PREFACE.

I have described the following work as an essay in metaphysics. Neither in form nor extent does it carry out the idea of a system. Its subject indeed is central enough to justify the exhaustive treatment of every problem. But what I have done is incomplete, and what has been left undone has often been omitted arbitrarily. The book is a more or less desultory handling of perhaps the chief questions in metaphysics.

There were several reasons why I did not attempt a more systematic treatise, and to carry out even what I proposed has proved enough for my powers. I began this book in the autumn of 1887, and, after writing the first two fifths of it in twelve months, then took three years with the remainder. My work has been suspended several times through long intervals of compulsory idleness, and I have been glad to finish it when and how I could. I do not say this to obviate criticism on a book now deliberately published. But, if I had attempted more, I should probably have completed nothing.

And in the main I have accomplished all that lay within my compass. This volume is meant to be a critical discussion of first principles, and its object is to stimulate enquiry and doubt. To originality in any other sense it makes no claim. If the
reader finds that on any points he has been led once more to reflect, I shall not have failed, so far as I can, to be original. But I should add that my book is not intended for the beginner. Its language in general I hope is not over-technical, but I have sometimes used terms intelligible only to the student. The index supplied is not an index but a mere collection of certain references.

My book does not design to be permanent, and will be satisfied to be negative, so long as that word implies an attitude of active questioning. The chief need of English philosophy is, I think, a sceptical study of first principles, and I do not know of any work which seems to meet this need sufficiently. By scepticism is not meant doubt about or disbelief in some tenet or tenets. I understand by it an attempt to become aware of and to doubt all preconceptions. Such scepticism is the result only of labour and education, but it is a training which cannot with impunity be neglected. And I know no reason why the English mind, if it would but subject itself to this discipline, should not in our day produce a rational system of first principles. If I have helped to forward this result, then, whatever form it may take, my ambition will be satisfied.

The reason why I have so much abstained from historical criticism and direct polemics may be briefly stated. I have written for English readers, and it would not help them much to learn my relation to German writers. Besides, to tell the truth, I do not know precisely that relation myself. And, though I have a high opinion of the metaphysical powers of the English mind, I have not seen any
serious attempt in English to deal systematically with first principles. But things among us are not as they were some few years back. There is no established reputation which now does much harm to philosophy. And one is not led to feel in writing that one is face to face with the same dense body of stupid tradition and ancestral prejudice. Dogmatic Individualism is far from having ceased to flourish, but it no longer occupies the ground as the one accredited way of "advanced thinking." The present generation is learning that to gain education a man must study in more than one school. And to criticise a writer of whom you know nothing is now, even in philosophy, considered to be the thing that it is. We owe this improvement mostly to men of a time shortly before my own, and who insisted well, if perhaps incautiously, on the great claims of Kant and Hegel. But whatever other influences have helped, the result seems secured. There is a fair field for any one now, I believe, who has anything to say. And I feel no desire for mere polemics, which can seldom benefit oneself, and which seem no longer required by the state of our philosophy. I would rather keep my natural place as a learner among learners.

If anything in these pages suggests a more dogmatic frame of mind, I would ask the reader not hastily to adopt that suggestion. I offer him a set of opinions and ideas in part certainly wrong, but where and how much I am unable to tell him. That is for him to find out, if he cares to and if he can. Would it be better if I hinted in effect that he is in danger of expecting more, and that I, if I
chose, perhaps might supply it? I have everywhere done my best, such as it is, to lay bare the course of ideas, and to help the reader to arrive at a judgment on each question. And, as I cannot suppose a necessity on my part to disclaim infallibility, I have not used set phrases which, if they mean anything, imply it. I have stated my opinions as truths whatever authority there may be against them, and however hard I may have found it to come to an opinion at all. And, if this is to be dogmatic, I certainly have not tried to escape dogmatism.

It is difficult again for a man not to think too much of his own pursuit. The metaphysician cannot perhaps be too much in earnest with metaphysics, and he cannot, as the phrase runs, take himself too seriously. But the same thing holds good with every other positive function of the universe. And the metaphysician, like other men, is prone to forget this truth. He forgets the narrow limitation of his special province, and, filled by his own poor inspiration, he ascribes to it an importance not its due. I do not know if anywhere in my work I may seem to have erred thus, but I am sure that such excess is not my conviction or my habitual mood. And to restore the balance, and as a confession possibly of equal defect, I will venture to transcribe some sentences from my note-book. I see written there that "Metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct, but to find these reasons is no less an instinct." Of Optimism I have said that "The world is the best of all possible worlds, and everything in it is a necessary evil." Eclecticism I have found preach
that "Every truth is so true that any truth must be false," and Pessimism that "Where everything is bad it must be good to know the worst," or "Where all is rotten it is a man's work to cry stinking fish." About the Unity of Science I have set down that "Whatever you know it is all one," and of Introspection that "The one self-knowledge worth having is to know one's mind." The reader may judge how far these sentences form a Credo, and he must please himself again as to how seriously he takes a further extract: "To love unsatisfied the world is mystery, a mystery which love satisfied seems to comprehend. The latter is wrong only because it cannot be content without thinking itself right."

But for some general remarks in justification of metaphysics I may refer to the Introduction.
PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION

It is a pleasure to me to find that a new edition of this book is wanted. I am encouraged to hope that with all its defects it has helped to stimulate thought on first principles. And it has been a further pleasure to me to find that my critics have in general taken this work in the spirit in which it was offered, whether they have or have not found themselves in agreement with its matter. And perhaps in some cases sympathy with its endeavour may have led them to regard its shortcomings too leniently. I on my side have tried to profit by every comment, though I have made no attempt to acknowledge each, or to reply to it in detail. But I fear that some criticisms must have escaped my notice, since I have discovered others by mere chance.

For this edition I have thought it best not to make many alterations; but I have added in an Appendix, beside some replies to objections, a further explanation and discussion of certain difficulties.