

The Human Intellect.

It is universally conceded that the real and essential difference between man and the lower animals is that the former has the power of reasoning which is exercised through a superior faculty known as the intellect. This term is quite common and is ordinarily used as meaning the power of thought within us. This definition gives, perhaps, as clear a conception as a more elaborate one but is rather vague as a foundation on which to base our assertions. A more workable one has been perfected by the "schoolmen," and is expressed somewhat as follows: an inorganic faculty of the soul which knows entities in their sensible quiddities. It shall now be our task to inquire by introspection and reflection into this most excellent of man's gifts and as far as possible, to give a concise idea of what seems to be its nature.

Every faculty given to man must have been created for some end, else why its existence; This is tacitly assumed by even those who deny our immediate creation by God. Consequently the first question which arises is: what is the intellect for and to what is it directed as its proper object? After a brief reflection and consideration it is seen that in the first dawning of reason, when we can clearly distinguish the different steps in our process of understanding, our knowledge was of generalities. The first man we knew was naturally our father and it seemed, then, that all men were "papas." It appears, consequently, that our knowledge was of the essential part or quiddity of a thing considered as something general in things of the same species. Furthermore it is altogether reasonable that this should be. For compare one with the other. The intellective faculty is a power of the soul—an immaterial substance united with the human body and existing in it. That the soul is immaterial is evident from the very fact of our consideration and reflection on one of its faculties. The soul is really totally applied to itself which clearly demonstrates its freedom from all corporeality or extension. The quiddity of a material object, too, is an abstract idea which we associate with this sensible thing and consequently its relation to the object is analogous to the relation of the soul to the body. We can then

safely conclude that the proper and immediate object of our intellect is the essence of a material thing considered as a universality.

Thus far the impression might be taken that the intellect is absolutely independent of any thing else. The falsity of this appears upon considering how our knowledge is really gained. Consider a man who never had the use of one sense—his sight. There is an old fable told of how some one attempted to explain to such a man the idea of whiteness. Snow was white; consequently whiteness was something cold and damp. Sugar was white and therefore whiteness was to be associated with sweetness. This might have continued indefinitely and the blind man would be no nearer to having any conception of colour. Isn't it logical, then, to assert that a man bereft of all his senses could know nothing, and that the intellect, depending on the senses for its objects, obtains nothing except through previous external sensation? Its dependence furthermore, is even greater on the internal senses, particularly the imagination, more properly called the phantasy. From it the intellect can receive and compare new objects with those previously represented there and by comparison involve new concepts. It is in fact extremely difficult to discern simple sensation from an act of the intellect. Some animals seem to reason and pass judgments on things; these acts, however, are rather the results of long association with certain invariable conditions and proceed from a tenacious sensitive memory combined with a keen imagination.

Naturally the next question which presents itself is how those external sensations we perceive are transferred to the intellect. It is commonly admitted that our reasoning powers are located in the brain, or, at least, that it is there they manifest themselves. Sensation, on the other hand, is perfected in its particular organ. How then can it be received in the brain and thence made into an intelligible object? Physiologists tell us that the nervous system here intervenes and in a manner similar to a telephone line carries the impression to a central point where it is received and represented in the phantasy. The succeeding process by which such representations are transferred into an intellectual pro-

duct is largely unknown. There have been, however, various theories put forward. The one which seems to explain it best and which is commonly accepted is that the intellect is a combination of two faculties, one active and the other passive. The acting part affects the representations in the phantasy and by converting those material pictures into immaterial images, abstracted from their previous conditions, makes them fitted to be united with the passive intellect, and with it to form the final term of our knowledge — the mental word or the intellectual expression of the object. Once several conceptions of different objects have been gained, new ones may be evolved by the intellect through a comparison, analysis or synthesis of those received from the senses. Thus very often we obtain new ideas without ever recurring to our sensitive powers.

The statement has been made that the object, direct and immediate of the intellect, was a universal concept. Does it follow then that we can know nothing of a particular individual or singular object? By no means, as we know from experience. These constitute the secondary and indirect objects of this faculty. After those representations in the phantasy have been acquired by the intellect they, and their immediate subject with them may be considered and compared as singular sensible things and thus our knowledge of the individual thing is gained.

A process akin to this is followed when we attempt to consider our own souls. To understand thoroughly and completely our spiritual nature is probably impossible to us, but through a careful consideration of its various acts we, with our weakened understanding, can gain a fairly complete conception of it, sufficient at least for our needs in this life and to enable us to make adequate preparation for the next.