

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSUASION

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The psychology of persuasion by William Macpherson

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WILLIAM MACPHERSON

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"Oh, what poor creatures we are, what poor creatures!"—*Brioux*.

"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!"—*Shakespeare*.

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BY

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PREFACE

IN the first three chapters of this book the elements of persuasion as a mental process are distinguished, and various forms of false persuasion in individuals and groups are described; it is shown how, from the very nature of the process involved, our persuasion of ourselves is only too apt to degenerate into self-deception, and how our persuasion of others may easily assume the form of a deliberate attempt to exploit their mental or moral weaknesses. Chapter IV indicates how the tendencies of false persuasion may be counteracted, and on what lines persuasion may be rightly directed. Up to this point the subject is treated mainly in its psychological aspect.

The subsequent chapters, which are closely related to, and follow naturally, the study of persuasion as a mental process, deal with persuasion more exclusively as a form of expression. In this part of the book special attention is given to such modern forms of propaganda as advertisements, newspapers, the cinematograph, the novel, and the drama. Chapter VII discusses the more formal persuasion of books and speeches, and in the last chapter an attempt is made to define the typical features that are likely to mark the persuasion of the future.

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The subject is illustrated throughout by frequent reference to the situations of everyday life and recent public events.

Since we are all, throughout our lives, continually persuading, or trying to persuade, ourselves or other people, and are inevitably, whether we will or no, played upon by innumerable persuasive influences, it may be claimed that the subject of the book is of general and vital interest. In these days of insistent propaganda, when the "publicist" is knocking loudly at the doors of all and sundry, it would seem to be of especial importance that we should be able to judge his claims dispassionately and justly.

Some of the chapters may appeal, perhaps, more intimately to politicians, lawyers, preachers, journalists, pamphleteers, and the many other writers and speakers among us who have an axe to grind in public: these, possibly—at least, such is the author's pious hope—may be assisted by the perusal of the book to put a keener and a truer edge on their weapons.

The book may be regarded, from a certain standpoint, as being a contribution to the literature of reconstruction. If we are to reconstruct our institutions effectively, we must first reconstruct our methods of thinking and learn how to persuade ourselves and others rightly.

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