

When no effort is made to control the succession of ideas in the mind, they do not always or generally follow in regular or logical order, but often by very slight connections and in very capricious and sometimes grotesque order. It is possible, however, by a continuous effort of the will to hold the mind upon a single subject and even upon a single aspect of a given subject until all irrelevant thoughts cease to intrude; and the succession of thoughts, thus confined to one subject, no longer proceeds by slight and capricious connections, but according to truth and the real relations of the subject. Moreover, when by this effort of the will the mind is withdrawn from other subjects and the succession of irrelevant ideas is excluded, we find, often to our surprise, always to our delight, that relevant thoughts abundantly multiply and the mind becomes wonderfully productive. As we say, the mind gets full of the subject, and thoughts both relevant and just suggest themselves with delightful facility. The condition of invention, then, is persistent, close, and continuous attention. We may adapt an old proverb and say in this connection that attention is the mother of invention.

We experience this same thought-productiveness when our attention, instead of being directed by an effort of the will, is involuntarily drawn to and fixed upon a subject by the inherent attractiveness of the subject itself. It is perfectly wonderful how productive his mind becomes, when, "in the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of"—some fair friend, and how he daily throws off page after page of the most relevant matter without exhausting the source or diminishing the supply.

This will explain also how it is that, when we are deeply interested in any subject, we find it hard not to talk about it. It is because we closely and continuously fix our attention upon it, or rather because it attracts and fixes our attention upon itself.

In some instances the attention is semi-voluntary, as in the case of the preacher who has let the whole week pass by without preparing his sermon and on Saturday night wakes up to the fact that Sunday and necessity are upon him. And now the thoughts that would not come when he did not fix his attention on his chosen subject do come when, at last, he is forced to do so.

Thoughts often come to men when engaged in the act of preaching or speaking, and sometimes a rapturous mental quickening is experienced, due, no doubt, to the intense concentration of the attention under the stimulus of high emotional excitement. This mental fructification and thought-production often continues after the sermon is ended, and sometimes in a heightened degree. What preacher has not sat up on Sunday night after service to write down the good thoughts that did not come to him while preaching? One of the greatest speakers of the English Parliament declared that he lost two nights' sleep over every important speech he had made—the night be-