

by a superficial reading of many great histories. Any one who thoroughly masters the history of Tacitus, comprising little more than two years, who distinctly understands the causes which led to the downfall of Galba, to the successes and defeats of Otho and Vitellius, and to the final triumph of Vespasian,—who understands all the allusions of the writer to matters with which he considered his readers would be as well acquainted as himself, all the allusions to the existing constitution of the senate, to the government of the provinces, to the imposts of Gaul and the turbulence of Egypt, would know far more about the condition of the ancient Roman world, would have gained far more solid knowledge, and more mental discipline, than he who should have merely read through the whole of Livy and Tacitus, Arnold, and Gibbon.

But I must explain more fully what I mean by studying,—really reading a book. And I will again take as an example Dr. Robertson's History of the Reign of Charles V, not as considering it by any means a philosophical or profound book, but as a work which, I suppose, is more or less known to all. The interest of the period of which it treats, the agreeableness of its style, the general impartiality of its author, have deservedly rendered it one of the most popular historical works in the language, while the author's regard for religion makes it more universally put into the hands of the young than either Hume or Gibbon.

I suppose, then, that you desire really to study the history of Charles V. Before commencing, you would wish to know something of the author, the time in which he lived, his profession or condition in life, and his religious and political opinions; for the tone of a writer is affected by all these, and from a knowledge of the circumstances in which a book is written, we can better judge of the amount of credence to be given to it; we shall know what to receive with caution, and on what subjects the author's mind may be expected to be warped by prejudices of education, religion, or politics, and we shall be prepared to give greater credit to statements which appear at variance with these prejudices. In the case of Robertson, you would find that he was a Presbyterian clergyman, but one of singular liberality of sentiment; so much so indeed as to draw down more than once censures from the narrow-mindedness of members of his own profession. You would thus be prepared to expect, as you would really find, a work of great impartiality. Indeed, in some parts it seems too cold and unimpassioned. Still, you would expect the Geneva robe sometimes to appear, and you would be prepared to receive statements, which might be affected by it with some degree of caution.

You would now begin the work, and first would read with great care the admirable view of the state of Europe which precedes it. You would