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KNOWLEDGE BY ACQUAINTANCE

EVER since Russell proposed the distinction between "knowledge by acquaintance" and "knowledge by description", there has been a good deal of discussion of these two ways of knowing. I feel, nevertheless, that the matter may profitably be reconsidered, especially because, so far as I am aware, there has been no adequate study of knowledge by acquaintance. This is true even of Russell himself, for the three early essays in the *Monist*, "On Acquaintance",¹ are in large measure a polemic against the neutral monism and radical empiricism of thirty years ago, and I doubt if he would now accept his own analysis as presented there, or if anyone still adheres to the positions attacked; while, in the essay entitled "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" reprinted in *Mysticism and Logic*, the main emphasis is on knowledge by description. In the present paper I shall limit myself almost entirely to a study of knowledge by acquaintance—its characteristics, problems and functions.

In the latter essay, where Russell first expounded the distinction between the two types of knowledge, he offers some meager, yet interesting observations on knowledge by acquaintance, which we may conveniently take as the starting point for our own reflections. Thus he writes, "I say that I am acquainted with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object; *i.e.*, when I am directly aware of that object itself." And again, "I think the relation of subject and object which I call acquaintance is simply the converse of the relation of object and subject which constitutes presentation."² In these citations Russell has called attention to one ob-

¹ *The Monist* XXIV 1-16, 162-187, 434-453; 1914.

² *Mysticism and Logic* 209, 210.