

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whittman  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte  
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse  
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke  
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# **The Human Machine**

Arnold Bennett

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**THE**  
**HUMAN MACHINE**  
**BY**  
**ARNOLD BENNETT**

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# I

## TAKING ONESELF FOR GRANTED

There are men who are capable of loving a machine more deeply than they can love a woman. They are among the happiest men on earth. This is not a sneer meanly shot from cover at women. It is simply a statement of notorious fact. Men who worry themselves to distraction over the perfecting of a machine are indubitably blessed beyond their kind. Most of us have known such men. Yesterday they were constructing motorcars. But to-day aeroplanes are in the air—or, at any rate, they ought to be, according to the inventors. Watch the inventors. Invention is not usually their principal business. They must invent in their spare time. They must invent before breakfast, invent in the Strand between Lyons's and the office, invent after dinner, invent on Sundays. See with what ardour they rush home of a night! See how they seize a half-holiday, like hungry dogs a bone! They don't want golf, bridge, limericks, novels, illustrated magazines, clubs, whisky, starting-prices, hints about neckties, political meetings, yarns, comic songs, anturic salts, nor the smiles that are situate between a gay corsage and a picture hat. They never wonder, at a loss, what they will do next. Their evenings never drag—are always too short. You may, indeed, catch them at twelve o'clock at night on the flat of their backs; but not in bed! No, in a shed, under a machine, holding a candle (whose paths drop fatness) up to the connecting-rod that is strained, or the wheel that is out of centre. They are continually interested, nay, enthralled. They have a machine, and they are perfecting it. They get one part right, and then another goes wrong; and they get that right, and then another goes wrong, and so on. When they are quite sure they have reached perfection, forth issues the machine out of the shed—and in five minutes is smashed up, together with a limb or so of the inventors, just because they had been quite sure too soon. Then the whole business starts again. They do not give up—that particular wreck was, of course, due to a mere oversight; the whole business

starts again. For they have glimpsed perfection; they have the gleam of perfection in their souls. Thus their lives run away. "They will never fly!" you remark, cynically. Well, if they don't? Besides, what about Wright? With all your cynicism, have you never envied them their machine and their passionate interest in it?

You know, perhaps, the moment when, brushing in front of the glass, you detected your first grey hair. You stopped brushing; then you resumed brushing, hastily; you pretended not to be shocked, but you were. Perhaps you know a more disturbing moment than that, the moment when it suddenly occurred to you that you had 'arrived' as far as you ever will arrive; and you had realised as much of your early dream as you ever will realise, and the realisation was utterly unlike the dream; the marriage was excessively prosaic and eternal, not at all what you expected it to be; and your illusions were dissipated; and games and hobbies had an unpleasant core of tedium and futility; and the ideal tobacco-mixture did not exist; and one literary masterpiece resembled another; and all the days that are to come will more or less resemble the present day, until you die; and in an illuminating flash you understood what all those people were driving at when they wrote such unconscionably long letters to the *Telegraph* as to life being worth living or not worth living; and there was naught to be done but face the grey, monotonous future, and pretend to be cheerful with the worm of *ennui* gnawing at your heart! In a word, the moment when it occurred to you that yours is 'the common lot.' In that moment have you not wished—do you not continually wish—for an exhaustless machine, a machine that you could never get to the end of? Would you not give your head to be lying on the flat of your back, peering with a candle, dirty, foiled, catching cold—but absorbed in the pursuit of an object? Have you not gloomily regretted that you were born without a mechanical turn, because there is really something about a machine...?

It has never struck you that you do possess a machine! Oh, blind! Oh, dull! It has never struck you that you have at hand a machine wonderful beyond all mechanisms in sheds, intricate, delicately adjustable, of astounding and miraculous possibilities, interminably interesting! That machine is yourself. "This fellow is preaching. I won't have it!" you exclaim resentfully. Dear sir, I am not preaching,

and, even if I were, I think you *would* have it. I think I can anyhow keep hold of your button for a while, though you pull hard. I am not preaching. I am simply bent on calling your attention to a fact which has perhaps wholly or partially escaped you—namely, that you are the most fascinating bit of machinery that ever was. You do yourself less than justice. It is said that men are only interested in themselves. The truth is that, as a rule, men are interested in every mortal thing except themselves. They have a habit of taking themselves for granted, and that habit is responsible for nine-tenths of the boredom and despair on the face of the planet.

A man will wake up in the middle of the night (usually owing to some form of delightful excess), and his brain will be very active indeed for a space ere he can go to sleep again. In that candid hour, after the exaltation of the evening and before the hope of the dawn, he will see everything in its true colours—except himself. There is nothing like a sleepless couch for a clear vision of one's environment. He will see all his wife's faults and the hopelessness of trying to cure them. He will momentarily see, though with less sharpness of outline, his own faults. He will probably decide that the anxieties of children outweigh the joys connected with children. He will admit all the shortcomings of existence, will face them like a man, grimly, sourly, in a sturdy despair. He will mutter: 'Of course I'm angry! Who wouldn't be? Of course I'm disappointed! Did I expect this twenty years ago? Yes, we ought to save more. But we don't, so there you are! I'm bound to worry! I know I should be better if I didn't smoke so much. I know there's absolutely no sense at all in taking liqueurs. Absurd to be ruffled with her when she's in one of her moods. I don't have enough exercise. Can't be regular, somehow. Not the slightest use hoping that things will be different, because I know they won't. Queer world! Never really what you may call happy, you know. Now, if things were different ...' He loses consciousness.

Observe: he has taken himself for granted, just glancing at his faults and looking away again. It is his environment that has occupied his attention, and his environment—'things'—that he would wish to have 'different,' did he not know, out of the fulness of experience, that it is futile to desire such a change? What he wants is a pipe that won't put itself into his mouth, a glass that won't leap of

its own accord to his lips, money that won't slip untouched out of his pocket, legs that without asking will carry him certain miles every day in the open air, habits that practise themselves, a wife that will expand and contract according to his humours, like a Wernicke bookcase, always complete but never finished. Wise man, he perceives at once that he can't have these things. And so he resigns himself to the universe, and settles down to a permanent, restrained discontent. No one shall say he is unreasonable.

You see, he has given no attention to the machine. Let us not call it a flying-machine. Let us call it simply an automobile. There it is on the road, jolting, screeching, rattling, perfuming. And there he is, saying: 'This road ought to be as smooth as velvet. That hill in front is ridiculous, and the descent on the other side positively dangerous. And it's all turns—I can't see a hundred yards in front.' He has a wild idea of trying to force the County Council to sand-paper the road, or of employing the new Territorial Army to remove the hill. But he dismisses that idea—he is so reasonable. He accepts all. He sits clothed in reasonableness on the machine, and accepts all. 'Ass!' you exclaim. 'Why doesn't he get down and inflate that tyre, for one thing? Anyone can see the sparking apparatus is wrong, and it's perfectly certain the gear-box wants oil.'

Why doesn't he—?' I will tell you why he doesn't. Just because he isn't aware that he is on a machine at all. He has never examined what he is on. And at the back of his consciousness is a dim idea that he is perched on a piece of solid, immutable rock that runs on castors.

## II

### AMATEURS IN THE ART OF LIVING

Considering that we have to spend the whole of our lives in this human machine, considering that it is our sole means of contact and compromise with the rest of the world, we really do devote to it very little attention. When I say 'we,' I mean our inmost spirits, the instinctive part, the mystery within that exists. And when I say 'the human machine' I mean the brain and the body—and chiefly the

brain. The expression of the soul by means of the brain and body is what we call the art of 'living.' We certainly do not learn this art at school to any appreciable extent. At school we are taught that it is necessary to fling our arms and legs to and fro for so many hours per diem. We are also shown, practically, that our brains are capable of performing certain useful tricks, and that if we do not compel our brains to perform those tricks we shall suffer. Thus one day we run home and proclaim to our delighted parents that eleven twelves are 132. A feat of the brain! So it goes on until our parents begin to look up to us because we can chatter of cosines or sketch the foreign policy of Louis XIV. Good! But not a word about the principles of the art of living yet! Only a few detached rules from our parents, to be blindly followed when particular crises supervene. And, indeed, it would be absurd to talk to a schoolboy about the expression of his soul. He would probably mutter a monosyllable which is not 'mice.'

Of course, school is merely a preparation for living; unless one goes to a university, in which case it is a preparation for university. One is supposed to turn one's attention to living when these preliminaries are over—say at the age of about twenty. Assuredly one lives then; there is, however, nothing new in that, for one has been living all the time, in a fashion; all the time one has been using the machine without understanding it. But does one, school and college being over, enter upon a study of the machine? Not a bit. The question then becomes, not how to live, but how to obtain and retain a position in which one will be able to live; how to get minute portions of dead animals and plants which one can swallow, in order not to die of hunger; how to acquire and constantly renew a stock of other portions of dead animals and plants in which one can envelop oneself in order not to die of cold; how to procure the exclusive right of entry into certain huts where one may sleep and eat without being rained upon by the clouds of heaven. And so forth. And when one has realised this ambition, there comes the desire to be able to double the operation and do it, not for oneself alone, but for oneself and another. Marriage! But no scientific sustained attention is yet given to the real business of living, of smooth intercourse, of self-expression, of conscious adaptation to environment—in brief, to the study of the machine. At thirty the chances are that a man will understand better the draught of a chimney than his own respiratory

apparatus—to name one of the simple, obvious things—and as for understanding the working of his own brain—what an idea! As for the skill to avoid the waste of power involved by friction in the business of living, do we give an hour to it in a month? Do we ever at all examine it save in an amateurish and clumsy fashion? A young lady produces a water-colour drawing. 'Very nice!' we say, and add, to ourselves, 'For an amateur.' But our living is more amateurish than that young lady's drawing; though surely we ought every one of us to be professionals at living!

When we have been engaged in the preliminaries to living for about fifty-five years, we begin to think about slacking off. Up till this period our reason for not having scientifically studied the art of living—the perfecting and use of the finer parts of the machine—is not that we have lacked leisure (most of us have enormous heaps of leisure), but that we have simply been too absorbed in the preliminaries, have, in fact, treated the preliminaries to the business as the business itself. Then at fifty-five we ought at last to begin to live our lives with professional skill, as a professional painter paints pictures. Yes, but we can't. It is too late then. Neither painters, nor acrobats, nor any professionals can be formed at the age of fifty-five. Thus we finish our lives amateurishly, as we have begun them. And when the machine creaks and sets our teeth on edge, or refuses to obey the steering-wheel and deposits us in the ditch, we say: 'Can't be helped!' or 'Doesn't matter! It will be all the same a hundred years hence!' or: 'I must make the best of things.' And we try to believe that in accepting the *status quo* we have justified the *status quo*, and all the time we feel our insincerity.

You exclaim that I exaggerate. I do. To force into prominence an aspect of affairs usually overlooked, it is absolutely necessary to exaggerate. Poetic licence is one name for this kind of exaggeration. But I exaggerate very little indeed, much less than perhaps you think. I know that you are going to point out to me that vast numbers of people regularly spend a considerable portion of their leisure in striving after self-improvement. Granted! And I am glad of it. But I should be gladder if their strivings bore more closely upon the daily business of living, of self-expression without friction and without futile desires. See this man who regularly studies every evening of his life! He has genuinely understood the nature of poet-

ry, and his taste is admirable. He recites verse with true feeling, and may be said to be highly cultivated. Poetry is a continual source of pleasure to him. True! But why is he always complaining about not receiving his deserts in the office? Why is he worried about finance? Why does he so often sulk with his wife? Why does he persist in eating more than his digestion will tolerate? It was not written in the book of fate that he should complain and worry and sulk and suffer. And if he was a professional at living he would not do these things. There is no reason why he should do them, except the reason that he has never learnt his business, never studied the human machine as a whole, never really thought rationally about living. Supposing you encountered an automobilist who was swerving and grinding all over the road, and you stopped to ask what was the matter, and he replied: 'Never mind what's the matter. Just look at my lovely acetylene lamps, how they shine, and how I've polished them!' You would not regard him as a Clifford-Earp, or even as an entirely sane man. So with our student of poetry. It is indubitable that a large amount of what is known as self-improvement is simply self-indulgence—a form of pleasure which only incidentally improves a particular part of the machine, and even that to the neglect of far more important parts.

My aim is to direct a man's attention to himself as a whole, considered as a machine, complex and capable of quite extraordinary efficiency, for travelling through this world smoothly, in any desired manner, with satisfaction not only to himself but to the people he meets *en route*, and the people who are overtaking him and whom he is overtaking. My aim is to show that only an inappreciable fraction of our ordered and sustained efforts is given to the business of actual living, as distinguished from the preliminaries to living.

### III

#### THE BRAIN AS A GENTLEMAN-AT-LARGE

It is not as if, in this business of daily living, we were seriously hampered by ignorance either as to the results which we ought to

obtain, or as to the general means which we must employ in order to obtain them. With all our absorption in the mere preliminaries to living, and all our carelessness about living itself, we arrive pretty soon at a fairly accurate notion of what satisfactory living is, and we perceive with some clearness the methods necessary to success. I have pictured the man who wakes up in the middle of the night and sees the horrid semi-fiasco of his life. But let me picture the man who wakes up refreshed early on a fine summer morning and looks into his mind with the eyes of hope and experience, not experience and despair. That man will pass a delightful half-hour in thinking upon the scheme of the universe as it affects himself. He is quite clear that contentment depends on his own acts, and that no power can prevent him from performing those acts. He plans everything out, and before he gets up he knows precisely what he must and will do in certain foreseen crises and junctures. He sincerely desires to live efficiently — who would wish to make a daily mess of existence? — and he knows the way to realise the desire.

And yet, mark me! That man will not have been an hour on his feet on this difficult earth before the machine has unmistakably gone wrong: the machine which was designed to do this work of living, which is capable of doing it thoroughly well, but which has not been put into order! What is the use of consulting the map of life and tracing the itinerary, and getting the machine out of the shed, and making a start, if half the nuts are loose, or the steering pillar is twisted, or there is no petrol in the tank? (Having asked this question, I will drop the mechanico-vehicular comparison, which is too rough and crude for the delicacy of the subject.) Where has the human machine gone wrong? It has gone wrong in the brain. What, is he 'wrong in the head'? Most assuredly, most strictly. He knows — none better — that when his wife employs a particular tone containing ten grains of asperity, and he replies in a particular tone containing eleven grains, the consequences will be explosive. He knows, on the other hand, that if he replies in a tone containing only one little drop of honey, the consequences may not be unworthy of two reasonable beings. He knows this. His brain is fully instructed. And lo! his brain, while arguing that women are really too absurd (as if that was the point), is sending down orders to the muscles of the throat and mouth which result in at least eleven grains of asperity, and

conjugal relations are endangered for the day. He didn't want to do it. His desire was not to do it. He despises himself for doing it. But his brain was not in working order. His brain ran away—'raced'—on its own account, against reason, against desire, against morning resolves—and there he is!

That is just one example, of the simplest and slightest. Examples can be multiplied. The man may be a young man whose immediate future depends on his passing an examination—an examination which he is capable of passing 'on his head,' which nothing can prevent him from passing if only his brain will not be so absurd as to give orders to his legs to walk out of the house towards the tennis court instead of sending them upstairs to the study; if only, having once safely lodged him in the study, his brain will devote itself to the pages of books instead of dwelling on the image of a nice girl—not at all like other girls. Or the man may be an old man who will live in perfect comfort if only his brain will not interminably run round and round in a circle of grievances, apprehensions, and fears which no amount of contemplation can destroy or even ameliorate.

The brain, the brain—that is the seat of trouble! 'Well,' you say, 'of course it is. We all know that!' We don't act as if we did, anyway. 'Give us more brains, Lord!' ejaculated a great writer. Personally, I think he would have been wiser if he had asked first for the power to keep in order such brains as we have. We indubitably possess quite enough brains, quite as much as we can handle. The supreme muddlers of living are often people of quite remarkable intellectual faculty, with a quite remarkable gift of being wise for others. The pity is that our brains have a way of 'wandering,' as it is politely called. Brain-wandering is indeed now recognised as a specific disease. I wonder what you, O business man with an office in Ludgate Circus, would say to your office-boy, whom you had dispatched on an urgent message to Westminster, and whom you found larking around Euston Station when you rushed to catch your week-end train. 'Please, sir, I started to go to Westminster, but there's something funny in my limbs that makes me go up all manner of streets. I can't help it, sir!' 'Can't you?' you would say. 'Well, you had better go and be somebody else's office-boy.' Your brain is something worse than that office-boy, something more insidiously potent for evil.

I conceive the brain of the average well-intentioned man as possessing the tricks and manners of one of those gentlemen-at-large who, having nothing very urgent to do, stroll along and offer their services gratis to some shorthanded work of philanthropy. They will commonly demoralise and disorganise the business conduct of an affair in about a fortnight. They come when they like; they go when they like. Sometimes they are exceedingly industrious and obedient, but then there is an even chance that they will shirk and follow their own sweet will. And they mustn't be spoken to, or pulled up—for have they not kindly volunteered, and are they not giving their days for naught! These persons are the bane of the enterprises in which they condescend to meddle. Now, there is a vast deal too much of the gentleman-at-large about one's brain. One's brain has no right whatever to behave as a gentleman-at-large: but it in fact does. It forgets; it flatly ignores orders; at the critical moment when pressure is highest, it simply lights a cigarette and goes out for a walk. And we meekly sit down under this behaviour! 'I didn't feel like stewing,' says the young man who, against his wish, will fail in his examination. 'The words were out of my mouth before I knew it,' says the husband whose wife is a woman. 'I couldn't get any inspiration to-day,' says the artist. 'I can't resist Stilton,' says the fellow who is dying of greed. 'One can't help one's thoughts,' says the old worrier. And this last really voices the secret excuse of all five.

And you all say to me: 'My brain is myself. How can I alter myself? I was born like that.' In the first place you were not born 'like that,' you have lapsed to that. And in the second place your brain is not yourself. It is only a part of yourself, and not the highest seat of authority. Do you love your mother, wife, or children with your brain? Do you desire with your brain? Do you, in a word, ultimately and essentially *live* with your brain? No. Your brain is an instrument. The proof that it is an instrument lies in the fact that, when extreme necessity urges, *you* can command your brain to do certain things, and it does them. The first of the two great principles which underlie the efficiency of the human machine is this: *The brain is a servant, exterior to the central force of the Ego.* If it is out of control the reason is not that it is uncontrollable, but merely that its discipline has been neglected. The brain can be trained, as the hand and eye

can be trained; it can be made as obedient as a sporting dog, and by similar methods. In the meantime the indispensable preparation for brain discipline is to form the habit of regarding one's brain as an instrument exterior to one's self, like a tongue or a foot.

## IV

### THE FIRST PRACTICAL STEP

The brain is a highly quaint organism. Let me say at once, lest I should be cannonaded by physiologists, psychologists, or metaphysicians, that by the 'brain' I mean the faculty which reasons and which gives orders to the muscles. I mean exactly what the plain man means by the brain. The brain is the diplomatist which arranges relations between our instinctive self and the universe, and it fulfils its mission when it provides for the maximum of freedom to the instincts with the minimum of friction. It argues with the instincts. It takes them on one side and points out the unwisdom of certain performances. It catches them by the coat-tails when they are about to make fools of themselves. 'Don't drink all that iced champagne at a draught,' it says to one instinct; 'we may die of it.' 'Don't catch that rude fellow one in the eye,' it says to another instinct; 'he is more powerful than us.' It is, in fact, a majestic spectacle of common sense. And yet it has the most extraordinary lapses. It is just like that man—we all know him and consult him—who is a continual fount of excellent, sagacious advice on everything, but who somehow cannot bring his sagacity to bear on his own personal career.

In the matter of its own special activities the brain is usually undisciplined and unreliable. We never know what it will do next. We give it some work to do, say, as we are walking along the street to the office. Perhaps it has to devise some scheme for making £150 suffice for £200, or perhaps it has to plan out the heads of a very important letter. We meet a pretty woman, and away that undisciplined, sagacious brain runs after her, dropping the scheme or the draft letter, and amusing itself with aspirations or regrets for half an hour, an hour, sometimes a day. The serious part of our instinctive

self feebly remonstrates, but without effect. Or it may be that we have suffered a great disappointment, which is definite and hopeless. Will the brain, like a sensible creature, leave that disappointment alone, and instead of living in the past live in the present or the future? Not it! Though it knows perfectly well that it is wasting its time and casting a very painful and utterly unnecessary gloom over itself and us, it can so little control its unhealthy morbid appetite that no expostulations will induce it to behave rationally. Or perhaps, after a confabulation with the soul, it has been decided that when next a certain harmful instinct comes into play the brain shall firmly interfere. 'Yes,' says the brain, 'I really will watch that.' But when the moment arrives, is the brain on the spot? The brain has probably forgotten the affair entirely, or remembered it too late; or sighs, as the victorious instinct knocks it on the head: 'Well, *next* time!'

All this, and much more that every reader can supply from his own exciting souvenirs, is absurd and ridiculous on the part of the brain. It is a conclusive proof that the brain is out of condition, idle as a nigger, capricious as an actor-manager, and eaten to the core with loose habits. Therefore the brain must be put into training. It is the most important part of the human machine by which the soul expresses and develops itself, and it must learn good habits. And primarily it must be taught obedience. Obedience can only be taught by imposing one's will, by the sheer force of volition. And the brain must be mastered by will-power. The beginning of wise living lies in the control of the brain by the will; so that the brain may act according to the precepts which the brain itself gives. With an obedient disciplined brain a man may live always right up to the standard of his best moments.

To teach a child obedience you tell it to do something, and you see that that something is done. The same with the brain. Here is the foundation of an efficient life and the antidote for the tendency to make a fool of oneself. It is marvellously simple. Say to your brain: 'From 9 o'clock to 9.30 this morning you must dwell without ceasing on a particular topic which I will give you.' Now, it doesn't matter what this topic is—the point is to control and invigorate the brain by exercise—but you may just as well give it a useful topic to think over as a futile one. You might give it this: 'My brain is my servant. I

am not the play-thing of my brain.' Let it concentrate on these statements for thirty minutes. 'What?' you cry. 'Is this the way to an efficient life? Why, there's nothing in it!' Simple as it may appear, this *is* the way, and it is the only way. As for there being nothing in it, try it. I guarantee that you will fail to keep your brain concentrated on the given idea for thirty seconds—let alone thirty minutes. You will find your brain conducting itself in a manner which would be comic were it not tragic. Your first experiments will result in disheartening failure, for to exact from the brain, at will and by will, concentration on a given idea for even so short a period as half an hour is an exceedingly difficult feat—and a fatiguing! It needs perseverance. It needs a terrible obstinacy on the part of the will. That brain of yours will be hopping about all over the place, and every time it hops you must bring it back by force to its original position. You must absolutely compel it to ignore every idea except the one which you have selected for its attention. You cannot hope to triumph all at once. But you can hope to triumph. There is no royal road to the control of the brain. There is no patent dodge about it, and no complicated function which a plain person may not comprehend. It is simply a question of: 'I will, *I* will, and I *will*.' (Italics here are indispensable.)

Let me resume. Efficient living, living up to one's best standard, getting the last ounce of power out of the machine with the minimum of friction: these things depend on the disciplined and vigorous condition of the brain. The brain can be disciplined by learning the habit of obedience. And it can learn the habit of obedience by the practice of concentration. Disciplinary concentration, though nothing could have the air of being simpler, is the basis of the whole structure. This fact must be grasped imaginatively; it must be seen and felt. The more regularly concentration is practised, the more firmly will the imagination grasp the effects of it, both direct and indirect. After but a few days of honest trying in the exercise which I have indicated, you will perceive its influence. You will grow accustomed to the idea, at first strange in its novelty, of the brain being external to the supreme force which is *you*, and in subjection to that force. You will, as a not very distant possibility, see yourself in possession of the power to switch your brain on and off in a particular subject as you switch electricity on and off in a particular room.

The brain will get used to the straight paths of obedience. And—a remarkable phenomenon—it will, by the mere practice of obedience, become less forgetful and more effective. It will not so frequently give way to an instinct that takes it by surprise. In a word, it will have received a general tonic. With a brain that is improving every day you can set about the perfecting of the machine in a scientific manner.

## V

### HABIT-FORMING BY CONCENTRATION

As soon as the will has got the upper hand of the brain—as soon as it can say to the brain, with a fair certainty of being obeyed: 'Do this. Think along these lines, and continue to do so without wandering until I give you leave to stop'—then is the time arrived when the perfecting of the human machine may be undertaken in a large and comprehensive spirit, as a city council undertakes the purification and reconstruction of a city. The tremendous possibilities of an obedient brain will be perceived immediately we begin to reflect upon what we mean by our 'character.' Now, a person's character is, and can be, nothing else but the total result of his habits of thought. A person is benevolent because he habitually thinks benevolently. A person is idle because his thoughts dwell habitually on the instant pleasures of idleness. It is true that everybody is born with certain predispositions, and that these predispositions influence very strongly the early formation of habits of thought. But the fact remains that the character is built by long-continued habits of thought. If the mature edifice of character usually shows in an exaggerated form the peculiarities of the original predisposition, this merely indicates a probability that the slow erection of the edifice has proceeded at haphazard, and that reason has not presided over it. A child may be born with a tendency to bent shoulders. If nothing is done, if on the contrary he becomes a clerk and abhors gymnastics, his shoulders will develop an excessive roundness, entirely through habit. Whereas, if his will, guided by his reason, had compelled the formation of a corrective physical habit, his shoulders