

28.
Mathe-
matical
psychology.

ently before his mind than they had, he was tempted to try how far the conceptions of equilibrium of motion and of the composition of forces could be applied to the inner play of ideas which chase, oppose, and displace each other, preserving all the time a kind of dynamical equilibrium. His elaborate mathematical calculations in the first part of his greater work on psychology do not specially refer to the purely intellectual process;¹ they refer rather to all inner processes which oppose each other, which come into conflict, restraining each other in proportion to their contrast, creating a tendency towards reversion to former conditions. Such a play of opposing forces is to be found likewise in the larger field of human society; this is accordingly quite as much a case for the application of those psychical mechanics which Herbart aimed at establishing.

In a history of scientific Thought, which aims at showing by what gradual steps the various provinces of phenomena have been brought under the methods of exact treatment, the psychology of Herbart has an important as well as a unique and isolated position. It

¹ Herbart himself says of his mathematical chapter, that the results therein given "do not follow immediately from the conception of a thinking being; but they refer to the mutual arrangements of any things, in so far as they are opposed and as they collide, restricting each other in proportion to their contrast, tending to revert to the previous condition, the unrestricted portions being fused into complex forces. The forces which are active in society are doubtless originally psychological forces. They meet in so far as they

appear in language and in actions in a common sensual world. In the latter they restrict each other; this is the universal spectacle of conflicting interests and social frictions. Also the fusion no doubt exists. . . . We therefore assume that among men living together the same conditions appear which exist, according to our view, among the ideas in one and the same consciousness. We examine the result of their mutual restrictive action" ("Psychologie als Wissenschaft," 'Werke,' ed. Hartenstein, vol. vi. p. 31, &c.