

CHARACTER BUILDING THROUGH THOUGHT

"The thought is always parent to the act."

"He that reigns within himself is more than king."

A certain man, of no great learning, fell heir to some steamships. He knew nothing of the sea, nothing of navigation or engineering, but the notion seized him to take a voyage and command his own ship. The ship was gotten under way, the self-appointed captain allowing the crew to go ahead with their usual duties, as the multiplicity of operations confused the amateur navigator. Once headed out to sea, however, the work grew simpler, and the captain had time to observe what was going on. As he strolled on the forward deck, he saw a little glass house in which a man was turning a big wheel, now this way, now that.

"What in the world is that man doing?" he asked.

"That's the helmsman. He is steering the ship."

"Well, I don't see any use in fiddling away all the time. There's nothing but water ahead, and I guess the engines can push her forward. When there's land in sight, or a ship coming head on, there'll be time enough to do steering. Shut up that toy house and pile on the steam."

The order was obeyed, and the few survivors of the wreck that followed had cause to remember the captain who thought a ship steered herself.

You say no such man ever existed, and you may be right. That isn't admitting that no such foolishness exists. However, you wouldn't be so foolish, would you?

Think a moment. Are you not in command of something more delicate, more precious, than any ship,—your own life, your own mind? How much attention are you giving to the steering of that mind? Don't you let it go pretty much as it will? Don't you let the winds of anger and passion blow it hither and thither? Don't you let chance friendships, chance reading and aimless amusement sway your life into forms you never would have deliberately chosen? Are you really captain of your own ship, driving it to a sure harbor of happiness, peace and success? If you are not, would you not like to become such a master of the situation? It is simpler than you perhaps think, if you will but realize certain fundamental truths, and put to work your own better nature. To tell you how, and to direct your efforts, is the object of this series of little talks on the use of thought in life-forming.

Considering that mind governs everything in the world, that force has been singularly neglected and misunderstood. Even when tribute has been paid to its power it has been treated as something unalterable, a tool that could be used if one was born with the genius to do so. Of recent years, the control of thought, its use to modify character already formed, to change even external surroundings, or, at least, their effect on oneself, and bring about health, happiness, and success, have been more and more studied and understood. The possibilities of thought-training are infinite, its consequences eternal, and yet few take the pains to direct their thinking into channels that will do them good, but, instead, leave all to chance, or, rather, to the myriad of circumstances that buffet and compel our mental action if counter-effort be not made.

There can be no more important study, no higher duty owed to ourselves and those about us, than this of thought-control, which results in self-development. Perhaps because thought, in itself, is intangible, and most of us have so little control over it, there is an impression that direction of mind-action is a difficult and abstruse affair, something that requires hard study, leisure and book knowledge to accomplish. Nothing is farther from the truth. Every person, however ignorant, however uncultured, and however busy, has within himself all that is needed, and all the time required, to re-make his intel-

lectual nature, his character, and practically his body and his life. Every person will have a different task, different problems to solve, and different results to aim at, but the process is practically the same, and the transformation is no more impossible for one than for another.

A sculptor's chisel in the hands of a bungler may mar the loveliest statue; in the hands of a criminal it may become a burglar's tool or a murderer's bludgeon. With the power in our hands to make or mar our natures, what reckless fools we are not to try to know how to produce beauty and harmony, happiness and success! The sculptor dares not strike random blows, while gazing away from the marble. With eyes steadfast, he makes every stroke count toward the final result, and that result he has fixed in his mind and in the model he has made after his ideas. We must do likewise in chiseling our characters, forming our environment, making our lives. We must know what we want, know we can get it, and set ourselves directly at the task, never relenting or relaxing in its performance.

The difference between our thought and an ordinary tool is that we must do something with it. We cannot lay it down and say we shall strike no blow. We must think, and every thought is a blow that forges a part of our lives. Let us, therefore, resolutely determine to turn thought to good use, to the best use, and then stiffen our will to carry out that determination.

WE MUST GROW OR DIE

A passion for growth, a yearning for a larger life, is characteristic of all great souls. A man is measured by his power to grow, to become larger, broader, nobler. The intensity of his desire to reach out and up defines his capacity for development.

Anyone, young or old, possessed by a passion for growth is constantly adding to his knowledge, always pushing his horizon a little farther. Every day he gains additional wisdom; every night he is a little larger than he was in the morning. He keeps growing as long as he lives. Even in old age he is still stretching out for larger things, reaching up to greater heights.

Men like Edward Everett Hale, and George T. Angell, and women like Mary A. Livermore and Julia Ward Howe, and a host of other noble souls that might be named, many of whom have long passed the three-score-and-ten mark, are still learning, are still fresh and responsive to new thoughts and ideas. And so it should be, for—

"Man was made to grow, not stop."

But, despite this natural law, many people cease to grow in early life. They get into ruts, and development ceases even before they reach their prime. There are men and women who at thirty or thirty-five years of age begin to fall behind. They cling to old things, old methods, and the ways in which they and their fathers and mothers have been accustomed. They put a limit to their capacity for growth, through a deifying of the "good old times" of their ancestors.

We often find plants and trees that are not fully developed but have reached their limit of growth. They cannot be made to respond to the wooing of enriched soil or copious watering. The power for the extension of cell life seems to have departed.

There are many human plants of similar nature. Early in life they settle into grooves from which nothing can displace them. They are dead to enterprise, to advancement along any line. New movements, new systems of business, larger conceptions of life, and similar things in the living, moving present do not appeal to them.