnson* once, in his unguarded mood, asserted that “the supposition of one man having more imagination, another more judgment, *is not true*; it is only one man has more mind than another. He who has vigour may walk to the east as well as the west, if he happens to turn his head that way.” This is only a sophism, and not a very ingenious one, in a dogmatical cloak; it would almost look like impertinent trifling with the common sense of my readers to endeavour to make plain what is already so palpable. Facts stare us too plainly in the face; they are like diamonds, not only cut glass, but send forth the light of the flame; they are stubborn things, and cannot be reasoned away at so cheap a rate, even by a *Johnson*. However, we find in one of his letters to *Mrs. Thrale*, a more correct, though quite a contrary opinion.

II. The ancient Egyptians appear to have been aware of the great influence of the diet upon the soundness, readiness, and the full development of our intellectual faculties, as we may infer from the dietetical rules framed for their priests, who exclusively cultivated all sciences. *Franklin*, from his personal experience, recommends abstemiousness in eating, and the exclusive use of clear water, as conducive to clearness of thought. The stablemen and drivers of Mr. Whitbread's brewery, observes the "American in England," are as colossal as their horses; and the appearance of all the people about this establishment goes to prove that beer-drinking is not, after all, such a bad thing in its physical effects. Its tendency, however, did not seem to be to quicken the intellect, for most of them had a dull, drowsy, and immovable look. It was impossible to detect any intellectuality in their countenances or speculation in their eyes.

Mr. Edgar A. Poe observes, that "the game of chess, in its effects upon the mental character, is greatly misunderstood, and that the higher powers of the reflective intellect are more decidedly and more usefully tasked by the unostentatious game of draughts than by all the elaborate frivolity of chess. Whist has long been noted for its influence upon what is termed the calculating power; and men of the highest order of intellect have been known to take an apparently unaccountable delight in it, while eschewing chess as frivolous. Beyond doubt there is nothing of a similar nature so greatly tasking the faculty of analysis. The best chess-player in Christendom may be little more than the best player of chess; but proficiency in whist implies capacity for success in all those more important undertakings where mind struggles with mind. The sources whence legitimate advantage may be derived, are not only manifold but multiform, and frequently among recesses of thought altogether inaccessible to the ordinary understanding. To observe attentively is to remember distinctly, and so far the concentrative chess-player will do very well at whist, while the rules of *Hoyle* are generally comprehensible; but it is a matter beyond the limits of the rule, that the skill of the analyst is evinced as he is making in silence a host of observations and inferences."

We learn from the statistics of France, that there is an odd analogy between the amount of daylight enjoyed by the people and their amount of intellectual illumination – the best lodged departments being also the best instructed.

The weakness or excellence of our senses, or a want of one of them, has also a striking influence upon our mind and moral character; for in that mysterious union of body and soul everything is strictly connected, and has a close relation to each other. "The blindness," says *Guillé*, Director of the Blind Hospital in Paris, "not only deprives the blind of ideas which are generated by sight, but is modifying a great many others. The blind having no notion of colour and shades, have many distorted ideas; have no notion of decency and shame, the loveliest qualities of youth; are but rarely kindhearted; accustomed to caution, they are very apt to confound their benefactor with their enemy."

It has been observed that our moral propensities, affections, and passions, are strongly influencing our understanding, giving it a certain bias or leading into error. This circumstance has even attracted the attention of the profound

French philosopher, *Pascal*. It has been, for instance, observed, that a vain man can never be a good dramatist; that the habit of flattery inevitably introduces a false taste into poetical compositions; that the love of power, like that of money, renders even the dullest intelligent; that a generous, open, manly nature bestows upon the faculties of men's understanding a reach of enlargement to which meaner natures are ever strangers. *Burke*, in one of his speeches, observes, that "prudence is a quality incompatible with vice, and can never be effectively enlisted in its cause." *Sheridan*, expatiating upon it (trial of *Warren Hastings*), remarks, that it is only a single domineering passion that is capable of exerting a supremacy over our understanding, and using its faculties as pliant instruments; whereas many passions let loose together tend to blunt and unsettle prudence. Every-day experience teaches us that we find it difficult to think well of those by whom we are depressed or thwarted, and that we are ready to admit every excuse for the vices of those who are useful or agreeable to us; that the habits of thinking having origin in strong feelings, are far more difficult to eradicate than any mere error of judgment, which so naturally falls before the exertions of the reasoning power; that passions deprive men of the power of calculating chances; that prejudice is destructive of sound judgment, and perverts all the operations of the intellectual faculties; that the will has a great influence upon our belief, though it does not create it; that great misfortunes disturb the understanding as much as great success; that adoration of "things that be" may blind even a vigorous intellect. Everybody might have had occasion to remark, that men, otherwise very clever and shrewd, are often blundering in their judgments and notions concerning their neighbours. The very same faults and feelings which they never fail to deprecate in others, which are in their eyes crimes of a deep dye, in them prove to be virtues; their long-winded loquacity they call oratory; their avarice is but economy; sticking to the pelf, in them, is forecast; what they are reckoning for a simple duty, when done by others, with them is self-immolation. *Lord Bolingbroke* used to call those who had written against his party, *scandalous libellers*, whereas writers for his party went with him by the name of *literary supporters*. But such influence of the passions upon our judgment is the department of dramatic poets.

The influence of society upon our intellectual powers is also a circumstance not much attended to. We know from experience that conversation enriches the understanding, and that solitude is the school of genius. "The study of books," says *Dr. Thomas Fuller*, "is a languishing and feeble motion, that heats not; whereas conference teaches and exercises at once. If I confer with an understanding man and a rude jester, he presses hard upon me on both sides; his imagination raises up mine to more than ordinary pitch. Jealousy, glory, and contention stimulate and raise me up to something above myself; and a consent of judgment is a quality totally offensive in consent. But as our minds fortify themselves by the communication of vigorous and regular understandings, it is not to be expressed how much they lose and degenerate by the continual commerce and frequentation we have with those that are mean and low. There is no contagion that spreads like that; I know sufficiently by experience what it is worth a yard."

The tendency of parliamentary life is to develop and encourage ready wit at the expense of learning, deep thought, and close reasoning. The most vigorous minds, when taking a serious part in parliamentary debates, are often inveigled to bring forth arguments that no man of sense would publish in writing – arguments which may pass unrefuted when set off with pointed language and fluent delivery. They have, it is true, frequent occasions for developing their talent for debate; but the habit of loose reasoning is the more prejudicial, as the ablest of them usually takes a seat in parliament at a very early age, before the mind has expanded to full maturity; and it is not always that they retain unimpaired those faculties which are required for close reasoning or enlarged speculation.

It is a true saying of *Lord Bacon*, that “reading makes a full man, talking a ready man, and writing an exact man.” There is no need of expatiating in that place upon the influence of training, education, and instruction on our intellectual powers; we only cannot help remarking, that the same course of study which all but fixed *Bunyan*, the author of “*Pilgrim’s Progress*,” in religious despair, hurried into profligacy and atheism the less favourably constituted mind of *Lawrence Claxton*, whose autobiography contains the avowal of his vicious life. It has been ascertained in France, that the amount of legal crime in that country does appear to keep pace with the amount of primary instruction; that educated populations exhibit a larger amount of crime than ignorant ones. “My own reason,” says *M. D’Angeville*, author of a very interesting book, ‘*Moral and Intellectual Statistics of France*,’ “had long combated the evidence of facts on this subject, before my investigation forced me to adopt this conclusion.” Whereas *Walter Scott* says, that the introduction of schools has tamed down the native ferocity of Scotchmen.

The effect of music upon the faculty of invention is likewise a fact as yet very little noticed, and hardly ever examined. “Almost all my tragedies,” says *Alfieri*, “were sketched in my mind, either in the act of hearing music, or a few hours after.” *Milton* listened to his organ for his solemn inspirations. *Lord Bacon* had music often played in the room adjoining his study. *Curran’s* favourite mode of meditation was with his violin in his hand.

III. But there is another range of observations and researches, which seem to have been wholly overseen, or rather neglected: it is, the influence which different deficiencies, excellencies, capacities, and bias<e>s, of our intellect, are exerting upon our morals and passions. It is well known that the disturbed equilibrium of mental faculties works perniciously upon the moral part of human nature. It is easy to aver that, for instance, men of weak memory are generally suspicious; that persons of limited capacity have generally a quick eye to their own interest; an open hand and a yielding heart are the invariable concomitants of genius, as much as a suspicious temper and niggardly disposition of mediocrity. A too vivid imagination is disqualifying the mind for the cold contact of reality. Poetical temperament appears to have a natural tendency to superstition. Men of higher order of genius rarely show themselves fitted for the calm affections and comforts of domestic life. Dogmatical turn of mind is usually connected with extreme vanity. The Persian poet,

Sâdee, says, that “a wise man does not always know when to begin; but a fool never knows when to stop.” Practical men, while improving their understanding, become more and more wavering and hesitating, and in the prosecution of their schemes exhibit, an unprecedented and unusual circumstance with them, a want of determination and firm resolution. *Thucydides* remarks (ii. 40), that “ignorance brings daring, while calculation brings fear.” This interesting fact, disclosing in a striking manner the great influence of the qualities and power of the intellect upon our mind, has been observed in surgeons and military officers. In middle ages, a Spanish monk had acquired a great reputation by his happy operations of the stone. He had been advised, when in France, to study anatomy, of which he appears to have been utterly ignorant; but having made some progress in it, he got dismayed at his former audacity, displayed but very indifferent skill as an operator, and at last abandoned his craft. The French Marshal, *Saint-Cyr*, observes, that military officers lose in determination what they might have gained, by improving their minds. It has been remarked in France, where such an experience is possible, that men of science turn courtiers more readily than men of letters, poets, and historians, who seem to be more jealous of their independence. On the other hand, we know that a serious application to science or the liberal arts softens and humanizes the temper, and cherishes those high emotions in which true virtue consists;* that, for instance, treachery is the usual concomitant of barbarism and ignorance; that men of profound mind are inclined to think lightly of the resources of human reason; whereas the pert, superficial thinker, is generally strongest in every kind of unbelief; that a man of genius, if not pursuing ambitious schemes, is either a humorist, or a visionary, or a hypochondriac.

But deficiencies as well as excellencies of our intellect have also a visible influence upon our judgment. A fool, for instance, condemns others for his own misfortunes; a half-witted accuses only himself; but the wise man neither complains of himself nor others. Prompt susceptibility of new impressions renders the judgment variable and shifting. Poets are strangely tempted to let imagination do memory’s work.

There are, then, two facts in the philosophy of the human mind, which were not duly examined: the great varieties in the qualities and inflections of the human intellect, and its influence upon the human passions and morals.

IV. —————Different minds
 Incline to different objects: one pursues
 The vast alone, the wonderful, the wild;
 Another sighs for harmony and grace
 And gentlest beauty. AKENSIDE.

There is in the powers and capacities of which the human intellect is made up, as much, if not more, variety, shades, infinite and minute gradations, as in the propensities, leanings, and passions of our mind, or in the countenance and

* ————— ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes
 Emollit mores, nec sinil esse ferros.

lineaments of our face. Every man has his peculiar turn of mind, his peculiar compass or reach of capacity, his peculiar propensities and bias<e>s, qualities and deficiencies of the faculties, and peculiar habits of thought. It would be easier to find two leaves of the same size and form, as two intellects of the same compass and cast. But some deficiencies being more striking, are soon taken notice of even by a common observer; as, for instance, a leaky memory, a distracted mind: while others, lying deeper in the nature of our intellect, in order to be ascertained, require some preliminary notions of the texture of the human understanding.

The human understanding is a compound of different faculties, native predispositions, and powers; as consciousness, intuition, perception, attention, association, fancy, imagination, judgment, and reason; their different compass, capacity, propensities, and deficiencies, are the intermittent fountain of diversity in the shades of the human intellect. Besides, out of these different relations, qualities, and deficiencies, grow mental varieties of a new order. *Dryden*, for instance, had an obliquity of understanding, which led him to the discovery of error only; his intellectual retina appears to have been too small to receive the whole compass and sketch of men; he was only capable of making rough drafts of a profile; whereas *Shakespeare* was able to portray a whole character – the good as well as the ill – with all shades of intellect, all inflections, turns, and touches of passion. There are men endowed with powers of apprehension so uncommonly quick, as almost to resemble intuition; whereas others discover the cause of the result not before the game is played, and carefully lock the door when the steed is stolen: there are persons more fertile in objections than expedients. We see, often, men of quick apprehension, but forgetful; whereas others are late to perceive, but are endowed with a retentive memory. One person excels in judgment, another in wit. There are men of wonderful memory, but restless, given to change in the objects of their inquiry; whereas others are capable of perseverance and pertinacity in most abstrusive researches. There are men who have sense in matters of theory, and no judgment in matters of practice; whilst others, having nothing above common sense, display an unmatched soundness of judgment. There are men that always place a microscope before their eyes, whilst others prefer looking through a magic lantern. There are men capable of elevating their mind to higher ranges of thought; others like only to engage in particulars and matters of fact. We sometimes see orators best in reply, whose opening speeches are always unsuccessful. There are men who cling with fondness to whatever is ancient, and never consent to any, though obviously beneficial, change, without many misgivings and forebodings; whilst others, always hastening forward, sanguine in hope, bold in speculation, are quick to discern the imperfection of whatever exists, think lightly of the risks and inconveniences which attend every innovation, and are disposed to pass off any change for improvement. There are Tories and Whigs in mental bias, as well as in politics. There are men skilful in the art of reading characters and practising on the weaknesses of individuals; whereas others have the sagacity to discern the feeling of masses, and the slightest shadow of coming events and revolutions. Some men are not satisfied till they have reduced the whole stock of their

knowledge to certain general principles, till they have built up a system; whilst others never fail to throw the rich colours of their imagination, and the hue of their mind, upon all that they have seen or thought of, and are not satisfied till they have transfigured it, embodied in a picture, and sketched out a likeness true to nature, but a likeness pitched to the height of an idea. There are some men whose faculties appear to leave them on taking up a pen, others who become half inspired. There are privileged men who do not fail of learning much from the experience of others; whereas the most part are hardly capable of profiting by their own.

There are some mental propensities common to all men, though not to the same degree, which are doing the same service to our understanding as the five fingers to the hand: perceptions acquired by the instrumentality of senses and apprehension, are by every one referred instinctively to a certain *place* and a certain *time*. Everybody on perceiving an effect, would like to know its cause. The same kind of native mental propensity leads us towards the formation and construction of general ideas, more or less numerous and comprehensive, which serve to reduce our observations, notions, and desultory knowledge, into a system, or perhaps may be laid down as a foundation of our reasoning. Besides, there are certain faculties and modes of thinking and of feeling, that lead us irresistibly to seek some communication with another world. But these general and innate propensities of the human understanding are of unequal intensity, and, what is more to the point, are unfitted to be developed and improved to the same level in every individual, even by the most careful and philosophical training; as the shrub can never become a tree. Of a hundred persons that are crossing a river, hardly one happens to think of tracing it up to its rise and down to its mouth. And this is the second source of diversity in the quality and compass of human intellect.

But there is besides a higher range of natural propensities of intellect, which is accounting for the infinite gradations in the mental capacities of men. There are, for instance, minds of so unfortunate a contexture, as to be wholly insensible to the beauty of truth, and unable of discerning it by any of its most striking signs; whilst others are endowed with a sharp-sightedness capable of catching up its slightest suggestions and foreshadowings, and picking it among the densest crowd of fallacies, misstatements, and sophistry. Some men have a better judgment, others a more lively and prolific fancy. There are men of philosophical temperament, whose mind delights only in speculative and scientific truth; whereas others exhibit a prevailing poetical temper, whose passion is ideal beauty. There are privileged men – as was, for instance, *Sir Walter Raleigh* – who, endowed with both reflective and active powers, are equally qualified to distinguish themselves in studious solitude and on the busy theatre of affairs. One person is constantly in search of analogies, another prefers to ascertain nothing but differences. Subtle minds attach much importance to slight distinctions; whereas high and discursive intellects lay a great stress on slight resemblances. Some men are generalizing, cautiously and slowly; others are prone to proceed rashly, without being able to take into consideration a sufficient number of observations duly examined. We may see some persons sticking fast to their opinions; whilst others alter their mind as

the wind is shifting from one point to another, as if they lacked the capacity of strong convictions. There are men thinking for themselves; whereas others do it by proxy, or are only beating the trodden paths. You often see men of extensive learning, superior capacity, and great experience, exhibiting a great shyness in asserting; whereas others, wise in their own conceit, confounding their compass of intellect with the limits of the human understanding, stick with pertinacity to their preconceptions, and boldly condemn the opinion of others, the possibility of their own being erroneous never entering their narrow mind. One is going sure grounds; another is always uncertain and wavering. One shows a childish credulity; another is always sifting, discussing, and arguing. There are quick-sighted men who are far from being foresighted.

There are intellects endowed with destructive powers; they know how to undermine the strongest evidence, find ways and means of shaking the strongest confidence; nothing daunted by any consideration of the most serious kind, they will patiently knock at every link of arguments joining great truths together, will probe every wall, try the strength of the ceiling, scrutinize and scan the foundation, till they have hit upon the weak side of the question at issue, and are not satisfied till they see themselves surrounded by ruins of what was a strong building of conviction; whereas others possess that comprehensiveness of mind and constructive power, which enables men to demolish an obsolete and vexatious system, but at the same time to raise a durable and useful fabric in its place. There are men who in the most obscure and abstruse investigations, are capable of availing themselves of a mere faint glimmering, and descry a path through a tangled wilderness – a path leading towards the object of their researches, and who put light where there was nothing but darkness; whereas others contrive to confuse and complicate the most trite and obvious notions or self-evident truths, or who in their mistaken love of depth take for profound whatever is obscure, preferring a muddy stream, though shallow, to a clear one, however deep. There are metaphysicians more potent to confute error than to establish truth. There are men who like to embrace the heterodox side of every question; others display a disposition to keep by the received though erroneous theories. *Dr. Priestley*, inveighing with unremitting zeal against the established religion, pertinaciously defended the chemical doctrine of phlogiston. *Jeremy Bentham*, though a great humorist, appears to have been wanting in the sense of the ridiculous. There are privileged persons, as *Themenes* in ancient, and *Talleyrand* in modern times, having a finer perception of all the particularities of character, and all the indications of coming change – persons capable of seeing the shadow of coming events; whereas to others, all those signs and foreshadowings are invisible or unintelligible. There are men given to contemplation, whose calm intellect best qualifies them to investigate speculative truth, while others have the penetrating judgment and speculative powers robust enough to seize large fragments of truth, and necessary mental capacities adapted to propagate and make it triumph, not only over the understandings of men, but over their affections and passions; the first are capable of stating truth with philosophical precision, the latter are masters of that rough moral computation, which contents itself for practical purpose with approximate accuracy. There are certain castes of

mind, generally of second-rate capacity, that always succeed in the world – others that never thrive. There are men wiser for others than for themselves. A man of fantastical, fanciful mind, is every day creating a new world for himself, never knows how to avail himself of the present circumstance till it has passed away; a stranger in the actual world, he is always living in times gone by, and always longing for time to come.

Besides, different pursuits, employments, and crafts, give to mental powers particular habits and bias; a man that is only putting on the head of a pin is not so intelligent as a mountaineer, whose intellect is sharpened by a great variety of employment. We read in *Heron's* "Scotland," that pedlers as they wander each alone, through thinly-inhabited districts, form habits of reflection and contemplation. Upon the great faculties and qualities which a life at sea quickens, it also impresses a form and colour of its own. A literary man has different habits of thought, from a practical and active one. Advocates have generally a great proficiency in argument and invective, are very skilful in unravelling the tangled tissue of a knotted statement, are masters of evasions and [subtilties]<subtleties> of inferior capacities, and have a shrewd insight into an antagonists weak point. In the conversion of a great advocate into a great judge, there is much to overcome and alter, as well as to acquire. *Tacitus* says, that a Roman soldier rarely possessed subtlety of intellect, for the military authority acting by compulsion does not exercise the understanding.*

Education, training, culture of mind, arts and sciences, cultivating the mind to a different development, calling forth different faculties or the same faculty in different ways and degrees, forming different habits of thought and bias of intellect, which are getting with time the intensive force of nature, have a modifying influence upon our understanding, especially upon certain intellects, which are easily moulded into every shape, like wax, and partly account for its minute gradations in power, extent, and deficiencies; as, for instance, a home-keeping youth has ever homely wit. We know by experience, that the visual force of the understanding is perverted by being fixed on one object exclusively. Philosophers, metaphysicians, antiquaries, and critics, strengthening by dint of continual exercise certain faculties at the expense of others, which are suffered to lie unemployed, render them weak, dull, and unwieldy. Persons seriously and constantly engaged in historical researches have a respect only for what is authentic. Scholastic philosophy, neglecting to discuss its principles, putting a blind confidence in the authority of others, only exerted itself with great energy to prove its statements, and often tortured into a proof what was to be proved; hence it came that the metaphysicians of the middle ages, though very acute dialecticians, were bad philosophers. The votaries of mental philosophy exhibit a certain vigour and an acuteness of faculty peculiar to them; they appear to be endowed with the power of nice discrimination – are capable of arresting and examining the most subtle and evanescent ideas, and of striking rapidly and boldly into the faintest track of analogy, in order to see where it leads, and what it is likely to produce; they appear to be emanci-

* *Credunt plerique militaribus ingeniis subtilitatem deesse; quia castrensis jurisdictio secreta et obtusior, ac plura manu agens, calliditatem feri non exerceat* ("Vita Agricola.")

pated, to a certain degree, from the tyranny of words, and seem to be endowed with undaunted intrepidity to push opinions up to the first causes. Mathematical sciences exercising exclusively the faculty of reasoning or deduction, give no employment to, and thus disqualify, the other powers of understanding concerned in the investigation of truth; hence it comes that mathematicians, losing the capacity of real observation and of critically appreciating comparative degrees of probability, are often found unfit for the most important employment of the human mind, think little of investigations whose practical use is not at hand, have a dislike to truths that cannot be proved with such evidence as their own set of propositions, and are not satisfied till they have clothed the determinate quantities of arithmetic in the universal symbols of algebra. They are apt to be stubborn in their opinions, and are very prone either to credulity or scepticism; for it has been observed by ancient and modern philosophers, that none of the intellectual studies tend to cultivate a smaller number of the faculties in a generally more partial manner than mathematics, and that an exclusive study of mathematical sciences not only does not prepare, but absolutely incapacitates, the mind for the intellectual energies which philosophy and life require. “Dull as a mathematician,” is a proverb current among Frenchmen, the most mathematical nation of Europe. *Bayle*, the most subtle logician, has confessed, that he could never comprehend the demonstration of the first problem of *Euclid*; and the German philologist *Wolf*, absolutely destitute of all mathematical capacity, was convinced from experience that the more capable a mind was for mathematics, the more incapable was it for the other noble sciences. We know from experience, that an habitual story-teller prefers invention to description; some of the best writers of fiction prove very bad historians, because, long habituated to invent and narrate at the same time, they are incapable of narrating without inventing. A poet never vouchsafes to discuss, but is painting and colouring for effect. A logician is concerning himself exclusively about maturity, definition, and connecting of his ideas and arguments, but is apt to neglect his style, and thinks slightly of elegant expressions. Well conducted metaphysical researches tend to generate exact and methodical habits of thought. Men who in their youth, prompted by their own innate inclination, were reading poetry, are found to have a more vivid and coloured style, even when writing upon abstruse subjects. Men that take a delight in comical compositions, exhibit more cheerfulness of mind, and buoyancy of spirit, and their thoughts bear a more lively and playful appearance. Every-day experience teaches that practical life has a sobering influence upon the most brilliant and buoyant faculties of our mind.

There is another circumstance which augments greatly the puzzling variety of wits – it is the different order and time in which they expand or are coming to maturity. We are told that *Albertus Magnus* appeared for the first thirty years of his life remarkably dull and stupid, and it was not till he advanced to middle age that his mind expanded. *Chaucer’s* genius was not fully developed till he was advanced in years. Generally the forthcoming of imaginative powers precedes the faculty of judgment. The fancy attains at an earlier period to the perfection of its beauty, power, and fruitfulness; but as it is the first to ripen, it is also the first to fade. It has already lost something of

its bloom and freshness, and of that internal golden flame of the opal, before the sterner faculty has reached maturity; and is commonly withered, when these faculties still retain all their energy. It rarely happens that the fancy and the judgment grow together, the latter being slower in its development. It happens still more rarely that the judgment; grows faster than the imagination; but the most difficult of all, the self-judgment, the knowledge of ourselves, of our intellectual capacities and moral inclinations, comes last, if it comes at all. We are, however, enabled to produce some remarkable cases of the maturity of judgment preceding the full development of imagination. *Bacon's* gigantic scheme of philosophical reform was planned while he was still very young. He early displayed in his works a great vigilance in observing, deep meditation, temperate and prematurely ripe judgment; but in richness of illustration, in variety of expression, in eloquence, his later writings are far superior. *Burke's* "Treatise on the Sublime and Beautiful," though it appeared when he was but twenty-five, is written in the style of a parliamentary report, whereas the "Thoughts on the Causes of the Existing Discontents," published when his judgment had reached its full maturity, shows that his eloquence was still in its splendid dawn; even in his old age he discussed tariffs and treaties in the most fervid and brilliant language of romance. We may cite that indefatigable courtier and poet, *Edward Young*, of whom it is said that sixty years had strengthened and enriched his genius and augmented even the brilliancy of his fancy. *Dryden* was also one of those in whom the period of imagination does not precede, but follows the period of observation and reflection.

There are, moreover, qualities and deficiencies in the moral and intellectual character of men going inseparable, like twin-stars or like silence and darkness; for instance, fiery temper and weak judgment; hardness of heart is inseparable from narrowness of mind. Ardent faith goes in alliance with fiery imagination. Weak memory is often connected with a certain instinctive bias for generalization. It seldom happens to meet with a man that has got a just taste without a sound understanding. Ignorance and learning, both in a high degree, are often seen to co-exist in the same minds. The vast learning of *Bacon* did not prevent him from believing in witchcraft. There are men exhibiting a not uncommon union of scepticism and credulity; in the age of imperial Rome the highest reason was seen in company with the most abject superstition; astrology and witchcraft led captive minds which boasted of being emancipated from the idle terrors of the avenging gods. Louis XI., King of France, very acute and sagacious in all worldly pursuits, was childishly credulous and superstitious. It is not unusual to find an extraordinary capacity for mental labour combined with extreme indolence and reluctance to undertake it. *Dr. Johnson* seldom took to writing when not in want of money.

But there are also some qualities of the mind incompatible, conflicting, if not absolutely antagonistic, or seldom to be met together; as, for instance, a scoffing wit and a feeling heart, wit and passion being entirely incompatible. Magnificent versification and ingenious combinations rarely harmonize with the expression of deep feeling. In *Dryden* alone we have the sparkle and the heat together. A quick intelligence is rarely found connected with strong powers of judgment. A rapid thinker is never meditative. Men of a speculative

turn of mind are rarely ready-witted, and hence very bad advisers in cases which require great celerity. Persons the most alert in discovering the flaws and defects in a work of genius are the least touched with its beauties. It is rare, says *Pascal*, that mathematicians are observant, and that observant minds are mathematical. Men celebrated for military prudence are often found to be headstrong statesmen. An impassioned mind prevents the understanding from ascertaining timely and judging rightly. A native quickness of apprehension is never supported by perseverance of attention. Very patient inquirers are but rarely endowed with great powers of intellect and freshness of mind. A poetical turn of mind is but rarely found allied with the scrutinizing, cautious, persevering, and deep-seeking spirit, capable of tracing out the hidden laws of nature. *Oersted*, who is an experimental philosopher, and, at the same time, a profoundly contemplative poet, who is extracting the beautiful from every branch of philosophy, is but a rare, if not a solitary, exception. A cunning mind is rarely found in connexion with a sound judgment. It is a rare occurrence to meet with a cunning man that is honest, and as seldom with a wise man that is a knave. An intellect of great compass is but rarely deep. A man of great sensibility is rarely quick-sighted. A refined taste and a solid understanding are frequently disjoined, though they are not necessarily incompatible. Persons of sensibility and fancy are but rarely conclusive reasoners. There are, moreover, two kinds of intellectual powers rarely found to coexist in one mind: the demonstrative faculty and the inductive faculty.

V. Such interesting sets of observations, setting off different relations between our understanding and mind, enabling us to find a clue to mental capacities of men and natural propensities of the human mind, afford at the same time an incontrovertible evidence of the variety and disparity of the mental capacities of men, and show that of all the magnificent predictions of *Lord Bacon*, the only one which was not verified is, that if his method of making discoveries was adopted, little would depend on the degree of force or acuteness of any intellect; *that all minds would be reduced to one level*; that his method resembled a compass or a rule, which equalizes all hands, and enables the most unpractised person to draw a more correct circle or line than the best draftsman; for *Bacon's* inductive method has flourished during two centuries, and has produced none of this levelling. Till our days a great experimental philosopher performs the inductive process in a different way from an old superstitious woman; the interval between a man of talents and a dunce is as wide as ever, and is never more conspicuous than when they engage in researches requiring the use of induction.

Having to survey the whole range of mental excellences and deficiencies, from stupidity up to the highest class of human intelligences, I was soon aware that it was next to impossible to confine my range within the small circle of observations upon my own intellect; however, as a necessary outset of my inquiry, I began with observing my own qualities and deficiencies; and this was the first step in my career. Next I extended my observations to those with whom I had daily intercourse, and whose moral as well as intellectual qualities and deficiencies I could read with accuracy, and compare with ob-

ervation upon my own mind; thus I went on with closely observing my chum, and soon extended my observations to all my school-fellows, and, as it generally happens, I began with remarking exclusively their faults and failings in morals, as well as their most striking intellectual deficiencies, being a confirmed “hater of fools,” and having a precocious dislike of blockheads – or perhaps because the first fruits of observation upon men are most commonly found to issue in satire. This was, then, the second step of my investigations, which I entered into in early life. At the outset I had frequent occasions to note down a great many interesting – at least I thought them to be so – observations, but with time their number began to grow short, their stock did not correspond with my expectations, I was at a loss to find a general law – some clue to guide me; they seemed to me not to afford materials enough to build up a system with. However, the early habit of such observations was not without some profit, as it enabled me to frame many useful rules for developing my own abilities, and making up the deficiencies of some faculties of my mind. For some subsequent years I have lost all relish for such a set of observations. Having finished my academical studies, I found no more opportunity of having about me so great a variety of persons, offering themselves with youthful candour and ingenuousness to my observations; I had to deal with grown-up people, who have learned to school their feelings, to veil their deficiencies, and only unawares and unconsciously offered some opening at which I could peep into their minds, so that from that time my observations were limited to what brief and partial glimpses into the human mind could afford.

But I soon hit upon some other means of satisfying my curiosity and following up my investigations. Examining, when in Italy, different Italian schools of painting, which from the fourteenth till the end of the sixteenth century have flourished under the blue skies of Ausonia, it struck me that the disparities and gradations of intellect might well be traced out in the performances of the celebrated Italian painters. The severe simplicity of the Tuscan school; the chaste conception, treated in a very glowing style, of the Roman; the brilliant, gorgeous, and voluptuous expression of the Venetian, are obviously creations of very different casts of mind. *Raphael* painting the Vatican *al frescoes*, made such rapid strides in his art, that while coming to the other end of his picture, new sides broke forth of his inexhaustible genius. Looking at the Last Judgment of *Michael Angelo* I saw a sculptor that is painting; in colouring, in conception, how unlike *Raphael* his contemporary! There is between them a greater distance than between *Dante* and *Ariosto*, and yet we cannot help admiring both, and in looking at their creations with as much astonishment as delight. How can we account for such difference? The cause seems to lie deep in their respective minds. It struck me, that reflecting upon the checkered genius of great painters, I may be led to the discovery of some new qualities, peculiarities, and forms of genius. I found something of that sort of observation in the book of *Piles Royet*, “*Idée du peintre parfait*” (Paris, 1699), who pretends to teach how to appreciate the relative talents of great

painters.*

However, I was soon aware, that not only in pictures of the great Italian masters, but also in poetry there are very obvious signs of the great disparity and variety of intellectual powers; the poetry of *Milton* and *Pope* broke forth from a very different cast of mind. *Spenser*, for instance, is a painter, whereas *Shakespeare* is a statuary of imitated nature. *Dante* is condensing all his thoughts and feelings in the facts he relates, and expresses himself invariably by images. *Lord Byron* does not catch the hues of surrounding objects, nor hold the mirror up to nature, but, like a volcano, throws gloomy grandeur and blazing light out of the inmost recesses of his proud soul. And this was one more progress in my inquiry. The sphere of my investigations widened the farther I proceeded, opening some new field of inquiry, which induced me unconsciously to take a wider range. Ere long I became aware, that not only in pictures or poetry, but in the composition of prose-writers, especially of historians, moral philosophers, orators, as well as in metaphysical systems and autobiographies, we may ascertain striking features of the variety of mental capacities. The study of the works of *Herodotus*, *Thucydides*, *Xenophontes*, *Demosthenes*; of *Aristotle* and *Plato*, of *Hume*, *Robertson*, and *Macaulay*, of *Swift* and *Bacon*, of the autobiography of *St. Augustine*, the first book in which Christianity is portrayed as the all-absorbing passion of the soul; the autobiography of that intellectual giant *Richard Baxter*, down to that of *Joseph Smith*, the prophet of the Mormons or Latter-day Saints; the autobiography of *Lord Herbert*, that of *Denis Zacheire*, the alchemist, and of *Lilly* the astrologer; *Swift's Journal to Stella*, the autobiographies of *J. J. Rousseau*, *Priestley*, *William Jones*, *Colley Cibber*, *Lackington*, *Alfieri*, *Benvenuto Cellini*, and many others that have given their own miniatures and the self-supplied key to their mental character,* letters of *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, letters of *Cowper*, who often delineates the finer features of his understanding with all the industry of a stranger, as well as memoirs of his early life – a harrowing and fearful chronicle of the growth of the dark cloud overshadowing his brain; the letters of *Lord Byron*, and in general the works of eminent authors; – suggested many new ideas, or put on the trace of very interesting observations upon the human intellect; for though the works of an author may not always give us a just image of the whole intellect of the man, however, it never fails of disclosing its main features and the exact measure of

* “Un autre auteur (‘Fresnoy Caroli Alphonsis de arte Graphica liber. Paris, 1637; avec des notes par *de Piles*’) a voulu redresser le syst[em]e de *de Piles*, va plus loin que lui; il pense: qu’avec des observations fines et adroites sur les différentes espèces de talen[t]s, qu’il faut avoir pour r[es]ussir dans un genre et en combinant les effets, que produisent certaines qualité[s] de l’esprit, on pourr[oit] arriver aux élém[en]t[s] nécessaires pour prononcer avec équité sur le mérite de plusieurs concurren[t]s, ou pour apprécier la valeur relative des grands hommes qui ont cour[ru] la même carrière, en quel genre que ce soit.”

* *Gibbon* gives, in his memoirs, a quaint account of his intellectual powers: “Wit, I have none. My imagination is rather strong than pleasing; my memory both capacious and retentive. The shining qualities of my understanding are extensiveness and penetration. I want both quickness and exactness. My genius is better qualified for the deliberate compositions of the closet, than for the extempore discourse of parliament. An unexpected objection would disconcert me; and as I am incapable of explaining to others what I do not thoroughly understand myself, I should be meditating while I ought to be answering.” It is, perhaps, most on account of this deficiency of ready wit, that *Sir James Mackintosh* thought that *Gibbon* might have been cut out of a corner of *Burke's* mind without his missing it.

mind, and, moreover, gives us an insight into his intellectual character, native as well as modified by his profession, with which the style is intimately connected; an energetic seaman having a different mode of writing from a hesitating judge.

But, however, these works of art or deep investigation did not enable me to take to pieces the whole web of the human mind. I found more in those spontaneous fruits of the human intellect, as letters to intimate friends, where the heart and the understanding are kept so tenderly near each other, where the unrestrained mind pours out its feelings, and shows its genuine face, and which exhibit the intellect in all its moods and phases by its own utterances, though they may sometimes happen to be coloured above or below the truth. That there may exist a stupendous difference among the works of art or reflection [indited]<intended> for the public, and letters to intimate friends, we have a striking instance in the celebrated “Memoirs of Mirabeau,” one of the founders of the sect of Economists in France; his twenty-two works are dull, heavy, tedious, and unreadable, written in an insipid, tiresome, confused, and intolerable style; whereas he is the writer of the most lively and interesting letters, in a style, which for ease, happy unconstraint, and raciness, have scarcely a rival.

There are, moreover, very interesting observations suggested by national proverbs, common sayings, and old pennywise saws, which are the first attempts of men to higher notions, and the quintessence of their observations upon the human mind, reflecting its inward nature; which contain, in few words, the hoarded wisdom of former ages, and constitute the manual of “hob-nailed philosophy.” In axioms, moreover, which, passing into a proverb, * have attained the sanction of common sense, I hoped to find some clue to guide me through the mazes of this startling variety in mental excellences and deficiencies.

Besides, we find traces of this kind of observation in every language, that faithful mirror of our mental faculties, and great organ of the world’s intellect; giving a striking evidence that men early busied themselves, more than we may suppose, with a close observation of such differences, and have made, in remotest times, very nice distinctions in the capacities, qualities, and deficiencies of intellects – distinctions which are lying by, embodied and preserved in language, as insects of the antediluvian ages in amber. The ancient Greeks used to distinguish τὸ κρίναι, the common-sense judgment, which men may pass upon subjects lying beyond their range, from the full theoretical or prac-

* The nativity of a proverb is a secret guarded by nature with its usual success: nobody could say who is its author, where and when it was born, how it came into circulation, till it has become the common property of all. Everybody applying it to a particular circumstance in conversation, bears upon his countenance a slight shadow of satisfaction of having uttered something witty, if not strictly new. The only exception to that rule known to us is *Swift*, who had an odd humour of making extempore proverbs. Observing that a gentleman, in whose garden he walked with some friends, seemed to have no intention to request them to eat any of the fruit, *Swift* observed, that it was a saying of his dear grandmother, “Always pull a peach when it is within your reach;” and, helping himself, he induced the company to follow his example. At another time he framed “an old saying and true,” for the benefit of a person who had fallen from his horse into the mire – “The more dirt the less hurt.” The man rose much consoled; but as he happened to be a collector of proverbs, he wondered he had never heard that one before.

tical knowledge which enables men not only to judge of a thing when done, but to carry it out themselves; and thus the people at large were considered competent judges of the conduct of their magistrates, though they might be very unfit to be magistrates themselves. Besides the most striking differences in the qualities of intellect – as common sense, understanding, reason, wisdom – we find in our language very nice distinctions of its deficiencies, as an idiot, an imbecile, a fool, a silly man, a natural, an innocent, a wiseacre, a dunce, a witless man, a dolt, a numskull, a nifty, booby, cudden, oaf, gump, noodle, tony, bullcalf, clod-poll, shutle-pate, goose-cap, an ass, a simpleton, a noddy, a ninny, a ninnyhammer, a half-witted, dull-witted, hard-witted, a dull-head, bull-head, dunder-headed, addle-headed, a giddy-head, beetle-head, a lack-brain, mad-brained, drowsy-headed, dull-pated, thick-skulled, crock-brained, hair-brained, rattle-headed, muddle-headed, wrong-headed, broken-witted, harem-scarem brain, greenhorn, zany, an after-wit, a driveller, a dotard. We have also in our language a great many expressions marking differences in the qualities of intellect, as, mother's wit, sound judgment, clear head, acute understanding, sober reason, reach of view, inventive talent, genius. There are besides some terms designating a close connexion between some moral and mental deficiencies, as, a coxcomb, a wiseling, a prig, a liar; and there is the word wisdom, the only term designating an intellectual pre-eminence, which necessarily includes virtue.

If, however, we were to form our judgment from the number of synonyms, it appears that men were in general more struck with the deficiencies of intellects – seem to have directed their attention to them with malicious curiosity, and to have observed them with more pertinacity than their excellences, and thus have made better and more nice distinctions among the former; for the ridiculous parts of intellectual character lie on the surface, and cannot be missed; he that runs may read them; and it appears, moreover, that every century and every class of society had contributed its share to the stock of observations and distinctions of this latter kind.

But I was not late in perceiving that often writers may think justly, and yet write without any effect – that a splendid style may cover a vacuity of thought; and hence that differences and disparities in the human intelligences are still more apparent in conversation, conduct, and actions, than in writings and set compositions; nay, it often happens that folly, which contrives to lurk unnoticed in speech and writing, will peep out in our actions, whose declarations are many times as explicit, and always more sure, than those that are contained in words. *Rousseau*, a philosopher in his writings, was but a petulant child in real life. *Dr. Johnson* said once of *Oliver Goldsmith*, that “nobody was more foolish when he had not a pen in his hand, or more wise when he had one.” *Lord Rochester* says of Charles II. that he never said a foolish thing, and never did a wise one.

Reading the historians of different nations, I could not help observing, that as there is a great variety in the moral character of different nations, which is set off in their history, so there must be the same difference in their mental capacities, as is apparent, not only in their respective literatures and popular stories, but in the structure of their languages, in their religious ob-

servances, in the dark mysteries of their traditions and local superstitions, and in their customary as well as statute laws. But as literature is the standard and mirror of the intellectual reach and capacities of civilized nations, the only means of forming any judgment about mental capacities of barbarous nations is the account of travellers. Thus we know, for instance, that a savage takes his religion on trust, but that almost all his other notions are the result of his personal exertions; hence it comes that among savages the oldest man is generally the wisest, because his faculties are only developed through the long process of a very limited experience, and by dint of personal observation.

Thus I saw opening before me a wide range of interesting and new observations, which, when completed, may form a distinct part of the philosophy of the human mind, founded on genuine observation, without any sophistical accompaniments and elucidations, and which may give rise to a new science – “natural history of the human intellects” – which is not to be found on the great list of human sciences formed by *Aristotle*, and completed by *Bacon* and *d’Alembert*.

There is a book of the Spaniard, *Juan Hurat*, “*Examen de los Ingenios*,” in which I expected to find some valuable observations and useful information; but I was sadly disappointed, as he is considering mental powers only in reference to physiognomy and temperament. According to his notions, short or faithful memory, imagination, and wit, proceed from dryness or humidity of the brain, or fiery temperament. He is of opinion that of all the aliments, salt is the most efficacious means of improving our wit; a specific which he seems to have neglected, or to have tried without success. It would be superfluous to expatiate on reasons which prevented me from deriving any profit from the contents of that book.

Dr. Walter Charleton published, towards the end of the seventeenth century, his “*Brief Discourse Concerning the Different Wits of Men*” in which he attributes the varieties of talents which are found among men, to the differences in the form, size, and quality of their brains. I found more information bearing, though indirectly, upon my subject, in some biographies, autobiographies, in the literary as well as political history of the different European nations, in the “*History of Speculative Philosophy*” by *Tiedeman*, *Tenneman*, and *Dugald Stewart*, in *Lord Brougham’s* “*Lives of Men of Letters, Science, and Eminent Statesmen*” I availed myself of sundry observations fit to be brought to bear upon the subject of my inquiry, that lie scattered in many philosophical as well as critical works, observations that dropped unconsciously from the pen of some distinguished writers, who appear to be familiar with inquiries connected with the philosophy of the human mind.

Having no guide to lead me on these unfrequented ranges of inquiry among the mazes where intellectual excellences and deficiencies are mingled in endless variety of proportion, and innumerable modes of combination, besides a sense of inadequate abilities, which I brought to this hard task, has so far grown upon me as its execution advanced, that I would fain have abandoned it to abler hands. However, considering that I happened to open a new path for the future *Linnæus* of human intellects – a path leading to the knowledge of men, and what is in them most noble and immortal, though I may not

have been successful in classifying what was insulated, and giving unity and system to those fragments of desultory knowledge, I had, however, the rare felicity, as Lord Bacon qualifies it, of having been present at the laying of the first stone of a new natural science, and have laid open a new field of research. Such encouraging considerations made me persist, and inveigled to publishing that essay, compound of facts that came under my own immediate observation, or were ascertained and set down by others; and I fondly hope that these little flamand pictures of different deficiencies, excellences, and biases of the human understanding will be found true to nature, as they were mostly drawn from living sitters.

This essay may also prove useful to those who would wish to see a likeness of their own intellect brought out in stronger relief, and reflected in a kind of mirror, showing faithfully its reach, bias, and excellences, as well as deficiencies, indicating the natural bent of their capacity, which may suggest some practical means for its further improvement, or for making up its deficiencies.