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Our time to spend on Howard Hill,
Is of but short duration,
But here we'll work as Senior's should
Until our graduation.

WHAT IS GENIUS ?

BY FRED F. DURRAH

Many a man who has shown extraordinary ability along some particular phase of work in life and has arrested the attention of the whole world by his remarkable deeds, has been called a genius. The question is often asked, What is this genius or extraordinary power that is so marked in some and is so lacking in others?

Webster says that genius is exalted intellectual power, capable of operating independently of tuition and training, and is marked by extraordinary faculty for original creation, interpretation, expression, invention, discovery, production or achievement; as a poet, orator, inventor or soldier of genius. Dr. Johnson's idea of genius was an infinite capacity for taking pains. The favorite idea of a genius among us, is one who never studies, or who studies nobody can tell when—at midnight or at odd times and intervals—and now and then strikes out “at a heat,” as the saying is, some wonderful production. “But the genius always does study; for he has that in his mind which makes him study.” “Attention is the very soul of genius,” says Dr. Dew, and it is not the fixed eye nor the poring over a book, but the fixed thought. It is in fact the action of the mind which is steadily concentrated upon one idea or series of ideas which collects in one point the rays of the soul till they search, penetrate, and fire the whole train of thoughts. It is no doubt true that a child of genius is born to do but one set of things in an excellent way. Although there are

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exceptions to this rule, as in the case of Napoleon. One may be a genius in mathematics, he may be a genius in music, he may be a genius on poetry or invention, or war, but in whatever phase of work his powers seemed to be directed, those powers must be applied with diligence. The cases are few and far between where the genius performed great things without taking great pains. One may be in the case of the German schoolmaster who once set his class a sum which he expected would suffice for an hour's work. One boy scrawled a line of figures on his slate and threw it down. "There it lies," said he, and his answer was right. In this case genius was a capacity for doing things without taking great pains. There were some in this class who had not the power to calculate sums, but they became great philosophers, and the great counter possessed only an arithmetical genius without taking pains. There is probably a class which can do anything equally well without taking pains. Of this class we have Joan of Arc as an example. A peasant girl of seventeen who understood the politics of her day as nobody else understood them. In war, whether for gallantry and resolution as a leader, for skill in artillery practice, for science in military combinations, or for Napoleon-like suddenness in surprise, she excelled all captains of her time. She was an accomplished rider who had never learned to ride. When questioned by theologians, she answered with such mastery that they were intellectually powerless in her presence. Yet she was an untaught peasant child, who could neither read nor write. Here, then, was genius, but she took no great pains to do what she did. Some have said that genius only borders on the miraculous. In this instance genius conspicuously borders on the miraculous. It is intellect and power so different in degree from that of other people that it seems to differ in kind, that it seems to be a sort of an inspiration, or, as we say, "intuition."

Now the word intuition means "seeing," and it will be found that persons of genius do *see* in their minds eye. The mathematician sees unwritten rows of numbers. The genius of war sees the positions of absent armies, sees the unknown consequences of events, and the genius of science sees the effects of natural forces—as of steam in a kettle—with a clearness that is unfamiliar to the general body of mankind.

This curious gift of mental vision is more common in chil-

dren than in grown up people, but genius, like the beautiful figure that lies hidden in the marble until the sculptor carves away and carves away and at last the image, lovely and sublime, is brought to view.

This peculiar power may be seen in a child at an early stage in life, but there must be some kind of operation undergone to bring out that which adorns and beautifies the soul.

The young Mozart, from the age of four was undeniably a born musician; this power called genius was in every way seen to possess the whole being of the youngster, yet this power did not show forth in its greatest splendor, nor did it send forth its rays lighting up the whole world as it were, until the sculptor had chiseled the marble into a beautiful picture.

This peculiar power for war may be possessed by some. Carlyle has somewhere said: "Is not every genius an impossibility until he appear?" This is singularly true of Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, the military genius in the great religious war. It was the last thing for contemporaries to conjecture that the deliverer of Germany and the great hero of the Thirty Years' War would have arisen in the ice-bound regions of Northern Europe. No great character had arisen in Sweden of exalted, fame neither king nor poet, nor philosopher, nor even singer. The little kingdom to all appearance was rich only in mines of iron and hills of snow. It was not until the middle of the sixteenth century that this product of genius presented himself, illumined with her rays of a thousand summers. Gustavus, with this power of genius, before thirty-five years, had made his countrymen a nation of soldiers; had freed his kingdom from Danish, Russian and Polish enemies; had made great improvements in the art of war, having introduced a new system of tactics never materially improved except by Frederick II; had reduced strategy to a science; had increased the strictness of military discipline; had trained up a band of able generals and inspired his soldiers with unbounded enthusiasm. Of course there were others who were moderately well skilled in military science in this war, but that peculiar inborn gift which had been brought out in Gustavus makes him shine as a beacon light before all the others.

So in the case of Napoleon, who is considered one of the world's greatest military geniuses. It was the bringing out of the

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man, the hidden figure in the marble, it was the attention, the very soul of this power that won him this great name. Geniuses, like gold or other precious metals, has to undergo a process to separate it from other impurities.

Byron, the great poet, had this peculiar inborn power which enabled him to write verse in such a wonderful way that he was called the poet of genius. There are others who have possessed this gift in a greater degree, probably, than Byron, and yet they have not been called poets of genius, or even had their names recorded as poets. Why? Many reasons may be given, but the most sure one would be that the power was not brought out, or the metal did not undergo the proper process. You will see issuing from the walls of the same college, nay, sometimes from the bosom of the same family, two young men of whom the one shall be a genius of high order, the other scarcely above the point of mediocrity; yet you shall see the genius sinking and perishing in poverty, obscurity and wretchedness; while on the other hand you shall observe the mediocre plodding his slow but sure way up the hill of life, gaining steadfast footing at every step, and mounting at length to eminence and distinction, an ornament to his family, a blessing to his country. Whose work in this? Their own, of course. A man is the architect of his own fortune.

Genius unexerted is like the poor moth that flutters around a candle till it scorches itself to death. If this power be desirable at all, it is only of that great magnanimous kind which, like the condor of South America, pitches from the summit of Chimborazo, above the clouds, and sustains itself at pleasure in that imperial region, with an energy rather invigorated than weakened by the effort.

We understand by genius, then, that it is that power, or rather those powers of the mind which are capable of penetrating into all things within our reach and knowledge, and distinguishing their essential differences. Every age has a kind of universal genius which inclines those that live in it to some particular studies.

We have during the Elizabethian age this peculiar power pervading the whole of England, and the world to-day is being blessed by the works of her great geniuses. Shakespeare, the poet of unequalled rank, possessed by this remarkable gift that

makes mountains cry out and stones to speak as it were, gave the world some of the most profound thoughts that have ever been penned by man. This gift developed as it were from boyhood, and having undergone certain operations, was like a little rivulet that scoops out the valley, moulds the hillside and carves the mountain's face; it sculptured Shakespeare's soul into grace and tuned his heart to the strains of tenderness and love.

Isaac Newton, the genius of science (invention), was possessed by this peculiar electric spark, that led him into the wonders and mysteries of nature, bringing to light the great law that everybody in the universe attracts every other body with a force which varies inversely as the square of the distance between the two bodies. After this peculiar power had been applied with greater effort it brought forth another law that says that every body continues in its state of rest or uniform motion in a straight line unless impelled by some external force to change that state. That power that enables one to make possible the impossible, to create original conceptions and combinations, to make real the unreal, to know the relation that one body bears to another—this is that power known as genius.

"Talent is that which is in a man's power," says Lowell, and genius is that in whose power a man is. The man of talents possesses them like so many tools: does his job with them and there an end, but the man of genius is possessed by it and it makes him unto a book or a life, according to its whims." Talent is some one faculty unusually developed; genius has the free and harmonious play of all the faculties of a human being. The world is always ready to receive talent with open arms, but often it does not know what to do with genius. "Mere talents," says Landor, "are dry leaves tossed up and down by gusts of passion, and scattered and swept away; but genius lies on the bosom of memory and gratitude at her feet." Genius finds its own road and carries its own lamp; but talent, like a docile creature, meekly bows its head while the world slips the collar over it, then it backs into the shafts like a lamb. The only difference between a genius and one of common capacity is that the former anticipates and explores what the latter accidentally hits upon. But even the man of genius himself more frequently employs the advantages that chance presents to him. It is the jeweler that gives value

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to the diamond, which the peasant has dug up without knowing its worth. "Genius," says Macaulay, "is subject to the same laws that regulate the production of cotton and corn."

Nature, like the sower in the parable of the New Testament, scatters the seeds of genius to the winds, and though some may perish among the stony places of the world, and some may be choked by the thorns and brambles of early adversity, yet others will now and then strike root, even in the clefts of the rock, struggle bravely up into sunshine, and spread over their sterile birthplace all the beauties of vegetation.

Marconi, the inventor of the wireless telegraphy, is the product of some of the seed of genius that nature has sown and allowed to fall in good ground. By persistent toil and effort and by diligent application of this peculiar power, the boisterous Atlantic is no more a peril to sailors, and distance is no longer a barrier to communication.

There is another product of the seed of genius which by chance has fallen in good ground, has sprung up, and is now stretching forth its branches like a green bay tree. This product is a genius of leadership, Booker T. Washington. The picture was hidden in the marble, but by incessant labor, ardent toil, chiseling away, and chiseling away, the picture has been brought to light portraying that which is most beautiful and most sublime in the heart of the man.

It is THIS capacity for high and long continued exertion, this vigorous power of profound searching and investigation that can

"Pluck bright honor from the pale faced moon
Or dive into the bottom of the deep
Where fathom line could never touch the ground
And drag up drowned honor by the locks."