

**MENTAL AND SOCIAL  
CULTURE: A  
TEXT BOOK FOR SCHOOLS  
AND ACADEMIES**

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Mental and Social Culture: A Text Book for Schools and Academies by Lafayette C. Loomis

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**LAFAYETTE C. LOOMIS**

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# MENTAL AND SOCIAL CULTURE:

A TEXT BOOK

FOR

SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES.

BY

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## PREFACE.

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WHAT are the means by which my mental faculties may be best developed and strengthened? What is the most successful mode of study? How much, and when, and how? How shall I learn the principles of politeness, of personal accomplishment—of rendering myself agreeable? What are the errors into which I am most liable to fall? what the habits I should seek to avoid?

These are questions that come home to every youth, but on which instruction has been greatly neglected. With no word of counsel in his whole course of instruction, the youth is expected to develop for himself mental success and social excellence.

To present the leading principles of mental and social culture, is the object of this work. The first thirteen chapters, excepting the eighth, are abridged from Dr. Watts' inestimable *Improvement of the Mind*. Many of the maxims and rules of conversation and politeness are from Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son*. A few paragraphs have been taken from other standard authors. For the remainder of the work, as well as for its general arrangement, the author alone must be responsible.

## CONTENTS.

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INTRODUCTION.....	5
CHAPTER I.—HOW TO OBTAIN KNOWLEDGE.....	7
II.—FIVE METHODS COMPARED.....	14
III.—RULES OF OBSERVATION.....	26
IV.—OF BOOKS AND READING.....	31
V.—JUDGING OF BOOKS.....	42
VI.—LECTURES.....	47
VII.—OF CONVERSATION.....	50
VIII.—PRACTICAL RULES: HOW AND WHEN TO SPEAK..	63
IX.—OF STUDY.....	68
X.—OF FIXING THE ATTENTION.....	73
XI.—OF ENLARGING THE MIND.....	11
XII.—OF IMPROVING THE MEMORY.....	85
XIII.—OF SELF-CONTROL.....	91
XIV.—OF CHEERFUL DISPOSITION.....	99
XV.—OF POLITENESS.....	105
XVI.—PRACTICAL HINTS ON BEHAVIOR.....	109

## INTRODUCTION.

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WHEN we are asked any simple question, as, "What will the weather be to-morrow?" or, "How much is four times thirteen?" that which does the work of finding or preparing an answer is called *The Mind*; it is *that part of our being which does our thinking*. Of its substance we know nothing; we call it *Spirit*. We have, however, some knowledge of the principles upon which it acts. Like the body, it is under the control of fixed and definite laws, which govern its growth and activity.

We well know that if we would attain to proficiency in any manual art, the hand must be trained. If we would become expert upon any musical instrument, not only must the hands be made to run over the keys hour after hour, and day by day, but this must be done in accordance with the laws of muscular growth and discipline. In like manner, if we would attain to mental excellence, it must be by an observance of the laws of the mind.

We are constituted in our natures *social beings*: much of our lives is spent in the companionship of others, and much of our happiness is derived from them. Hence our mental improvement must be considered in this two-fold aspect,—first, the action of the mind by itself; second, its action in connection with others.



By the first of these we learn the manner in which we improve the power of thought, reasoning, and memory; and in which we gather knowledge. By the second, we learn the art of deriving knowledge and happiness from others, as well as of bestowing the same in return.

These two elements of culture are, however, so constantly intermingled in our education and life, that it will be more advantageous to consider them together, as we find them in our daily study and intercourse.

We shall therefore treat first, Of the rules for the government of mind in the attainment of knowledge: second, Of the modes of obtaining knowledge, both individual and social: third, Of the general principles of self-government and social intercourse, with some practical hints adapted to the improvement of youth.

# MENTAL AND SOCIAL CULTURE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### HOW TO OBTAIN KNOWLEDGE.

**RULE I.**—DEEPLY possess your mind with the importance of a good judgment, and the rich and inestimable advantage of right reasoning. Review the instances of your own misconduct in life; think how many follies and sorrows you might have escaped, and how much guilt and misery you might have prevented, if from your early years you had taken due pains to judge aright concerning persons, times, and things. This will awaken you with lively vigor to address yourselves to the work of improving your reasoning powers, and seizing every opportunity and advantage for that end.

**II.** Consider the weakness and frailty of human nature in general, which arise from the very constitution of a soul united to a material body. Consider the depth and difficulty of many truths, and the flattering appearances of falsehood, whence arise an infinite variety of dangers to which we are exposed in our judgment of things.

**III.** A slight view of things so momentous is not sufficient. You should therefore contrive and practise proper methods to acquaint yourself with your own ignorance, and to impress your mind with a sense of the low and imperfect degree of your present knowledge, that you may be incited with

labor and activity to pursue after greater measures. Among others, you may find methods such as these successful:

1. Survey at times the vast and unlimited regions of learning. Let your meditations run over the names of all the sciences, with their numerous branchings, and innumerable particular themes of knowledge; and then reflect how few of them you are acquainted with in any tolerable degree.

2. Think what a numberless variety of questions and difficulties there are belonging even to that particular science in which you have made the greatest progress, and how few of them there are in which you have arrived at a final and undoubted certainty.

3. Read the accounts of those vast treasures of knowledge which some of the dead have possessed, and some of the living do possess. Read the almost incredible advances which have been made in science. Acquaint yourself with persons of great learning, that by converse among them, and comparing yourself with them, you may be animated with new zeal to equal them as far as possible, or to exceed: thus let your diligence be quickened by a generous and laudable emulation.

Remember this, that if upon some few superficial acquirements you value, exalt, and swell yourself, as though you were a man of learning already, you are thereby building an impassable barrier against all improvement: you will lie down and indulge idleness, and rest yourself contented in the midst of deep and shameful ignorance.

IV. Presume not too much upon a bright genius, a ready wit, and good parts; for this, without labor and study, will never make a man of knowledge and wisdom. This has been an unhappy temptation, to persons of a vigorous and lively fancy, to despise learning and study. They have been acknowledged to shine in an assembly, and to sparkle in a discourse on common topics, and thence they took it into their heads to abandon reading and labor, and grow old in