THOUGHTS ARE THINGS

PRENTICE MULFORD

THE MIND POWER SERIES VOL. 62

Thoughts are Things

Essays Selected From The White Cross Library

Prentice Mulford

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Thoughts are Things , P. Mulford
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9
Deutschland

ISBN: 9783849617240

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Cover Design: © James Steidl - Fotolia.com

PRENTICE MULFORD, THE NEW GOSPELER

By CHARLES WARREN STODDARD

IT is perhaps a little singular that I cannot remember just when and how I first met Prentice Mulford. It seems as if we had always known one another, away back in those early days on the Pacific shore; but we grew more intimate while we were stopping at the old Hotel de France, down by the waterside, near the foot of Broadway, in Oakland, California and that was in 1867.

He was writing for the daily and weekly press at the time and this kept him busy whenever he felt industrious, but there were delightful intervals when he felt and acted as if the world was all before him, where to choose, and he was not hurrying to make a choice. The truth is, he loved his freedom, and he had fairly revelled in it from his youth up. When he was forty-nine years of age he retired from the world and built himself a little hermitage in the swarnpy wilds of New Jersey. The true story of that experience he has told with much humor humor was ever his saving grace in a volume of the White Cross Library entitled "The Swamp Angel."

In this unique narrative he says: "I have seen in these forty-nine years, two years of life as an indifferent sailor on a merchant vessel and whaler. On the latter I was cook, to the misery of all on board who come within the range of my culinary misdeeds.

"I was twelve years in California, where I dug a little gold and a good deal of dirt. I had taught school, tended bar, kept a grocery, run for the legislature, been a post-officer, peddled a very tough article of beef, on horseback, to the miners on the Terolumne river bars and gulches, started a hog ranch and failed, served as a special policeman and tax collector, kept an express office, prospected for silver in the Nevadas; found nothing but snow, scenery and misery; preempted no end of land, laid out towns which are laid out yet, run a farm to weeds and farrow land, and lectured and written a good deal for the papers. Before I started out in life, when a boy of fourteen, I had charge of a country hotel, which I ran ashore in four years; but it never cost the girls and boys of my youthful era one cent for horse-hire out of my stables."

In these old days I found him a weatherbeaten young man, as shy as a country boy, and with many traits that must have resembled Thoreau in his youth. This shyness he ultimately overcame, but not until after years of painful struggle.

In January, 1874, he wrote me from London: "I extract more than one grain of comfort from my present situation, as I consider it exactly the discipline I need to crush out this damnable oversensitiveness and to put me where I think I belong, through my own effort. I don't feel very much depressed, for I've a 'fighting-mad' on to meet the world. So surely as I told you, if you recollect, a little over two years ago, that I would come to England so surely do I tell you now, that in the course of two or three years more I go where I deem I ought to be. I need hard pressure to bring out what is in me, on the same principle that it requires hard pressure to extract the choicest juice of the grape."

Mulford was never more charming than in the old days at the Hotel de France. In my alleged novel, "For the Pleasure of His Company," in the chapter entitled "Scribes and Pharisees," I have endeavored to restore the now obsolete hotel and its forlorn garden. I have said: "In the rear of the hotel a long and narrow garden ran down to the water's edge; a tide washed estuary separated the garden from a broad marsh; beyond the marsh a grove of wind-warped oaks marked the middle 'distance and contrasted .well with the-purple outlines of the distant foothills of the Coast Range. A long, one-story wooden building, with a veranda, sheltered the windy side of the garden. It was divided into single rooms, with a door and a window in each ; arbors with tables of various sizes in them were scattered over the grounds; there were several spaces allotted to the out-of-door games so popular with those who habitually dine al fresco, and everywhere the garden paths were hedged with

artichokes that strove in vain to hide a hopeless but happy mingling of flowers and kitchen vegetables.

"Diogenes came late dear, delightful Diogenes, whose youth seemed to have spontaneously matured and whose gravity was of the light-comedy cast."

Now, the Diogenes here referred to was none other than Prentice Mulford, and he and I at the time had rooms adjoining, in the detached cottage that flanked the garden. It was quite Mexican in character, this long, low cottage; everything about it sagged a little and was slowly slipping to decay.

Prentice, as we all called him, used to pace up and down among the mingled poppies and artichokes, sometimes laughing quietly to himself for he was a confirmed humorist; his very brown eyes fairly glowed with mirth and his mouth seemed ever to be trying to repress a smile.

Sometimes he would pass the day in a boat, threading the Alameda marshes farther side o' the creek. Once I went with him and we took our luncheon with us; there was much good talk that day, grave and gay, and the -hours were not half long enough. Sometimes he coursed the hills, always all alone, and came home late to dinner with abundant wildflowers in his hands, which he divided among us with the naive simplicity of a child.

He was advertised to lecture at San Antonio, a pretty village now swallowed up in the all-absorbing Oakland. We resolved our little coterie at the hotel de France to go in a body to this lecture and boom the lecturer. We filled a victoria to overflowing on that eventful night. Our triumphant entry into the pastoral twilight of San Antonio created almost as much excitement as the street parade of

a country circus. There was a bonfire in front of the courthouse, and young folk clustered about it and there was a boy with a big bass drum, which he beat wildly as we drew near. , Prentice lectured in the courtroom to an audience that was sparse and unresponsive. The lecturer described his solitary wanderings in the fastnesses of the Sierras; the vicissitudes in the life of a gold hunter, seeking a livelihood and a vocation for his heart was ever open to conviction. He tried to make it clear to that handful of villagers that there is something finer than refined gold, and that something is after all the one thing worth seeking; it can be had for the asking if only one knows how to ask and asks in earnest. There were beautiful descriptive passages, plaintively delivered pictures in the depths of the forest, alone at night, the camp-fire darting its golden arrows into the canopy of leaves; a lone star now and again visible for a moment, as if it had parted the branches far above him to look down upon the solitary soul alone in that vast wilderness; we could almost hear the mysterious snapping of twigs, and the mournful voices of the night: the haunting voices that thrill one and chill one's blood. There were touches of poetry and bits of cheerful philosophy scattered along the rippling humor of the whole and we, his followers, were very proud of him. There was no charge for admission to that courthouse; such villagers do not leave their comfortable homes nor refrain from their early beds if they have to pay in advance for the privilege. Prentice felt that the fairer way was to take up a collection at the close of the entertainment and then each could contribute what he felt it in his heart to give.

The hat was passed; the audience silently withdrew; we heartily congratulated our hero and then turned to note the contents of the hat that had gone the rounds. O Charity! How many sins find shelter under cover of thee! The hat contained five dimes, (there were no smaller coins in

circulation in the California of those days) several horn buttons, a suspender buckle and the fraction of a fine-toothed comb. We drove homeward in a weird frame of mind, but our late supper was a joy and happily restored our souls, so that at some unrecorded hour toward the dawn we sought our pillows at peace with all the world.

Mulford started for London before I did, but we met there in 1873 m et in the very room which Joaquin Miller had long inhabited; his Mexican saddle in its Saratoga trunk stood against the wall of the room in proof of it. Prentice and I occupied the same room for a while, since there were but six in the house all told, piled two and two a-top of each other and all engaged for the season. I had Miller's bed to myself; Mulford had a camping outfit and protested that he preferred the floor.

It seemed odd for us to be there in Miller's room in London, for he was our dear old friend and we each hailed from the wild lands of Oregon, the Sierras and the South Seas. Sometimes I wakened in the dead of night or rather at two in the morning because it was so still; that is the only hour, the only moment when London is still, save just before Big Ben strikes twelve at midnight, on the last day of the last month of the year and then all London holds its breath to listen, and the effect is ghastly. Sometimes, I say, I awakened at two in the morning, and from under my half-shut eyelids I saw Prentice sitting up in his blankets, his saucepan over a spirit lamp by his side and something savory sizzling therein for his frugal midnight repast. There was always a merry twinkle in his eye; perhaps he was thinking of the forest primeval as he knew it in days of yore, or of the garden of artichokes on the shore of Oakland creek and of the contrast as we found ourselves marooned, as it were, in that great dead sea of humanity he and I alone together in our bohemian Bloomsbury lodgings.

Mulford's humor was of the dryest quality he seemed to enjoy it as much as everyone else did. One day he said to me: "Come! You are wasting time: you have seen nothing of London; I will pilot you today!" He knew his London well. We went forth into a fog that was of the pea-soup variety. It seemed useless to wait any longer for it to clear off. The days were all alike and were darker than twilight ever dared to be. I clung to Mulford's coat sleeve, for I knew if he were once to get beyond my reach I could never hope to find him again. We groped blindly among the streets, where the atmosphere was only less palpable than the houses that walled us in. At intervals we inquired where we were, for otherwise we could never have known at all. We had to feel our way carefully and take soundings at intervals. "Here," said Prentice, as we paused in space, "Here is Temple Bar!" I thought I saw something that might have been the ghost of an arch hewn out of the solid fog. The top of it, though it was not lofty, was lost to view. Temple Bar, now gone forever from the place where its gates once swung in the wall of the old city. It was here Her Gracious Majesty Victoria of England was wont to receive the keys of the city from the hands of the lord mayors, when she drove in state to St. Paul's cathedral. We threaded Fleet street, but could not see to the farther shore.

"Here is Her Majesty's Tower, "said Prentice, but nothing of it was visible, not one stone upon another. We crossed London bridge almost without knowing it; the waters of the Thames, which are but condensed fog, were invisible from the parapet, and the steam ferries were picking their way cautiously and looking very like marine monsters in a muddy aquarium. We crawled through the tunnel for foot traffic under the Thames, which was like a hole in the fog, and for hours carried the sky about on our shoulders; it was a woolly, greasy and ill-smelling sky. Our nostrils were

clogged with cinders, like chimney flues, and there were smudges all over our faces. Sometimes for a moment or two we saw a spot overhead that was like a pale red wafer and we knew it for the sun, now lost to us. The lamps that burned all day were like glow-worms for dimness; and so we explored the wonders of the town and saw as much of it as a blind man sees, but no more.

Mulford's nature seemed to broaden and de.epen rapidly with those first experiences abroad. I could hardly realize that he was the same person who went afield in the Oakland days and was happy if he brought home a handful of grass and wild flowers at evening. Of course he was not the same; he was turning himself inside out and taking a wondrous interest in the life about him.

He once wrote me thus: "I have three things to say to you: Come to Paris! Come to Paris! Come to Paris! London is hell. Paris is heaven."

Perhaps he found Paris a little more like heaven because he had recently married a young lady of singular charm. He once told her story, and his, in an article that appeared in a London magazine, but the name and the date of that periodical I have forgotten. I hope it will be thought no indiscretion if I confess that in a book of mine called "Exits and Entrances" there are two London sketches entitled "Hampstead Heath" and "Bloomsbury Lodgings." Therein I write of one J "the blue J " I call him; and of "Josie" and of "Junius". In "Bloomsbury Lodgings" I say: "There was an aromatic odor of bride cake in the air. There was great rejoicing in the catacomb. Everybody was unnaturally gay, as everybody is wont to be when two souls have but a single thought which argues a great want of originality in one of them and that thought is the unutterable one that includes license, parson, clerk, etc."

Now, since these papers of mine are confidences and need go no further than this, I may whisper that the J , "the blue J " in the case, was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be none other than Joaquin Miller; "Junius" is, or was, Prentice Mulford, and "Josie" the little lady who became his wife. "Bloomsbury Lodgings" are at No. u Museum street, one door from Oxford street, and one block from the entrance to the British Museum.

The Mulfords traveled on the continent and enjoyed the best of good fellowship for some years. They settled in New York City, where Prentice was over head and ears in daily journalism. It was in the days of the "Graphic" and it was Mulford' s duty to read all the news of the world, sift it, condense it and pack it in a nutshell for the nibbling of those scudding souls that have not time for details. Those nuts could be cracked and gulped on the wing.

But that sort of thing could not go on forever. He had a mission and he was convinced of the fact; the difficulty was to find the way to enter upon it He found it in time, but the struggle was a hard one. He left New York and wrote me : ' 'Things are comfortable with me in Boston and growing more so. I have come to the conclusion that a man may have whatever he wants, or, rather, needs, by setting his mind on it and waiting for it to come. I travel now on that basis and school myself not to worry for the morrow; be as rich as circumstances will allow today. I say to myself that I am a pretty good fellow, and when I've done my best, I trust to the Lord to do his best for me.

"I have learned to crochet, to knit my own undershirts, to play lawn tennis, to sketch a very little, and some other things. I would like to tell you 'lots.' Can't you visit me?

Should like to see you more than I can tell. Boston is unique and worth a study."

I am not easily startled. Probably it is fortunate for me that such is the case. There is always enough wear and tear, even in the most ordinary life, to make it worth one's while to cultivate repose and avoid excesses of whatever nature. One day I received the following message from Prentice Mulford :

"Very glad indeed to receive your letter, very glad indeed a breath of the old days in Oakland, San Francisco, London, New York. * * * *

JOSIE MRS. PRENTICE MULFORD

"I must tell you that Josie and I are matrimonially separated, but not by any means socially. It is better all around, and mutually agreeable all around. * * I never enjoyed life better. Am in fine health, good digestion, go sailing about almost every day, own a boat, dress in flannel shirts on the go-as-you-please plan. Independent but not crazy.

"Poor, dear Mrs. B sent me a goody-goody letter on the basis that Josie and I were doing the proper 'capah' as man and wife. Of course I had to tell her that we were not months ago, this; have not heard a word from her since. Suppose she is shocked and counts me ruined. You know that with a certain order of people I am ruined about once in every seven years. And it seems quite impossible for the average world to understand that parties can separate good friends without any row and goings on, and going 'round among people to tell your little old tale of trouble o'er and o'er. And they do love it so; and do hate you so unless you do it."

Mrs. B was our very good friend, one of the little coterie at the Hotel de France in "For the Pleasure of His Company," and there known as "The Pompadour." We were all very fond of her and proud of her, for she was stately and beautiful. I had written to Prentice to tell him that she had fallen upon evil times and was dying a lingering death. He replied:

"Sad what you write about Mrs. B , but as I now see things, Charlie, it is all the natural ending of people with neither convictions nor principles to stand on. You may think this hard, but you would not could I explain myself more at length. She was good and generous, but her estimate of life, of living, was narrow. Hence the result."

After the dissolution of the matrimonial partnership, Mulford seems to have cut loose from the world or at least from that phase of it with which he had become much involved. His wish was to commune with nature and with his own soul. He desired solitude, and as much of silence as one can ever hope to find out of doors.

In "The Swamp Angel" Prentice Mulford tells the story of his amateur hermit life, and tells it with so much humor that one half suspects that he had never taken himself quite seriously but I cannot wholly believe that.

He says in "The Swamp Angel": "I had long entertained the idea of building for myself a house in the woods, and there living alone. Not that I was cynical or disgusted with the world. 1 have no reason to be disgusted with the world. It has given me lots of amusement, sandwiched between headaches, periods of repentance, and sundry hours spent in the manufacture of good resolutions, many of which I could not keep because they spoiled so quickly on my

hands. I have tried to treat the world pretty well, and it has rewarded me. For the world invariably returns kick for kick, frown for frown, smile for smile.

"I found at last in New Jersey, apiece of woods, a swamp, a spring near by, a rivulet, and, above all, a noble, wide-spreading oak. The owner willingly consented to my building there, and under the oak I built."

From that hermitage he wrote me: "I am living alone at present, in the country, in a house I built for myself. I look often on your photograph, which is hung up here, and think."

He was in process of weaning and had not yet cut all the threads that bound him in affection to his fellow men. In a postscript he adds: "Josie is in Florida with her present husband."

When he abandoned his hermitage he did it in this fashion: "I had imagined I could live happily alone with nature, and largely independent of the rest of the human race. I couldn't. I don't believe anybody can. Nature has taught me better. I found that the birds went in pairs and in flocks; that plants and trees grew in families; that ants live in colonies, and that everything of its kind had a tendency to live and grow together. But here I was, a single bit of the human race, trying to live alone and away from my kind. The birds and trees were possibly glad of my admiration for them, but they said: 'You don't belong to us. You shouldn't try to belong to us. You belong to your own race; go join them again; cultivate them. We live our own lives; you can't get wholly into our lives. You're not a bird, that you can live in a nest and on uncooked seeds; or a squirrel, that can live in a hole in a tree; or a tree, that can root itself in one place and stay there, as you've been trying to do. A hermit is one

who tries to be a tree, and draw nourishment from one spot, when he is really a great deal more than a tree, and must draw life and recreation from many persons and places. A bear is not so foolish as to try and live among foxes; neither should a man try to live entirely among trees, because they cannot give him all that he must have to get the most out of life. So I left my hermitage, I presume forever, and carted my bed and pots and pans to the house of a friend perched on the brink of the Palisades opposite Tinker's."

That Prentice Mulford had a mission and that he did not labor in vain has been proved beyond a peradventure by his large and enlightened following. If his name is not upon every lip and his work not noised abroad, it is because he was a silent worker, and they work silently who are under his spiritual guidance. The elements of his philosophy are opposed to all noisy demonstration.

The themes he loved to treat are such as appeal to the thoughtful seeker "Love Is Life," "Sympathy Is Force," "Our Thoughts Are Forces," "Thoughts Are Things," "Thought Is an Element," "Strength Is Born of Rest," "Truths Prove Themselves," "New Thoughts Bring Life," "Power and Talent Grow in Repose," "Truths Bring Health: Lies Breed Disease."

The culmination of his philosophy, the core of his creed, the first article of the faith he sought to found, are embodied in his remarkable essay, "The Church of Silent Demand." It may be found, together with more than seventy other tracts, in the six volumes of his published works called "The White Cross Library."

In 1885 Prentice wrote me: "I have for many years gone into Catholic cathedrals and churches when opportunity

offered, there to sit, if for ever so few minutes; and every morning I now enter, for a similar purpose, the little French chapel, close by my office, of Notre Dame des Victoires; and in those sittings am I more and more impressed with what is of grandeur, sweetness and sacredness of Rome. * * *

"The Infinite is with us in all creeds and nations, and to call on the Infinite for more power, patience, courage and cheerfulness is to get it."

I have a photograph of Prentice Mulford, upon the back of which he has written: "The remains of your friend after fifty years of struggle with himself."

While he was in the hermitage where, no doubt, the struggle was continuedhe wrote me: "A man must have some room and play for his frailties. It is quite enough to be accountable to himself for them. I wish you were here!"

That struggle ceased long before his mysterious passage to the other life, and of that passage I will not write here, but later on, perhaps, in a paper to be called "The Passing of Prentice Mulford."

In writing of "The Church of Silent Demand," he says: "We suggest the following inscription as appropriate to be placed on the front of the chapel:

THE CHURCH OF SILENT DEMAND TO THE SUPREME POWER

and the following placed so as to be clearly read within the chapel:

"Demand first Wisdom, so as to know what to ask for."

" 'Ask and ye shall receive.' Ask imperiously, but ask in a willing mood for what the Supreme Power sees best for you."

" 'Love thy neighbor as thy self,' but demand good first for yourself that you may be the better fitted to do good to all."

Thoughts are Things

Chapter One: THE MATERIAL MIND *V.* THE SPIRITUAL MIND

THERE belongs to every human being a higher self and a lower self--a self or mind of the spirit which has been growing for ages, and a self of the body, which is but a thing of yesterday. The higher self is full of prompting idea, suggestion and aspiration. This it receives of the Supreme Power. All this the lower or animal self regards as wild and visionary. The higher self argues possibilities and power for us greater than men and women now possess and enjoy. The lower self says we can only live and exist as men and women have lived and existed before us. The higher self craves freedom from the cumbrousness, the limitations, the pains and disabilities of the body. The lower self says that we are born to them, born to ill, born to suffer, and must suffer as have so many before us. The higher self wants a standard for right and wrong of its own. The lower self says we must accept a standard made for us by others--by general and long-held opinion, belief and prejudice.