

Recipes for Thinking

"Beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face."

We learn to think as we take diseases, by contagion. The sweeping stars teach us lessons of infinite order and steadfast purpose. The rolling oceans and the great winds speak to us their prophecies and aspirations. The mountains create in us the exalted mood; the grass and flowers and birds offer their rich gifts to every passer-by. Day by day Mother Nature opens her great text-book and stands ready to instruct us. "We are all richer than we think," mourns Montaigne, "but we are brought up to go a-begging." The power of thought is not external; it is implanted in our minds, and

"To know

Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without."

72

THE STARRY SKIES

XII

IF, day after day, the same persons should gather about your dinner-table, persons of transcendent beauty of face and form, possessing qualities of mind and heart with which even a cursory acquaintance would reveal to you undreamed-of wonders, and an intimate friendship with which would bring you lasting delight and lift you above the petty irritabilities of your nature; if, wherever you went, such companions should attend you, never interfering, never intruding, never growing old—would it not pass belief that you should be ignorant of their names and residences, that you should lower your veil as they passed, that meeting them in foreign lands you should be unable to distinguish them one from another?

73

The Starry Skies

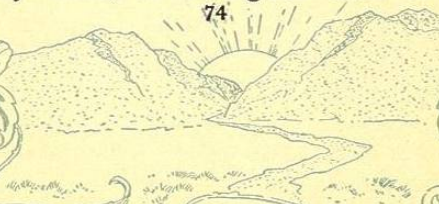
Yet nothing is more universal than this miracle of ingratitude and ignorance in regard to the stars in the heavens. "I blush with shame," a student recently said, "to think that thirty years of my life had passed before I knew the brilliant square of Pegasus, the beautiful cross of the Swan, or how to distinguish Sirius from Jupiter or Venus; to think that, when I could not sleep, I should light my lamp to read

All that I know
Of a certain star,

when I might contemplate unparalleled beauty and majesty shining by the very light of God!"

This is no plea for the difficult study of astronomy. Right ascension, perihelion, and logarithms are not essential to the observer. What she wants is to be able to group the stars into constellations, to call them by name, to distinguish them in

74



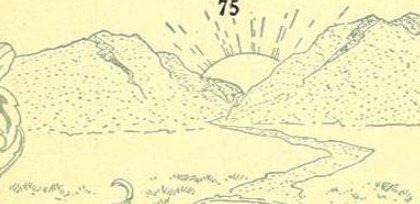
The Starry Skies

whatever position they have shifted, to lead the eye of a companion along lines and "pointers" to a certain favourite, to approximate distances by degrees, to see with a poet's eye, love with a poet's heart.

With the winter months the most beautiful constellations rise into evening view. Orion, the Pleiades, and the Great Dipper, almost everybody knows, and with these as starting-points, any one with ordinary vision, patience, perseverance, and the charts in such a book as Warren's "Recreations in Astronomy," can familiarize herself with the heavens. Warren's book is mentioned because, as one of the Chautauqua text-books, it may be found in nearly every village in the country. Other simple text-books with charts will serve as well.

The student should begin with the circle of constellations in the north, because they are always in sight.

75

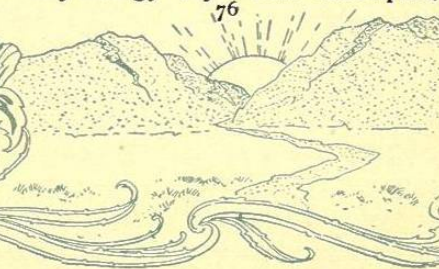


The Starry Skies

The Great Dipper, which is part of the Great Bear, is first noted, its "pointers," the two stars on the side farthest from the handle, leading unflinchingly to the polar star. Continuing the line through Polaris, one comes to some bright stars in the form of a great W, which is Cassiopeia. The Little Dipper or Bear has Polaris for the end of its handle, and curves towards the handle of its larger and brighter relative.

Continuing the line from the bowl of the Great Dipper through Polaris and Cassiopeia, it leads to a great square of bright stars, Pegasus; to which Andromeda, a line of bright stars, is added as a handle, making another large dipper. The end star of the handle is the middle of a shorter line, running up and down, named Perseus, and this line curves at its base towards Capella, a beautiful star of the first magnitude.

Mythology says that Cassiopeia,

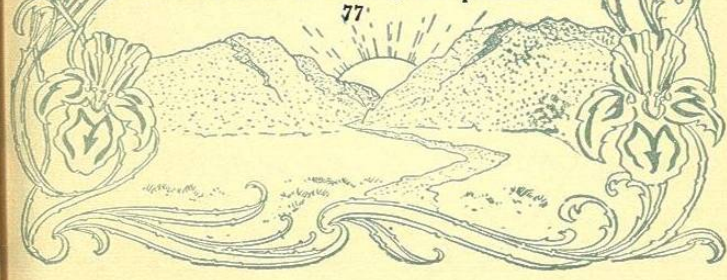


The Starry Skies

wife of Cepheus (whose constellation is near her), sought to rival the Nereides in beauty, who, in turn, prayed Neptune to avenge them. This god sent a sea-serpent to ravage the coast; and, to stay the plague, the graceless king and queen chained their daughter Andromeda to a rock, in sacrifice to the monster. The gallant Perseus mounted his winged horse Pegasus, took in his hand Medusa's head, which froze every beholder with fright, slew the serpent, and released Andromeda. The impartial Greeks placed them all together in the sky.

Among the other northern constellations which the student must not miss are Cygnus, the Swan, with its beautiful cross; Lyra, with its brilliant Vega, a star of the first magnitude; and Boötes, with another great star, Arcturus.

After leaving the northern constellations, turn to Orion, the prince of



The Starry Skies

all, and study its treasures of first and second magnitude stars, its nebulae, its double star in the foot, composed of a white and a blue sun; and the other double stars, blue and purple, and blue and yellow, respectively. One should also read the mythology on the subject, and know the names of its parts—as, for instance, that the belt stars are called the Three Magi. Following the belt as a guide, on each side, about equally distant, are two brilliant stars, Sirius below and Aldebaran above—the latter the eye of the Bull, one of the signs of the zodiac; and the former, Sirius, a part of the constellation of the Great Dog, and the most magnificent star in the heavens. A line from the Pleiades to Sirius cuts Aldebaran and Orion.

After Orion and its attendant subjects, the student should undertake the signs of the zodiac, at least one of which—the Bull, with Aldebaran for its eye—has already been noted.

78



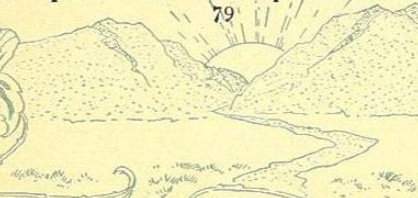
The Starry Skies

After this the map of the sky is easily read and understood.

For the whereabouts of the wandering planets one must depend upon the reports printed from month to month in many of the periodicals.

Such a study of the stars is of greater interest if it is done in company with one or two others. Opera-glasses reveal many beauties invisible to the naked eye. Two light sticks a yard long firmly joined by short cross-pieces facilitate two persons' finding the same star by each person looking along one of the parallel sticks. It is also well to remember, in estimating distances, that the "pointers" of the Great Dipper are five degrees apart. As one becomes an enthusiast, she will recollect that by rising early in the morning she may in winter see the stars of summer, and in the summer the winter display; and thus from insomnia itself learn the ubiquitous law of compensation.

79



WANTED—A MEMORY

XIII

"I SHOULD have enjoyed this book greatly," a bright young student said to an older friend, "if I had not been haunted by the thought that I ought to remember it. It gave me a kindred feeling for that character of Mary Wilkins whose anxious wife sprinkled gentian into his tea and over his victuals. The gentian may have been good for him, but it spoiled his meals."

Others than this schoolgirl wake up, at times, to the consciousness of their feeble memories. Wake up, perhaps, only to intrench themselves behind them as an excuse to palliate their carelessness and to preclude all mental effort; or to accept them as a mere infirmity of nature, an affliction like myopia or insomnia, to be publicly paraded.

80

Wanted—A Memory

The truth is, that a trained memory is a virtue, not an accomplishment; it is acquired and not hereditary; and its absence should be condemned, not condoled.

In a chamber of every brain lurks a messenger who, moment by moment, carries from the eye, the ear, the fingers, treasures which we call impressions. They are not stored idly away. Each one passing through the laboratory of the mind becomes a part of the whole, and changes the intellectual composition, as a chemical compound is changed by a new ingredient. From this well, enriched or defiled, the owner dips his resources; and it is certain that nothing can be drawn forth that has not been put in.

The habit of thinking and the habit of remembering are so closely related that the same prescription applies to both. This may be summarized into two ingredients—attention and prac-

81

Wanted—A Memory

tice. The conductor looks into hundreds of faces day after day, and seldom mistakes in collecting a ticket at the proper station. The politician remembers unerringly the names of constituents whom he sees only at long intervals. The letter-carrier can tell you the number of every house on his beat. The historian has a multitude of dates at his tongue's end. How have they accomplished these feats? First, by the concentration of their attention; second, by the continual practice of their chosen tasks.

It was not of faces or names or house-numbers, however, that the young girl was thinking. She was a lover of good literature; and to read a book and then forget it seemed to her like "rearing a towering scheme of happiness and beholding it razed." She was unaware that even what of good she had forgotten had deepened and broadened the

Wanted—A Memory

channel of her mind; and that borrowed images had been transmuted into instinct. Ignorant of this, she mourned that what she would have retained had passed away. She mourned and asked a remedy.

The first mistake, my dear young lady, lies in the manner of your reading. While choosing worthy books, you read them for the pleasure they give you at the moment. You do not attempt to remember; and remembering without effort is, to the uninitiated, as hopeless as squaring the circle. You must give your undivided attention to what you read, "chaining your mind lest it fall abroad with liberty." Being a reasoning creature and not a parrot, you should comprehend an ordinary statement at the first reading. An enormous waste of faculty results from the schoolboy practice of learning a rule by repeating it over and over. If, however, the sentence or para-

Wanted—A Memory

graph is abstruse, it should be re-read slowly and thoughtfully, and not left until it is mastered.

The one-reading habit secures vivid impressions, a prime factor of a good memory. Benvenuto Cellini records that when in his boyhood he saw a salamander come out of the fire, his grandfather gave him a sound beating that he might remember so unique a prodigy; and Lowell says that the same theory held in mediæval France where the children were annually whipped at the boundaries of the parish, lest the place of them might ever be lost through the neglect of so inexpensive a mordant to the memory. The cuticle of the mind may be stimulated to vivid impressions by the exercise of the imagination. A writer cites the case of the Battle of Bunker Hill.

"What did the eyes see?" he asks. "Fifteen hundred Americans intrenched upon the hill. Colonel

84



Wanted—A Memory

Prescott, General Putnam and General Warren are in command. But how are these Americans dressed and equipped? Like what do these intrenchments appear? What is the expression on the faces of the commanders and soldiers? Show me the Pine-Tree banner that fluttered fearlessly in the smoke of battle. Show me those three assaults, those repulses, the clouds of smoke, the desperate fight with the butts of muskets, the hillside red with the fallen foe. Come, painter! how looked Boston and the burning Charlestown, the waters between, the war-ships, the blue New England sky?" It is reading thus by the light of the imagination that one is enabled to remember.

The next aid to memory is the process of sifting. From the great mass of literature carefully select the portion which seems best suited to your needs. Much of this, if you have a

85



Wanted—A Memory

healthy memory, you will read with oblivion. Even among the best you must discriminate, gathering, as Carlyle says, "the metal grains here available, the dross-heaps there avoidable;" and for the last you may safely follow Mrs. Malaprop's advice to "illiterate them from your memory."

The sifting process is greatly aided by the constant practice of taking notes as you read. However brief and unconnected they may be, they will yet form solid pegs on which to hang your acquisition, and will serve to dissipate the haziness of your mental atmosphere. Sometimes the heart of a whole chapter may be compressed into a few lines, and the subsequent abstract serve to recall the matter of an entire volume.

After an image has been developed upon the photographic plate of the mind, how shall it be fixed there into the faculty which we call memory? As Mr. Squeers long ago discovered,

86

Wanted—A Memory

practical application is the only mordant. The lad set to wash the windows of Dotheboys' Hall was not likely to forget that "to clean is a verb, active"; and in modern educational systems the youth draws his plan in the studio and then works it out in wood or metal in the workshop. Thurlow Weed, in the beginning of his political career, had a memory like a sieve. Dates, names, appointments, faces—everything escaped him. He began night after night, to relate the events of the day to his wife. He recalled the dishes he had for his meals, the editorials he had read, the letters he had written, the streets he had walked, the very words he had heard and spoken. To this practice, continued for nearly fifty years, he attributed his marvelous memory.

If, after every chapter you read, you would close the book and make yourself think over or repeat aloud

87

Wanted—A Memory

the contents of the chapter, you would read far less and remember far more. Always preface your continuation of a book by a brief summary of what has gone before and close each reading with a mental or written statement of the principal events, characters, causes, and results you have encountered. Its most striking phrases might be introduced into your own conversation, and the best anecdotes repeated to your friends.

Rare indeed is the dinner-table that may not be enlivened by such memory practice; and the speaker will have the additional reward of seeing his listeners bring their contributions to the common feast. The correction of error, the addition of incident and personal recollection, and the freedom of discussion, cannot fail to strengthen first impressions, rivet attention, stir curiosity, and classify acquisition.

88



Wanted—A Memory

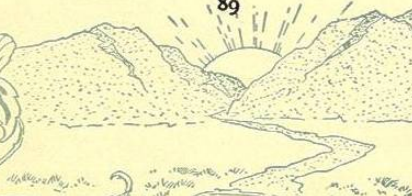
After all, memory is only knowledge made available; and knowledge without it is as useless as the contents of a safe to which the key is lost. What if our joy in perfecting it be "three parts pain"? Is it not compensation enough that whereas once

In subtle mockery
Thou smilest at the window where I wait
Who bade thee ride for life,

now

Thou standest before me glad and fleet,
And layest undreamed-of treasures at my feet?

89



DRY THINGS

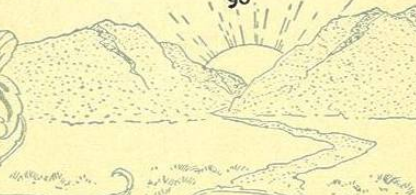
XIV

"SOMEbody sent me 'Sesame and Lilies' for a birthday present," a bright young girl told me. "I supposed that I should hate Ruskin, but really," with surprise, "he is delightful!"

A week later she overtook me on the street. "You like morning walks. May I go with you to-morrow — early — before breakfast?" "Yes," I replied, smiling at her earnest crescendo and rosy cheeks, "I shall be delighted; but what restless spirit has been pricking you? Did you ever in your life see the sun rise?"

"That is just it. Do not for the world let the girls know, but I have been reading Browning a little. Why do people talk so about his hidden

90



Dry Things

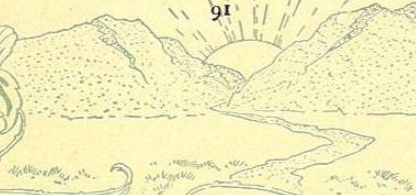
meanings? That description of the sunrise, who could not understand that? Understand—why, it is as easy as Longfellow, and—now I want to see it!"

The next morning she was waiting for me at the gate. "It is well that Browning rang the bell. I should have taken another nap for all anybody else. Just see the dew on the grass! Why it is like rain. And hear those birds sing! I should like to run. Everybody is asleep, can't we have a race? What fun this is! And I have always thought that if one thing were worse than another it was getting up in the morning. See those clouds breaking; now I *must* say it:

"Day!

Faster and more fast,
O'er night's brim, day boils at last;
Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim
Where spurting and suppressed it lay:
For not a froth-flake touched the rim

91



Dry Things

Of yonder gap in the solid grey
Of the eastern cloud, an hour away,
But forth one wavelet, then another curled,
Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,
Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then over-
flowed the world."

There was a mist over the child's eyes. Ruskin is right, I said to myself, when he wonders, not at what men suffer, but at what they lose.

My companion was silent while we walked down the hill. As we turned towards her home she said suddenly: "I shall never dare say again that I dislike history, or that I cannot endure Thackeray, or that the old paintings in the galleries are hideous. I shall be discreetly silent about things I cannot appreciate; for I believe now that dry things are just things we do not know enough about to care for."

92



THE BROAD VIEW

XV

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light.
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly!
But westward look, the land is bright.

WHAT does it mean, this something in Clough's lines which beyond rhythm and picture appeals to us? And to what does Carlyle refer when he talks fiercely of respectability with its thousand gigs? and Matthew Arnold when he asserts that the occupant of every gig is a Philistine? Is it not a warning to get out of the cramped narrowness of our daily lives? to open more than one outlook on life—else we shall catch but faint and tardy glimpses of the radiance that floods it?

When Honorius was told at Ravenna that Roma was lost he gave signs of the deepest distress, believ-

93

