

THESIS.

Subject: Volitional Powers.

Name: H. L. Kiehl.

In the examination of the different forms of nervous activity presented to us in the ascending series of animal life, we find, as we approach man, blind unreasoning instinct, gradually giving place to rational intelligence. But neither the performance of reasoning processes, nor the execution of their results, necessarily involves the exercise of will, for even in man, intellectual operations of a high order may go on automatically.

The whole system of training a dog or a horse, like the early education of a child, consists in bringing such motives to bear upon it, as are adapted to its nature.

A creature that has no capacity for loving right or hating wrong for its own sake, can only be made to comprehend that certain actions will bring reward and certain others punishment. And the direction of its conduct is clearly determined by the preponderance of such motives.

When bears and lions growl and fight, it is because it is their nature to; they cannot make themselves other than they are; but when we urge children not to let their angry passions rule. It is because we believe that they can acquire, if they try hard enough, the independent self-regulating power which we are ourselves conscious of exercising.

The man who is in full possession of his will power can use it in giving bodily effect to his mental decision, by either

putting in action the muscles which will execute the movement he has determined on, or by restraining them from the action to which they are prompted by some other impulse, and also in controlling and directing that succession of mental operations, by which the determination is arrived at.

When our current of thought is flowing on smoothly and uninterruptedly, we are no more conscious of effort than we are in the act of breathing.

really, an effort may be required either to check the current, or to turn it into another channel; but as soon as a difficulty or obstruction arises the will is called into play to overcome it, by determinately sending the mind in search of the desiderated idea.

So, when the attention is distracted, either by some sense-impression, or by the intrusion of some inappropriate idea or feeling, we have to make an effort to keep it fixed upon our train of thought.

the degree of that conscious effort being the measure of our will exertion.

In proportion as we are able thus to concentrate our attention on the subject proper to the time, and to exclude all distracting considerations while pursuing the train of thought which the contemplation of it suggests, will be our power of advantageously employing our intellectual faculties in the acquirement of knowledge and in the pursuit of truth; and all men

who have been distinguished by their intellectual achievements have possessed this faculty in a considerable degree.

It is one which is eminently capable of cultivation by steady intention of mind and habitual exercise, and the more frequently it is put in practice, the easier the exercise becomes.

In fact, when a man has once brought his intellectual faculties under the mastery of his will, to such an extent as to induce the state of abstract

ion whenever he pleases, this state becomes secondarily automatic.

The fixed thoughts, which at first required a constant will-effort for its maintenance comes to be continued without any consciousness of exertion, so long as the will may permit.

All determinate recollection involves the exercise of volitional control over the direction of the thoughts; and, if this control be suspended, and the mind be left to its own automatic activity, the power of recalling

even the most familiar ideas
is completely annihilated.

So, again, the determi-
nate exercise of the judgment,
which involves the comparison
of ideas, can only take place
under the guidance of the
will; which selects those which
are appropriate, and brings
them into collocation with
each other.

By the motive power
of ideas and feelings, the man
in full possession of his vol-
itional faculty has the power
of refraining from bodily action

under the immediate pressure of motives, and also of so far modifying the relative force of motives by the mode in which he mentally contemplates them, that their preponderance may be completely reversed.

The will is constantly initiating movement, or directing movement, without any consciousness of motives.

Thus when a man chooses a certain profession, or undertakes a certain office, and does so with the fixed purpose of faithfully dis-

charging its responsibilities,
the habits he forms become a
"second nature" to him; he does
not stop to think whether
he shall or shall not perform
any action which clearly forms
part of his duties; but his
Will says to his body, "do this,"
and the body does it.

And, further, the Will
can put a check upon the bod-
ily action to which some strong
internal impulse would di-
rectly prompt, so that time
is gained for consideration, by
which the further course is guided.

If after restraining the immediate impulse to action, we deliberate upon further steps, the Will has exactly the same power of modifying the decision as before.

It is by doing, that we learn to do, by overcoming that we overcome, by obeying reason and conscience that we learn to obey, and every right act which we cause to spring out of pure principles, will have a greater weight in the formation of character than all the theory in the world.