

To the latent consciousness all the suggestive, associative, and inventive powers of the mind are infinitely indebted.

This latent power, strong and active, and under the control of the will, cannot fail to give its possessor great facility in dealing with ideas, whether as an artist or a scholar, a poet or an inventor, a politician or a pulpit orator.

In perfect obedience to the will, it gives great readiness and presence of mind, flashing up rapidly the right idea at the right time; and no doubt its power and facility are increased by those operations of the mind, that call it into frequent and vigorous exercise.

Volition, backed by strong feeling, has ever great suggestive and controlling power over the latently conscious ideas that lie in the shadow behind them.

In short, all the operations of a day, that are not the direct results of our conscious attention, are the product of this latent power; and we are regulated in the performance of every act that requires our attention, by all the knowledge and the experience that stand immediately by in the shadow.

Lastly, it must be remembered that latent consciousness is altogether a distinct thing from memory. For though we may be latently conscious of things stored away in memory, yet we may be latently conscious of many things that have never reached the memory. Thus, in looking at a castle in a landscape which I have never seen before, though my active attention has never been turned from the castle towards its surroundings at all, I am latently conscious of these surroundings nevertheless; and if there is any peculiarity in any of them, or any movement, it at once arrests my active attention.

In passing through a country which I have never seen before, I am latently conscious of many things that never engage my attention actively. Anything peculiar, however, which thus passes through the latent consciousness, is sure at once to attract active attention to it.

The chief difference between Active consciousness and Latent consciousness is, that in the first case, the consciousness of things is so concentrated or great, that it reaches the degree of active attention; while, in the second case, the consciousness of things is so diffused or small, that it does not reach the degree of active attention. Active consciousness is possible to only one thing; latent consciousness, even with active consciousness at the same moment, is possible to many things.*

DEFINITIONS AND EXPLANATIONS.

Attention.—Definitions and Explanations.

Attention is that faculty which the mind possesses of concentrating its active thinking or perceptive powers upon an object of thought; in other words, of bringing them to a focus upon it. It is just the eye of the mind, through which it must look in order to know or become sensibly conscious of any thing.

Attention can be directed to only one thing at a time; if attention is directed, in one act, to more things than one, it must be diffusively to them as one aggregate; if special attention is to be given to the individuals of an aggregate, it must be by successive acts, surveying separately every individual of the aggregate. Briefly, we can think of only one thing in one act of the attention. The wider the field of attention in one act, the more diffused is the attention; the narrower the field, the more concentrated is the attention; but the field is always a unity.

Conceptions.—Definition and Explanations.

A Conception is just what we think a thing to be—a kind of mental photograph of external phenomena. We cannot take up matter into the mind and carry it about with us; but we can make a mental transcript or copy of it, and then carry it about with us for ever. But this mental transcript differs from other transcripts, in that the mind never recognizes it apart

* The Latent conscious power is thus the complement and the helpmate of the Active conscious power; the latter works in the light, the former in the shadow, and both operate together in harmony. The Active consciousness possesses powers of control over the Latent conscious sphere, and can bring the light of the attention to bear on things within it; and things in the Latent conscious sphere are also able, to a certain extent, to arrest the attention of the Active consciousness, or, otherwise, to affect the mind. The one, the Active consciousness, is just the full light of the attention; the other, the Latent consciousness, is just that obscure twilight that reveals nothing definite or distinguishable, but at the same time enough to influence our mental operations, or prompt us to turn our full attention towards it.

I am aware that my use of the term "Latent consciousness" to denote this phase of mind may be objected to by some as not being altogether the best term to employ. It is difficult, however, to get a term more suitable; and there is little danger of any ambiguity, or of being misunderstood, through my employment of it.