

**THE DOCTRINE OF LIFE.
WITH SOME
OF ITS THEOLOGICAL
APPLICATIONS**

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The doctrine of life. with some of its theological applications by William Batchelder Greene

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WILLIAM BATCHELDER GREENE

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[*William Batchelder Greene*]

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NOTE.

THE germs of this essay may be found in an article written by me, and published in the seventh number of the "Dial."

Since writing that article, my views have undergone a slight change; I am, however, still willing to be held answerable for what I then wrote.

These facts account for the present preface.

W. B. G.

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THE NATURE OF LIFE.

No change in human conduct ever takes place without a sufficient reason; and that sufficient reason is always found in the strongest motive.

Were the above formula false, certainty would at once vanish from all scientific investigation of human conduct. We might expect to meet as an enemy, to-morrow, him with whom we part in friendship to-night; and as a friend, him, upon whom we now heap the most unpardonable indignities. Every heart would be filled with indecision and fear. No one could predict his own conduct, under given circumstances, with any certainty whatever; for high motives for perseverance in well doing, produce no effect upon a will that is self-determined.

But the formula is *not* false. From like

causes we never fail to experience like effects ; and, for this reason, knowledge is fixed and stable, and the human mind a legitimate object of science.

In the eternity which preceded our birth, a chain of causes was generated, which, operating upon us under the form of motives, produces its precise effect upon every one of our present actions.

Much of our present character is ascribable to the school-mistress from whom we learned our alphabet, — much to the primer, the spelling-book, and the catechism, which many of us seem never to forget. But how much were the instructions received through the school-mistress, and how much were the primer and spelling-book modified by the character of the pilgrim fathers, who have left their stamp upon every thing we meet ? And how much was the character of our fathers modified by the persecutions, wars, and revolutions of the mother country ? How much were these changes in the mother country modified by the Reformation, under Martin Luther, and John Calvin ? How much of the Reformation was immediately occasioned by the abuses of the church ? How many of the

abuses of the church flowed from paganism? But enough, — else where should we stop?

All men, and all created nature, have been at work, from the beginning of time to this day, to produce the circumstances which now influence our actions. As soon as an act has been performed, it becomes independent of the individual performing it, and forthwith gives birth to some other act, which last gives birth to still another, and so they continue, and will continue, until the law of cause and effect shall cease to operate.

Had the conduct of any one of the old Egyptian kings, who has been forgotten for ages, been other than it was, the difference would have perpetuated itself through an uninterrupted chain of causes and effects, producing and reproducing itself to the present day. That difference might indeed have been unperceived by us; but it would not have failed to produce its precise effect upon our conduct. The motion of a straw alters the centre of gravity of the universe.

But we by no means intend to establish a system of fatalism.

I am certain that whatever I do, it is *I* that do it, and not a mass of influences flowing