

# WILLIAM ATKINSON

THOUGHT-CULTURE; OR,  
PRACTICAL MENTAL  
TRAINING

William Atkinson

**Thought-Culture; Or,  
Practical Mental Training**

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# Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	8
CHAPTER III	10
CHAPTER IV	13
CHAPTER V	16
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	18

# William Walker Atkinson

## Thought-Culture; Or, Practical Mental Training

### CHAPTER I

#### THE POWER OF THOUGHT

In other volumes of this series we have considered the operations of the human mind known as Will, Memory, etc. We now approach the consideration of those mental activities which are concerned with the phenomena of *thought*— those activities which we generally speak of as the operation of the intellect or reason.

What is thought? The answer is not an easy one, although we use the term familiarly almost every hour of our waking existence. The dictionaries define the term "Thought" as follows: "The act of thinking; the exercise of the mind in any way except sense and perception; serious consideration; deliberation; reflection; the power or faculty of thinking; the mental faculty of the mind; etc." This drives us back upon the term, "to think" which is defined as follows: "To occupy the mind on some subject; to have ideas; to revolve ideas in the mind; to cogitate; to reason; to exercise the power of thought; to have a succession of ideas or mental states; to perform any mental operation, whether of apprehension, judgment, or illation; to judge; to form a conclusion, to determine; etc."

Thought is an operation of the intellect. The intellect is: "that faculty of the human soul or mind by which it receives or comprehends the ideas communicated to it by the senses or by perception, or other means, as distinguished from the power to feel and to will; the power or faculty to perceive objects in their relations; the power to judge and comprehend; also the capacity for higher forms of knowledge as distinguished from the power to perceive and imagine."

When we say what we "think," we mean that we exercise the faculties whereby we compare and contrast certain things with other things, observing and noting their points of difference and agreement, then classifying them in accordance with these observed agreements and differences. In *thinking* we tend to classify the multitude of impressions received from the outside world, arranging thousands of objects into one general class, and other thousands into other general classes, and then sub-dividing these classes, until finally we have found mental pigeon-holes for every conceivable idea or impression. We then begin to make inferences and deductions regarding these ideas or impressions, working from the known to the unknown, from particulars to generalities, or from generalities to particulars, as the case may be.

It is this faculty or power of thought – this use of the intellect, that has brought man to his present high position in the world of living things. In his early days, man was a much weaker animal than those with whom he was brought into contact. The tigers, lions, bears, mammoths, and other ferocious beasts were much stronger, fiercer, and fleetier than man, and he was placed in a position so lacking of apparent equal chance of survival, that an observer would have unhesitatingly advanced the opinion that this weak, feeble, slow animal must soon surely perish in the struggle for existence, and that the "survival of the fittest" would soon cause him to vanish from the scene of the world's activities. And, so it would have been had he possessed no equipment other than those of the other animals; viz., strength, natural weapons and speed. And yet man not only survived in spite of these disadvantages, but he has actually conquered, mastered and enslaved these other animals which seemed likely to work his destruction. Why? How?

This feeble animal called *man* had within him the elements of a new power – a power manifested in but a slight degree in the other animals. He possessed an intellect by which he was able to deduce, compare, infer – reason.

His lack of natural weapons he overcame by borrowing the idea of the tooth and claw of the other animals, imitating them in flint and shaping them into spears; borrowing the trunk of the elephant and the paw of the tiger, and reproducing their blow-striking qualities in his wooden club. Not only this but he took lessons from the supple limbs and branches of the trees, and copied the principle in his bow, in order to project its miniature spear, his arrow. He sheltered himself, his mate and his young, from the fury of the storm, first by caves and afterwards by rude houses, built in inaccessible places, reached only by means of crude ladders, bridges, or climbing poles. He built doors for his habitations, to protect himself from the attacks of these wild enemies – he heaped stones at the mouth of his caves to keep them out. He placed great boulders on cliffs that he might topple them down on the approaching foe. He learned to hurl rocks with sure aim with his strong arm. He copied the floating log, and built his first rude rafts, and then evolved the hollowed canoe. He used the skins of animals to keep him warm – their tendons for his bowstrings. He learned the advantages of cooperation and combined effort, and thus formed the first rudiments of society and social life. And finally – man's first great discovery – he found the art of fire making.

As a writer has said: "For some hundreds of years, upon the general plane of self-consciousness, an ascent, to the human eye gradual but from the point of view of cosmic evolution rapid, has been made. In a race large-brained, walking-erect, gregarious, brutal, but king of all other brutes, man in appearance but not in fact, was from the highest simple-consciousness born the basic human faculty, self-consciousness and its twin, language. From these and what went with these, through suffering, toil and war; through bestiality, savagery, barbarism; through slavery, greed, effort, through conquests infinite, through defeats overwhelming, through struggle unending; through ages of aimless semi-brutal existence, through subsistence on berries and roots; through the use of the casually found stone or stick; through life in deep forests, with nuts and seeds, and on the shores of waters with mollusks, crustaceans and fish for food; through that greatest, perhaps, of human victories, the domestication and subjugation of fire; through the invention and art of bow and arrow; through the training of animals and the breaking of them to labor; through the long learning which led to the cultivation of the soil; through the adobe brick and the building of houses therefrom; through the smelting of metals and the slow birth of the arts which rest upon these; through the slow making of alphabets and the evolution of the written work; in short, through thousands of centuries of human life, of human aspiration, of human growth, sprang the world of men and women as it stands before us and within us today with all its achievements and possessions."

The great difference between thought as we find it in man, and its forms among the lower animals lies in what psychologists have called "progressive thought." The animals advance but little in their thinking processes but rest content with those of their ancestors – their thought seems to have become set or crystallized during the process of their evolution. The birds, mammals and the insects vary but little in their mental processes from their ancestors of many thousand years ago. They build their nests, or dens, in almost precisely the same manner as did their progenitors in the stone-age. But man has slowly but steadily progressed, in spite of temporary set-backs and failures. He has endeavored to progress and improve. Those tribes which fell back in regard to mental progress and advancement, have been left behind in the race, and in many cases have become extinct. The great natural law of the "survival of the fittest" has steadily operated in the life of the race. The "fittest" were those best adapted to grapple with and overcome the obstacles of their environment, and these obstacles were best overcome by the use of the intellect. Those tribes and those individuals whose intellect was active, tended to survive where others perished, and consequently they were able to transmit their intellectual quality to their descendants.

Halleck says: "Nature is constantly using her power to kill off the thoughtless, or to cripple them in life's race. She is determined that only the fittest and the descendants of the fittest shall survive. By the 'fittest' she means those who have thought and whose ancestors have thought and profited thereby. Geologists tell us that ages ago there lived in England bears, tigers, elephants, lions and many other powerful and fierce animals. There was living contemporaneous with them a much weaker animal, that had neither the claws, the strength, nor the speed of the tiger. In fact this human being was almost defenceless. Had a being from another planet been asked to prophesy, he would undoubtedly have said that this helpless animal would be the first to be exterminated. And yet every one of those fierce creatures succumbed either to the change of climate, or to man's inferior strength. The reason was that man had one resource denied to the animals – the power of progressive thought. The land sank, the sea cut off England from the mainland, the climate changed, and even the strongest animals were helpless. But man changed his clothing with the changing climate. He made fires; he built a retreat to keep off death by cold. He thought out means to kill or to subdue the strongest animals. Had the lions, tigers or bears the power of progressive thought, they could have combined, and it would have been possible for them to exterminate man before he reached the civilized stage... Man no longer sleeps in caves. The smoke no longer fills his home or finds its way out through the chinks in the walls or a hole in the roof. In traveling, he is no longer restricted to his feet or even to horses. For all this improvement man is indebted to *thought*. That has harnessed the very vibrations of the ether to do his bidding."

And thus we see that man owes his present place on earth to his Thought-Culture. And, it certainly behooves us to closely consider and study the methods and processes whereby each and every man may cultivate and develop the wondrous faculties of the mind which are employed in the processes of Thought. The faculties of the Mind, like the muscles of the body, may be developed, trained and cultivated. The process of such mental development is called "Thought-Culture," and forms the subject of this book.

## CHAPTER II

# THE NATURE OF THOUGHT

It was formerly considered necessary for all books on the subject of thought to begin by a recital of the metaphysical conceptions regarding the nature and "thingness" of Mind. The student was led through many pages and endless speculation regarding the metaphysical theories regarding the origin and inner nature of Mind which, so far from establishing a fixed and definite explanation in his mind, rather tended toward confusing him and giving him the idea that psychology was of necessity a speculative science lacking the firm practical basis possessed by other branches of science. In the end, in the words of old Omar, he "came out the door through which he went."

But this tendency has been overcome of late years, and writers on the subject pass by all metaphysical conceptions regarding the nature of Mind, and usually begin by plunging at once into the real business of psychology – the business of the practical study of the mechanism and activities of the mind itself. As some writer has said, psychology has no more concern with the solution of the eternal riddle of "What is Mind?" than physics with the twin-riddle of "What is Matter?" Both riddles, and their answers, belong to entirely different branches and fields of thought than those concerned with their laws of operation and principles of activity. As Halleck says: "Psychology studies the phenomena of mind, just as physics investigates those of matter." And, likewise, just as the science of physics holds true in spite of the varying and changing conceptions regarding the nature of matter, so does the science of psychology hold true in spite of the varying and changing conceptions regarding the nature of Mind.

Halleck has well said: "If a materialist should hold that the mind was nothing but the brain, and that the brain was a vast aggregation of molecular sheep herding together in various ways, his hypothesis would not change the fact that sensation must precede perception, memory and thought; nor would the laws of the association of ideas be changed, nor would the fact that interest and repetition aid memory cease to hold good. The man who thought his mind was a collection of little cells would dream, imagine, think and feel; so also would he who believed his mind to be immaterial. It is very fortunate that the same mental phenomena occur, no matter what theory is adopted. Those who like to study the puzzles as to what mind and matter really are must go to metaphysics. Should we ever find that salt, arsenic and all things else are the same substance with a different molecular arrangement, we should still not use them interchangeably."

For the purposes of the study of practical psychology, we may as well lay aside, if even for the moment, our pet metaphysical conceptions and act as if we knew nothing of the essential nature of Mind (and indeed Science in truth does *not* know), and confine ourselves to the phenomena and manifestations of Mind which, after all, is the only way in which and by which we can know anything at all about it. As Brooks says: "The mind can be defined only by its activities and manifestations. In order to obtain a definition of the mind, therefore, we must observe and determine its various forms of activity. These activities, classified under a few general heads and predicated of the unseen something which manifests them, will give us a definition of mind."

The act of consciousness determines the existence of Mind in the person experiencing it. No one can be conscious of thought and, at the same time, deny the existence of mind within himself. For the very act of denial, in itself, is a manifestation of thought and consequently an assertion of the existence of mind. One may assert the axiom: "I think, therefore, I have a mind;" but he is denied the privilege of arguing: "I think, therefore, I have no mind." The mind has an ultimate and final knowledge of its own existence.

The older view of Mind is that it is a something higher than matter which it uses for its manifestation. It was held to be unknowable in itself and to be studied only through its manifestations.

It was supposed to involve itself, to become involved, in some way in matter and to there manifest itself in an infinitude of forms, degrees, and variations. The materialistic view, which arose into prominence in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, held, on the contrary, that Mind was merely an activity or property of Matter – a function of matter akin to extension and motion. Huxley, voicing this conception said: "We have no knowledge of any thinking substance apart from an extended substance... We shall, sooner or later, arrive at a mechanical equivalent of consciousness, just as we have arrived at a mechanical equivalent of heat." But, Huxley, himself, was afterwards constrained to acknowledge that: "How it is that anything so remarkable as a state of consciousness comes about by the result of irritating nervous tissue, is just as unaccountable as the appearance of the *jinn* when Aladdin rubbed his lamp."

The most advanced authorities of the day, are inclined to the opinion that both Matter and Mind are both differing aspects of some one fundamental Something; or, as some of the closest thinkers state it, both are probably two apparently differing manifestations or emanations of an Underlying Something which, as Spencer says: "transcends not only our reason but also our imagination." The study of philosophy and metaphysics serves an important purpose in showing us *how much we do not know*, and why we do not know – also in showing us the fallacy of many things we had thought we did know – but when it comes to telling us the real "why," actual cause, or essential nature of *anything*, it is largely a disappointment to those who seek fundamental truths and ultimate reasons. It is much more comfortable to "abjure the 'Why' and seek the 'How'" – if we can.

Many psychologists classify the activities of the mind into three general divisions; *viz.*, (1) Thinking; (2) Willing; (3) Feeling. These divisions, which result from what is known as "the tri-logical classification," were first distinctly enunciated by Upham although Kant had intimated it very plainly. For many years before the favored division was but two-fold the line of division being between the *cognitive*, or knowing, activities, and the *conative*, or acting, activities, generally known as the Understanding and the Will, respectively. It took a long time before the authorities would formally recognize the great field of the Feelings as forming a class by themselves and ranking with the Understanding and the Will. There are certain sub-divisions and shadings, which we shall notice as we proceed, some of which are more or less complex, and which seem to shade into others. The student is cautioned against conceiving of the mind as a thing having several compartments or distinct divisions. The classification does not indicate this and is only intended as a convenience in analyzing and studying the mental activities and operations. The "I" which feels, thinks and acts is the same – one entity.

As Brooks well says: "The mind is a self-conscious activity and not a mere passivity; it is a centre of spiritual forces, all resting in the background of the ego. As a centre of forces, it stands related to the forces of the material and spiritual universe and is acted upon through its susceptibilities by those forces. As a spiritual activity, it takes the impressions derived from those forces, works them up into the organic growth of itself, converts them into conscious knowledge and uses these products as means to set other forces into activity and produce new results. Standing above nature and superior to its surroundings, it nevertheless feeds upon nature, as we may say, and transforms material influences into spiritual facts akin to its own nature. Related to the natural world and apparently originating from it, it yet rises above this natural world and, with the crown of freedom upon its brow, rules the natural obedient to its will."

In this book, while we shall fully and unquestionably recognize the "tri-logical classification" of the activities of the Mind into the divisions of Thinking, Willing and Feeling, respectively, nevertheless, we shall, for convenience, use the term "Thought" in its broadest, widest and most general sense, as: "The power or faculty of thinking; the mental faculty; the mind," rather than in its narrower and particular sense of: "the understanding or cognitive faculty of the mind." Accordingly, we shall include the cultivation of the mental activities known as Attention, Perception, Imagination, etc., together with the strictly cognitive faculties, under the general term of Thought-Culture.

## CHAPTER III

### PHASES OF THOUGHT

We have seen that the Mind is that something within us which Thinks, Feels and Wills. There are various phases of these three forms of activity. These phases have often been called "the faculties of the mind," although many authorities decry the use of this term, holding that it gives an impression of *several parts or divisions* of the mind, separate and distinct from each other, whereas these phases are merely the *several powers or forms of activity* of the Mind. Every manifestation of mental activity falls under one of the three before-mentioned general forms, i.e., Thinking, Feeling and Willing, respectively. Every manifestation of mental activity is either that of the Intellect, the Feelings, or the Will. Let us consider the first of these three general forms of mental activity – the Intellect.

The *Intellect* is defined as: "That faculty or phase of the human mind by which it receives or comprehends the ideas communicated to it by the senses or by perception, or other means, as distinguished from the power to feel and to will; the power or faculty to perceive objects in their relations; the power to judge and comprehend; also the capacity for higher forms of knowledge as distinguished from the power to perceive and imagine." The term itself is derived from the Latin term *intellectus*, the primary meaning of which is "to choose between," which primary meaning will give the true essential meaning of the term in its present usage; namely, the faculty or phase of the mind by which we "choose between" things or by which we *decide*.

The phase or faculty of Intellect concerns itself with Thinking, in the particular and narrower sense of that term. Its products are *thoughts, mental images* and *ideas*. An *idea* or *mental image* is a mental conception of anything, as for instance our conception which we express by the terms, *man, animal, house, etc.* Sometimes the word *idea* is used to express merely the abstract or generalized conception of the thing, as, for instance, *Man* in the sense of "all men;" while *mental image* is used in the sense of the mental conception of some one particular thing, as a "*a man*;" it being held that no mental image can be had of a generalization. A *thought* is held to be a mental product arising from a combination of two or more ideas or mental images, as for instance: "A horse is an animal;" "a man is a biped;" etc.

The Intellect is held to embrace and include a number of minor phases or faculties, such as Perception, Understanding, Imagination, Memory, Reason and Intuition, which are explained as follows:

*Perception* is that faculty of the Mind which interprets the material presented to it by the senses. It is the power whereby we gain our knowledge of the external world, as reported to us by the channels of sense. Through Perception we are able to form ideas and mental images, which in turn lead to thoughts. The objects of which we become conscious through Perception are called *percepts*, which form the bases of what we call *concepts*, or ideas.

*Understanding* is that faculty of the Mind by the means of which we are able intelligently to compare the objects presented to it by Perception, and by which we separate them into parts by analysis, or to combine them into greater classes, or wholes, by synthesis. It produces ideas, both abstract and general; also concepts of truths, laws, principles, causes, etc. There are several sub-phases of Understanding, which are known as: Abstraction, Conception or Generalization, or Judgment and Reasoning, respectively, which are explained as follows:

*Abstraction* is that faculty of the Mind which enables it to abstract, or draw off, and consider apart from an object, a particular *quality* or *property* of an object, thus making of the quality or property a distinct object of thought apart from the original object. Thus are the *abstract ideas* of *sweetness, color, hardness, courage, beauty, etc.*, which we have abstracted or *drawn off* from their original associations, either for the purpose of putting them out of sight and consideration, or else to

view and consider them by themselves. No one ever tasted "sweetness" although one may have tasted *sweet things*; no one ever saw "red," although one may have seen *red things*; no one ever saw, heard, tasted or felt "courage" in another, although one may have seen *courageous people*. Abstract ideas are merely the mental conception of *qualities* or *properties* divorced from their associated objects by Abstraction.

*Conception* or Generalization is that faculty of the Mind by which it forms and groups together several particular ideas in the form of a *general idea*. By the processes of Conception we form *classes* or *generalizations* from particular ideas arising from our *percepts*. First, we *perceive* things; then we *compare* them with each other; then we abstract their particular qualities, which are not common to the several objects; then we *generalize* them according to their resemblances; then we *name* the generalized concept. From these combined processes we form a Concept, or *general idea* of the class of things to which the particular things belong. Thus from subjecting a number of cows to this process, we arrive at the general Concept of "Cow." This general Concept includes all the qualities and properties *common to all cows*, while omitting those which are not common to the class. Or, we may form a concept of Napoleon Bonaparte, by combining his several qualities and properties and thus form a *general idea* of the man.

*Judgment* is that faculty of the Mind whereby we determine the agreement or disagreement between two concepts, ideas, or objects of thought, by comparing them with each other. From this comparison arises the judgment, which is expressed in the shape of a logical *proposition*: "The horse is an animal;" or "the horse is not a cow." Judgment is also used in forming a concept, in the first place, for we must *compare qualities* before we can form a *general idea*.

*Reasoning* is that faculty of the Mind whereby we compare two Judgments, one with the other, and from the comparison deduce a third Judgment. This is a form of indirect or mediate comparison, whereas the Judgment is a form of immediate or direct comparison. From this process of Reasoning arises a result which is expressed in what is called a Syllogism, as for instance: "All dogs are animals; Carlo is a dog; therefore, Carlo is an animal." Or expressed in symbols: "A equals C; and B equals C;" therefore, "A equals B." Reasoning is of two kinds or classes; *viz.*, Inductive and Deductive, respectively. We have explained these forms of Reasoning in detail in another volume of this series.

*The Feelings* are the mental faculties whereby we experience emotions or feelings. Feelings are the experiencing of the agreeable or disagreeable nature of our mental states. They can be defined only in their own terms. If we have never experienced a feeling, we cannot understand the words expressing it. Feelings result in what are called emotion, affection and desire. An emotion is the simple feeling, such as joy, sorrow, etc. An affection is an emotion reaching out toward another and outside object, such as envy, jealousy, love, etc. A desire is an emotion arising from the *want* of some lacking quality or thing, and the inclination to possess it.

*Memory* is the faculty of the Mind whereby we retain and reproduce, or consciously revive any kind of past mental experience. It has two sub-phases; *viz.*, Retention and Recollection, respectively. It manifests in the storing away of mental images and ideas, and in the reproduction of them at a later period of time, and also of the recognition of them as objects of past experience.

*Imagination* is the faculty of the Mind whereby we represent (*re-pre-sent*) as a mental image some previously experienced idea, concept or image. Its activities are closely allied and blended with those of the Memory. It has the power not only of reproducing objects already perceived but also another power of *ideal creation* whereby it *creates* new combinations from the materials of past experience. It is a faculty, the importance of which is but little understood by the majority of men. Inasmuch as the mental image must always precede the material manifestation, the cultivation of the Imagination becomes a matter of great importance and worthy of the closest study.

*Intuition* is the faculty of the Mind whereby it evolves what have been called Primary Truths or Primary Ideas. By Primary Ideas are meant the ideas of Space, Time, Cause, Identity, etc. By Primary Truths are meant the so-called "Self-Evident Truths" of geometry, mathematics and logic. Under the

head of Intuition are also sometimes included the activities of the Subconscious or Superconscious regions of the mind, of which we have spoken in detail in a volume under that name of this series. Some authorities hold to the older idea of "Innate Ideas" by which is meant that every human being is born with the knowledge of certain fundamental truths, unconnected with any experience. Others hold that these ideas are simply the result of the experience of the race, transmitted to us as "germ ideas" which must grow by experience and exercise.

That each and every faculty of the Mind may be strengthened and developed by Culture and Exercise is now held to be a fact by nearly every authority worthy of that name. Just as the physical muscle may be cultivated by the proper methods, so may the mental faculties be strengthened and cultivated by the appropriate methods and means. Inasmuch as the majority of the race are deficient in the development of one or more of the leading mental faculties, it becomes a matter of great interest and importance that all should acquaint themselves with the means whereby their deficiencies may be corrected and remedied. We shall now proceed to the consideration of Thought-Culture in general, and then to the consideration of the culture of each particular general faculty, in detail.

## CHAPTER IV

# THOUGHT-CULTURE

Thought-Culture is based upon two general scientific facts which may be stated as follows:

I. The brain centres of thought may be developed by exercise. While we do not assert that the brain and the mind are identical, it is nevertheless a scientific truth that "the brain is the organ of the mind" and that one of the first requisites for a good mind is a good brain. It has been proven by experiment that the brain-cells concerned in special mental activities multiply in proportion to the active use of the special faculties employed in the mental operation. It has also been ascertained that disuse of special faculties of the mind tends to cause a process akin to atrophy in the brain-cells concerned in the particular activity, so that it becomes difficult to think clearly along those particular lines after a long period of disuse. Moreover, it is known that the education and mental culture of a child is accompanied by an increase and development of the brain-cells connected with the particular fields of thought in which the child is exercised.

There is a close analogy between the exercise of the brain-cells and the exercise of the muscles of the body. Both respond to reasonable exercise; both are injured by overwork; both degenerate by disuse. As Brooks says: "The mind grows by its own inherent energies. Mental exercise is thus the law of mental development. As a muscle grows strong by use, so any faculty of the mind is developed by its proper use and exercise. An inactive mind, like an unused muscle, becomes weak and unskilful. Hang the arm in a sling and the muscle becomes flabby and loses its vigor and skill; let the mind remain inactive and it acquires a mental flabbiness that unfits it for any severe or prolonged activity. An idle mind loses its tone and strength like an unused muscle; the mental powers go to rust through idleness and inaction. To develop the faculties of the mind and secure their highest activity and efficiency, there must be a constant and judicious exercise of these faculties. The object of culture is to stimulate and direct the activity of the mind."

Experiments conducted by scientists upon dogs have shown that in the case of dogs specially trained to unusual mental activity, there has been a corresponding increase of the number of active brain-cells in the particular parts of the brain concerned with those mental activities. Microscopic examination of the brain tissues showed the greatest difference between the brain structure of the trained dogs and untrained ones of the same brood. So carefully were the experiments conducted that it was possible to distinguish between the dogs trained in one set of activities from those trained in another. Biologists have demonstrated the correctness of the brain-cell development theory beyond reasonable doubt, and ordinary human experience also adds its testimony in its favor.

In view of the above, it will be seen that by intelligent exercise and use any and all faculties of the mind may be developed and cultivated, just as may any special muscle of the body. And this exercise can come only from actual use of the faculties themselves. Development must come from within and not from without. No system of outward stimulation will develop the faculties of the mind – they may be cultivated only by an exercise in their own particular field of work. The only way to exercise any particular faculty of thought is to *think* through that faculty.

II. Not only are the brain-cells developed by exercise, but it also appears to be a fact that the mind appears actually to be *nourished* by knowledge of the outside world of things. The raw material of thought is taken into the mind and there is digested by the thought-processes, and is afterward actually *assimilated* by the mind in a manner strikingly similar to the processes of the physical organs of nutrition. A mind to be at its best must be supplied with a normal amount of mental nourishment. Lacking this, it tends to become weak and inefficient. And, likewise, if its owner is a mental glutton and furnishes too much nourishment, particularly of a rich kind, there is a tendency toward "mental dyspepsia" and indigestion – the mind, unable to assimilate the mental food furnished it, is inclined to

rebel. Moreover, if the mind be supplied with mental food of only one kind – if the mind is confined to one narrow field of thought – it weakens and the mental processes become impaired. In many ways is this curious analogy apparent.

Not only does the mind need development, but it also needs intelligent cultivation. For it may be *developed* by improper objects of thought just as well as by the proper ones. A rich field will grow tares and weeds as well as good grain or fruit. Thought-culture should not be confined to the *development of a strong and active mind*, but should be also extended to the *cultivation of a wise and intelligent mind*. Strength and Wisdom should be combined. Moreover there should be sought a harmonious and normal development. A one-sided, mental development is apt to produce a "crank," while a development in unhealthy mental fields will produce an abnormal thinker tending dangerously near to the line of insanity. Some "one-idea" men have great mental power and development, but are nevertheless unbalanced and impractical. And insane persons often have strongly developed minds – developed abnormally.

Some authorities, holding special theories regarding the nature of mind, hold that Thought-Culture is merely a *training* of the faculties rather than a *creation* of new mental power, inasmuch as the mind cannot be built up from the outside. This is a curious combination of truth and error. It is true that the mind cannot be built up from outside material, in the sense of creating *new mind*, but it is also true that in every mind there is the potentiality of growth and development. Just as the future oak is said to be in the acorn, so are the potentialities of mind-growth in every mind waiting for nourishment from outside and the proper cultivation. Brooks has well stated this, as follows: "The culture of the mind is not creative in its character; its object is to develop existing possibilities into realities. The mind possesses innate powers which may be awakened into a natural activity. The design of culture is to aid nature in improving the powers she has given. No new power can be created by culture; we can increase the activity of these powers, but cannot develop any new activities. Through these activities new ideas and thoughts may be developed, and the sum of human knowledge increased; but this is accomplished by a high activity of the natural powers with which the mind is endowed, and not by the culture of new powers. The profound philosopher uses the same faculties that the little child is developing in the games of the nursery. The object of culture is to arouse the powers which nature has given us into a normal activity and to stimulate and guide them in their unfolding."

In connection with the objection above mentioned, it may be said that while the development of the mind must come from within itself, rather than from without, nevertheless, in order to develop, it must have the nourishing material from the outside world in order to grow. Just as the body can grow from within only by the aid of nourishment from outside, so the mind, while growing from within, needs the material for thought which can come only from without itself. Thought requires "things" upon which to exercise itself – and upon which it is nourished. Without these outside objects, it can have no exercise and can receive no nourishment. Thought consists in the perception, examination and comparison of *things*, and the consequent building up new combinations, arrangements and syntheses. Therefore, the perceptive faculties are most necessary to Thought, and their culture is most necessary in the general work of Thought-Culture.

It must not be lost sight of that in Thought-Culture there is necessary a variety of exercises and forms of nourishment. What will develop one faculty will exert but a faint effect upon others. Each needs its own particular kind of exercise – each its particular kind of mental nourishment. While it is true that there is a certain benefit gained by the entire mind from an exercise of any of its parts, this effect is but secondary in importance. A man well developed mentally has been developed in each faculty, each in its own way. The faculty of perception requires objects of perception; the faculty of imagination requires objects of imagination; the faculty of reasoning requires objects of reasoning; and so on, each requiring objects of exercise and nourishment of its own kind – in its own class. In some persons some of the faculties are well developed while others are deficient. It follows that in such a case the weak faculties should be developed first, that they be brought up to the general

standard. Then a further general development may be undertaken if desired. Moreover, in general development, it will be found that certain faculties will respond more readily to the cultivation given, while others will be slow to respond. In such cases wisdom dictates that a greater degree of exercise and nourishment be given to the slower and less responsive faculties, while the more responsive be given but a lighter development. In Thought-Culture as in physical culture, the less developed and slower responding parts should be given special attention.

In the following chapters we shall point out the methods and exercises calculated to develop the several faculties of the mind to the best advantage, in each case giving general advice along the lines of the cultivation of the particular faculty which will serve as general instruction regarding its culture. The student should carefully study the entire work before he attempts to specialize in the development of any particular faculty. The particular work may be aided by an acquaintance with the entire field of Thought-Culture for many of the faculties shade into each other in their activities and are always more or less interdependent. For, be it remembered, the mind is a *whole*, and not a mere aggregation of many parts. To understand the parts, one must study the whole – to understand the whole, one must study the parts.

## CHAPTER V

# ATTENTION

Attention is not a faculty of the mind in the same sense as perception, abstraction, judgment, etc., but is rather in the nature of an act of will concerned in the focusing of the consciousness upon some object of thought presented or represented to the mind. In some respects it bears a resemblance to Abstraction, inasmuch as it sets aside some particular object for the consideration of the consciousness, to the exclusion of other objects. Wayland explains attention as a condition of mind in which the consciousness is excited and directed by an act of the will. Hamilton says: "Consciousness may be compared to a telescope; Attention is the pulling out and pressing in of the tubes in accommodating the focus of the eye;" and also that: "An act of attention, that is an act of concentration, seems thus necessary to every exertion of consciousness, as a certain contraction of the pupil is requisite to every exertion of vision. . . Attention then is to consciousness what the contraction of the pupil is to sight, or to the eye of the mind what the microscope or telescope is to the bodily eye. . . It constitutes the better half of all intellectual power."

Brodie says that: "It is Attention, much more than any difference in the abstract power of reasoning, which constitutes the vast difference which exists between minds of different individuals." Butler says: "The most important intellectual habit that I know of is the habit of attending exclusively to the matter in hand. . . It is commonly said that genius cannot be infused by education, yet this power of concentrated attention, which belongs as a part of his gift to every great discoverer, is unquestionably capable of almost indefinite augmentation by resolute practice." And Beattie says: "The force wherewith anything strikes the mind is generally in proportion to the degree of attention bestowed upon it."

Realizing the importance of attention, the student will naturally wish to cultivate the power of bestowing it when necessary. The first rule in the cultivation of the attention is that the student shall carefully acquire *the habit of thinking of or doing but one thing at a time*. This first rule may seem easy, but in practice it will be found very difficult of observance, so careless are the majority of us in our actions and thinking. Not only will the trouble and care bestowed upon the acquiring of this habit of thought and action be well repaid by the development of the attention, but the student will also acquire a facility for accomplishing his tasks quickly and thoroughly. As Kay says: "There is nothing that contributes more to success in any pursuit than that of having the attention concentrated on the matter in hand; and, on the contrary, nothing is more detrimental than when doing one thing to have the mind taken up with something else." And as Granville says: "A frequent cause of failure in the faculty of attention is striving to think of more than one thing at a time." Kay also well says: "If we would possess the power of attention in a high degree, we must cultivate the habit of attending to what is directly before the mind, to the exclusion of all else. All distracting thoughts and feelings that tend to withdraw the mind from what is immediately before it are therefore to be carefully avoided. This is a matter of great importance, and of no little difficulty. Frequently the mind, in place of being concentrated on what is immediately before it, is thinking of something else – something, it may be, that went before or that may come after, or something quite alien to the subject."

The following principles of the application of the attention have been stated by the authorities:

I. The attention attaches more readily to interesting than to uninteresting things.

II. The attention will decline in strength unless there is a variation in the stimulus, either by a change of object or the developing of some new attribute in the object.

III. The attention, when tired by continuous direction toward some unvarying object, may be revived by directing it toward some new object or in allowing it to be attracted and held by some passing object.

IV. The attention manifests in a two-fold activity; *viz.* (1) the concentration upon some one object of thought; and (2) the shutting out of outside objects. Thus, it has its positive and negative sides. Thus, when a man wishes to give his undivided attention to one speaker in a crowd of speaking individuals, he acts positively in focusing his consciousness upon the selected individual, and negatively by refusing to listen to the others.

V. The attention is not a faculty, but a means of using any faculty with an increased degree of efficiency.

VI. The degree of attention possessed by an individual is an indication of his power of using his intellect. Many authorities have held that, in cases of genius, the power of concentrated attention is usually greatly developed. Brooks says: "Attention is one of the principal elements of genius." Hamilton says: "Genius is a higher capacity of attention." Helvetius says: "Genius is nothing but protracted attention." Chesterfield says: "The power of applying our attention, steady and undissipated, to a single object is a sure mark of superior genius."

The attention may be cultivated, just as may be the various faculties of the mind, by the two-fold method of Exercise and Nourishment; that is, by using and employing it actively and by furnishing it with the proper materials with which to feed its strength. The way to exercise the attention is *to use it frequently* in every-day life. If you are listening to a man speaking, endeavor to give to him your undivided attention, and, at the same time, to shut out from your consciousness every other object. In working, we should endeavor to use the attention by concentrating our interest upon the particular task before us to the exclusion of all else. In reading, we should endeavor to hold our minds closely to the text instead of hastily glancing over the page as so many do.

Those who wish to cultivate their attention should take up some line of study in which it is necessary to fasten the attention firmly for a time. A half-hour's study in this way is worth more than hours of careless reading so far as the cultivation of the attention is concerned. Mathematics is most valuable in the direction of developing the power of attention. Gibbon says: "After a rapid glance on the subject and distribution of a new book, I suspend the reading of it which I only resume after having myself examined the subject in all its relations."

Some writers have held that the attention may be developed by the practice of selecting the voice of one person speaking among a crowd of speakers, and deliberately shutting out the other sounds, giving the whole attention to the particular speaker; or, in the same manner, selecting one singer in a church choir or band of singers; or one musical instrument in an orchestra; or one piece of machinery making sounds in a room filled with various machines, etc. The practice of so doing is held to strengthen one's powers of concentration and attention.

Draper says: "Although many images may be simultaneously existing upon the retina, the mind possesses the power of singling out any one of them and fastening attention upon it, just as among a number of musical instruments simultaneously played, one, and that perhaps the feeblest, may be selected and its notes exclusively followed." And as Taylor says: "In a concert of several voices, the voices being of nearly equal intensity, regarded merely as organic impressions on the auditory nerve, we select one, and at will we lift it out and disjoin it from the general volume of sound; we shut off the other voices – five, ten and more – and follow this one alone. When we have done so for a time, we freely cast it off and take up another." Carpenter says: "The more completely the mental energy can be brought into one focus and all distracting objects excluded, the more powerful will be the volitional effort."

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