



The mastery of languages; or, The art of speaking foreign tongues idiomatically

Thomas Prendergast

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- cised a most pernicious influence in deterring people from the study of languages, and from the investigations requisite to lead to the discovery of the proper method of acquiring them. It is currently believed, on the authority of great names, that the aptitude which we display in childhood is lost by degrees as we grow to maturity; and that there is a special faculty which characterizes the linguist, without which no great or rapid progress can reasonably be expected. But we have no proof that any of our powers begin to decay in early life, nor are we in possession of any analysis of the infantile process, complete enough to enable us to determine by what method, or by what concurrence of accidents, B it happens that every child acquires an idiomatic power over the language of those among whom his lot may be cast. We may, therefore, repudiate those maxims, and thus get rid of the two chief obstacles which we encounter on the threshold. In other pursuits we work upon certain intelligible principles, and we gradually obtain definite results, commensurate with our efforts; but no true mode of action has been laid down, whereby an educated man, even when residing abroad, can reasonably expect to acquire a free colloquial use of a foreign language, without going through a course of study, which is always either tedious or laborious, and which, in many instances, proves unavailing. The scholar fails in spite of the advantages he possesses in having access to the accumulated learning, and the combined experience and skill of all Christendom. And yet every one of his children, unless subjected to counteracting influences, accomplishes the task without books, without study, and without ins...

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