

A
FRAGMENT
ON
MACKINTOSH

BEING
STRICTURES ON SOME PASSAGES IN THE DISSERTATION
BY SIR JAMES MACKINTOSH PREFIXED TO THE
ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA

BY
JAMES MILL

TO THE READER.

I WROTE remarks on Sir James's Dissertation, when copies of it were first distributed to his friends; before it was regularly published, as one of the preliminary discourses of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*;—induced to do so, by my belief, that the confusion into which he had thrown the science of Ethics was calculated to do great injury to the minds of such young inquirers as might resort to his work for instruction; and my fear that the puffing, on the part both of himself and his friends, which had so successfully served the author through life, and the reputation he thence enjoyed, would procure a temporary and unfortunate celebrity to a deleterious production.

I had made my remarks in the form of letters to the author. And they were written with that severity of reprehension which the first feelings of indignation against an evil-doer inspire.

From accidental circumstances the publication was delayed, till the death of Sir James. The form of letters to himself then appeared incon-

gruous. And I also felt reluctant, under the feelings which that event inspired, to speak so harshly as I had done of a man who could no longer appear in his own defence.

The form of the writing was therefore to be changed. The return to the work, after the warmth of the original feeling was over, was repulsive. Leisure was wanting. The Dissertation had not excited the public attention, and was not likely to do so. There no longer appeared a motive for taking any trouble about it.

After a season, however, leisure for looking at what I had written, and a motive for doing so, having occurred, I was induced by the perusal to believe, that the state of the science of morals, and of the public mind in regard to it, presented a call for the corrections which I had endeavoured to apply to the most hurtful of the prevalent misapprehensions, and the exposition which I had presented of the more important truths. And the publication, in its present form, is the result of that persuasion.

I was drawn to the selection I have made of the parts of the Dissertation on which I have animadverted (it would have been intolerable to go through with the whole), by my opinion of their relative importance. Among the subjects which Sir James has maltreated, the passages I have examined appeared to present to us those on which it was most desirable that the public

mind should be set right ; and they were among the passages which furnished the most instructive specimens of the vices in Sir James's mode of writing, from which it were good that future writers should, by dread of punishment, be deterred.

In executing my design, I have been embarrassed between two desires, which I have found it very difficult to reconcile ; the desire of being perspicuous, and the desire of being short. To be perspicuous, it seemed that the exposition of all the topics of moral philosophy should be introduced. To avoid tediousness, it seemed that almost every thing of this kind ought to be excluded. My fear now is, that I have done too much for brevity ; and that I shall often be with difficulty understood, as well by supposing a knowledge of principles which I ought to have explained, as by abridging my exposure of the lip-work we have from Sir James. I am thus in danger of incurring two reproaches ; that of tediousness, from which the nature of my subject does not permit me to escape ; and that of obscurity, which I may have deserved, by endeavouring to make the call on my reader's patience as little grievous to him as possible.

I have placed the subjects in the order in which that which precedes is calculated to aid in the ready apprehension of that which follows. It will therefore be for the convenience of

those who may deem the following pages worthy of their attention, to carry their perusal regularly from beginning to end ; as part of what is necessary for the elucidation of the subsequent passages will often be found to have been anticipated in those which precede.