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# **SECRETS OF MENTAL SUPREMACY**

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*My mind to me a kingdom is. — Epictetus.*

*The mind's the measure of the man. — Watts.*

*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he. — Jesus.*

*The man does not contain the mind: the mind contains the man. — Socrates.*

*In the universe there is nothing great but man: in the man there is nothing great but mind. — Aristotle.*

## I. INTRODUCTION.

**I**N the brief articles which will make up this series my object will be to present in the shortest, plainest, and most practical manner methods which, in my experience and that of many others who have been more or less under my influence, have seemed to be conducive to increased mental efficiency.

It is said that there is no royal road to learning; and while in a sense this is true, it is also true that, in all things, even in mind training, there is a right way and a wrong way — or rather there is one right way, and there are a thousand wrong ways.

Now, after trying, it seems to me, most of the wrong ways, I have found what I believe to be the right way; and in these articles I shall try to expound it to you. You need not expect an essay on psychology or a series of dissertations upon the "faculties of the mind"; for there will be nothing of the kind. On the other hand, I shall, so far as possible, avoid text-book terms and the text-book tone — both of which are quite absurd and quite futile. I shall try to give you bare facts. I shall try to give you plain directions, stripped of all verbal and pseudo-scientific flummery, for the acquisition of mental activity and mental supremacy.

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## II. MIND AND ITS MATERIAL.

**F**IRST of all, before you are able to think at all, you must have something to think about. You must have some mental "stock in trade." And this mental stock in trade you can gain only through the senses. The appearance of a tree, the roar of the ocean, the odor of a rose, the taste of an orange, the sensation you experience in handling a piece of satin — all these are so much material helping to form your stock of mental images — "the content of the consciousness," as the scholastic psychologists call it.

Now, all these millions and millions of facts which make up our mental stock in trade — the material of thought are gained through the senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and so on.

### **Value of the Perceptions.**

In a recent article in a leading French scientific journal, a well-known scientist, Dr. A. Peres, has presented some ideas which are so thoroughly in accord with my own observations extending over many years, that I yield to the temptation to quote. Dr. Peres first makes note of modern degeneracy in this respect. I append a free translation of a few extracts which seem to me especially worthy of attention: —

“Have we naught but arms and legs? Have we not also eyes and ears? And are not these latter organs necessary to the use of the former? Exercise then not the muscles only, but the senses that control them.’ Thus was a celebrated philosopher wont to express himself. Nevertheless when we measure acuteness of vision we find that it is becoming weaker; hardness of hearing is on the increase; we suffer daily from lack of skill in workmen, in domestics, in ourselves; as to taste and smell, they are used up — thus do the inevitable laws of atavism act.

"The trouble is that, despite Rousseau's objurgating, we have always paid too little attention to the hygiene and education of the senses, giving all our care to the development of physical strength and vigor; so that the general term 'physical education' finally has assumed the restricted meaning of 'muscular education.'

"The senses, which put us in contact with exterior objects, have nevertheless a primordial importance. ... So great is their value that it is the interest and even the duty of man to preserve them as a treasure, and not to do anything which might derange their wonderful mechanism."

The length and exactness of the sight, the skill and sureness of the hand, the delicacy of the hearing, are of value to artist and artisan alike by the perfection and rapidity of work that they insure. Nothing embarrasses a man so trained; he is, so to speak, ready for anything. His cultivated senses have become for him tools of universal use. The more

perfect his sensations, the more justness and clearness do his ideas acquire. The education of the senses is the primary form of intellectual education.

"The influence of training on the senses is easily seen. The adroit marksman never misses his aim; the savage perceives and recognizes the slightest rustling; certain blind persons know colors by touch; the precision of jugglers is surprising; the gourmet recognizes the quality of a wine among a thousand others; odor is with chemists one of the most sensitive reactions.

"The senses operate in two ways, either passively, when the organ, solely from the fact that it is situated on the surface of the body, and independently of the will, is acted upon by exterior bodies; or actively, when the organ, directed and excited by the will, goes, so to speak, in advance of the body to receive the impression. Passively, we see, hear, touch, smell; actively, we observe, listen, feel, sniff. By the effect of the attention and by arranging our organs in certain ways, our impressions become more intense. . . .

"The impressions made by exterior objects on the sense-organs, the nerves and the brain, are followed by certain mental operations. These two things are often confounded. We are in the habit of saying that our senses often deceive us; it would be more just to recognize that we do not always interpret correctly the data that they furnish us. The art of interpretation may be learned. . . .

"The intuitive, concrete form given nowadays to education contributes to the training of the senses by developing attention, the habit of observation; but this does not suffice. To perfect the senses and make each of them, in its own perceptions, acquire all possible force and precision, they must be subjected to special exercises, appropriate and graded. A new gymnastic must thus be created in all its details."

There are, of course, a certain number of "specific" or racial impressions and tendencies that come down through what is called heredity; but these are merely instincts and impulses, and while they have an influence upon the person's character and habits of thought, they do not, in themselves, provide actual material for thought.

If you can imagine a person who was blind and deaf, who could not smell or taste or feel or move; he would be quite unable to think, for he would have in his mind nothing about which to think. The material of thought, the mental stock in trade, is gained through the senses; and in any rational effort to train the mind we must begin by training the senses — the perceptions, as they are more accurately called, — so that we may see, hear, smell, taste, and feel with more precision and keenness. Trained perceptions are the very foundation of all mental power.

Our system of training for mental supremacy will begin, then, with a brief study of the perceptions, or senses, and the methods by which we may gain the power of seeing more clearly, listening more intently, of feeling more delicately, and, in general, of developing the perceptive powers.

## **Memory and Its Uses.**

But the perceptions are of little value unless we remember what we have perceived. You may have read all the wise books ever written, you may have traveled the wide world over; you may have had all kinds of interesting and unusual experiences; but — unless you can remember what you have read, what you have seen, and what you have done — you will have no real use of it all. You will have gained no mental "stock in trade," no material by the employment of which you may hope to achieve mental supremacy. It will be necessary, then, for us to study not only methods of developing power of perception, but the means by which perception may be retained and recalled at will.

## **The Power of Associating Memories.**

But the memory itself is not enough. I have known people of unusual powers of memory who could not talk, write, or think well — who were like "the bookful blockhead, ignorantly read, with loads of learned humor in his head"; but who, in spite of all their experience and their recollection of it, had nothing to write, nothing to say.

So — memory is not enough. One must have the power of putting memories together — of analyzing, comparing, contrasting, and associating memories — until the entire mass of memories, which form the "content of the consciousness," is wrought into one splendid, homogeneous whole — a mass of images, each one of which is intimately connected with many others, and all of which are under instant command of the central sovereign—the will.

It will be necessary, then, to give special attention to this most important matter of analyzing, comparing, and grouping mental images. Of all the activities of the mind this faculty, called "the power of association," is the one most directly conducive to what is generally called "a brilliant mind."

## **Imagination and Judgment.**

The possession of trained perceptions, of a retentive memory and great powers of association are of enormous value; but only when combined with another faculty — imagination; and imagination is merely the power of recombining certain memories in such a fashion that the combination is new. Imagination is a faculty of the highest possible importance. Every splendid achievement, every invention, every business enterprise, every great poem, or book or picture, has been not only conceived but completed in imagination before it became actualized in fact.

And then it is necessary to be able to compare the mental pictures, gathered by the perceptions, remembered and classified by memory and association, so as to determine the relation of these memories to each other and their application to other ideas or mental images. And this valuable faculty of the mind is called judgment.

## **Necessity for Concentration.**

Now, in order to do well in any one of the things of which I have been writing, it is necessary that the entire mind should be engaged upon that one thing. To do anything well one must do only that thing at that time. And this is particularly true of the action of the mind. The focusing of the entire power of the mind upon one thing is commonly known as concentration or "the power of attention."

So essential is this power of concentrating the entire mind upon the task in hand that it is not too much to say that no great degree of mental power can ever be gained without concentration. So in our study of the practical methods by which mental supremacy may be achieved, we shall pay special attention to the development of this invaluable faculty.

But in order to do anything with the mind (or with the body either, for that matter) one must choose, must wish to do that thing. And this choice, this decision to do something, is called the will. The power to choose quickly and decisively and to act vigorously upon that choice is a rather rare thing. He who has that power is said to have a strong will.

This question of will and its development is most important. The great difference between men – between strong men and weaklings, between the honored and the disregarded, between the masters and the serfs—is will. A man of strong, unfaltering will is sure to succeed even if his abilities are mediocre; but a man of weak will, no matter what his abilities, is not likely to achieve either success or honor among men.

As a great psychologist has said: "The education of the will is really of far greater importance than that of the intellect." And again: "Without this [will] there can be neither independence, nor firmness, nor individuality of character." Ik Marvel says: "Resolve is what makes a man manifest. . . . Will makes men giants."

The will, like any other mental faculty, may be highly developed by training; and this, with many practical exercises, also we will take up in its proper place.

## **Importance of the Social Faculties.**

The above brief outline of the mental powers embraces those which any one may develop and use without help from or association with other people. The highest powers of the mind, however, or at any rate, the most impressive powers of the mind, can be developed only through contact with others — through social intercourse.

A man might have miraculously keen perceptions, perfect memory, splendid imagination, infallible judgment, indomitable will — he might have all of these; and yet he would miss the rewards of mental supremacy unless he were capable of dealing with other people — unless he were socially accomplished.

In our efforts to train the powers of the mind, therefore, it will be necessary to make a study of some of the principles affecting our relations with other people; and so we shall in the same practical and straightforward way discuss sympathy, adaptability, and self-command. The important question of verbal expression as applied to both speech and writing will also receive special attention.

### **Mental Action a Unit.**

In conclusion you must not forget that, although I speak of the various mental acts as if they were separate, this is done only for convenience of discussion and description. As a matter of fact the mind is one thing—a unit. All the various "faculties" act together constantly. One cannot remember what an oak tree looks like unless he has carefully observed an oak tree. He cannot imagine an oak tree unless he remembers it. He cannot judge of the difference between an oak tree and a maple tree unless he can imagine a picture of the two side by side. And he cannot do any one of these things without attention; nor again can he concentrate his attention without an act of will.

So we see that the various acts of the mind, perception, memory, imagination, judgment, attention, and will, are inextricably interdependent—and that one act involves all the rest.

Happily this makes our task all the easier and more interesting. In this series I shall begin by giving you some plain practical advice as to the development of the perceptive powers—the ability to see, hear, feel, taste, and smell more efficiently. But with every moment of practice such as I advise you will also be developing a more exact and acute memory, a finer and more expansive imagination, a greater power concentration, and a stronger will. When we come to discuss the cultivation of the will power the exercises will require the use of the perceptions, the memory, the imagination, and other faculties. So, you see, in developing the mind in any one phase of its activity you are, at the same time and by the same act, adding to the power and usefulness of the entire mind.