

THE ART OF STUDY.

Alfred Williams, in "Young Men."

We say the art of study deliberately, and not for the want of a better heading to our article, as perhaps is sometimes done, when the need is to adorn an otherwise irrelevant treatise, being convinced that the process of learning, and of study in particular, approaches very near to the highest of artistic attainments. For there is a right and a wrong way to everything. If you stand and watch an expert navy using his pick you will not fail to be struck by the great ease and grace with which he wields what is, at best, a very cumbersome implement; and if you mount higher in the scale of physical and mental labor you will find everywhere that the same rule applies, the same cultivated facility is noticeable, the same deftness and applicability.

So many are desirous of learning a craft, a language, or becoming proficient in the literature of a period, or an historical fragment, or, it may be, a science branch, or some other useful accomplishment, and they buy books, and material, and set to work in the hope of an early and easy victory. But many discontinue even before the idea has properly taken root; some push into bud, a few make blossom, but those who bear fruit are rare indeed. Not that the fault is wholly their own. They intend to advance, and work consistently, as they think, to that end; but the lack of judgment, and method, and fixed rule, and, in a word, their unacquaintance with the art of getting forward, all conspire to weaken their purpose and thwart their design. And so, reluctantly and despondently, they lay down their studies or hobbies, and believe themselves finally and irrevocably wrosted.

The First Essential.

The primary meaning of the word study, Latin *studium*, is zeal, desire, purpose; and here we have, in the word itself, the treasure and its key, the object and the means of attaining to it. The first essential, then, is the desire and the will to learn, and the zeal to prosecute the object when you have to wade through difficulties to it; and the courage, if you fail once, to make a second and more determined attempt. I suppose there are many who begin to learn a language, or who would like to learn one, or to digest a volume of poems, or prose, and so on, but, as we have said, not knowing exactly how to proceed, for want of guidance, they languish and remain unlettered. And yet it is so very simple, if we recognize in the beginning that a start must be made from the very bottom, and the way climbed little by little. You know that the hill looks high in the distance, but the ground rises imperceptibly, and as you go up you do not feel to have lost much in energy, but ever as you advance the top appears less and less difficult of approach, and when at last you stand on the summit you think it was very easy after all, and wonder why you ever had any doubts as to climbing it.

It was only the time required, and not the toil and fatigue, as you had imagined. And it is exactly the same with learning a language, a piece of literature, or a science course. It is not that there is any real terror in it, if you allow yourself the time, and keep plodding on, and are willing to go gently; but if you want to go full speed ahead and reach the height of your ambition in a few bounds, it is then that you feel the impossibility of the task before you. "Gently make haste" is about the best motto we can take.

I well remember my own first difficulties in this connection. I could not well say what determined me to learn Latin, which was my first step in tasteful literature. Perhaps it was by reason of the Latin footnotes you meet with so frequently in many of the old volumes dealing with the literature of the Elizabethan and Caroline periods. No

one advised me to do it or not to do it, for I had neither guide nor critic; but I found something said to me, "You must learn Latin," and without further consideration I acquired the elementary text-book and began. I had no particular end in view at the beginning, but I soon obtained one. Something said, "You must make haste and read Caesar." My heart leapt at the thought of reading Caesar in the original, and, spurred with this hope, I worked cheerfully away at my book, though I was able to spare but an hour a day for five days. This, you see, was only five hours a week.

But I soon found there was a way to study and an art of study. I found that my five hours a week might be very fruitful or very fruitless. You might learn much in the time or little. It was all a matter of will and attention. Then the way in which you approach your study and take leave of it is a tremendous consideration, and whether you are going to shut your mind at the same time as your book, or carry a portion of your book in the mind's eye, makes a great difference.

It is useless to think of retaining in the memory what you have learned, if you do not exercise that memory, and mentally revert many times during the day to the short hour of your labor. This you may always do with the smallest trouble if you will but cultivate the habit of doing it. I mentioned, just now, the taking up and laying down of the day's portion, the approach and leave-taking. Now, for several years, my own time and method have been this. Breakfast-time, half-an-hour French; dinner-time, one hour Latin; evening, at least ten minutes French, half-an-hour English, and one hour Greek. As the time draws near for each portion of study I focus my attention on what is coming earnestly, and open the door of the mind, as it were, to receive its guest, and the result is that at the precise moment of taking up your book or slate you are able to make capital progress without waiting to collect your attention, and to the quota of the working hour is utilized to the full.

The Private Student.

When you have finished your apportioned task, do not lay it all down hastily and thoughtlessly, as though you were never going to take it up again; but take time, and hold your attention to the subject some few moments after finishing the actual work; by this means you will remember just where you left off, and so both save valuable time when you return to study, and help to strengthen the impression. The private student, of course, who is working for his own satisfaction, who is "doing" a language to read it, and not to write it, will not need to be so scrupulous as he who is working for a school examination. My own view is that, even admitting the necessity of a strict examination, there is still too great stress laid on the purely technical and grammatical part, as against the literary attainments of the pupil. For instance, we know, according to the poet, that Pyrrhus slew Priam, and it is interesting to know whether it was done with a sword or a spear, but whether the sword or spear was, grammatically, in the masculine or feminine gender has as much to do with the story as the man in the moon has to do with present-day astronomy.

What, after all, is gained by wasting precious months of time to enable a student to write what is at best poor Latin, or poor Greek, when you have deprived him of reading, perhaps, a dozen books in the time, and of so strengthening his grip on the literature rather than on the grammar alone? For we neither speak nor write the classics now, that is, outside schools and universities; but read them we certainly do. As an example, I will say that I had not nearly grasped the Latin Subjunctive Mood, when, after a year's

study, I entered on Caesar, but by the time I had read his seven books, I had not only learned it pretty completely, but had also the great satisfaction of knowing that I had learned all the history of the books, and made lifelong friends and impressions, which I should never have done by keeping pedantically to the grammar alone.

The Supreme Test.

Again, in Greek, following the precepts of the Teachers, I spent about five months trying to get through Sidgwick's "Writer." But what did I learn? Almost nothing; for the simple reason that the lessons, when you had done them, left little to be remembered but the labor. And one day I asked myself seriously if it were not better to get to the literature and read, instead of continuing with the drudgery of writing, which I thereupon did, and I shall testify that in two months I had read the first book of Xenophon, the first book of the "Iliad," the first book of the "Odyssey," a whole book of prose and poetical extracts, and the play "Hecuba."

I have mentioned these things in the hope that they may be of sound practical use to others who may be ambitious to learn a language, and to show, I hope, that the supreme test of language lies not so much in the being able to parse correctly, and to name accurately all the little-used terms and particles occurring therein, but rather in the ability to read, translate, and interpret your author; to understand the broad principles and general structure. The strictly grammatical and philological parts may very well suit those who have years of time to devote to the matter, but they are of little service to the private student, I mean he who has to work for his bread, and who is not cramped with the necessity of passing a school examination.

My advice to all private students is, learn nouns, verbs, adjectives, and let the other things look after themselves. These are the three great features. All else will come naturally little by little, but surely, in time. Write out lists of all new words, and lose them, if you can, so as to necessitate the re-writing of them. Never read any book soever without taking notes. If you use a slate for study have pencil and chalk at hand; for the unimportant points use pencil, for the important use chalk; and it is advisable to print the words, if you have any difficulty in committing them to memory. It is surprising how much more easily you retain the image of a thing if you carefully print the words in chalk on your slate.

Then, of course, if you can, you should keep a difficult word in view for a whole day; if possible, print it where your eye may light upon it unusually, for anything met with or viewed under unusual circumstances stands a better chance of retention than when it is studied in the ordinary way. For the first half-year I was learning French I could only spare an hour a week. This was on Saturday evenings. But I used to think of the lesson many times during the week, a by dint of carefully nursing the weekly impression I made very fair progress amid all my other work.

Above all, love dictionaries. Do not be afraid of turning a few leaves, for while you are searching for one word your eyes will light on hundreds of others, many of which will be remembered, or at least recognized, later on. And, if you can, learn whole passages and recite them to yourself when you are alone, and try to read a little aloud every day, for this is an excellent means of getting a vocabulary, and is not among the least of things pertaining to the art of study. And finally, remember, there is nothing really useful gained without some amount of labor, and as the work is yours, so also will be the pleasure of the prize when you have attained it, and also the joy of getting it.