

Who can measure the influence of nature upon politics, the school, the church, and social life? Who can measure the effect of any one of these systems of laws upon the others? Or who can measure the power of these concentric congeries of facts upon man, who stands at their common centre? In all these vast circles of facts and influences, there is not one that may not stimulate a child's mind to action, and so aid to form his character. A white pebble or a yellow leaf excites the faculty of observation; a particolored blade of grass leads to an act of analysis: two sticks of unequal length produce a comparison, and then an argument; distress arouses pity, and cruelty indignation; friendship evokes the sentiment of moral beauty, and magnanimity the moral sublime; trial develops persistence and determination; danger calls out courage; a vision of the adorable evokes adoration. The gigantic powers of nature elicit, sometimes superstition, sometimes grandeur, sometimes veneration. The ignorant savage shudders at the feet of Nature; while Coleridge, in the Valley of Chamouni, breaks into the apostrophe to Mont Blanc:—

O dread and silent Mount! I gazed upon thee

Till thou, still present to the bodily sense,
Didst vanish from my thought: entranced
in prayer,

I worshipped the Invisible alone.

Yet, like some sweet beguiling melody,—

So sweet we know not we are listening to it,—
Thou the meanwhile wast blending with my
thought,

Yea, with my life, and life's own secret joy;
Till the dilating soul, enrapt, transfused,
Into the mighty vision passing—there,
As in her natural form, swelled vast to
heaven.

Thus it is that our mental energies are set in motion and habits of action formed. Passing by the unseen world of spirit, the most wonderful of these phenomena are the play and movement of social life. A word or a sign,

a frown or a smile, a sneer or a tear, a prayer or an oath, is a sharp-pointed graver that delivers its blow and leaves its mark. More wonderful than even the bridge or castle-building of the fairies is the play of thought, feeling, and volition that carves out character; and almost equally marvellous is the play of external facts and forces which sets thought, feeling, and volition in motion. Yet, great as is the variety of stimulating powers, rarely or never is a whole nature developed. Naturalists tell us of rudimentary organs, of which the eye-specks of the fish found in Mammoth Cave are examples. The analogues of these are found in nearly every human soul.

3. *Finally, the will.*—I am not about to discuss the metaphysics of this most difficult subject. For the present, liberty and necessity, free-will and predestination, must stand aside. I do not undertake to harmonize freedom and universal causation. No doubt these matters will continue to trouble both philosophers and theologians for ages to come. But I assert my faith in freedom; I believe that the will is free, spontaneous, self-determining, endowed with originating and creating power. The soul can set the soul in motion. It can choose its own lines of activity—the channels along which it will discharge its currents. The mind has power over its own trains of thought. In this way it partially controls those series of actions that develop character and make the man.

The mechanism of thought and feeling is set in motion, and is thereby modified, by stimuli that spring from three sources: inheritance, environment, will. To gauge the respective power of these stimuli is a difficult or impossible task. Sometimes more stress is laid upon one, and then again upon another. Formerly the native energy of the man