

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

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The psychology of public speaking by Walter Dill Scott

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WALTER DILL SCOTT

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OF PUBLIC
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Psychological Laboratory, Northwestern University.*

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THE AUTHOR RESPECTFULLY DEDICATES THIS VOLUME TO
THE ARTIST

Professor Robert McLean Cumstock

WHO AWAKENED IN HIM AN ABIDING INTEREST
IN PUBLIC SPEAKING, AND TO
THE SCIENTIST

Professor George A. Coe

WHO INSPIRED IN HIM A LOVE
FOR PSYCHOLOGY

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Introduction.

The term psychology has a peculiarly formidable appearance. It is supposed to denote something mysterious and ominous and to be closely related to the "black art" or something of that sort. It is a study in character to note the way different people are affected by reference to the subject.

The author of this series of articles spent his youth in a rural community, and attended high school and a normal school in a neighboring city. The inhabitants of the rural district knew that he intended to teach school, but had not kept posted as to what had become of him after he had left the normal school. Some ten years later he returned to his boyhood home and renewed old acquaintances. By this time he had completed his college and university work, received his degree abroad and settled down as an ordinary professor of psychology in an American university.

Words can but feebly express the replies which were received from the old acquaintances when they were informed that he was a professor of psychology. His former Sunday School teacher was a dear old lady who had not lost her interest in him, and when he told her that he was teaching psychology, she threw up her hand in horror and exclaimed, "What under heaven is that?" The author thought that the emphasis was on the *under* heaven, thus indicating that it could have nothing to do with heaven, and hence not

worthy the consideration of an earnest young man. When the word "psychology" was uttered in answer to the question, "What yer teachin' now?" the old farmer exclaimed, "What on earth is that?" This was a little more encouragement, for it at least seemed to imply that the farmer assumed it to occupy a place on this planet. But when a more profane youth substituted for the two words, "on earth," an expression which is excluded from polite society, it became evident that the farmer had no intentions of praising. Another former acquaintance who had read articles on witchery, telepathy, astrology and kindred subjects, believed that he knew what psychology was. He showed what he thought of the waywardness of his former boy acquaintance by asking him, "What yer teachin' that tomfoolery fer?"

The common prejudice against psychology is well founded and easily understood. The science was founded by Aristotle, who defined it as the science of the soul. His treatise was too abstract and difficult for the comprehension of an ordinary man. At a later time all sorts of teachings were presented in the name of psychology. All abnormal actions of the mind and many assumed actions were grouped under the name of psychology. This treatment of the subject held sway so long that even to the present day the impression is abroad that it has to do mainly with telepathy, "unconscious cerebration," hypnotism, double personalities, and subjects of a kindred character. It is but recently that psychology has outgrown the form impressed upon it by Aristotle, or else the form that it sometimes took

during former centuries, which related it to all the absurdities of the dark ages.

It frequently happens that the best place for an introduction to a book or series of articles is at the end. In the present chapter it will not be possible to indicate the nature of the series which is to follow, but it may be worth while to give certain suggestions as to the nature and value of the psychology of public speaking.

In the first place, it should be remarked that psychology, as studied to-day, is one of the most practical and fascinating of all the sciences. It is the study of the mental processes as we observe them continually in ourselves and in those about us. The methods of research have been improved and the store of knowledge enlarged. The fields of investigation have been widening and the applications which have been made of recent years have been most encouraging. That psychology is beneficial, if not essential, for all teachers is now assumed by our best authorities. Much has been done in the last few years to advance the study of psychology among business men. Its application to the science of medicine is becoming more evident from year to year. It is coming to be realized that the study of one's own mind and that of others is one of the most pleasing and profitable studies for all persons.

The readers of this work are an elect group of persons whose function is that of practical psychologists. They are all diligent students of psychology, and their success has been due in part to their great ability in this line. They understand the minds of their audiences, and know how to