



HOW TO
INCREASE
YOUR
MENTAL
EFFICIENCY

ARNOLD BENNETT

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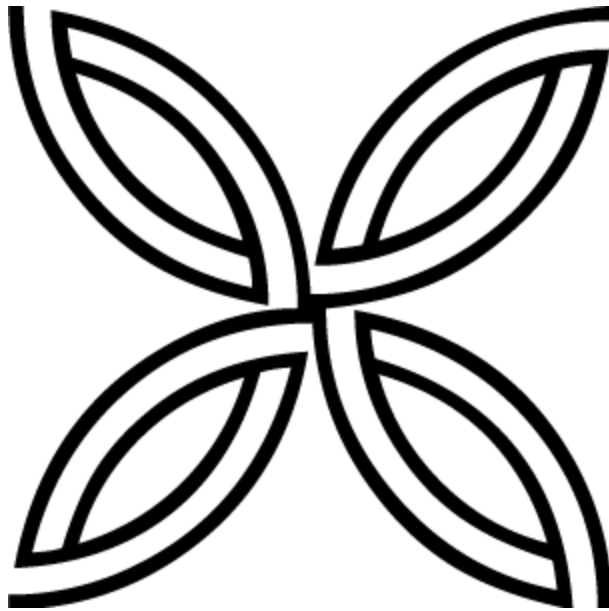
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I MENTAL EFFICIENCY

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 splendours 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.