

**ON SELF-CULTURE,
INTELLECTUAL,
PHYSICAL AND MORAL**

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On Self-Culture, Intellectual, Physical and Moral by John Stuart Blackie

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ON
SELF-CULTURE

Intellectual, Physical, and Moral

A Vade Mecum for Young Men and Students

BY
JOHN STUART BLACKIE,
PROFESSOR OF GREEK IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

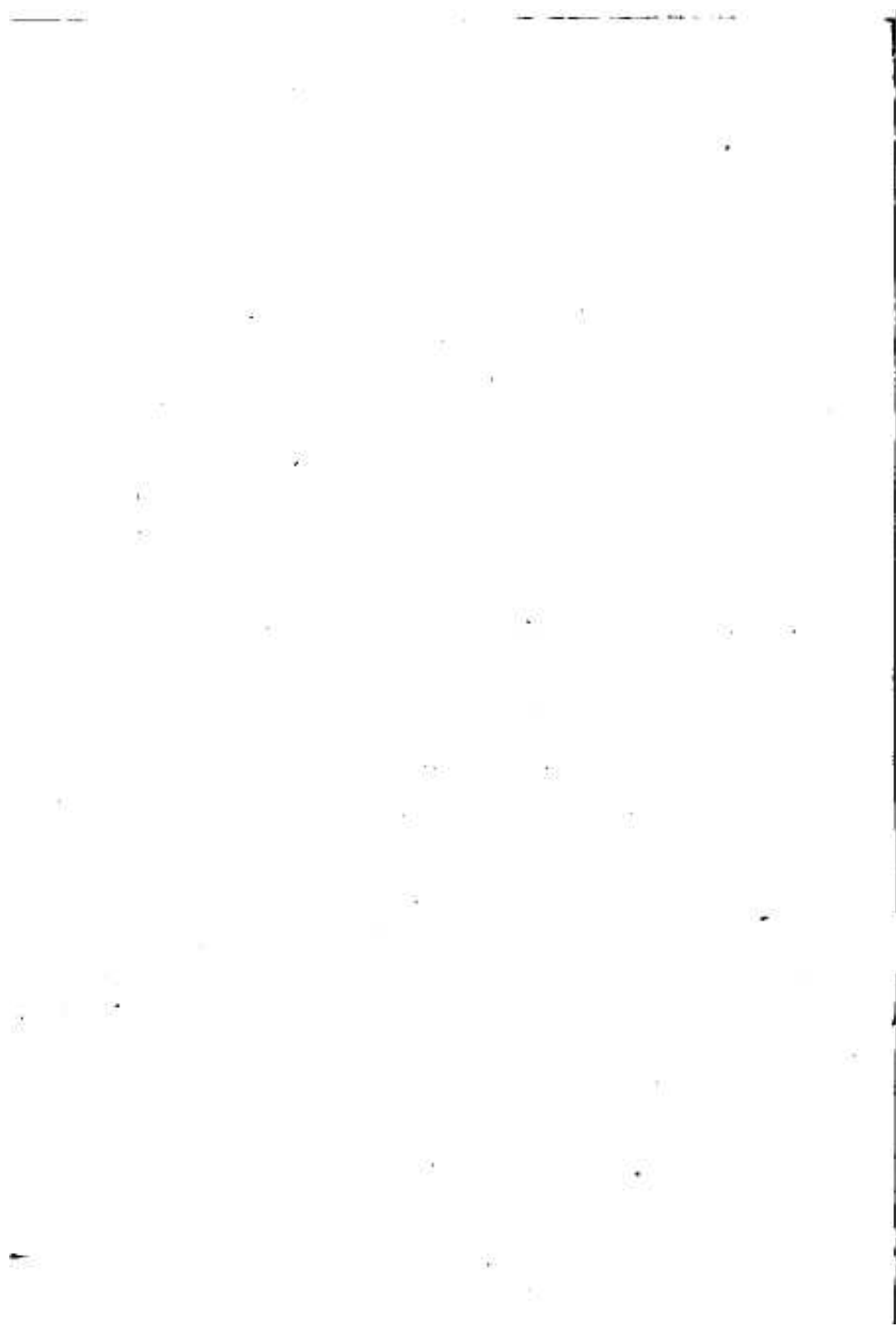
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THE CULTURE OF THE
INTELLECT.

Es ist immer gut etwas zu wissen.—GOETHE.





THE CULTURE OF THE INTELLECT.

1. IN modern times instruction is communicated chiefly by means of BOOKS. Books are no doubt very useful helps to knowledge, and in some measure also, to the practice of useful arts and accomplishments, but they are not, in any case, the primary and natural sources of culture, and, in my opinion, their virtue is not a little apt to be overrated, even in those branches of acquirement where they seem most indispensable. They are not creative powers in any sense ; they are merely helps, instruments, tools ; and even as tools they are only artificial tools, superadded to those with which the wise prevision of Nature has equipped us, like telescopes and microscopes, whose assistance in many researches reveals unimagined wonders, but the use of which should never tempt us to undervalue or to neglect the exercise of our own eyes. The original and proper sources of knowledge are not books, but life, experience, personal thinking, feeling, and acting. When a man starts with these, books can fill up many gaps, correct much that is in-

accurate, and extend much that is inadequate ; but, without living experience to work on, books are like rain and sunshine fallen on unbroken soil.

“ The parchment roll is that the holy river,
From which one draught shall slake the thirst for ever !
The quickening power of science only he
Can know, from whose own soul it gushes free.”

This is expressed, no doubt, somewhat in a poetical fashion, but it contains a great general truth. As a treatise on mineralogy can convey no real scientific knowledge to a man who has never seen a mineral, so neither can works of literature and poetry instruct the mere scholar who is ignorant of life, nor discourses on music him who has no experience of sweet sounds, nor gospel sermons him who has no devotion in his soul or purity in his life. All knowledge which comes from books comes indirectly, by reflection, and by echo ; true knowledge grows from a living root in the thinking soul ; and whatever it may appropriate from without, it takes by living assimilation into a living organism, not by mere borrowing.

II. I therefore earnestly advise all young men to commence their studies, as much as possible, by direct OBSERVATION of FACTS, and not by the mere inculcation of statements from books. A useful book was written with the title,—*How to Observe*. These three words might serve as a motto to guide us in the most important part of our early education—a part, unfortunately,