

THE MASTERY OF DESTINY

JAMES ALLEN





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CONTENT

PREFACE – page 5

I. DEEDS, CHARACTER, AND DESTINY – page 6

II. THE SCIENCE OF SELF-CONTROL – page 13

III. CAUSE AND EFFECT IN HUMAN CONDUCT – page 20

IV. TRAINING OF THE WILL – page 24

V. THOROUGHNESS – page 27

VI. MIND-BUILDING AND LIFE-BUILDING – page 30

VII. CULTIVATION OF CONCENTRATION – page 35

VIII. PRACTICE OF MEDITATION – page 41

IX. THE POWER OF PURPOSE – page 47

X. THE JOY OF ACCOMPLISHMENT – page 50

PREFACE

THE discovery of the law of Evolution in the material world has prepared men for a knowledge of the law of cause and effect in the mental world. Thought is not less orderly and progressive than the material forms which embody thought; and not alone cells and atoms, but thoughts and deeds are charged with a cumulative and selective energy. In the realm of thought and deed, the good survives, for it is "*fittest*"; the evil ultimately perishes. To know that the "*perfect law*" of Causation is as all-embracing in mind as in matter, is to be relieved from all anxiety concerning the ultimate destiny of individuals and of humanity-

"For man is man and master of his fate"-

and the will in man which is conquering the knowledge of natural law will conquer the knowledge of spiritual law; the will which, in ignorance, chooses evil, will, as wisdom evolves and emerges, choose good. In a universe of law, the final mastery of evil by man is assured. His lesser destinies of separation and sorrow, defeat and death, are but disciplinary steps leading to the Great Destiny of triumphal mastery. He himself is unconsciously building, albeit with lacerated hands and labour-bowed form, the Temple of Glory which is to afford him an eternal habitation of peace.

In this volume I have tried to set down some words indicative of this Law and this Destiny, and the manner of its working and its building; and have so arranged the subject-matter as to make the book a companion volume to *The Life Triumphant*. The first six, and the last, chapters first appeared in *Bibby's Quarterly* and *Bibby's Annual*, and it is by kind permission of the Editor, Mr. Joseph Bibby, that they are now brought together and published in volume form, the other three chapters having been added to make the book consecutive and complete.

JAMES ALLEN.

BRYNGOLEU, ILPRACOMBE, ENGLAND,
April, 1909.

DEEDS, CHARACTER, AND DESTINY

THERE is, and always has been, a wide-spread belief in Fate, or Destiny, that is, in an eternal and inscrutable Power which apportions definite ends to both individuals and nations. This belief has arisen from long observation of the facts of life. Men are conscious that there are certain occurrences which they cannot control, and are powerless to avert. Birth and death, for instance, are inevitable, and many of the incidents of life appear equally inevitable. Men strain every nerve for the attainment of certain ends, and gradually they become conscious of a Power which seems to be not of themselves, which frustrates their puny efforts, and laughs, as it were, at their fruitless striving and struggle. As men advance in life, they learn to submit, more or less, to this overruling Power which they do not understand, perceiving only its effects in themselves and the world around them, and they call it by various names, such as God, Providence, Fate, Destiny, etc.

Men of contemplation, such as poets and philosophers, step aside, as it were, to watch the movements of this mysterious Power as it seems to elevate its favourites on the one hand, and strike down its victims on the other, without reference to merit or demerit. The greatest poets, especially the dramatic poets, represent this Power in their works, as they have observed it in Nature. The Greek and Roman dramatists usually depict their heroes as having foreknowledge of their fate, and taking means to escape it; but by so doing they blindly involve themselves in a series of consequences which bring about the doom which they are trying to avert. Shakespeare's characters, on the other hand, are represented, as in Nature, with no foreknowledge (except in the form of presentiment) of their particular destiny. Thus, according to the poets, whether the man knows his fate or not, he cannot avert it, and every conscious or unconscious act of his is a step towards it.

Omar Khayyam's "*Moving Finger*" is a vivid expression of this idea of Fate:

" The Moving Finger writes, and having writ, Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit Shall lure it back to cancel half a line, Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it. "

Thus, men in all nations and times have experienced in their lives the action of this invincible Power or Law, and in our nation to-day this experience has been crystallized in the terse proverb, "*Man proposes, God disposes.*"

But, contradictory as it may appear, there is an equally wide-spread belief in man's responsibility as a free agent. All moral teaching is an affirmation of man's freedom to choose his course and mould his destiny; and man's patient and untiring efforts in achieving his ends are declarations of consciousness of freedom and power. This dual experience of fate on the one hand, and freedom on the other, has given rise to the interminable controversy between the believers in Fatalism and the upholders of Free-will - a controversy which was recently revived under the term "*Determinism versus Free-will.*" Between apparently conflicting extremes there is always a "*middle way*" of balance, justice, or compensation which, while it includes both extremes, cannot be said to be either one or the other, and which brings both into harmony; and this middle way is the point of contact between two extremes. Truth cannot be a partisan, but, by its nature, is the Reconciler of extremes; and so, in the matter which we are considering, there is a "*golden mean*" which brings Fate and Free-will into close relationship, wherein, indeed, it is seen that these two indisputable facts in human life, for such they are, are but two aspects of one central law, one unifying and all-embracing principle, namely, the law of causation in its moral aspect.

Moral causation necessitates both Fate and Free-will, both individual responsibility and individual predestination, for the law of causes must also be the law of effects, and cause and effect must always be equal; the train of causation, both in matter and mind, must be eternally balanced, therefore eternally just, eternally perfect.

Thus every effect may be said to be a thing preordained, but the predetermining power is a cause, and not the fiat of an arbitrary will.

Man finds himself involved in the train of causation. His life is made up of causes and effects. It is both a sowing and a reaping. Each act of his is a cause which must be balanced by its effects. He chooses the cause (this is Free-will), he cannot choose, alter, or avert the effect (this is Fate) ; thus Free-will stands for the power to initiate causes, and destiny is involvement in effects. It is therefore true that man is predestined to certain ends, but he himself has (though he knows it not) issued the mandate; that good or evil thing from which there is no escape, he has, by his own deeds, brought about. It may here be urged that man is not responsible for his deeds, that these are the effects of his character, and that he is not responsible for the character, good or bad, which was given him at his birth. If character was "*given him*" at birth, this would be true, and there would then be no moral law, and no need for moral teaching; but characters are not given ready-made, they are evolved; they are, indeed, effects, the products of the moral law itself, that is-the products of deeds. Character is the combined result of an incalculable number of deeds, is, in reality, an accumulation of deeds which has been piled up, so to speak, by the individual during vast ages of time and through innumerable lives, by a slow process of orderly evolution. A man's birth into this life, with his complex character, to which he considers himself irresponsibly predestined, was determined by his own deeds in former lives.

Man is the doer of his own deeds; as such he is the maker of his own character; and as the doer of his deeds and the maker of his character, he is the moulder and shaper of his destiny. He has the power to modify and alter his deeds, and every time he acts he modifies his character, and with the modification of his character for good or evil, he is predetermining for himself new destinies - destinies disastrous or beneficent in accordance with the nature of his deeds. Character is destiny itself; as a fixed combination of deeds, it bears within itself the results of those deeds. These results lie hidden as moral seeds in the dark recesses of the character, awaiting their season of germination, growth, and fruitage.

Those things which befall a man are the reflections of himself; that destiny which pursued him, which he was powerless to escape by effort, or avert by prayer, was the relentless ghoul of his own wrong deeds demanding and enforcing restitution ; those blessings and curses which come to him unbidden are the reverberating echoes of the sounds which he himself sent forth.

It is this knowledge of the Perfect Law working through and above all things; of the Perfect Justice operating in and adjusting all human affairs, that enables the good man to love his enemies, and to rise above all hatred, resentment, and complaining; for he knows that only his own can come to him, and that, though he be surrounded by persecutors, his enemies are but the blind instruments of a faultless retribution; and so he blames them not, but calmly receives his accounts, and patiently pays his moral debts.

But this is not all; he does not merely pay his debts; he takes care not to contract any further debts. He watches himself and makes his deeds faultless. While paying off evil accounts, he is laying up good accounts. By putting an end to his own sin, he is bringing evil and suffering to an end.

And now let us consider how the Law operates in particular instances in the outworking of destiny through deeds and character. First, we will look at this present life, for the present is the synthesis of the entire past; the net result of all that a man has ever thought and done is contained within him.

It is noticeable that sometimes the good man fails and the unscrupulous man prospers-a fact which seems to put all moral maxims as to the good results of righteousness out of account - and because of this, many people deny the operation of any just law in human life, and even declare that it is chiefly the unjust that prosper. Nevertheless, the moral law exists, and is not altered or subverted by shallow conclusions. It should be remembered that man is a changing, evolving being. The good man was not always good; the bad man was not always bad. Even in this life (without, for the moment, going back to former lives), there was a time, in a large number of instances, when the man who is now just, was unjust; when he who is now kind, was cruel; when he who is now pure, was impure.

Obversely, there was a time in this life, in a number of instances, when he who is now unjust, was just; when he who is now cruel, was kind; when he who is now impure, was pure. Thus, the good man who is overtaken with calamity to-day is reaping the result of his former evil sowing; later he will reap the happy result of his present good sowing; while the bad man is now reaping the result of his former good sowing; later he will reap the result of his present sowing of bad.

But when just causes (of the effects which we see) are not apparent in this life, then they were set going in former lives; and, indeed, the entire evolution of any being, through innumerable births and deaths and ever-enlarging destinies, may be regarded as one long, extended, unbroken line of causes and effects; one indestructible, ever-growing, ever-changing, and ascending life.

Characteristics are fixed habits of mind, the results of deeds. An act repeated a large number of times becomes unconscious, or automatic—that is, it then seems to repeat itself without any effort on the part of the doer, so that it seems to him almost impossible not to do it, and then it has become a mental characteristic. Thus, the character of an individual at birth is a combination of habits which he himself has built up by his own thoughts and acts during the course of his evolution, and in accordance with his efforts in this life will his character be modified for good or evil in the future. Here is a poor man out of work. He is honest, and is not a shirker. He wants work, and cannot get it. He tries hard, and continues to fail. Where is the justice in his lot? There was a time in this man's condition when he had plenty of work. He felt burdened with it; he shirked it, and longed for ease. He thought how delightful it would be to have nothing to do. He did not appreciate the blessedness of his lot. His desire for ease is now gratified, but the fruit for which he longed, and which he thought would taste so sweet, has turned to ashes in his mouth. The condition which he aimed for, namely, to have nothing to do, he has reached, and there he is compelled to remain till his lesson is thoroughly learned. And he is surely learning that habitual ease is degrading, that to have nothing to do is a condition of wretchedness, and that work is a noble and blessed thing. His former desires and deeds have brought him where he is; and now his present desire for work, his ceaseless searching and asking for it, will just as surely bring about its own beneficent result.

**editor and graphics editor
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