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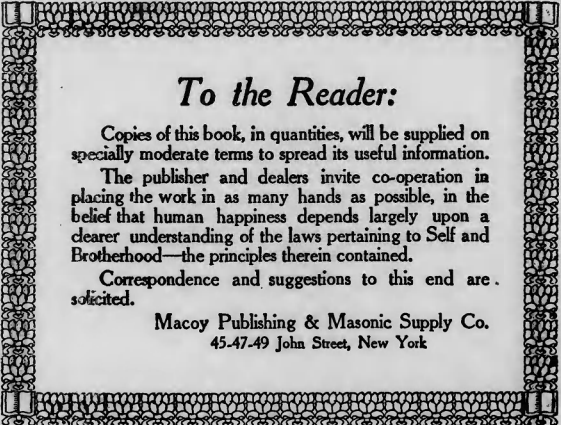
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# **Influence of Thought**

**Over all Conditions**

**By W. J. COLVILLE**





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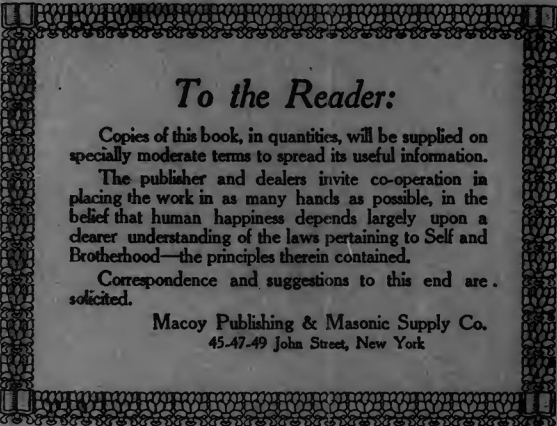
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# Influence of Thought Over all Conditions

W. J. Colville

So much is constantly being said and written,—and has been for many ages,—concerning the power of a strong and steady will and its practically unlimited ability to influence all human conditions and circumstances, that until quite recently comparatively little attention has been given to the equal importance of right thinking in molding character and regulating environment. The criticism is continually being offered that there is nothing new in New Thought except the name, and tho' we must admit that, from at least one standpoint—that of the history of philosophy—this assertion is well warranted, from another viewpoint, and one which comes much nearer home to the majority who are attracted by the title, there is something startlingly novel in the claim put forward by all representatives of what is broadly and inclusively styled the New Thought Movement.

The real newness of the attitude taken virtually by all who profess New Thought is the immense importance they attach to *thinking* as distinct from *willing*, and without necessarily endorsing to the full the most extravagant claims sometimes put forward by over-zealous advocates, it behooves us all to carefully consider the immense benefits accruable from a well regulated mental attitude. Will, we must always remember, is identifiable with Love and this must ever prove the great initiator in all undertakings; but

Thought is the chief executive, and without the combined operation of the two, no definite result can be achieved. It must be patent to all careful observers, and self-evident to all real thinkers, that Will alone does not suffice to bring into manifestation anything like all we endeavor to externalize thro' the force of its unassisted energy. The necessity for combining Faith with Prayer to render prayer effectual is the theological method of stating the proposition that Will or Desire alone, no matter how earnest, is inadequate to bring to pass all the manifestable blessings of which we may be in search.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" has proved a fruitful text for many a sermon and many an essay, and recently the stage has supplemented the efforts of pulpit, platform and library in enforcing the truth embodied in that momentous phrase. The fine popular drama, "As a Man Thinks," which has recently enjoyed long and highly successful runs in many prominent cities, sets forth the doctrines involved in this great saying in a most attractive and convincing manner, and also testifies to the fact that progressive physicians, like *Dr. Seelig* in the play, are in the front rank of those who are insisting upon the mental cause, and therefore logically upon the need for a mental remedy for disease.

Before the close of the eighteenth century, the famous *Dr. Benjamin Rush*, of Philadelphia, declared that the influence of the mind over the body was exceedingly great, but its extent we were unable to estimate. This saying of one of the greatest American physicians of a past generation has been quoted and freely commented upon by the well known *Dr. Schofield* and other eminent British physicians in recent works treating of the mental factor in health, sickness and recovery.

James Allen, whose admirable books are being studied widely at present in many quarters, said in the popular manual "As a Man Thinketh" (which we advise all our friends to read and study), "the aphorism 'As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he' not only embraces the whole of a man's being, but is so comprehensive as to reach out to every condition and circumstance of his life. A man is literally what he thinks, his character being the complete sum of all his thoughts." This sweeping assertion needs some interpreting or we shall find ourselves brought into sharp collision with Swedenborg and other profound philosophers who have positively declared that a man is his affections, that it is the *love* of the man which makes him all that he really is. The text affords the true nexus by stating that it is as we think "in our hearts" that we truly are; and to "think in our hearts" can only be an old way of saying that our thoughts and our affections must be so perfectly attuned together that we never allow ourselves to think in opposition to our desires or our intentions.

Good will is far more prevalent than many people suppose, and there are also many actually strong-willed as well as well-wishing persons who utterly fail to accomplish much on account of their complete lack of mental self-discipline. Desires are all right in many cases where mental attitudes are entirely wrong; it therefore is unnecessary, in a majority of instances, to harp on the well-worn string of right intention, for the intention is generally right already. We all of us need a great deal of mental drilling, first, because we have (most of us) been brought up to underestimate the value of right thinking and we have (many of us) not been taught that we have even any ability to regulate our thinking tho' we can govern our words and actions according to prevailing sentiment, and, second, on account of the wide

prevalence of wrong thought all around us even where good will seems predominant.

It would be absurd as well as unjust to accuse friends and kindred of having no desire for the welfare of relatives and companions for we know how tender and deep is the affection often subsisting between relatives and comrades who are all unwittingly working against each other's chances of health and happiness, because of mutual indulgence in anxiety, which is the chief bane of friendly interest in innumerable instances. Many people are so painfully emotional and so little rational that they esteem it a mark of callousness or indifference when one takes the firm mental attitude advocated and found successful by practitioners of psycho-therapy or mental therapeutics. The best interests of no one can be served by encouraging any other than a strong and resolute mental attitude; but instead of encouragement and help to conquer difficulties, we are very apt to receive depressing sympathy from our closest friends and nothing can well be more enervating. We "hope for the best," it is true, but our hope is frequently only a flickering flame, but when we "fear the worst" our fear is a very powerful asset.

Nothing seems quite so difficult to instill into the minds of average persons as the bracing doctrine that their own thoughts have far more to do with governing their circumstances than has any environment in influencing their thought. The blindest and most stupid of all popular errors is founded in a mistaken view of the truth embodied in the old adage "History repeats itself," which is never wholly without foundation, and never can be so long as there is a fixed order of sequence between causes and their effects. If we have been thinking steadily along certain lines for a number of years, and have regularly experienced a certain regular suc-

cession of events, we surely need not rebel intellectually if told that there is a definite connection between those thoughts of ours and the facts of our exterior existence. We have simply been demonstrating the relation between unseen sowing and visible reaping.

If our manner of life has proved agreeable to us and we are satisfied with our continuous reaping in accordance with the nature of our perpetual sowing, we do not feel sad, irritable, discouraged, or aught else unpleasant; consequently we may be willing to "let well enough alone" and continue along the road we have been so long contentedly traveling. But when we are sad and dissatisfied with our conditions and find our lives monotonously gloomy, and perhaps threatening to grow even gloomier, we need the tonic of new thinking; and if we do not feel equal to the task of changing our mental habits without assistance, we do well to receive help and encouragement from any who are experienced, in some degree, in helping the oppressed to throw off their burdens. Self-treatment can be the only ultimate treatment in any case, because it is one's own thought and not some one else's that brings about the actual conditions of our bodies and then of our surroundings, which we experience either to our joy or to our sorrow, but this fact by no means does away with the need for mutual help in time of trouble.

Tho' we cannot emphasize too strongly the importance of individual right thinking, it would be ridiculous to deny that millions of people are often set thinking in a special way by the intrepid thought of some great pioneer teacher. The greatest teachers the world has ever known, the most illustrious prophets, are they who once were solitary voices crying as in wildernesses, but they never ceased to cry even when their call seemed to elicit no immediate response from any quarter. There is a wonderfully strong and true lesson

in the story of Elijah finding that he had seven thousand companions in Israel, when he imagined himself to stand, mentally and spiritually, entirely alone; but the grandeur of the prophet's character shines forth much more strikingly when he is faithful while believing himself a solitary witness, than after he has received the blissful assurance that he has a multitude of brave companions.

The supreme test of character must always occur when we feel ourselves entirely alone and called upon to take a stand demanding all the moral and mental energy we can possibly summon into expression. There are weak and timid natures which seem as yet unable to face practically the stronger teachings which the world has always been receiving from its bravest and wisest enlighteners and these must be granted some accommodated dilution of truth in preparation for more heroic administrations soon to follow. To deny the real existence of sickness and of danger is often a help to timid natures, but the stronger in spirit "face the music" denying nothing and evading nothing, but singing above the noise of the most tempestuous breakers.

On an ocean voyage many persons suffer from sea-sickness entirely because of their foolish apprehension and some disagreeable sub-conscious memories; and as in these days so many people mar their ocean voyages, even when daring to undertake them, by this belief in the inevitability of *mal de mer*, it is very important that a rational view of our mental attitude toward the ocean should be discussed freely and frequently. There are three very prominent causes for unnecessary suffering at sea, viz., Fear, Memory, Susceptibility. Under these three general and ample headings, the entire malady and its prevention may be intelligently considered. Fear is no more justifiable on water than on land, and indeed statistics prove that there are proportionately far



fewer accidents on the ocean than on land. Memory always needs disciplining, but no more in one place than another. We may easily call to remembrance some suffering of our own on a former voyage or remember some harrowing experience related by an acquaintance, and straightway we begin to suffer all the symptoms we are recalling. The remedy is to transfer the attention from a painful reminiscence to an agreeable immediate situation, and refuse resolutely to allow uncontrolled memories to dictate our present feelings. Susceptibility to the feelings of those around us is often a result of ungoverned sensitiveness, coupled with anxious solicitude for the safety and comfort of others beside ourselves; but tho' there are many good uses for extreme sensitiveness when rightly disciplined, unless it is rendered amenable to the sway of enlightened judgment it is far more troublesome than profitable.

The first great step to be taken toward an emancipated life is to set oneself resolutely to the work of concentrating all attention upon some pleasant immediate prospect, or else giving oneself up to quiet meditation upon some encouraging and uplifting theme. Either the subjective or the objective method will prove effectual provided concentration upon a desirable object, outwardly observed or inwardly realized, be uninterrupted. Divided consciousness, distracted attention and all that signifies the absence of complete absorption for the time in a single mental engagement, is the cause of so little real success attending many well-meaning, but nevertheless half-hearted methods; or, if anyone objects to the term "half-hearted" on the plea that he is truly devoted to his work intentionally and therefore cannot be justly censured for only partial affection for it, we must substitute "half-minded" to express exactly the shade of meaning we wish to convey. In the epistle of James we

are told that "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" and much instability is unquestionably attributable to our thoughts being divided between what we love and what we dread.

The most formidable opponent to our success in changing circumstances is our deeply rooted belief that environment is something to which we must perforce submit, and tho' it be an indisputable fact that most people do submit to circumstances and are governed by them, such persons are never leaders but always followers. So-called new and advanced thought partially fails of great accomplishment because its professed advocates do not actually carry it out in their lives to anything like a sufficient degree to make it a genuine power in the eyes of a community. Limitations are encouraged on every hand to such an extent that very often those who proclaim loudly that they hold very advanced views on all subjects are just as much handicapped as any of their neighbors who make no such claim for mental emancipation. To see an abstract proposition intellectually and to admire it as a literary curiosity is a very common experience, but to actually apply it and work it out involves a mental effort that only a few determined minds are resolved to actualize.

A distorted view and a misuse of memory may be safely assigned as chief causes for non-success along the line of progressive mental effort. We hear on every hand that we must "judge the future by the past." This is one of many popular half truths which are extremely dangerous on account of their being half falsehoods. Judging the future by the past may be either a very intelligent or a very stupid process. We remember that we left our windows open one day and went out regardless of weather indications foretelling rain, and on returning to our apartments found some

of our belongings injured by the water. We learn by experience either to close windows when rain is indicated or else to place spoilable objects in places of security. This is quite sensible, as everybody knows; but what would be more foolish in this connection than to build up a theory that whenever it rains some of our property will inevitably be damaged. We have power to neutralize such a possible effect by setting in motion a different cause. In like manner on the mental plane we can attract what we formerly repelled and repel what we aforesaid attracted.

The immutability of law is, when rightly regarded, the most encouraging topic on which we can possibly meditate, but it is so often perverted to excuse mental inefficiency, that sometimes we almost feel that some mischief may result from its perpetual promulgation. Habits form character, and by habits we mean modes of thinking far more than outward practices, which are never other than expressions of thought, either self-generated or absorbed sub-consciously from those around us.

If it be true that "as a man thinks so is he," then it must be equally true that as a man thinks not so is he not. We need often to reverse a familiar sentence to render it more vividly impressive in the ears of many who have been so long accustomed to hear it voiced in the old way that custom has rendered them inattentive to its significance; but let it be stated in an unaccustomed form and at once they prick up their ears and listen gladly to the novel utterance. You cannot gather *thorns* from *grapes* nor *thistles* from *figs*, may at once call attention to a great spiritual lesson long heeded but slightly when the familiar gospel saying has been reiterated; but does it not stand to reason that just as we cannot gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, the converse must be equally certain?

All frantic endeavors to alter circumstances may prove abortive, because environment is plastic material moulded into kaleidoscopic shapes by our thoughts, whether we know that this is so or not. We generate thought-forms quite unwittingly, and we generate a personal aura or human atmosphere without knowing it, as the inevitable consequence of entertaining certain classes of thoughts. Then come words, acts, manners all that is summed up in the one word conduct or behavior, which seems so very influential a factor in our success or failure. We actually do what we do and say what we say because we think what we think, or because we are simply unthinking in many instances and negligence can never lead to triumphs in any conceivable direction.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox has called attention to the fact that unthinking women advocate kindness to all living creatures with dead birds and even aigrettes on their heads, simply because they have never given thought to how such barbaric millinery is procured. When they read a temperate article, like one written by Mrs. Wilcox, and realize that atrocious cruelty is practised to procure such hat-disfiguring, they at once refuse to purchase articles which cannot get into the market without compelling some persons to inflict wanton injury upon our friends in plumage, without whose presence in the woods our world would have lost much of its attractiveness, and our fruit trees their protection.

We need to think intelligently so that we may speak and act righteously, even without conscious premeditation, for out of the heart proceed words and acts spontaneously. At first when we are getting off a wrong road onto a right one, or substituting a good habit for a bad one, we may need to devote serious attention to deliberate thinking, but let us get fairly started on a rightful track or accustomed to useful habits and then, without effort, we shall say and do just

the right things at the right time and in the right place, and soon come to bask in the sunshine of that delightful liberty which is known only to those who have become accustomed to expect only the good they desire and therefore pray without ceasing the effectual fervent faithful prayer of the righteous man that availeth much.

## A Foreword

"I looked upon the world, and saw that to some it was shadowed by sorrow and scorched by the fierce fires of suffering. I looked for the cause, but could not find it until I looked within, and there found both the cause and the self-made nature of the cause. I looked again, deeper, and found the remedy. I found one Law, the Law of Love; one Life, the Life of adjustment to that Law; one Truth, the Truth of a conquered mind and a quiet and obedient heart. And I dreamed of writing a book which should help men and women, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, worldly or unworldly, to find within themselves the source of all success, all happiness, all accomplishment, all truth: And the dream remained with me, and at last became substantial, and now I send it forth into the world on its mission of healing and blessedness, knowing that it cannot fail to reach the homes and hearts of those who are waiting and ready to receive it."

James Allen

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