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Look Inside?

Busy people have a habit of pasting above their desks these days various mottos reminding themselves that one of the chief rules in the gospel of efficiency is to do nothing themselves that they can get somebody to do for them. It is a variation of the pleasant labor-saving device that we used to use in college. We called it a 'pony' there. It translated our Greek and Latin for us, and certainly saved time and trouble.

Of course professors who never had the advantage of a modern business training warned us that though we might pass our examinations by skillful driving of the 'pony,' we would come out without knowing what it was all about. Later, some of us found that when we came in contact with those who had given themselves the trouble to do their own translating, we met a certain grip and clarity of mind which put us decidedly at a disadvantage in the hard contests of the world.

The 'pony' has multiplied. There were never so many species and varieties of him as today. He has been trained for use in human activities where at first glance it would seem very difficult for him to travel. Take the business of accumulating facts and ideas for professional purposes. Most ingenious sets of files and catalogues have been contrived to save the student the trouble of remembering. Information is put in a drawer and when

you want it, you go and get it. It hampers conversation, to be sure, if you happen to find yourself in company with one who carries his information in his head. But of course the chief reason for the filing pony is that he saves you the trouble of looking for anything in your head.

The difficulty is that every now and then the file fails you. Here is a trivial experience in point:

I had a call for an item of Lincolniana which I knew - a certain book of mine proving it - that I had once handled, had known its whereabouts, its owner; but when I went to my files, search as I would, I could not put my hand upon it. Again and again, for over a period of several weeks, I dug up and down, following one trail after another in those files and the item still eluded me. Finally, as a last resort, it occurred to me that it might be well to look into my head. I had been taught that a thing which has once passed through the mind, even hurriedly on its way to the files, makes an impression that is never lost.

So I sat myself down by my fire, though it took considerable resolution to do it, and began slowly and painfully to search through the labyrinth of my brain. I remember that William James had said about such an undertaking: "We make search in our memory for a forgotten idea, just as we rummage our house for a lost object. In both cases we visit what seems to us the probable neighborhood of that which we miss. We turn over the things under which, or within which, or alongside of which, it may possibly be; and if it lies near

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them, it soons comes to view."

It was interesting work after I had once made up my mind to it. I kept picking up things that I did not know I had, as one does when he looks into a long neglected case of books or chest of clothes or cabinet of curiosities. As a matter of fact, I went straight to my item of Lincolniana, although I kept stopping on the way to look at long neglected notions. When I at last had it, I suddenly remembered a note which after Lincoln's death was found attached to a bundle of miscellaneous papers:

"If you cannot find it anywhere else, look into this."

It might not be amiss to add to the efficiency mottos above our desks a paraphrase of this note:

When you cannot find it in the files look inside you head.

A trivial experience, to be sure, but it is not without its lesson - a lesson which can be carried over into larger things. The world seems to be pretty well obsessed these days with the notion that it can find sure labor-saving devices to which to hand over all its problems: Outside law instead of inside self-control; wholesale organization instead of retail education; formulae for ruling men, strong in logic but weak in knowledge of human nature. We try them so hopefully and drop into such black despair when they work badly! We should not despair, we still have our heads; and it is quite miraculous what a head, when used, will do in solving problems that have not yielded to law, organization or formula, only - and here is the rub - it is hard, personal work, the kind that we train would like to

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a'pony'to do for us.

But if we flinch at the work, it will encourage us to remember that one advantage of using your head instead of depending upon a pony is that you always have it with you; and also that, using it, you will be sa continually coming upon things which you did not know you owned, so that soon you will have a sense of being richer than you ever knew you were - richer in strong, beautiful, desirable things which have no place in files and organizations and formulae.

A very great man of old, St. Augustine, after trying various schemes devised in his time for saving men's souls and giving them a joyful life, being still unsatisfied, looked inside. What he found for his soul - and that is his great story - we need not touch on here. It is what he found in his mind - incidentally, we may say, to his master struggle, that is to the point:

"Men go abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty billows of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the compass of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars," he says in his Confessions, "and pass themselves by."

St. Augustine was particularly enthusiastic over his memory. He talks of its "fields and spacious palaces" and the innumerable treasures he discovered there. "When I enter," he said, "I require what I will to be brought forth, and something instantly comes; others must be longer sought after, which are fetched, as it were, out of some inner receptacle; others rush out in troops, and

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while one thing is desired and required, they start forth, as who should say, 'Is it perchance I?' These I drive away with the hand of my heart, from the face of my remembrance; until what I wished for be unveiled, and appear in sight, out of its secret place. Other things come up readily, in unbroken order, as they are called for; those in front making way for the following; and as they make way, they are hidden from sight, ready to come when I will."

Now, who is going to deny that there is one of us that does not possess just such a place of treasure in his mind as St. Augustine found he had when he turned from outside devices and looked inside?

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