

It may be observed, I think, in common life, that persons of tolerable natural capacities, who have never learned to write, have, in general, a readier faculty of memory, than those who have been long accustomed to commit to paper what they wish to preserve. The reason of this I take to be of the same kind with that by which persons deaf and dumb, have a quicker observation with their eyes, than those who enjoy the sense of hearing, viz. because they exercise that faculty more than others do—are obliged to trust it more, and have recourse to it oftener. Hence then we may derive another rule for the improvement of the memory: If we wish to it be faithful, we must trust it—if we give it nothing to keep, it will of course become incapable of keeping any thing; but, by proper exercise, to employ it without fatigue, it may be improved to a degree, of which before such trial, one could hardly form a conception.

To facilitate the remembrance of what we read, a regular method of study is also indispensibly requisite. The mind delights in order, and best recollects former ideas by the affinity they have to each other, and the regularity of the position in which they were first viewed. A mass of ideas without order or dependence on each other, it is not to be expected that any common memory will retain. In reading history in particular, we should carefully carry along with us the order of time and place. It hath indeed passed into a proverb, that "Geography and Chronology are the two eyes of History." Whoever would read history with pleasure and advantage, if he be not already a complete master of those preparatory sciences, ought therefore to have constantly by him a set of good maps and chronological tables. If he read ancient history D'Anville's maps are the best—for chronology, he may with advantage use Blair, Playfair, or Tallents.

It is proper to caution the young student also against an error, which is common among such as are in too great haste to be learned, and that is a desire of grasping too much in the mind at once. He ought not to set out with a resolution of studying every subject at the same time, nor of reading too many books. The man of many books is not the most learned man, but rather he who hath with the greatest accuracy studied the best authors. To make a man learned in any science, reflection is, if possible, more necessary than even reading. To read but a moderate portion at once, allowing sufficient time to reflect upon it, and digest it, is undoubtedly the way to make the surest improvement. Those *librorum helluones*, who read every thing and never allow themselves time to reflect, seldom understand any one subject with accuracy; but after they have devoured the works of the most voluminous writers, it may be said of them, as of Pharaoh's lean kine when they had eaten up the rest, "that they are still lean and ill-favoured as before."

Neither ought the man of moderate parts to be too particular in charging his memory with the *Minutia* of history; such as names and dates, which are of no great moment. A judicious writer on this subject, (Mr. Knox, I think, if my memory do not now deceive me) compares a good memory to a net, which lets the small fry pass through it, and only retains the large fishes. No common memory can retain every minute circumstance in a long historical narrative; we ought therefore to fix our attention upon the great and leading parts of it—to seize those with avidity,—and for the sake thereof, to pass by the others, regarding them only as embellishments or connectives.