
The Mind's Workshop

by Eugene V. Debs

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We are constantly reading of the products of the mind, and in all our working hours, with never a moment's omission, we are confronted with the achievements of the mind in tangible forms too numerous to be cataloged or classified. We read of the efforts of the mind, the triumphs of the mind, and the treasures of the mind. We have textbooks devoted to what is called "mental philosophy," and still when the question is asked, "What is the mind?" no man can answer. As well expect by reaching out to feel the stars. Defying explorations and investigations, the profoundest thinker of the age many discuss learnedly the operations of the mind, but when required to define "mind" he is as incapable of solving the problem as were the cave men of prehistoric times.

It is conceded that the brain is the seat of the mind and we know that the head is where the brain is located. In other words, the head is the mind's workshop, where it carries forward all of its vast and mysterious operations; and of the billions of heads created since the "beginning," no two have been alike, and the difference in the mind's machinery by which it carries forward its enterprises is greater than any dissimilarity discovered in the construction of heads from that of an idiot to that of the profoundest philosopher that ever commanded a world to listen when he expounded the heights and depths of wisdom. Milton said:

The mind in its own place and in itself,
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.¹

¹ From *Paradise Lost* (1667), by **John Milton** (1608-1674).

The mind's "own place" is the head, and while men talk learnedly of the head no man has ever seen the mind performing its operations. Churchill wrote that:

Within the brain's most secret cells
A certain Lord Chief Justice dwells.
Of sov'reign pow'r, whom One and All,
With common Voice we *Reason* call.²

But it so happens that comparatively few brains can boast of a "Lord Chief Justice" or any other distinguished jurist or philosopher worthy the name of "Reason," or any other faculty of similar characteristics; and still it is held that by proper mind culture, begun in youth and carried forward to mature age, every brain, if it does not finally have a "Lord Chief Justice" to preside over the mind, may possess some less distinguished dignitary to guide and direct the mind and enable it to achieve usefulness.

In numerous instances those who have written of mind culture and mind development make little note of physical training, discarding the idea that a healthy body is required, as a general proposition, to secure a healthy mind. True it is that instances are on record where minds of exceptional vigor have inhabited the brain of men whose physical powers were abnormally weak, and that on the other hand, men of great physical development remain all their days in mental childhood, instances which go far to prove that mental training had little to do with physical drilling and discipline, and that the mind's development was dependent upon conditions apart from food, air, exercise, and other health-giving accessories. Sir Isaac Newton is referred to as ranking low in his studies until, aroused by the insults of a fellow student, he resolved to achieve supremacy. Adam Clarke is another illustration of stupidity, who excited ridicule until his dormant faculties were aroused, when he outstripped his fellow students and won immortality by his mental achievements.³ Of Napoleon it has been said that by those who knew him best that in his boyhood he exhibited none of those masterly qualities which enabled him later to

² From *The Ghost* (1762) by **Charles Churchill** (1731-1764)

³ **Adam Clarke** (c. 1761-1832) was a British theologian who over the course of 40 years compiled a 6 volume, 6000-page Biblical commentary which served as one of the essential documents of Wesleyanism for generations.

burst like a volcano upon Europe, overthrow thrones and kingdoms, and exhibit himself as one of the master spirits of the world. It is to be inferred that such men have healthy bodies, and that they possess healthy brains, without which their names would not adorn the pages of history.

Nor is it to be overlooked that within the realm of mind achievements writers are constantly referring to such ancient worthies as the Greek philosophers, poets, and sculptors — to ancient orators — as also to men of modern times, such as Shakespeare, Milton, and others of great renown, while little or nothing at all is said of men who, being neither philosophers, poets, nor warriors, have led on the pioneer hosts of civilization and redeemed a part of the world at least from savagery, and who are yet to make all the wildernesses bloom and reclaim the desert wastes, if such work is ever performed.

Look at the schools of the period, and what does the world behold? Reference is made to those colleges and universities where a youth is taught that the highest achievement of the mind is to translate a Greek or a Latin poem or to learn his piece and “spout” it in the presence of a bald-headed committee and receive a blue ribbon as a reward.

On the other hand, what is said of the brawny brainworkers who in 10,000 shops are carrying forward the enterprises of this wonderfully practical age? Little or nothing at all. If there could be instituted an intellectual tournament in which a graduate of the university and a graduate of, for example, the Baldwin locomotive shops were to appear to demonstrate which of the two minds had achieved the largest development, the scene would be singularly unique. The graduate of Rockefeller’s Standard Oil university would possibly have for his subject, “Was Adam Originally a Rag Baby?” The committee would listen with profound attention to the Standard Oil university graduate. There would be ringing applause as the “rag baby” theory was extolled or denounced, and the graduate would leave the stage with tokens of boundless appreciation. Now comes the graduate of the Baldwin locomotive works. As he emerges from behind the screen a locomotive follows. Then they stand side by side, and the locomotive builder simply says, “I built this wonderful machine.” Does he receive the blue ribbon? By no means. The “rag baby” orator is at once pronounced the most intellectual. The committee observes nothing in the building of a locomotive to be compared with the achievement of the graduate of the Standard Oil university, who is invited to a ban-

quet while the graduate of the Baldwin locomotive works retires to reflect upon modern ideas of brains and mind development.

For centuries there have been what is called the “learned professions” — law, theology, and medicine. Possibly theology should have precedence, as the priests have dominated all others. Under the shield medical quackery has flourished until schools (?) have multiplied to an extent that the term “learned” has become practically meaningless. Nor are things essentially different in theology, and the world is confronted at last with so many “right” ways and “wrong” ways that thousands are discarding the teachings of “learned” professors. As for law, while there remain certain recognized landmarks of justice and equity, it is found that of all the delusions and snares that have cursed the world, law supplies by far the greatest number. Hence it may be said that after all, mind development, except in the practical affairs of life, has not advanced since the days of Adam, and strange as may appear, the graduates of colleges who profess to know it all are as determined now as when the ancients consulted their oracles to ignore all mind development except in cases where they consent to apply the stamp of their approval. As a result, the shop is a thing of contempt in the estimation of the college, and though the shop can display more mind development in a year than the college can in a century, the world runs after colleges and shouts its praises and the shop chimes in to swell the laudations.

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Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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