

Literary Notices.

THE STUDY OF LANGUAGES Brought Back to its True Principles, or the Art of Thinking in a Foreign Language. By C. Marcel, Knt. Leg. Hon. New York: D. Appleton & Company.

The study of language as at present conducted in schools, and even under private tuition, is very unsatisfactory. After years spent in the most uninteresting drudgery, the student, in the large majority of cases, can neither read, write, nor speak the language with any kind of fluency, and the little that has been learned passes from the mind in a year or two. Mr. Marcel thinks that this state of things admits of remedy, and the principles which he promulgates in this work are worthy of attentive consideration by both teachers and learners. We can, in our limited space, only give a few of the most important of these, which will give an idea of the improvements which he would like to introduce. To the art of reading in a foreign tongue he gives the first attention, and suggesting that the student should familiarize himself with the articles, pronouns, prepositions, adverbs and conjunctions, which form together a class of words every one of which appears on an average 200 times oftener than one of a class formed by the substantives, adjectives, and verbs, and which have, to a great extent, the same meaning wherever found, he insists that the student should at once devote almost his whole attention to reading, and make every effort to get over a great deal of ground in a short time. He says:—

The first books to be used should treat of familiar subjects, and be written in an easy style, in order to avoid encountering at the same time the difficulty of the subject and that of the language.

We insist on this point, because the prevalent notion that none but works written in the most elegant or classical style ought

to be put into the hands of beginners, creates the necessity of resorting to various preparatory exercises, and is in opposition to the principle of gradation dictated by nature: it is one of the chief causes both of the discouragement experienced by learners at their entrance upon the study, and of the unreasonable duration of linguistic instruction.

The reading of the foreign text may be commenced at the outset, without any preparatory studies or exercises, by means of a literal translation. With the interpretation of that text before his eyes, the student, having first perused an English phrase, will then utter it with his eyes directed to its foreign equivalent; that is, he will translate the latter in mentally attaching, as far as it is practicable, the known to the unknown words. For greater facility in passing from one text to the other, these should be placed opposite to each other in the first books which he uses.

The mode of interpretation which we recommend is peculiar in so far as it permits a foreign language to be studied through an English translation, or an English original text which has been translated into that language. These interpretations, by removing uncertainty as regards the true meaning of the foreign text, far surpass in efficiency the usual mode of translating with the help of a dictionary, which continually leads to errors that call for assistance. They dispense with the necessity of either a master or a dictionary. The enormous time consumed by the latter, and the perplexity arising from its various interpretations, discourage beginners, and delay their progress, when they have to look out for nearly all the words of their author. Words, moreover, which are thus translated one by one, present but a vague meaning, and frequently none, to a child as yet little versed in his own language.

It is partly owing to this illogical, repulsive, and unnatural process that must be attributed, for the great majority of young persons, the signal failure of linguistic studies. With the aid of a dictionary they hardly translate, and translate badly, twenty-five or thirty lines a day—about a volume in the course of a year—whereas twenty-five or thirty volumes at least should be read to secure the complete acquisition of the art of reading.