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MENTAL EFFICIENCY

**AND OTHER HINTS
TO MEN AND WOMEN**

by ARNOLD BENNETT

Author of "How to Live on 24 Hours a Day"

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CONTENTS

I. MENTAL EFFICIENCY	3
THE APPEAL.....	3
THE REPLIES	5
THE CURE	7
MENTAL CALISTHENICS	8
II. EXPRESSING ONE'S INDIVIDUALITY	12
III. BREAKING WITH THE PAST.....	15
IV. SETTLING DOWN IN LIFE.....	17
V. MARRIAGE	20
THE DUTY OF IT	20
THE ADVENTURE OF IT	22
THE TWO WAYS OF IT	24
VI. BOOKS.....	26
THE PHYSICAL SIDE	26
THE PHILOSOPHY OF BOOK-BUYING.....	28
VII. SUCCESS	30
CANDID REMARKS.....	30
THE SUCCESSFUL AND THE UNSUCCESSFUL.....	32
THE INWARDNESS OF SUCCESS	34
VIII. THE PETTY ARTIFICIALITIES	37
IX. THE SECRET OF CONTENT	40

I. MENTAL EFFICIENCY

THE APPEAL

IF there is any virtue in advertisements --and a journalist should be the last person to say that there is not--the American nation is rapidly reaching a state of physical efficiency of which the world has probably not seen the like since Sparta. In all the American newspapers and all the American monthlies are innumerable illustrated announcements of "physical-culture specialists," who guarantee to make all the organs of the body perform their duties with the mighty precision of a 60 h.p. motor-car that never breaks down. I saw a book the other day written by one of these specialists, to show how perfect health could be attained by devoting a quarter of an hour a day to certain exercises. The advertisements multiply and increase in size. They cost a great deal of money. Therefore they must bring in a great deal of business.

Therefore vast numbers of people must be worried about the non-efficiency of their bodies, and on the way to achieve efficiency. In our more modest British fashion, we have the same phenomenon in England. And it is growing. Our muscles are growing also. Surprise a man in his bedroom of a morning, and you will find him lying on his back on the floor, or standing on his head, or whirling clubs, in pursuit of physical efficiency. I remember that once I "went in" for physical efficiency myself. I, too, lay on the floor, my delicate epidermis separated from the carpet by only the thinnest of garments, and I contorted myself according to the fifteen diagrams of a large chart (believed to be the magna charta of physical efficiency) daily after shaving. In three weeks my collars would not meet round my prize-fighter's neck; my hosier reaped immense profits, and I came to the conclusion that I had carried physical efficiency quite far enough.

A strange thing -- was it not? -- that I never had the idea of devoting a quarter of an hour a day after shaving to the pursuit of mental efficiency. The average body is a pretty complicated affair, sadly out of order, but happily susceptible to culture. The average mind is vastly more complicated, not less sadly out of order, but perhaps even more susceptible to culture. We compare our arms to the arms of the gentleman illustrated in the physical efficiency advertisement, and we murmur to ourselves the classic phrase: "This will never do." And we set about developing the muscles of our arms until we can show them off (through a frock coat) to women at afternoon tea. But it does not, perhaps, occur to us that the mind has its muscles, and a lot of apparatus besides, and that these invisible, yet paramount, mental organs are far less efficient than they ought to be; that some of them are atrophied, others starved, others out of shape, etc. A man of sedentary occupation goes for a very long walk on Easter Monday, and in the evening is so exhausted that he can scarcely eat. He wakes up to the inefficiency of his body, caused by

his neglect of it, and he is so shocked that he determines on remedial measures. Either he will walk to the office, or he will play golf, or he will execute the post-shaving exercises. But let the same man after a prolonged sedentary course of newspapers, magazines, and novels, take his mind out for a stiff climb among the rocks of a scientific, philosophic, or artistic subject. What will he do? Will he stay out all day, and return in the evening too tired even to read his paper? Not he. It is ten to one that, finding himself puffing for breath after a quarter of an hour, he won't even persist till he gets his second wind, but will come back at once. Will he remark with genuine concern that his mind is sadly out of condition and that he really must do something to get it into order? Not he. It is a hundred to one that he will tranquilly accept the status quo, without shame and without very poignant regret. Do I make my meaning clear?

I say, without a -very poignant regret, because a certain vague regret is indubitably caused by realizing that one is handicapped by a mental inefficiency which might, without too much difficulty, be cured. That vague regret exudes like a vapour from the more cultivated section of the public. It is to be detected everywhere, and especially among people who are near the half-way house of life. They perceive the existence of immense quantities of knowledge, not the smallest particle of which will they ever make their own.

They stroll forth from their orderly dwellings on a starlit night, and feel dimly the wonder of the heavens. But the still small voice is telling them that, though they have read in a newspaper that there are fifty thousand stars in the Pleiades, they cannot even point to the Pleiades in the sky. How they would like to grasp the significance of the nebular theory, the most overwhelming of all theories ! And the years are passing; and there are twenty-four hours in every day, out of which they work only six or seven; and it needs only an impulse, an effort, a system, in order gradually to cure the mind of its slackness, to give " tone " to its muscles, and to enable it to grapple with the splendors of knowledge and sensation that await it! But the regret is not poignant enough. They do nothing. They go on doing nothing. It is as though they passed for ever along the length of an endless table filled with delicacies, and could not stretch out a hand to seize. Do I exaggerate? Is there not deep in the consciousness of most of us a mournful feeling that our minds are like the liver of the advertisement -- sluggish, and that for the sluggishness of our minds there is the excuse neither of incompetence, nor of lack of time, nor of lack of opportunity, nor of lack of means?

Why does not some mental efficiency specialist come forward and show us how to make our minds do the work which our minds are certainly capable of doing? I do not mean a quack. All the physical efficiency specialists who advertise largely are not quacks. Some of them achieve very genuine results. If a course of treatment can be devised for the body, a course of treatment can be devised for the mind. Thus we might realize some of the ambitions which all of us cherish in regard to the utilization in our spare time of that magnificent machine which we allow to rust within our craniums. We have the desire to perfect ourselves, to round off our careers with the graces of knowledge and taste. How many people would not gladly undertake some branch of serious study, so that they might not die under the reproach of having lived and died without ever really having known anything about anything! It is not the absence of desire that prevents them. It is, first, the absence of will-power-- not the will to begin, but the will to continue; and, second, a

mental apparatus which is out of condition, "puffy," "weedy," through sheer neglect. The remedy, then, divides itself into two parts, the cultivation of will-power, and the getting into condition of the mental apparatus. And these two branches of the cure must be worked concurrently.

I am sure that the considerations which I have presented to you must have already presented themselves to tens of thousands of my readers, and that thousands must have attempted the cure. I doubt not that many have succeeded. I shall deem it a favour if those readers who have interested themselves in the question will communicate to me at once the result of their experience, whatever its outcome. I will make such use as I can of the letters I receive, and afterwards I will give my own experience.

THE REPLIES

The correspondence which I have received in answer to my appeal shows that at any rate I did not overstate the case. There is, among a vast mass of reflecting people in this country, a clear consciousness of being mentally less than efficient, and a strong (though ineffective) desire that such mental inefficiency should cease to be. The desire is stronger than I had imagined, but it does not seem to have led to much hitherto. And that "course of treatment for the mind," by means of which we are to "realize some of the ambitions which all of us cherish in regard to the utilization in our spare time of the magnificent machine which we allow to rust within our craniums"-- that desiderated course of treatment has not apparently been devised by anybody. The Sandow of the brain has not yet loomed up above the horizon. On the other hand, there appears to be a general expectancy that I personally am going to play the role of the Sandow of the brain. Vain thought!

I have been very much interested in the letters, some of which, as a statement of the matter in question, are admirable. It is perhaps not surprising that the best of them come from women-- for (genius apart) woman is usually more touchingly lyrical than man in the yearning for the ideal. The most enthusiastic of all the letters I have received, however, is from a gentleman whose notion is that we should be hypnotized into mental efficiency. After advocating the establishment of "an institution of practical psychology from whence there can be graduated fit and proper people whose efforts would be in the direction of the subconscious mental mechanism of the child or even the adult," this hypnotist proceeds: "Between the academician, whose specialty is an inconsequential cobweb, the medical man who has got it into his head that he is the logical foster-father for psychonomical matters, and the blatant 'professor' who deals with monkey tricks on a few somnambules on the music-hall stage, you are allowing to go unrecognized one of the most potent factors of mental development." Am I? I have not the least idea what this gentleman means, but I can assure him that he is wrong. I can make more sense out of the remarks of another correspondent who, utterly despising the things of the mind, compares a certain class of young men to "a halfpenny bloater with the roe out," and asserts that he himself "got out of the groove" by dint of having to unload ten tons of coal in three hours and a half every day during several years. This is interesting and it is constructive, but it is just a little beside the point.

utterly abandoned the presumptuous practice of judging and condemning -- he will never attain real content. "Ah!" you exclaim again, " he has nothing newer to tell us than that ' the greatest of these is charity!'" I have not. It may strike you as excessively funny, but I have discovered nothing newer than that. I merely remind you of it. Thus it is, twins on the road to Delhi, by continual meditation upon the in- destructibility of Force, that I try to cultivate calm, and by continual meditation upon the oneness of Force that I try to cultivate charity, being fully convinced that in calmness and in charity lies the secret of a placid if not ecstatic happiness. It is often said that no thinking person can be happy in this world. My view is that the more a man thinks the more happy he is likely to be. I have spoken. I am overwhelmingly aware that I have spoken crudely, abruptly, inadequately, confusedly.

THE END

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