

**MANUALS OF THE SCIENCE AND
ART OF TEACHING. FIRST SERIES
- NO. II. THE CULTIVATION OF
THE MEMORY**

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by Various

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VARIOUS

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FIRST SERIES—No. II.

THE
CULTIVATION OF THE MEMORY



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These Manuals, with the exception of the last of each series, have been written, at the request of the Literature Committee of the National Society, by men distinguished at their several Universities, and possessed of large experience either as teachers or examiners. The last of each series, that on Class Teaching and that on Apparatus, is the work in each case of a Lecturer on Method at one of the larger Training Colleges.

The writers have endeavoured in each case to connect the practice of teaching with the fundamental principles on which it should rest, and to bear in mind the capacities and needs of the particular class of readers for which these Manuals are specially intended. The chapters have been broken up into short paragraphs, with conspicuous headings, and simplicity of language has been uniformly aimed at.

In order to obtain greater clearness and precision, and to save cross-references from one Manual to another, each subject has been treated independently, and is complete in itself. This independence of authorship has necessarily caused some repetition of matter, but it will be seen that this slight addition to the bulk of the whole has largely contributed to the definiteness and completeness of the separate parts.

THE CULTIVATION OF THE MEMORY.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT MEMORY IS.

WE have sometimes heard a lesson given on the geography of England which consisted almost entirely of lists of *names*, lists of mountains, rivers, bays, capes, etc., without any associations of interest by which the names could be fixed in the memory. There was a great deal of praiseworthy zeal in the lesson ; the teacher had taken the greatest possible pains to cull from his text-book every *fact* of note, and had watched the clock carefully that he might bring the whole lesson into the allotted time ; but there was no repose, no pause, and no reference to the children's previous knowledge as a standard of comparison.

Again, we have sometimes heard, in an infant school, a lesson given to a class of children between six and seven years of age on the manufacture of glass ; this lesson was just as carefully prepared, and given in quite as praiseworthy a spirit : but it was all *words*, because it did not rest upon the children's experience as a standard of comparison ; the ingredients of glass, the process of manufacture, its qualities, kinds, and uses, were all talked about, but there was very little in common with the children's previous knowledge.

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Let us ask ourselves in what were both these lessons wanting? They were deficient in three points:—

- (1) There was *no time* for the sense-impression, by touch, or look, or hearing, to travel to the brain.
- (2) There was *no association* with the children's own experience, as a basis for additional knowledge.
- (3) The various facts given were not of a nature to be permanently and intelligently associated by a child.

The lessons were probably not lost entirely: happily, the minds of children are seldom entirely passive; they selected some few things that arrested their attention. Either a sound or some other sense-impression, or some faint connection with their previous knowledge, or the wish to learn helped them to remember some of the points of the lesson. But the best thing that could happen was that they should forget, as soon as possible, the greater part of it, and not burden their minds with *indistinct, unassociated, unsuitable ideas*.

But, before we proceed to the discussion of what Memory is, and how it may be cultivated, we ought to notice one very important fact, viz., that there are two kinds of memory, very often opposed to each other, and that the use of the first tends to weaken the second and higher memory:

- (1) A mechanical, artificial memory, dependent entirely upon mechanical aids from the senses,—a passive memory which often results in 'wandering' thoughts, led astray by superficial observation;
- (2) An intelligent,¹ active memory, that *selects for itself* points of natural interest, classifying all objects by comparison and contrast.

Both kinds are necessary, the first as a means to an end—as the servant of the second; but the cultivation of the first should never be made *the object of a class lesson*. Tables

¹ It will be seen afterwards that even very young scholars are capable of exercising the intelligent memory.

of weights and measures (unless the lesson be preparatory and explanatory), lists of capes, historical dates, grammatical definitions, etc., are not subjects for class lessons; they should be prepared by younger children in silent lessons, and by older children in home lessons.

We have said that the two kinds of memory are opposed. You will find that the more you cultivate artificial memory the natural attempt to select what is most interesting will become weaker, and you will rely more and more on sound and sight; *vice versa*, an intelligent thinker will have an increasing dislike to learning by heart, especially after the eighteenth year of age.

Both memories should be cultivated from the first, but they should be kept apart, each to its proper use. As it is found very difficult to form the habit of artificial memorising, when the habit of intelligent memorising has been in a large measure formed, we recommend all teachers to cultivate the artificial memory *early*, but *in its proper subordination*.

Now, let us dismiss for the present the Artificial Memory, as the less important subject of our thoughts, though we shall sometimes recur to her, and let us introduce you to the Intelligent Memory, and let her say for herself what she thinks of your lesson.—‘My dear boy or girl, your intentions were very good, you were anxious to supply me with plenty of food; but you have made my head swim with the number and rapidity of your dishes. You have overloaded my digestion, the food was not cooked or flavoured according to my simple tastes. In plain English, you crowded so many objects into your lesson, that you did not give me time to concentrate my *attention* on any one object; you gave me no clear mental *picture* of each object; you did not draw upon my *previous knowledge* of geography or common things for comparison or contrast.’

Memory says: I need two things especially,—

- (1) *Sufficient time* to take a good look all round a new object.

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- (2) Some connecting link supplied by *my own knowledge*, to which to attach the new object of thought.

You know what different shapes I take in different persons. I have as many different shapes as a certain fabulous Proteus, who could change his shape (the ancients believed) as often as he pleased. I take rather a heavy, lumbering shape in a country lad, because he has seen so *few real objects* to which to attach new ideas, and a great part of your lesson was *words*, not *things* to him ; but if he takes time to grasp a new idea, he has this advantage, that there is nothing to confuse him, and if he is slow, *he is sure and clear so far as he goes*. I take a nimble, alas ! too nimble a shape in the London boy : he sees plenty of objects, and if he would only *take time to observe minutely*, would have distinct ideas and plenty of them ; but he is like one of his own sparrows, in this street one moment and in that street the next ; he has *plenty* of ideas, but no *distinct* ideas ; *he is quick, but wanting in depth, though his knowledge covers a large surface*.

If you can contrive to form two habits in your class, you will be giving them the benefit of *a good memory for life*.

- (1) *Attention*, slow, grave, deliberate, to secure distinct, clear, well-marked ideas or mental pictures, acquired through *each of the senses*, that can be employed.
- (2) *Association* of these ideas, through common qualities, by which you can connect them with each other, so that each idea may naturally and immediately suggest its appropriate companion idea or ideas.

There can be no true memory without these two : without *attention*, your mind will be a sort of dim, cracked looking-glass, reflecting your face in all kinds of blurred, crooked fashions ; without *association*, your mind may be compared to a chest of drawers, full of tossed and tumbled articles,

where the right article never comes to hand. All sorts of clumsy attempts are made to abridge mental efforts ; make it your golden rule, *never to hurry a willing child*.

For, observe, you do not want to *re-collect* things slowly and painfully, you want to *remember* them quickly and easily. Re-collection implies an *effort* of the mind to recall or gather together the parts of a picture which should *come together of themselves*. Memory should act at once, without an effort of the will, if (1) the mental pictures are clear, and (2) if they are properly connected.

How do I remember?—Do not merely ask yourself, What is my memory like? but ask yourself *What* things do I remember best? and, *How* did I come to remember them? Do not deal in abstract ideas and allegories, as if you were a philosopher or a poet. Some fanciful person might say : 'Memory is like a chain, binding all periods of life together with links of gold ; or like a beautiful silk fabric, crossed and re-crossed by brighter or darker lines, forming bright or dull patterns ; or like rays of light, constantly crossing, and sometimes interfering.' Such fanciful illustrations could only give you a picture of the *power of association* which memory possesses,—how a single thought may carry our minds in many different directions.

We have another reason for disliking to talk about abstract terms, which are useful enough for general reasoning, but the very worst words for young people to employ when trying to realise their own mental powers. You may often hear people talking of memory, imagination, conception, etc., as if they were various compartments of a curious, tightly packed box, called the mind, instead of the living, real 'I,' which, perhaps, never thinks at all without combining all these powers in one single act of thought. Let us give you this hint, when you hear your thinking mind, *i.e.* yourself, spoken of in abstract terms, such as sensation, or perception, translate them into the first person : *I* feel some-