



DAVID HUME

(1711-1776.)

From a painting by A. Ramsay in the Gallery at Edinburgh.



AN ENQUIRY  
CONCERNING  
HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

BY  
DAVID HUME

REPRINTED FROM THE EDITION OF 1777. WITH HUME'S  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND A LETTER FROM ADAM SMITH.

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## PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.

THE present volume is the second of the series of Philosophical Classics which The Open Court Publishing Company purposes issuing in cheap form for the convenience and instruction of the general reading public. It is an unannotated reprint, merely, of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, made from the posthumous edition of 1777, together with Hume's charming autobiography and the eulogistic letter of Adam Smith, usually prefixed to the *History of England*. These additions, with the portrait by Ramsay, which forms the frontispiece to the volume, render the picture of Hume's life complete, and leave but a word to be said concerning his philosophical importance.

With the great public, Hume's fame has always rested upon his *History of England*,—a work now antiquated as history and remarkable only for the signal elegance and symmetry of its style. But this once prevalent opinion, our age has reversed, and, as has been well remarked,<sup>1</sup> "Hume, the spiritual father of Kant, now takes precedence over Hume, the rival of Robertson and Gibbon." It is precisely here, in fact, that Hume's significance for the history of thought lies. With him modern philosophy entered upon its Kantian phase, became critical and positivistic, became a theory of knowledge. For the old "false and adulterate" metaphysics he sought to substitute a "true" metaphysics, based on the firm foundations of reason and experience. His scepticism,—and of scepticism he has since been made the standard-bearer,—was directed against the old ontology only, and not against science proper (inclusive of philosophy). "Had Hume been an absolute sceptic

<sup>1</sup> Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy*, New York, 1896.