



MENTAL EFFICIENCY

ARNOLD BENNETT

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MENTAL EFFICIENCY

AND OTHER HINTS TO MEN AND WOMEN

BY
ARNOLD BENNETT

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Mental Efficiency By Arnold Bennett.

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There is no doubt that the mass of the audience would consider that I had missed my vocation, and ought to have been a caterer instead of a preacher. But, once started, I would not be discouraged. I would keep on, Sunday night after Sunday night. Our leading advertisers have richly proved that the public will believe anything if they are told of it often enough. I would practise iteration, always with refreshments. In the result, it would dawn upon the corporate mind that there was some glimmering of sense in my doctrine, and people would at last begin to perceive the folly of neglecting to savour the present, the folly of assuming that the future can be essentially different from the present, the fatuity of dying before they have begun to live.

5. MARRIAGE

THE DUTY OF IT

Every now and then it becomes necessary to deal faithfully with that immortal type of person, the praiser of the past at the expense of the present. I will not quote Horace, as by all the traditions of letters I ought to do, because Horace, like the incurable trimmer that he was, "hedged" on this question; and I do not admire him much either. The praiser of the past has been very rife lately. He has told us that pauperism and lunacy are mightily increasing, and though the exact opposite has been proved to be the case and he has apologized, he will have forgotten the correction in a few months, and will break out again into renewed lamentation. He has told us that we are physically deteriorating, and in such awful tones that we have shuddered, and many of us have believed. And considering that the death-rate is decreasing, that slums are decreasing, that disease is decreasing, that the agricultural labourer eats more than ever he did, our credence does not do much credit to our reasoning powers, does it? Of course, there is that terrible "influx" into the towns, but I for one should be much interested to know wherein the existence of the rustic in times past was healthier than the existence of the town-dwellers of to-day. The personal appearance of agricultural veterans does not help me; they resemble starved 'bus-drivers twisted out of shape by lightning.

But the *pièce de résistance* of the praiser of the past is now marriage, with discreet hints about the birth-rate. The praiser of the past is going to have a magnificent time with the subject of marriage. The first moanings of the tempest have already been heard. Bishops have looked askance at the birth-rate, and have mentioned their displeasure. The matter is serious. As the phrase goes, "it strikes at the root." We are marrying later, my friends. Some of us, in the hurry and pre-occupation of business, are quite forgetting to marry. It is the duty of the citizen to marry and have children, and we are neglecting our duty, we are growing selfish! No longer are produced the glorious "quiverfuls" of old times! Our fathers married at twenty; we marry at thirty-five. Why? Because a gross and enervating luxury has overtaken us. What will become of

England if this continues? There will be no England! Hence we must look to it! And so on, in the same strain.

I should like to ask all those who have raised and will raise such outcries. Have you read "X"? Now, the book that I refer to as "X" is a mysterious work, written rather more than a hundred years ago by an English curate. It is a classic of English science; indeed, it is one of the great scientific books of the world. It has immensely influenced all the scientific thought of the nineteenth century, especially Darwin's. Mr. H.G. Wells, as cited in "Chambers's Cyclopædia of English Literature," describes it as "the most 'shattering' book that ever has or will be written." If I may make a personal reference, I would say that it affected me more deeply than any other scientific book that I have read. Although it is perfectly easy to understand, and free from the slightest technicality, it is the most misunderstood book in English literature, simply because it is *not* read. The current notion about it is utterly false. It might be a powerful instrument of education, general and sociological, but publishers will not reprint it—at least, they do not. And yet it is forty times more interesting and four hundred times more educational than Gilbert White's remarks on the birds of Selborne. I will leave you to guess what "X" is, but I do not offer a prize for the solution of a problem which a vast number of my readers will certainly solve at once.

If those who are worrying themselves about the change in our system of marriage would read "X," they would probably cease from worrying. For they would perceive that they had been putting the cart before the horse; that they had elevated to the dignity of fundamental principles certain average rules of conduct which had sprung solely from certain average instincts in certain average conditions, and that they were now frightened because, the conditions having changed, the rules of conduct had changed with them. One of the truths that "X" makes clear is that conduct conforms to conditions, and not conditions to conduct.

The payment of taxes is a duty which the citizen owes to the state. Marriage, with the begetting of children, is not a duty which the citizen owes to the state. Marriage, with its consequences, is a matter of personal inclination and convenience. It never has been anything else, and it never will be anything else. How could it be otherwise? If a man goes against inclination and convenience in a matter where inclination is

"of the essence of the contract," he merely presents the state with a discontented citizen (if not two) in exchange for a contented one! The happiness of the state is the sum of the happiness of all its citizens; to decrease one's own happiness, then, is a singular way of doing one's duty to the state! Do you imagine that when people married early and much they did so from a sense of duty to the state—a sense of duty which our "modern luxury" has weakened? I imagine they married simply because it suited 'em. They married from sheer selfishness, as all decent people do marry. And do those who clatter about the duty of marriage kiss the girls of their hearts with an eye to the general welfare? I can fancy them saying, "My angel, I love you—from a sense of duty to the state. Let us rear innumerable progeny—from a sense of duty to the state." How charmed the girls would be!

If the marrying age changes, if the birth-rate shows a sympathetic tendency to follow the death-rate (as it must—see "X"), no one need be alarmed. Elementary principles of right and wrong are not trembling on their bases. The human conscience is not silenced. The nation is not going to the dogs. Conduct is adjusting itself to new conditions, and that is all. We may not be able to see exactly *how* conditions are changing; that is a detail; our descendants will see exactly; meanwhile the change in our conduct affords us some clew. And although certain nervous persons do get alarmed, and do preach, and do "take measures," the rest of us may remain placid in the sure faith that "measures" will avail nothing whatever. If there are two things set high above legislation, "movements," crusades, and preaching, one is the marrying age and the other is the birth-rate. For there the supreme instinct comes along and stamps ruthlessly on all insincere reasonings and sham altruisms; stamps on everything, in fact, and blandly remarks: "I shall suit my own convenience, and no one but Nature herself (with a big, big N) shall talk to *me*. Don't pester me with Right and Wrong. I *am* Right and Wrong...." Having thus attempted to clear the ground a little of fudge, I propose next to offer a few simple remarks on marriage.

THE ADVENTURE OF IT

Having endeavoured to show that men do not, and should not, marry from a sense of duty to the state or to mankind, but simply and solely from an egoistic inclination to marry, I now proceed to the individual case of the man who is "in a position to marry" and whose affections are not employed. Of course, if he has fallen in love, unless he happens to be a person of extremely powerful will, he will not weigh the pros and cons of marriage; he will merely marry, and forty thousand cons will not prevent him. And he will be absolutely right and justified, just as the straw as it rushes down the current is absolutely right and justified. But the privilege of falling in love is not given to everybody, and the inestimable privilege of falling deeply in love is given to few. However, the man whom circumstances permit to marry but who is not in love, or is only slightly amorous, will still think of marriage. How will he think of it?

I will tell you. In the first place, if he has reached the age of thirty unscathed by Aphrodite, he will reflect that that peculiar feeling of romantic expectation with which he gets up every morning would cease to exist after marriage—and it is a highly agreeable feeling! In its stead, in moments of depression, he would have the feeling of having done something irremediable, of having definitely closed an avenue for the outlet of his individuality. (Kindly remember that I am not describing what this human man ought to think. I am describing what he does think.) In the second place, he will reflect that, after marriage, he could no longer expect the charming welcomes which bachelors so often receive from women; he would be "done with" as a possibility, and he does not relish the prospect of being done with as a possibility. Such considerations, all connected more or less with the loss of "freedom" (oh, mysterious and thrilling word!), will affect his theoretical attitude. And be it known that even the freedom to be lonely and melancholy is still freedom.

Other ideas will suggest themselves. One morning while brushing his hair he will see a gray hair, and, however young he may be, the anticipation of old age will come to him. A solitary old age! A senility dependent for its social and domestic requirements on condescending nephews and nieces, or even more distant relations! Awful! Unthinkable! And his first movement, especially if he has read that terrible novel, "*Fort comme la Mort*," of De Maupassant, is to rush out into the street

and propose to the first girl he encounters, in order to avoid this dreadful nightmare of a solitary old age. But before he has got as far as the doorstep he reflects further. Suppose he marries, and after twenty years his wife dies and leaves him a widower! He will still have a solitary old age, and a vastly more tragical one than if he had remained single. Marriage is not, therefore, a sure remedy for a solitary old age; it may intensify the evil. Children? But suppose he doesn't have any children! Suppose, there being children, they die—what anguish! Suppose merely that they are seriously ill and recover—what an ageing experience! Suppose they prove a disappointment—what endless regret! Suppose they "turn out badly" (children do)—what shame! Suppose he finally becomes dependent upon the grudging kindness of an ungrateful child—what a supreme humiliation! All these things are occurring constantly everywhere. Suppose his wife, having loved him, ceased to love him, or suppose he ceased to love his wife! *Ces choses ne se commandent pas*—these things do not command themselves. Personally, I should estimate that in not one per cent. even of romantic marriages are the husband and wife capable of *passion* for each other after three years. So brief is the violence of love! In perhaps thirty-three per cent. passion settles down into a tranquil affection—which is ideal. In fifty per cent. it sinks into sheer indifference, and one becomes used to one's wife or one's husband as to one's other habits. And in the remaining sixteen per cent. it develops into dislike or detestation. Do you think my percentages are wrong, you who have been married a long time and know what the world is? Well, you may modify them a little—you won't want to modify them much.

The risk of finding one's self ultimately among the sixteen per cent. can be avoided by the simple expedient of not marrying. And by the same expedient the other risks can be avoided, together with yet others that I have not mentioned. It is entirely obvious, then (in fact, I beg pardon for mentioning it), that the attitude towards marriage of the heart-free bachelor must be at best a highly cautious attitude. He knows he is already in the frying-pan (none knows better), but, considering the propinquity of the fire, he doubts whether he had not better stay where he is. His life will be calmer, more like that of a hibernating snake; his sensibilities will be dulled; but the chances of poignant suffering will be very materially reduced.

So that the bachelor in a position to marry but not in love will assuredly decide in theory against marriage—that is to say, if he is timid, if he prefers frying-pans, if he is lacking in initiative, if he has the soul of a rat, if he wants to live as little as possible, if he hates his kind, if his egoism is of the miserable sort that dares not mingle with another's. But if he has been more happily gifted he will decide that the magnificent adventure is worth plunging into; the ineradicable and fine gambling instinct in him will urge him to take, at the first chance, a ticket in the only lottery permitted by the British Government. Because, after all, the mutual sense of ownership felt by the normal husband and the normal wife is something unique, something the like of which cannot be obtained without marriage. I saw a man and a woman at a sale the other day; I was too far off to hear them, but I could perceive they were having a most lively argument—perhaps it was only about initials on pillowcases; they were *absorbed* in themselves; the world did not exist for them. And I thought: "What miraculous exquisite Force is it that brings together that strange, sombre, laconic organism in a silk hat and a loose, black overcoat, and that strange, bright, vivacious, querulous, irrational organism in brilliant fur and feathers?" And when they moved away the most interesting phenomenon in the universe moved away. And I thought: "Just as no beer is bad, but some beer is better than other beer, so no marriage is bad." The chief reward of marriage is something which marriage is bound to give—companionship whose mysterious *interestingness* nothing can stale. A man may hate his wife so that she can't thread a needle without annoying him, but when he dies, or she dies, he will say: "Well, *I was interested.*" And one always is. Said a bachelor of forty-six to me the other night: "Anything is better than the void."

THE TWO WAYS OF IT

Sabine and other summary methods of marrying being now abandoned by all nice people, there remain two broad general ways. The first is the English way. We let nature take her course. We give heed to the heart's cry. When, amid the hazards and accidents of the world, two souls "find

each other," we rejoice. Our instinctive wish is that they shall marry, if the matter can anyhow be arranged. We frankly recognise the claim of romance in life, and we are prepared to make sacrifices to it. We see a young couple at the altar; they are in love. Good! They are poor. So much the worse! But nevertheless we feel that love will pull them through. The revolting French system of bargain and barter is the one thing that we can neither comprehend nor pardon in the customs of our great neighbours. We endeavour to be polite about that system; we simply cannot. It shocks our finest, tenderest feelings. It is so obviously contrary to nature.

The second is the French way, just alluded to as bargain and barter. Now, if there is one thing a Frenchman can neither comprehend nor pardon in the customs of a race so marvellously practical and sagacious as ourselves, it is the English marriage system. He endeavours to be polite about it, and he succeeds. But it shocks his finest, tenderest feelings. He admits that it is in accordance with nature; but he is apt to argue that the whole progress of civilisation has been the result of an effort to get away from nature. "What! Leave the most important relation into which a man can enter to the mercy of chance, when a mere gesture may arouse passion, or the colour of a corsage induce desire! No, you English, you who are so self-controlled, you are not going seriously to defend that! You talk of love as though it lasted for ever. You talk of sacrificing to love; but what you really sacrifice, or risk sacrificing, is the whole of the latter part of married existence for the sake of the first two or three years. Marriage is not one long honeymoon. We wish it were.

When *you* agree to a marriage you fix your eyes on the honeymoon. When *we* agree to a marriage we try to see it as it will be five or ten years hence. We assert that, in the average instance, five years after the wedding it doesn't matter whether or not the parties were in love on the wedding-day. Hence we will not yield to the gusts of the moment. Your system is, moreover, if we may be permitted the observation, a premium on improvidence; it is, to some extent, the result of improvidence. You can marry your daughters without dowries, and the ability to do so tempts you to neglect your plain duty to your daughters, and you do not always resist the temptation. Do your marriages of 'romance' turn out better than our marriages of prudence, of careful thought, of long foresight? We do not think they do."

So much for the two ways. Patriotism being the last refuge of a scoundrel, according to Doctor Johnson, I have no intention of judging between them, as my heart prompts me to do, lest I should be accused of it. Nevertheless, I may hint that, while perfectly convinced by the admirable logic of the French, I am still, with the charming illogicalness of the English, in favour of romantic marriages (it being, of course, understood that dowries *ought* to be far more plentiful than they are in England). If a Frenchman accuses me of being ready to risk sacrificing the whole of the latter part of married life for the sake of the first two or three years, I would unhesitatingly reply: "Yes, I *am* ready to risk that sacrifice. I reckon the first two or three years are worth it." But, then, I am English, and therefore romantic by nature. Look at London, that city whose outstanding quality is its romantic quality; and look at the Englishwomen going their ways in the wonderful streets thereof! Their very eyes are full of romance. They may, they do, lack *chic*, but they are heroines of drama. Then look at Paris; there is little romance in the fine right lines of Paris. Look at the Parisiennes. They are the most astounding and adorable women yet invented by nature. But they aren't romantic, you know. They don't know what romance is. They are so matter-of-fact that when you think of their matter-of-factness it gives you a shiver in the small of your back.

To return. One may view the two ways in another light. Perhaps the difference between them is, fundamentally, less a difference between the ideas of two races than a difference between the ideas of two "times of life"; and in France the elderly attitude predominates. As people get on in years, even English people, they are more and more in favour of the marriage of reason as against the marriage of romance. Young people, even French people, object strongly to the theory and practice of the marriage of reason. But with them the unique and precious ecstasy of youth is not past, whereas their elders have forgotten its savour. Which is right? No one will ever be able to decide. But neither the one system nor the other will apply itself well to all or nearly all cases. There have been thousands of romantic marriages in England of which it may be said that it would have been better had the French system been in force to prevent their existence. And, equally, thousands of possible romantic marriages have been prevented in France which, had the English system prevailed there, would have turned out excellently. The prevalence of dowries in

England would not render the English system perfect (for it must be remembered that money is only one of several ingredients in the French marriage), but it would considerably improve it. However, we are not a provident race, and we are not likely to become one. So our young men must reconcile themselves to the continued absence of dowries.

The reader may be excused for imagining that I am at the end of my remarks. I am not. All that precedes is a mere preliminary to what follows. I want to regard the case of the man who has given the English system a fair trial and found it futile. Thus, we wait on chance in England. We wait for love to arrive. Suppose it doesn't arrive? Where is the English system then? Assume that a man in a position to marry reaches thirty-five or forty without having fallen in love. Why should he not try the French system for a change? Any marriage is better than none at all. Naturally, in England, he couldn't go up to the Chosen Fair and announce: "I am not precisely in love with you, but will you marry me?" He would put it differently. And she would understand. And do you think she would refuse?

6. BOOKS

THE PHYSICAL SIDE

The chief interest of many of my readers is avowedly books; they may, they probably do, profess other interests, but they are primarily "bookmen," and when one is a bookman one is a bookman during about twenty-three and three-quarter hours in every day. Now, bookmen are capable of understanding things about books which cannot be put into words; they are not like mere subscribers to circulating libraries; for them a book is not just a book—it is a *book*. If these lines should happen to catch the eye of any persons not bookmen, such persons may imagine that I am writing nonsense; but I trust that the bookmen will comprehend me. And I venture, then, to offer a few reflections upon an aspect of modern bookishness that is becoming more and more "actual" as the enterprise of publishers and the beneficent effects of education grow and increase together. I refer to "popular editions" of classics.

Now, I am very grateful to the devisers of cheap and handy editions. The first book I ever bought was the first volume of the first modern series of presentable and really cheap reprints, namely, Macaulay's "Warren Hastings," in "Cassell's National Library" (sixpence, in cloth). That foundation stone of my library has unfortunately disappeared beneath the successive deposits, but another volume of the same series, F.T. Palgrave's "Visions of England" (an otherwise scarce book), still remains to me through the vicissitudes of seventeen years of sale, purchase, and exchange, and I would not care to part with it. I have over two hundred volumes of that inestimable and incomparable series, "The Temple Classics," besides several hundred assorted volumes of various other series. And when I heard of the new "Everyman's Library," projected by that benefactor of bookmen, Mr. J.M. Dent, my first impassioned act was to sit down and write a postcard to my bookseller ordering George Finlay's "The Byzantine Empire," a work which has waited sixty years for popular recognition. So that I cannot be said to be really antagonistic to cheap reprints.

Strong in this consciousness, I beg to state that cheap and handy reprints are "all very well in their way"—which is a manner of saying that they are not the Alpha and Omega of bookishness. By expending £20 yearly during the next five years a man might collect, in cheap and handy reprints, all that was worth having in classic English literature. But I for one would not be willing to regard such a library as a real library. I would regard it as only a cheap edition of a library. There would be something about it that would arouse in me a certain benevolent disdain, even though every volume was well printed on good paper and inoffensively bound. Why? Well, although it is my profession in life to say what I feel in plain words, I do not know that in this connection I *can* say what I feel in plain words. I have to rely on a sympathetic comprehension of my attitude in the bookish breasts of my readers.

In the first place, I have an instinctive antipathy to a "series." I do not want "The Golden Legend" and "The Essays of Elia" uniformed alike in a regiment of books. It makes me think of conscription and barracks. Even the noblest series of reprints ever planned (not at all cheap, either, nor heterogeneous in matter), the Tudor Translations, faintly annoys me in the mass. Its appearances in a series seems to me to rob a book of something very delicate and subtle in the aroma of its individuality—something which, it being inexplicable, I will not try to explain.

In the second place, most cheap and handy reprints are small in size. They may be typographically excellent, with large type and opaque paper; they may be convenient to handle; they may be surpassingly suitable for the pocket and the very thing for travel; they may save precious space where shelf-room is limited; but they are small in size. And there is, as regards most literature, a distinct moral value in size. Do I carry my audience with me? I hope so. Let "Paradise Lost" be so produced that you can put it in your waistcoat pocket, and it is no more "Paradise Lost." Milton needs a solid octavo form, with stoutish paper and long primer type. I have "Walpole's Letters" in Newnes's "Thin Paper Classics," a marvellous volume of near nine hundred pages, with a portrait and a good index and a beautiful binding, for three and six, and I am exceedingly indebted to Messrs. Newnes for creating that volume. It was sheer genius on their part to do so. I get charming sensations from it, but sensations not so charming as I should get from Mrs. Paget Toynbee's many-volumed and grandiose edition, even aside from Mrs.

Toynbee's erudite notes and the extra letters which she has been able to print. The same letter in Mrs. Toynbee's edition would have a higher æsthetic and moral value for me than in the "editionlet" of Messrs. Newnes. The one cheap series which satisfies my desire for size is Macmillan's "Library of English Classics," in which I have the "Travels" of that mythical personage, Sir John Mandeville. But it is only in paying for it that you know this edition to be cheap, for it measures nine inches by six inches by two inches.

And in the third place, when one buys series, one only partially chooses one's books; they are mainly chosen for one by the publisher. And even if they are not chosen for one by the publisher, they are suggested *to* one by the publisher. Not so does the genuine bookman form his library. The genuine bookman begins by having specific desires. His study of authorities gives him a demand, and the demand forces him to find the supply. He does not let the supply create the demand. Such a state of affairs would be almost humiliating, almost like the *parvenu* who calls in the wholesale furnisher and decorator to provide him with a home. A library must be, primarily, the expression of the owner's personality.

Let me assert again that I am strongly in favour of cheap series of reprints. Their influence though not the very finest, is undisputably good. They are as great a boon as cheap bread. They are indispensable where money or space is limited, and in travelling. They decidedly help to educate a taste for books that are neither cheap nor handy; and the most luxurious collectors may not afford to ignore them entirely. But they have their limitations, their disadvantages. They cannot form the backbone of a "proper" library. They make, however, admirable embroidery to a library. My own would look rather plain if it was stripped of them.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF BOOK-BUYING

For some considerable time I have been living, as regards books, with the minimum of comfort and decency—with, in fact, the bare necessities of life, such necessities being, in my case, sundry dictionaries, Boswell, an

atlas, Wordsworth, an encyclopædia, Shakespere, Whitaker, some De Maupassant, a poetical anthology, Verlaine, Baudelaire, a natural history of my native county, an old directory of my native town, Sir Thomas Browne, Poe, Walpole's Letters, and a book of memoirs that I will not name. A curious list, you will say. Well, never mind! We do not all care to eat beefsteak and chip potatoes off an oak table, with a foaming quart to the right hand. We have our idiosyncrasies. The point is that I existed on the bare necessities of life (very healthy—doctors say) for a long time. And then, just lately, I summoned energy and caused fifteen hundred volumes to be transported to me; and I arranged them on shelves; and I re-arranged them on shelves; and I left them to arrange themselves on shelves.

Well, you know, the way that I walk up and down in front of these volumes, whose faces I had half-forgotten, is perfectly infantile. It is like the way of a child at a menagerie. There, in its cage, is that 1839 edition of Shelley, edited by Mrs. Shelley, that I once nearly sold to the British Museum because the Keeper of Printed Books thought he hadn't got a copy—only he had! And there, in a cage by himself, because of his terrible hugeness, is the 1652 Paris edition of Montaigne's Essays. And so I might continue, and so I would continue, were it not essential that I come to my argument.

Do you suppose that the presence of these books, after our long separation, is making me read more than I did? Do you suppose I am engaged in looking up my favourite passages? Not a bit. The other evening I had a long tram journey, and, before starting, I tried to select a book to take with me. I couldn't find one to suit just the tram-mood. As I had to *catch* the tram I was obliged to settle on something, and in the end I went off with nothing more original than "Hamlet," which I am really too familiar with.... Then I bought an evening paper, and read it all through, including advertisements. So I said to myself: "This is a nice result of all my trouble to resume company with some of my books!" However, as I have long since ceased to be surprised at the eccentric manner in which human nature refuses to act as one would have expected it to act, I was able to keep calm and unashamed during this extraordinary experience. And I am still walking up and down in front of my books and enjoying them without reading them.

I wish to argue that a great deal of cant is talked (and written) about reading. Papers such as the "Anthenæum," which nevertheless I peruse with joy from end to end every week, can scarcely notice a new edition of a classic without expressing, in a grieved and pessimistic tone, the fear that more people buy these agreeable editions than read them. And if it is so? What then? Are we only to buy the books that we read? The question has merely to be thus bluntly put, and it answers itself. All impassioned bookmen, except a few who devote their whole lives to reading, have rows of books on their shelves which they have never read, and which they never will read. I know that I have hundreds such. My eye rests on the works of Berkeley in three volumes, with a preface by the Right Honourable Arthur James Balfour. I cannot conceive the circumstances under which I shall ever read Berkeley; but I do not regret having bought him in a good edition, and I would buy him again if I had him not; for when I look at him some of his virtue passes into me; I am the better for him. A certain aroma of philosophy informs my soul, and I am less crude than I should otherwise be. This is not fancy, but fact.

Taking Berkeley simply as an instance, I will utilise him a little further. I ought to have read Berkeley, you say; just as I ought to have read Spenser, Ben Jonson, George Eliot, Victor Hugo. Not at all. There is no "ought" about it. If the mass of obtainable first-class literature were, as it was perhaps a century ago, not too large to be assimilated by a man of ordinary limited leisure *in* his leisure and during the first half of his life, then possibly there might be an "ought" about it. But the mass has grown unmanageable, even by those robust professional readers who can "grapple with whole libraries." And I am not a professional reader. I am a writer, just as I might be a hotel-keeper, a solicitor, a doctor, a grocer, or an earthenware manufacturer. I read in my scanty spare time, and I don't read in all my spare time, either. I have other distractions. I read what I feel inclined to read, and I am conscious of no duty to finish a book that I don't care to finish. I read in my leisure, not from a sense of duty, not to improve myself, but solely because it gives me pleasure to read. Sometimes it takes me a month to get through one book. I expect my case is quite an average case. But am I going to fetter my buying to my reading? Not exactly! I want to have lots of books on my shelves because I know they are good, because I know they would amuse me, because I like to look at them, and because one day I might have a

caprice to read them. (Berkeley, even thy turn may come!) In short, I want them because I want them. And shall I be deterred from possessing them by the fear of some sequestered and singular person, some person who has read vastly but who doesn't know the difference between a J.S. Muria cigar and an R.P. Muria, strolling in and bullying me with the dreadful query: "*Sir, do you read your books?*"

Therefore I say: In buying a book, be influenced by two considerations only. Are you reasonably sure that it is a good book? Have you a desire to possess it? Do not be influenced by the probability or the improbability of your reading it. After all, one does read a certain proportion of what one buys. And further, instinct counts. The man who spends half a crown on Stubbs's "Early Plantagenets" instead of going into the Gaiety pit to see "The Spring Chicken," will probably be the sort of man who can suck goodness out of Stubbs's "Early Plantagenets" years before he bestirs himself to read it.

7. SUCCESS

CANDID REMARKS

There are times when the whole free and enlightened Press of the United Kingdom seems to become strangely interested in the subject of "success," of getting on in life. We are passing through such a period now. It would be difficult to name the prominent journalists who have not lately written, in some form or another, about success. Most singular phenomenon of all, Dr. Emil Reich has left Plato, duchesses, and Claridge's Hotel, in order to instruct the million readers of a morning paper in the principles of success! What the million readers thought of the Doctor's stirring and strenuous sentences I will not imagine; but I know what I thought, as a plain man. After taking due cognizance of his airy play with the "constants" and "variables" of success, after watching him treat "energetics" (his wonderful new name for the "science" of success) as though because he had made it end in "ics" it resembled mathematics, I thought that the sublime and venerable art of mystification could no further go. If my fellow-pilgrim through this vale of woe, the average young man who arrives at Waterloo at 9.40 every morning with a cigarette in his mouth and a second-class season over his heart and vague aspirations in his soul, was half as mystified as I was, he has probably ere this decided that the science of success has all the disadvantages of algebra without any of the advantages of cricket, and that he may as well leave it alone lest evil should befall him. On the off-chance that he has come as yet to no decision about the science of success, I am determined to deal with the subject in a disturbingly candid manner. I feel that it is as dangerous to tell the truth about success as it is to tell the truth about the United States; but being thoroughly accustomed to the whistle of bullets round my head, I will nevertheless try.

Most writers on success are, through sheer goodness of heart, wickedly disingenuous. For the basis of their argument is that nearly any one who gives his mind to it can achieve success. This is, to put it briefly, untrue. The very central idea of success is separation from the multitude of plain men; it is perhaps the only idea common to all the various sorts of

success—differentiation from the crowd. To address the population at large, and tell it how to separate itself from itself, is merely silly. I am now, of course, using the word success in its ordinary sense. If human nature were more perfect than it is, success in life would mean an intimate knowledge of one's self and the achievement of a philosophic inward calm, and such a goal might well be reached by the majority of mortals. But to us success signifies something else. It may be divided into four branches: (1) Distinction in pure or applied science. This is the least gross of all forms of success as we regard it, for it frequently implies poverty, and it does not by any means always imply fame. (2) Distinction in the arts. Fame and adulation are usually implied in this, though they do not commonly bring riches with them. (3) Direct influence and power over the material lives of other men; that is to say, distinction in politics, national or local. (4) Success in amassing money. This last is the commonest and easiest. Most forms of success will fall under one of these heads. Are they possible to that renowned and much-flattered person, the man in the street? They are not, and well you know it, all you professors of the science of success! Only a small minority of us can even become rich.

Happily, while it is true that success in its common acceptation is, by its very essence, impossible to the majority, there is an accompanying truth which adjusts the balance; to wit, that the majority do not desire success. This may seem a bold saying, but it is in accordance with the facts. Conceive the man in the street suddenly, by some miracle, invested with political power, and, of course, under the obligation to use it. He would be so upset, worried, wearied, and exasperated at the end of a week that he would be ready to give the eyes out of his head in order to get rid of it. As for success in science or in art, the average person's interest in such matters is so slight, compared with that of the man of science or the artist, that he cannot be said to have an interest in them. And supposing that distinction in them were thrust upon him he would rapidly lose that distinction by simple indifference and neglect. The average person certainly wants some money, and the average person does not usually rest until he has got as much as is needed for the satisfaction of his instinctive needs. He will move the heaven and earth of his environment to earn sufficient money for marriage in the "station" to which he has been accustomed; and precisely at that point his genuine desire for

money will cease to be active. The average man has this in common with the most exceptional genius, that his career in its main contours is governed by his instincts. The average man flourishes and finds his ease in an atmosphere of peaceful routine. Men destined for success flourish and find their ease in an atmosphere of collision and disturbance. The two temperaments are diverse. Naturally the average man dreams vaguely, upon occasion; he dreams how nice it would be to be famous and rich. We all dream vaguely upon such things. But to dream vaguely is not to desire. I often tell myself that I would give anything to be the equal of Cinquevalli, the juggler, or to be the captain of the largest Atlantic liner. But the reflective part of me tells me that my yearning to emulate these astonishing personages is not a genuine desire, and that its realization would not increase my happiness.

To obtain a passably true notion of what happens to the mass of mankind in its progress from the cradle to the grave, one must not attempt to survey a whole nation, nor even a great metropolis, nor even a very big city like Manchester or Liverpool. These panoramas are so immense and confusing that they defeat the observing eye. It is better to take a small town of, say, twenty or thirty thousand inhabitants—such a town as most of us know, more or less intimately. The extremely few individuals whose instincts mark them out to take part in the struggle for success can be identified at once. For the first thing they do is to leave the town. The air of the town is not bracing enough for them. Their nostrils dilate for something keener. Those who are left form a microcosm which is representative enough of the world at large. Between the ages of thirty and forty they begin to sort themselves out. In their own sphere they take their places. A dozen or so politicians form the town council and rule the town. Half a dozen business men stand for the town's commercial activity and its wealth. A few others teach science and art, or are locally known as botanists, geologists, amateurs of music, or amateurs of some other art. These are the distinguished, and it will be perceived that they cannot be more numerous than they are. What of the rest? Have they struggled for success and been beaten? Not they. Do they, as they grow old, resemble disappointed men? Not they. They have fulfilled themselves modestly. They have got what they genuinely tried to get. They have never even gone near the outskirts of the battle for success. But they have not failed. The number of failures is surprisingly

small. You see a shabby, disappointed, ageing man flit down the main street, and someone replies to your inquiry: "That's So-and-so, one of life's failures, poor fellow!" And the very tone in which the words are uttered proves the excessive rarity of the real failure. It goes without saying that the case of the handful who have left the town in search of the Success with the capital S has a tremendous interest of curiosity for the mass who remain. I will consider it.

THE SUCCESSFUL AND THE UNSUCCESSFUL

Having boldly stated that success is not, and cannot be, within grasp of the majority, I now proceed to state, as regards the minority, that they do not achieve it in the manner in which they are commonly supposed to achieve it. And I may add an expression of my thankfulness that they do not. The popular delusion is that success is attained by what I may call the "Benjamin Franklin" method. Franklin was a very great man; he united in his character a set of splendid qualities as various, in their different ways, as those possessed by Leonardo da Vinci. I have an immense admiration for him. But his Autobiography does make me angry. His Autobiography is understood to be a classic, and if you say a word against it in the United States you are apt to get killed. I do not, however, contemplate an immediate visit to the United States, and I shall venture to assert that Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography is a detestable book and a misleading book. I can recall only two other volumes which I would more willingly revile. One is *Samuel Budgett: The Successful Merchant*, and the other is *From Log Cabin to White House*, being the history of President Garfield. Such books may impose on boys, and it is conceivable that they do not harm boys (Franklin, by the way, began his Autobiography in the form of a letter to his son), but the grown man who can support them without nausea ought to go and see a doctor, for there is something wrong with him.

"I began now," blandly remarks Franklin, "to have some acquaintance among the young people of the town that were lovers of reading, with whom I spent my evenings very pleasantly; *and gained money by my industry and frugality.*" Or again: "It was about this time I conceived the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection.... I made a little

book, in which I allotted a page for each of the virtues. I ruled each page with red ink, so as to have seven columns, one for each day of the week.... I crossed these columns with thirteen red lines, marking the beginning of each line with the first letter of one of the virtues; on which line, and in its proper column, I might mark, by a little black spot, every fault I found upon examination to have been committed respecting that virtue, upon that day." Shade of Franklin, where'er thou art, this is really a little bit stiff! A man may be excused even such infamies of priggishness, but truly he ought not to go and write them down, especially to his son. And why the detail about red ink? If Franklin's son was not driven to evil courses by the perusal of that monstrous Autobiography, he must have been a man almost as astounding as his father. Now Franklin could only have written his "immortal classic" from one of three motives: (1) Sheer conceit. He was a prig, but he was not conceited. (2) A desire that others should profit by his mistakes. He never made any mistakes. Now and again he emphasizes some trifling error, but that is "only his fun." (3) A desire that others should profit by the recital of his virtuous sagacity to reach a similar success. The last was undoubtedly his principal motive. Honest fellow, who happened to be a genius! But the point is that his success was in no way the result of his virtuous sagacity. I would go further, and say that his dreadful virtuous sagacity often hindered his success.

No one is a worse guide to success than your typical successful man. He seldom understands the reasons of his own success; and when he is asked by a popular magazine to give his experiences for the benefit of the youth of a whole nation, it is impossible for him to be natural and sincere. He knows the kind of thing that is expected from him, and if he didn't come to London with half a crown in his pocket he probably did something equally silly, and he puts *that* down, and the note of the article or interview is struck, and good-bye to genuine truth! There recently appeared in a daily paper an autobiographic-didactic article by one of the world's richest men which was the most "inadequate" article of the sort that I have ever come across. Successful men forget so much of their lives! Moreover, nothing is easier than to explain an accomplished fact in a nice, agreeable, conventional way. The entire business of success is a gigantic tacit conspiracy on the part of the minority to deceive the majority.

Are successful men more industrious, frugal, and intelligent than men who are not successful? I maintain that they are not, and I have studied successful men at close quarters. One of the commonest characteristics of the successful man is his idleness, his immense capacity for wasting time. I stoutly assert that as a rule successful men are by habit comparatively idle. As for frugality, it is practically unknown among the successful classes: this statement applies with particular force to financiers. As for intelligence, I have over and over again been startled by the lack of intelligence in successful men. They are, indeed, capable of stupidities that would be the ruin of a plain clerk. And much of the talk in those circles which surround the successful man is devoted to the enumeration of instances of his lack of intelligence. Another point: successful men seldom succeed as the result of an ordered arrangement of their lives; they are the least methodical of creatures. Naturally when they have "arrived" they amuse themselves and impress the majority by being convinced that right from the start, with a steady eye on the goal, they had carefully planned every foot of the route.

No! Great success never depends on the practice of the humbler virtues, though it may occasionally depend on the practice of the prouder vices. Use industry, frugality, and common sense by all means, but do not expect that they will help you to success. Because they will not. I shall no doubt be told that what I have just written has an immoral tendency, and is a direct encouragement to sloth, thriftlessness, etc. One of our chief national faults is our hypocritical desire to suppress the truth on the pretext that to admit it would encourage sin, whereas the real explanation is that we are afraid of the truth. I will not be guilty of that fault. I do like to look a fact in the face without blinking. I am fully persuaded that, per head, there is more of the virtues in the unsuccessful majority than in the successful minority. In London alone are there not hundreds of miles of streets crammed with industry, frugality, and prudence? Some of the most brilliant men I have known have been failures, and not through lack of character either. And some of the least gifted have been marvellously successful. It is impossible to point to a single branch of human activity in which success can be explained by the conventional principles that find general acceptance. I hear you, O reader, murmuring to yourself: "This is all very well, but he is simply being paradoxical for his own diversion." I would that I could persuade

you of my intense seriousness! I have endeavoured to show what does not make success. I will next endeavour to show what does make it. But my hope is forlorn.

THE INWARDNESS OF SUCCESS

Of course, one can no more explain success than one can explain Beethoven's C minor symphony. One may state what key it is written in, and make expert reflections upon its form, and catalogue its themes, and relate it to symphonies that preceded it and symphonies that followed it, but in the end one is reduced to saying that the C minor symphony is beautiful—because it is. In the same manner one is reduced to saying that the sole real difference between success and failure is that success succeeds. This being frankly admitted at the outset, I will allow myself to assert that there are three sorts of success. Success A is the accidental sort. It is due to the thing we call chance, and to nothing else. We are all of us still very superstitious, and the caprices of chance have a singular effect upon us. Suppose that I go to Monte Carlo and announce to a friend my firm conviction that red will turn up next time, and I back red for the maximum and red does turn up; my friend, in spite of his intellect, will vaguely attribute to me a mysterious power. Yet chance alone would be responsible. If I did that six times running all the players at the table would be interested in me. If I did it a dozen times all the players in the Casino would regard me with awe. Yet chance alone would be responsible. If I did it eighteen times my name would be in every newspaper in Europe. Yet chance alone would be responsible. I should be, in that department of human activity, an extremely successful man, and the vast majority of people would instinctively credit me with gifts that I do not possess.

If such phenomena of superstition can occur in an affair where the agency of chance is open and avowed, how much more probable is it that people should refuse to be satisfied with the explanation of "sheer accident" in affairs where it is to the interest of the principal actors to conceal the rôle played by chance! Nevertheless, there can be no doubt in the minds of persons who have viewed success at close quarters that a proportion of it is due solely and utterly to chance. Successful men

flourish to-day, and have flourished in the past, who have no quality whatever to differentiate them from the multitude. Red has turned up for them a sufficient number of times, and the universal superstitious instinct not to believe in chance has accordingly surrounded them with a halo. It is merely ridiculous to say, as some do say, that success is never due to chance alone. Because nearly everybody is personally acquainted with reasonable proof, on a great or a small scale, to the contrary.

The second sort of success, B, is that made by men who, while not gifted with first-class talents, have, beyond doubt, the talent to succeed. I should describe these men by saying that, though they deserve something, they do not deserve the dazzling reward known as success. They strike us as overpaid. We meet them in all professions and trades, and we do not really respect them. They excite our curiosity, and perhaps our envy. They may rise very high indeed, but they must always be unpleasantly conscious of a serious reservation in our attitude towards them. And if they could read their obituary notices they would assuredly discern therein a certain chilliness, however kindly we acted up to our great national motto of *De mortuis nil nist bunkum*. It is this class of success which puzzles the social student. How comes it that men without any other talent possess a mysterious and indefinable talent to succeed? Well, it seems to me that such men always display certain characteristics. And the chief of these characteristics is the continual, insatiable *wish* to succeed. They are preoccupied with the idea of succeeding. We others are not so preoccupied. We dream of success at intervals, but we have not the passion for success. We don't lie awake at nights pondering upon it.

The second characteristic of these men springs naturally from the first. They are always on the look-out. This does not mean that they are industrious. I stated in a previous article my belief that as a rule successful men are not particularly industrious. A man on a raft with his shirt for a signal cannot be termed industrious, but he will keep his eyes open for a sail on the horizon. If he simply lies down and goes to sleep he may miss the chance of his life, in a very special sense. The man with the talent to succeed is the man on the raft who never goes to sleep. His indefatigable orb sweeps the main from sunset to sunset. Having sighted a sail, he gets up on his hind legs and waves that shirt in so determined a manner that the ship is bound to see him and take him off. Occasionally he plunges into the sea, risking sharks and other perils. If he doesn't "get

there," we hear nothing of him. If he does, some person will ultimately multiply by ten the number of sharks that he braved: that person is called a biographer.

Let me drop the metaphor. Another characteristic of these men is that they seem to have the exact contrary of what is known as common sense. They will become enamoured of some enterprise which infallibly impresses the average common-sense person as a mad and hopeless enterprise. The average common-sense person will demolish the hopes of that enterprise by incontrovertible argument. He will point out that it is foolish on the face of it, that it has never been attempted before, and that it responds to no need of humanity. He will say to himself: "This fellow with his precious enterprise has a twist in his brain. He can't reply to my arguments, and yet he obstinately persists in going on." And the man destined to success does go on. Perhaps the enterprise fails; it often fails; and then the average common-sense person expends much breath in "I told you so's." But the man continues to be on the look-out. His thirst is unassuaged; his taste for enterprises foredoomed to failure is incurable. And one day some enterprise foredoomed to failure develops into a success. We all hear of it. We all open our mouths and gape. Of the failures we have heard nothing. Once the man has achieved success, the thing becomes a habit with him. The difference between a success and a failure is often so slight that a reputation for succeeding will ensure success, and a reputation for failing will ensure failure. Chance plays an important part in such careers, but not a paramount part. One can only say that it is more useful to have luck at the beginning than later on. These "men of success" generally have pliable temperaments. They are not frequently un-moral, but they regard a conscience as a good servant and a bad master. They live in an atmosphere of compromise.

There remains class C of success—the class of sheer high merit. I am not a pessimist, nor am I an optimist. I try to arrive at the truth, and I should say that in putting success C at ten per cent. of the sum total of all successes, I am being generous to class C. Not that I believe that vast quantities of merit go unappreciated. My reason for giving to Class C only a modest share is the fact that there is so little sheer high merit. And does it not stand to reason that high merit must be very exceptional? This sort of success needs no explanation, no accounting for. It is the justification of our singular belief in the principle of the triumph of

upon the indestructibility 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
