

# I

## *Clear All Wires!*

One half of the art of using your energies centers around the task of keeping the lines clear. Each least nerve tract in your body carries currents. To do this, each must be well insulated. So there grows around each, early in life, a membrane of inconceivable thinness which serves the usual two functions of ordinary insulation on an electric cable. The first function is that of keeping the nerve currents within bounds and channelling them all to the muscles and brain centers where they accomplish the most. The second function is that of excluding all currents and chemisms arising outside of the line. Were these to leak in through the insulation, they would somehow mix with and change the nerve current so that it would not regulate behavior properly.

Now, just as each single nerve tract must be thus protected against leakages of energy in two directions, so with each system of nerves, no matter how large and how intricate. Ideally, then, we would first learn how to detect and locate each leakage, as it arises, and then we would invent methods of stopping it. Com-

ing at the problem in the spirit of the engineer, we see at once that there may be three varieties of leakage, with respect to location alone. First, at the generator; secondly, along the transmission line; and finally at the motor. That is to say, in the central nervous system; or along the nerve tracts; or where the nerve current discharges into muscle fibre.

Had we the space here, we could fill several hundred pages with details of these leakages. But as this is a compact handbook and pocket guide, we must present the barest outline—and hope that you will grasp its broader implications.

The beginning of all transmission of energy is a matter of attention. We first tap our energies in the act of facing the task at hand. If we have learned how to face it, we improve our chances of success. If we fail, we are likely to botch the work. The art of attending is the foundation of energy economy. Any treatise on self-improvement which ignores that art is not worth reading. Any school which turns out students who cannot control their attention effectively is a failure, regardless of its other merits. The art of attending can be learned only through long practice and stern discipline. I offer no short cut. We economize on energy chiefly by establishing effective habits of attention.