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## CAGES.

### A STUDY IN MENTAL HYGIENE.

Several letters have reached us this week, dealing with what might be regarded as a problem in mental hygiene—the tendency of the mind to get into grooves and to lose the elasticity which enables it to view a question from every point of view, to turn it inside out and to scan it against the background of that particular period of the world's evolution in which it arises. How many people, for instance, through the force and determination of their own thought, can muster sufficient energy to get to the roots or source of some existing evil, how many have the courage to break the chains of self-interest and to dare to thrust out egoism in order to view some given situation from the platform of public well-being alone? The word "freedom," as it applies to the individual, is one of the most difficult words to define, but it implies anyhow the conquest of fear and the acquirement of the power of independent thought; the first is more easy of attainment than the last. It is so difficult to take all the old-established ideas and beliefs, all the so-called "scientific facts" that we have stored away in our brain boxes as irrefutable, to turn them out of those brain boxes and to examine them with the eye of unprejudiced thought. Yes; it is difficult to take them out and, if you do, you have to reckon with the fact that it will prove impossible to fit them all in again. Yet, what were brains given for but to think with? They contain other centres besides those for automatic muscular movement and memory.

At the present time, the large majority of people live in mental cages; they have been carefully brought up in such cages, taught to send their thoughts in certain directions; and, if they happen not to have that saving grace—a hobby—many of them tend to become at last very little better than warmed-up corpses until, perhaps, at last some rude shock ruffles their treadmill or eider-down existence, as the case may be, and they find that some tremendous precipice has to be bridged to bring them into line with the trend of modern thought. The realization that a great wide world, outside the circumscribed limits of their own vision, is in the throes of adjusting its parts to the general evolution is not always a pleasant one to them—the wider vision is some-

what fearsome and they close down the doors of their cages; it is more comfortable not to take the ideas out of the box for critical examination. The attitude that what "everybody says" must be right may be all very well sometimes, but the opinion of one person who will face some question, turn it outside in and examine it with unprejudiced thought from every aspect and in a broad-minded, large-hearted and unselfish way, is much more likely to be right than the views of the ninety-and-nine who choose the line of least resistance and follow what appears to them the obvious and less thorny path.

It is not, however, to be for a moment inferred that the "obvious" path is always the wrong one; but when a crisis arrives, be it for an individual or for a class, it behoves those concerned to look beneath the flotsam we call public opinion, and to teach the brain to form its own individual opinion, while at the same time maintaining sufficient control to keep a sane outlook on life, to strike the balance which neither adopts a standpoint that is far behind evolution, nor rushes to such extremes as to turn what might be forces of good into avalanches of unmitigated evil.

The ease with which books are obtained at the present day is, to a great extent, responsible for the upbuilding of many mental cages. Not for a moment do we belittle the benefits which arise from bringing the writings of great minds from throughout the ages within easy reach of the masses, but the continual outflow of books sometimes means that our minds get more or less filled only with the shadows and reflections of what are the results of the mental strivings of others, instead of developing creations and conceptions all our own. He who would use his body for the purpose for which it was given to him—his soul's development—must be something better than a mere member of a group soul. He must learn to develop the possibilities and activities of his own mind, to give up merely existing on the opinions of others and basking in the warmth of their approbation, must learn to face everything—knowledge, politics and everyday life—with that awakeness which will bring clear vision and courage to take a share in the long march forward in evolution towards that goal, when every individual will have learned how to put into practice the finest lesson in mental hygiene that ever

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