

AN ATTEMPT TO DEFINE THE TERMS USED
IN CONNECTION WITH RIGHT-HANDED-
NESS.*

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Any attempt to discuss the nature of the physiological features concerned in the problems of right and left-handedness is greatly hampered by the lack of precision in the nomenclature of the subject and by the number of different meanings with which most of the terms are at present invested. The object of the present note is to try to discover how far uniformity of meaning may be attained in the scientific use of these terms with the minimum of estrangement from the connotation in which they are currently employed. In a number of instances attributes supposed to be characteristic of various organs and functions of the body have been metaphorically applied to mental processes—we thus speak of a splenetic temperament, a hearty greeting, a short-sighted judgment, etc.—but in no sphere except in that of manual aptitude has this led to any noticeable confusion, the metaphorical nature of the expression being usually obvious.

The special capacity of the normal right hand, forming as it does a natural standard of aptitude, has given rise to a series of words etymologically based on this fact, but now only by metaphor connected therewith, and often used to denote intellectual or even moral superiority. Expressions built from the word "hand," such as, a handy implement, a right-hand assistant, a left-handed transaction, etc., give rise to little or no confusion, but the case is otherwise with those built from the Greek and Latin root "dexter." The latter includes a large number of terms, many of which are indispensable for certain purposes, and it is with these that

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