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THE EXTERNAL WORLD AND THE SOCIAL
CONSCIOUSNESS.¹

THE question how far our fundamental notions of the existence and the structure of the external world are affected, not only in their accidents, but in their very essence, by the suggestions that we get from our fellows, is a problem of obvious psychological interest. I have myself been led, within the past two or three years, to some comments upon this problem, which I shall venture to set forth in the following paper — itself only an introduction, as will soon appear, to a somewhat extended line of research. For like most psychological problems, this one soon leads into a philosophical exploration of no small interest when once you have fairly begun your journey. And so let us in this discussion briefly survey the field of inquiry that lies open before us, and indicate the possible regions into which we might be still further led were there time. Let me say at the start that I make very little claim, indeed, as regards the originality of this discussion. I seek only to put some familiar considerations into a light which may give them a not unknown, but perhaps too much neglected significance.

I.

It needs but a glance at the sources of our information to show that even for those among us who live in the very closest

¹ A Lecture read before the Philosophical Club of Princeton College, Feb. 2, 1894.