

## THE INFLUENCE OF SURROUNDINGS

By Charles W. Leadbeater\*

Influence is perpetually radiated upon us by all objects of Nature, even by the very earth upon which we tread. Each type of rock or soil has its own special variety, and the differences between them are very great, so that their effect is by no means to be neglected. In the production of this effect three factors bear their part: the life of the rock itself, the kind of elemental essence appropriate to its astral counterpart, and the kind of nature-spirits which it attracts.

The point for us to bear in mind is that each kind of soil—granite or sandstone, chalk, clay or lava—has its definite influence upon those who live on it, an influence that never ceases. Night and day, summer and winter, year in and year out, this steady pressure is being exercised, and it has its part in the molding of races and districts, types as well as individuals. All these matters are as yet but little comprehended by ordinary science. But there can be no doubt that in time to come these influences will be thoroughly studied, and the doctors of the future will take them into account and prescribe a change of soil as well as of air for their patients.

An entirely new and distinct set of influences is brought into play wherever water exists, whether it be in the form of lake, river, or sea— all of them truly powerful in different ways, but most powerful and observable in the last. Here also the same three factors have to be considered: the life of the water itself, the elemental essence pervading it, and the type of nature-spirits associated with it.

Very strong influences are also radiated by the vegetable kingdom; the different kinds of plants and trees vary greatly in their effect. Those who have not specially studied the subject invariably underrate the strength, capacity, and intelligence shown in vegetable life. Trees, especially old trees, have a strong and definite individuality, well worthy the name of a soul. This soul, though temporary in the sense that it is not yet a reincarnating entity, is nevertheless possessed of considerable power and intelligence along its own lines. It has decided likes and dislikes, and to clairvoyant sight it shows quite clearly by a vivid rosy flush, an emphatic enjoyment of the sunlight and the rain, and undoubted pleasure also in the presence of those whom it has learnt to like, or with whom it has sympathetic vibrations. Emerson appears to have realized this, for he is



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quoted in Hutton's *Reminiscences* as saying of his trees: "I am sure they miss me; they seem to droop when I go away, and I know they brighten and bloom when I go back to them and shake hands with their lower branches."

It must be remembered that an old forest tree is a very high development of vegetable life, and that when it is transferred from that kingdom it will not pass into the lowest form of animal life. In some cases its individuality is even sufficiently distinct to allow it to manifest itself temporarily outside its physical form, and in that case it will often take the human shape. . . . *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*; and if primitive man saw a huge grave human form come forth from a tree, he was likely enough in his ignorance to set up an altar there and worship it, not in the least understanding that he himself stood far higher in evolution than it did, and that its very assumption of his image was an acknowledgement of that fact.

The occult side of the instinct of a plant is also exceedingly interesting. Its one great object is always to found a family and reproduce its species; and it certainly has a feeling of active enjoyment in its success, in the color and beauty of its flowers and in their efficiency in attracting bees and other insects. Unquestionably plants feel admiration lavished upon them and delight in it; they are sensitive to human affection and they return it in their own way.

When all this is borne in mind, it will be readily understood that trees exercise much more influence over human beings than is commonly supposed. Those who choose to cultivate sympathetic and friendly relations with *all* their neighbors, vegetable as well as animal and human, may both receive and give a great deal of which the average person knows nothing, and may thus make their life fuller, wider, more complete.

The classification of the vegetable kingdom adopted by the occultist follows the line of the seven great types, and each of these is divided into seven sub-types: a set of temperamental characteristics, which it never wholly loses. Although in order to express itself it needs matter belonging to all the different types, it will still have a preponderance of its own type, and will always recognizably belong to that type and no other, until after its evolution is over when it returns to the Logos as a glorified spiritual power through the same channel by which it originally rushed out as a mere undeveloped potentiality.

The distinction between the magnetism radiated by the oak and the pine, the palm tree and the banyan, the olive and the eucalyptus, the rose and the lily, the violet and the sunflower, cannot fail to be obvious to any sensitive person. Wide as the poles asunder is the dissimilarity between the "feeling" of an English forest and a tropical jungle, or the bush of Australia or New Zealand.

For thousands of years humans have lived so cruelly that all wild creatures fear and avoid them, so the influence of the animal kingdom upon humanity is practically confined to that of the domestic animals. In our relations with domestic animals our influence over them is naturally far more potent than theirs over us, yet this latter is by no means to be ignored. People who have really made friends with an animal are often much helped and strengthened by the affection lavished upon them in return. Being more advanced, human beings are naturally capable of greater love than an animal is, but the animal's affection is usually more concentrated, and it is far more likely to throw the whole of its energy into it than a person is. The very fact of the human being's higher development gives them a multiplicity of interests, among which their attention is divided; the animal often pours the entire strength of his nature into one channel, and so produces a most powerful effect. People have a hundred other matters to think about, and the current of their love consequently cannot but be variable. When the dog or the cat develops a really great affection it fills the whole of their life, and they therefore keep a steady stream of force always playing upon their object—a factor whose value is by no means to be ignored. Similarly the individual who is so wicked as to provoke by cruelty the hatred and fear of domestic animals becomes by a righteous retribution the center of converging forces of evil. It must be remembered that such conduct arouses deep indignation among nature-spirits and other astral and etheric entities, as well as among all right-minded people, whether living or dead.

Since it is emphatically true that no person can afford to be disliked or feared by their cat or dog, it is clear that the same consideration applies with still greater force to the human beings that surround us. It is not easy to overestimate the importance of winning the kindly regard of those with whom we are in constant association—the value to a teacher of the attitude towards him of his pupils, to a merchant of the feeling of his clerks, to an officer of the devotion of his men—and this entirely apart from the obvious effects produced on the physical plane. If a person holding any such position as these is able to arouse the enthusiastic affection of their subordinates, they become the focus upon which many streams of such forces are constantly converging. Not only does this greatly uplift and strengthen them, but it also enables them—if something of the working of occult laws is understood—to be of far greater use to those who feel the affection, and to do much more with them than would otherwise be possible.

It should be observed that to obtain this result, it is not in the least necessary that there should be uniformity of opinion. As to the particular effect with which we are at present concerned, mental attitudes have no connection whatever; rather, it is a matter of strong, kindly feeling. If the feeling should unfortunately be of an opposite kind—if the person is feared or despised—currents of evil influence are perpetually flowing towards them, which cause weakness and discord in the vibrations of their higher

vehicles, and also cuts them off from the possibility of doing satisfactory and fruitful work with those under their charge.

It has been said that we are known by the company we keep. It is also to a very large extent true that we are *made* by it, for those with whom we constantly associate are all the while unconsciously influencing us and bringing us by degrees more and more into harmony with such vibrations as they radiate. Those who are much in the presence of a large-minded and unworldly individual have a very fine opportunity of becoming large-minded and unworldly themselves, for a steady though imperceptible pressure in that direction is perpetually being exerted upon them, so that it is easier for them to grow in that way than in any other. For the same reason, a person who spends his time loafing with the idle and vicious is exceedingly likely to end by becoming idle and vicious himself. The study of the hidden side of things emphatically endorses the old proverb that "evil communications corrupt good manners."



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This fact of the enormous influence of close association with a more advanced soul is well understood in the East, where it is recognized that the most important and effective part of the training of a disciple is that they shall live constantly in the presence of the teacher and bathe in his or her aura. The various vehicles of the teacher are all vibrating with a steady and powerful swing at rates both higher and more regular than any which the pupil can yet maintain, though he may sometimes reach them for a few moments; but the constant pressure of the stronger vibrations of the teacher gradually raises those of the pupil into the same key. A person who has as yet but little musical ear finds it difficult to sing correct intervals alone, but if they join with another stronger voice, which is already perfectly trained, the task becomes easier—which may serve as a kind of rough analogy. The great point is that the

dominant note of the teacher is always sounding, so that its action is affecting the pupil night and day without need of any special thought on the part of either of them. Growth and change must of course be ceaselessly taking place in the vehicles of the pupil, as in those of all other human beings; but the powerful vibrations emanating from the teacher render it easy for this growth to take place in the right direction, and exceedingly difficult for it to go any other way, somewhat as the splints which surround a broken limb ensure that its growth shall be only in the right line, so as to avoid distortion.

No ordinary human being, acting automatically and without intention, will be able to exercise even a hundredth part of the carefully directed influence of a spiritual teacher. But numbers may to some extent compensate for lack of individual power, so that the ceaseless though unnoticed pressure exercised upon us by the opinions and feelings of our associates leads us frequently to absorb many of their prejudices without knowing it. Therefore it is distinctly undesirable that we should remain always among one set of people and hear only one set of views. It is eminently necessary that we should know something of other viewpoints, for only in that way can we learn to see good in all. Only by thoroughly understanding both sides of any case can we form an opinion that has any right to be called a real judgment. The biased person is always and necessarily the ignorant person; and the only way in which that ignorance can be dispelled is by getting outside of our own narrow little circle, and learning to look at things for ourselves and see what they really are—not what those who know nothing about them suppose them to be.

The extent to which our human surroundings influence us is only realized when we change them for a while. The most effective method of doing this is to travel in another country. But true travel is not rushing from one large hotel to another, consorting all the time with one's own people and grumbling at every custom that differs from ours. It is rather to live for a time quietly in some foreign land, trying to really get to know its people and to understand them; to study a custom and see why it has arisen, and what good there is in it, instead, of condemning it offhand because it is not our own. The traveler who does this will soon come to feel the characteristic influences of the various races—to comprehend such fundamental diversities as those between the English and the Irish, the Indian and the American, the Breton and the Sicilian, and yet to realize that they are to be looked upon *not* as one better than another, but as the different colors that go to make up the rainbow, the different movements that are all necessary as parts of the great oratorio of life.

The ordinary tourist is too often imprisoned in the triple armor of aggressive race-prejudice; they are so full of conceit over the supposed excellences of their own nation that they are incapable of seeing the good in any other. The wise traveler who is willing to open their heart to the action of higher forces may receive from this source much that is valuable, both of instruction and experience. But in order to do that they must begin by putting themselves in the right attitude; they must be ready to listen rather than to talk, to learn rather than to boast, to appreciate rather than to criticize, to try to understand rather than rashly to condemn.

We know how often travel is recommended as a cure for many physical ills, especially for those which manifest themselves through the various forms of nervous derangement. Most of us find it to be fatiguing, yet also undeniably exhilarating,

though we do not always realize that this is not only because of the change of air and of the ordinary physical impressions but also because of the change of the etheric and astral influences which are connected with each place and district. Ocean, mountain, forest or waterfall, each has its own special type of life, astral and etheric as well as visible; and, therefore, its own special set of impressions and influences. Many of these unseen entities are pouring out vitality, and in any case the vibrations, which they radiate, awaken unaccustomed portions of our etheric double, and of our astral and mental bodies. The effect is like the exercise of muscles which are not ordinarily called into activity—somewhat tiring at the time, yet distinctly healthy and desirable in the long run.

City-dwellers are often accustomed to their surroundings, and usually do not realize the horror of them until they leaves them for a time. To dwell beside a busy main street is, from the astral point of view, like living on the brink of an open sewer: a river of fetid mud, which is always throwing up splashes and noisome odors as it rolls along. No human being, however unimpressionable, can endure this indefinitely without deterioration, and an occasional change into the country is a necessity on the ground of moral as well as physical health. In traveling from the town into the country, we also leave behind us to a great extent the stormy sea of waning human passion and labor, and such human thoughts as still remain to act upon us are usually of the less selfish and more elevated kind. In the presence of one of Nature's great wonders, such as Niagara Falls, almost everyone is temporarily drawn out of themselves and out of the petty round of daily care and selfish desire, so that their thought is nobler and broader, and the thought-forms which they leave behind them are correspondingly less disturbing and more helpful. These considerations once more make it evident that in order to obtain the full benefit of travel a man or woman must pay attention to Nature and allow it to act upon them. If they are wrapped up all the while in selfish and gloomy thoughts, crushed by financial trouble, or brooding over their own sickness and weakness, little benefit can be derived from the healing influences.

To take a walk in the country is to travel on a smaller scale, and in order to appreciate its healthful effect we must bear in mind what has been said of all the different vibrations issuing from various kinds of trees or plants, and even from different kinds of soil or rock. All these act as a kind of massage upon the etheric, astral and mental bodies, and tend to relieve the strain which the worries of our common life persistently exert upon certain parts of these vehicles. Glimpses of the truth on these points may sometimes be caught from folk traditions. For example, there is a widely spread belief that strength may be gained from sleeping under a pine tree with the head to the north. For some cases this is suitable, and the rationale of it is that there are magnetic currents always flowing over the surface of the earth, which are quite undetected by most people. These magnetic currents, by steady, gentle pressure,

gradually comb out the entanglements and strengthen the particles both of the astral body and of the etheric part of the physical, thus bringing them more into harmony and introduce rest and calm. The part played by the pine tree is first that its vibrations make the person sensitive to those magnetic currents, and bring that person into a state in which it is possible for them to act upon him, and secondly, that it is constantly throwing off vitality in that special condition in which it is easiest for a person to absorb it.

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