

What Evidence Do We Have That Frances Wright Personally Was An Epicurean?

Post by "Cassius" of September 23, 2020 at 10:53 PM

I am going back to her 1829 edition of her Course of Popular Lectures. This one contains an opening lecture on "knowledge" and I am finding this rings true to how I now read Epicurus. Don will recognize this as perhaps echoing our recent discussions on the passage translated as "mere words":

The field of knowledge is around, and about, and within us. Let us not be alarmed by sounding words, and let us not be *deceived* by them. Let us look to things. It is things which we have to consider. Words are, or, more correctly, should be, only the signs of things. I say they should be ; for it is a most lamentable truth, that they are now very generally conceived to constitute the very substance of knowledge. Words, indeed, should seem at present contrived rather for the purpose of confusing our ideas, than administering to their distinctness and arrangement. Instead of viewing them as the shadows, we mistake them for the substance ; and conceive that in proportion as we enlarge our vocabulary, we multiply our acquirements.

Further:

I shall have occasion, in a more advanced stage of our enquiries, to examine minutely the errors in the existing mode of instruction, and which are of a nature to perplex the human mind from infancy to age, and to make even learning an additional stumbling block in the way of knowledge. For the present, I would confine myself to the establishing the simple position, that all real knowledge is derived from positive sensations.

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tions of others, it is possible, while pretending to communicate knowledge, only to communicate belief. This we know to be the system pursued in all our schools and colleges, where the truths of the most demonstrable sciences are presented under the disguise of oral or written lessons, instead of being exposed, in practical illustrations, to the eye, and the ear, and the touch, in the simple, incontrovertible fact. This method, while it tends to hide and perpetuate the errors of teachers, so does it also inculcate credulity and blind belief in the scholar, and finally establishes the conclusion in the mind, that knowledge is compounded of words, and signs, and intellectual abstractions, instead of facts and human sensations.