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Study of the Latin and Greek Classics.

Of all the "death-bed sayings" on record, none please me more than that of Beausobre to his son: Go, said he,

"Argentum et marmor vetus, teraque et artis
Suspice.

Suspice, et forma non fragilis
Movebit in pectore delectationis multum.
Ibi, cum Euroauster, tum erit admiratio—
Flori felicitatis suavis et jucunda."

Moving among the solid temples of "silver," and of "marble," reared by ancient literature, the intruder finds the holy beauty around him giving softness to his step, and banishing all ungentle levity. The plastic mind gradually yielding to the touch of that loveliness which has crept in through the senses, becomes of itself grand and lovely. The heart too receives its coloring—even as the cheek is colored, when standing beneath the stained windows of some real temple.

These truths have come home to me, at too late an hour, and a quill or two will not be worn out sinfully, in an attempt to impress their importance upon younger men.

If I fail, as most probably I shall, the consciousness of having consumed a day in useful effort, will be a tolerable reward—perhaps reward enough.

"The inner man moulds the outer," is an old and true saw. Its truth may be seen, reader, by looking around you—indeed, by looking at yourself. If you are a philosopher—a genuine philosopher—your glass will image forth an aspect of serene dignity. If a sophist, one of perplexed cunning. In the first instance, your manner will be lofty yet affable—a key to the better feelings of all:—in the latter grovelling, yet scornful—to every one food for the most unreserved contempt. Yielding that these different appearances are produced by the workings of the inner man, can you hit upon a mode for ennobling these workings, in themselves confused and feeble, so evidently effectual as the introduction of knowledge and its all-arranging hand? Some may say that the manner is of no moment. The effects produced under every one's own observation would, if remembered, serve to stifle this assertion. Why was it that the most eloquent of Grecians struggled for years to remove the defects of a faulty bearing, if no valuable end was to be attained?

It follows then that dignity and suavity are of service: that these—in many cases essential—are the offspring of a confidence in one's own knowledge. And now, I ask, whence may we draw richer supplies of this than from the pages of ancient writers? Are they not rife with all the useful reasoning—the philosophic intelligence—the happiness of application, that cultivated man could devise for the assistance of untutored intellect?

From the logic of the sage we learn, by a spirit

of imitation natural to human beings, to quicken our own powers of reasoning. The perspicuity of arrangement and expression, so admirable in our master, becomes gradually a part of our own style. We are led by the strength of example to lop off the redundancies of a corrupt method, and by the acquirement of correct notions of purity, enabled to render our productions chaste and clear. And these improvements in the reasoning powers are effected at the same time that we possess ourselves of the richest treasures of lore!

But this is only one source of advantage among many as valuable. Wit, a power of the mind seldom granted with a liberal hand by nature—receives, in the course of communion with the playful and keen, a training of no little value. Charmed by the attic grace which softens and mellows the satire of our companions, (for let us conjure up at the hearthside the great masters of the past, and through their works hold with them 'pleasant converse,') our efforts will be to increase by farther intercourse, the small store already laid up perhaps unintentionally. Thus may we, if naturally possessed of wit, so polish and sharpen the gift of nature, that no armor may resist its progress: or, if destitute of this strong weapon, form for ourselves one less beautiful indeed, but of scarce less real worth.

Without this chastening influence, native wit degenerates into a harshness excessively grating to the ear of refinement, and productive of no single good effect.

Thus is improved or created a quality allowed by all to be of much utility in the contests between mind and mind. And what is life but a field of conflict, wherein the passions of one—perpetually at strife with those of another—are forever calling to their assistance the weapons of intellect!

I have before spoken of the effect produced on the manner by a confidence in one's acquired resources. Carrying this a step farther, I will remark, that many of the qualities regarded as amiable among men, such as urbanity and modesty, may be gained not only by the act of storing the mind, but from the actual lessons and counsels of the bland teachers from whom these stores are received. Will any one deny the happy consequences of an urbane and modest deportment, in man's intercourse with his fellows? Surely none would so far forget the beauty of virtue as thus to sneer at its manifestations.

We can scarcely find among the various pursuits of men, one in which the pursuer may not be assisted by the experience and lessons of his predecessors on the same path. The painter esteems himself happy when able to collect in his studio the meanest of the antique models. The sculptor contemplates among the relics of the past those master-efforts, so deservedly famous, and is indefatigable in a study essential to the production of

purity in his own manner. Extend this to eloquence. Most truly the orators of antiquity have been sturdy pioneers upon a noble path, and to neglect their guidance would retard the pursuer of the same course, and entangle him in many difficulties. Indeed, with the works of these, elocutionists have invariably recommended familiarity. The strength of Demosthenes,—*monte decurrens velut amnis*—the ‘abundant grace’ of the polished Tully, are of themselves milk for a giant’s nurturing. But they have not come forth alone from the wreck of time. They are attended by worthy companions.

The depths of a strong mind teem with the seeds of fine thought. Ideas lofty and rich are then in embryo, and it is a tedious but an essential task to bring them to maturity. The lessons and practice of those by whom excellence was most nearly approached, cannot do other than afford aid of the strongest nature to the student, who has in immediate view an anxious care of these germs, and looking forward to the season when a gigantic growth has rewarded his culture, longs with a virtuous ambition for its coming, that he may scatter among men the fruits of mature strength. Let all remember this, and seek not only rule of guidance, but successful illustration among the pages of the past.

It would be no difficult matter to point out other important qualities, ripened by a study of the ancient classics. To show how strongly assisted the organs of judgment, &c. may be by the strength-infusing food of knowledge, winnowed as it has been by time, would be truly *labor absque labore*. But I have already trespassed on the reader’s courtesy, and shall leave the unfilled catalogue to be completed, if he thinks it worth the while, at his own leisure.

It has been my object to show that “the classical student’s own good and that of his fellows, would be advanced by his assiduity:” and as I have not yet remarked distinctly upon the latter, I will do so now, and briefly.

Men unable individually to defend and protect their rights, enter into compacts for mutual assistance. Certain laws are drawn up, guiding the administrator of justice. This justice is the main duct by which the social body is supplied. With it, order and tranquillity shed their light upon a nation’s progress towards happiness. Without it, the members within, and the body sinks under a benumbing paralysis. It is, then, the part of every good citizen to see that justice be maintained free from impurity, and by precept and example to enliven its energies. And what is it that gives weight to counsel, if it be not the adviser’s learning and reputation?

“*Insani sapiens nomen ferat, sequus iniqui.*”

What, in a just man’s practice, so softens down to

our feelings all necessary roughnesses, as a secret veneration for himself?

I have shown, or attempted to show, that the character becomes chaste by communion with those exalted spirits from whom are drawn the supplies of wisdom; and we now see that both the possession of these supplies and the reputation gained thereby, are of service to the public—moreover that skill, necessary in the management of public affairs, is generated, or to say the least increased—so rendering the ruler more capable of furthering the interests of the ruled.

We see then, that the individual and the public good are advanced by the study in question. Let us now examine whether this advancement may not be effected by confining ourselves first to translations, secondly to our own legitimate literature.

With regard to the first, others have pointed out the futility of all such transfers. The Turk exchanges his turban and robe for the habiliments of the Christian. Through the mask of this assumed garb what eye can detect the original Mussulman? Is he swarthy! others of his adopted brethren are equally so. Does the tuft of long hair by which Houris hands are to draw the faithful into Paradise, differ from the unshorn locks of those around him? his assumed head-gear conceals the difference.—Thus does he lose all trace of his former being, and since the assumed qualities sit on him but indifferently, the change is always for the worse. Are we to doubt the truth of this illustration? All experience forbids us so to do. The sterling gold of Shakspeare—converted into French tinsel—was only so converted to meet with ridicule and contempt.

Secondly, may not these advantages be gained by researches into our own literature? I would say, in the first place, that this latter is but a branch engrafted on the ancient tree; and if we wish to effect thorough familiarity, we must examine downward—solving difficulties as we proceed—until we come to the root, from whence springs all lore. Farthermore:—Acquaintance with “our own literature” being but one move towards the attainment of thorough knowledge, this very admission stamps it as an inferior degree of excellence, and will any one doubt the utility of gaining the greatest in a generous pursuit?

This connexion of past lore with the present, suggests to me an important point, upon which I shall linger for a brief space.

Few are ignorant of the close connexion between the ancient and modern languages themselves. It was the influence of the polished and manly Latin that gave euphony to the barbarous jargon brought by the German tribes from their forests. It was this that spread over the nations of modern Europe, mellowing in one instance the roughness of the Norman idiom, and in fine, entwining itself inseparably with the mongrel plant

brought into being in England, after the conquest of Duke William. Indeed, so much incongruity pervaded this, that many great writers have believed it a vehicle too rude and perhaps unsafe, for the conveyance of their harvests to posterity. Under this belief Bacon wrote his "*Novum Organum*," as well as many of his more important works, wholly in Latin.

So close, therefore, is the union, that familiarity with one of the principal languages of antiquity has become absolutely essential to a *thorough* intimacy with our own.

Upon the connexion with the other I will barely remark, that the precept and practice of learned men most assuredly carry a weight at home, and was it not natural for these, filled as they were with the beauty of that tongue, whose melody and richness had lent a charm even to the outpourings of wisdom, to introduce its merits into their own less noble one? This they have done; and so originated a connexion important and harmless, inasmuch as it has benefitted the one greatly, without injuring the other.

I will now observe upon the time of life most suited to an attainment of that skill, essential in opening to the neophyte these well-stored magazines of useful and pleasing information. If the candidate for distinction in any, the simplest profession, had at the time of entering upon it, yet to master the rudiments of his language, would he not contemplate the double task in despair? Knowing that the greatest genius on earth, if without the means of expressing the teeming thoughts of a crowded mind, is but a "mighty savage," he feels, if success be his object, the absolute necessity of beginning the almost endless labor. From childhood to manhood he should be furbishing this key to his mind's resources.

And the case is the same with regard to the study of the elements which throw open the riches of the past to our conception. These riches are very seldom possessed when the means of doing so are not gradually acquired in very early years. The hours are not then counted—the labor does not present itself in a huge and startling mass to the narrow view of youth, but is seen part by part as the student advances. With years of inactive life before him, his time is his own, and we may almost say unlimited. Undeterred by the calls of the world, he has leisure to possess himself of every requisite for enjoying the feast to be partaken of hereafter. Turn to one who, after neglecting the acquisition of that which he has at length learned to look upon as most valuable, attempts to rectify his error. With the duties of life accumulating every moment on his hands—with the toil to be endured spread out like a map before his eye, he rarely has energy enough to persevere. The task is given up as a hopeless one, and his judgment, on the ground of interference with essential duties,

sanctions the decision urged by timidity. Then deprived of all means of gaining the treasure, he laments the error by which its acquisition was deferred until too late a season.

I have said nothing of the exquisite entertainment to be drawn from the study before us. My object has been to work on the feelings of real and palpable interest, so effectual in ruling men of the present day.

Let us now turn to a picture, to me of great beauty. The strifes and toils of the world are left behind us. We have sought the shades of retirement, to consume in domestic happiness the few remaining years of our earthly term. The merchant has come from the hills and valleys of the east to the banks of the Nile. He brings with him

"Munera terre

Et maris extremos Arabas distantes et Indos."

His wanderings have been among the groves of spice, and over the sands of the great deserts. His cheek has been shaded by the palm and the cool cedar, but it has too been blistered by a scorching sun. All this is at length passed, and chaunting the "Allah Acbar," wearied—yet joyful in his weariness—he plants his pavilion on the quiet shore, there in patience to abide the coming of Dyer or Xebeck, appointed for his passage to the destined mart. Thus after experiencing the various fortunes of active life, we sink into ease.

To him who has no '*munera scientiæ*'—no attachment to polite research, from which to draw pleasure in the hours of solitude, this seclusion is worse than a foretaste of that grave so soon to succeed it. His mind is a mere void, aching to be filled. Accustomed to satiety, before the affairs of life were relinquished, the contrast is now all the more painful. It is this that accounts for the discontent of those "*refugees from the closed shop*," whom we see around us. But on this picture I do not love to linger. There is another, possessing in the home of his retirement, a home of placid delight. Surrounded by the fruits of mental exertion—the parent tree long dead—he revels among the richly flavored and the luscious, until existence becomes one continued feast. His influence in the world is undiminished—his works are remembered with feelings of reverence and affection. Afar from the restless crowd he is, as has been beautifully said, like the moon in her relation with ocean; and rendered no less influential by the tranquil steadiness with which he keeps aloof from the scenes of his influence. To such a man the treasures of ancient lore are invaluable; they are charms possessing power to call up the host of worthies, by nature and assiduous cultivation, great and excellent. In the sacred recesses of his studio he communes with these. He is cheered by his intercourse with companions so pleasing, and his path to the grave is smoothed by

flowers of the *softest leaf*. At length the drama draws to a close! Like the chaste Talbot, he breathes his gratitude to those who have been to him the *fountains of 'sweet joy.'* It is his last breath. Loved for his virtues, and venerated for his good works, he sinks to the grave, on whose brink he has long been lingering, and whose ideal horrors, the lessons of true knowledge have rendered to him objects to be welcomed, not dreaded—loved, not feared.
