

PREFACE.

Of all things that are proper, the most reasonably so is to be diffident in offering a system of thought. And if this be true for everyone, the only excuses the writer can make for his offer here are, firstly, some few words of encouragement from the circle of great thinkers—who indeed seem by nature to be the most liberal; the fact that he has not yet met any system exactly like his own; and the belief that its solutions and proposals may be useful.

The outlines of it were reached at first without any acquaintance with German philosophy, with the exception of Kant. It appears, however, as if what is here termed the Mysterious Power and the Universe-Soul is not altogether unlike the Will of Schopenhauer, the Unconscious of Hartmann, and the Absolute Ego of Schelling, in some broad respects. Yet the aspect in which it presents itself—rising from the quarter of pleasure-and-pain facts—is totally different from that of any such philosophy, and its genesis is of a source apart from everything German; for the course of thinking which led to it is a strict descendant of British methods, and in nearest genealogy—as far as from any distinct author—from John Stuart Mill—"St. Mill" as Paul Janet innocently styles him. The British spirit—"Seek the facts"—infuses it, though the statements in these papers are, for brevity's sake, docked of detail and illustration. Moreover, not only does it claim to be founded on facts, but it asks to be followed out further by inductive methods. If the system prove not too crude, it may have a certain interest for this reason of descent, if no other.

The first essay—which has appeared before—is an analysis of "the Altruistic Act," in which Act the main difficulties of Ethical inquiry are gathered. The attempt is simply to arrive at and state the facts correctly, permitting inferences only so far as necessary to hold these facts consistently together. It is a product of actual difficulties in the writer's thinking on the subject, and records his way through them. The leading nut to be cracked was to trace