

In the learner gets  
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In learning to skate and ride a bicycle the great difficulty is, to learn by our own experience that it is really possible to keep our balance, when supported on what seems to be a very precarious foundation. In acquiring new branches of knowledge it is also generally true that well begun is half done; but not quite for the same reason. In learning a new language, it is very irksome to master the rudiments that have to be learnt first, such as the alphabet, the pronunciation, and the elements of the grammar. After these are thoroughly learnt, the most unpleasant part of the task is finished, and a good foundation is laid for the acquisition of the language. Not only in languages, but also in science, there is generally a certain amount of drudgery at the commencement in learning the elements, which cannot be mastered without severe labour. When the learner gets beyond these elements, he is carried on without conscious effort by the interest of the subject. But perhaps literary composition is of all kinds of workmanship the best illustration of the great importance of a good beginning.

Every literary worker, from the schoolboy composing a short essay to the author of a great history or epic poem, feels that he has made considerable progress towards the completion of his work, when he has once managed to make a good start. Only it must be noticed that the proverb says “ Well begun is half done.” A bad commencement actually impedes the progress of composition, as it has either to be written all over again, or must be amended by many alterations, the making of which entails a large expenditure of time and trouble. But a good beginning may be literally regarded as bringing the author to the middle of his work.

The usual practice of experienced writers is to think out their subject well before they write a single word. This often takes a long time, in many cases a much longer time than that occupied in the actual labour of composition; so that the beginning of the writing of a work may really be the middle point of the author's labour, if we take into consideration the whole time that he bestows on the work from its first conception in his mind. In the construction of material structures, also, the importance of beginning well is generally recognised. A good architect devotes his greatest attention to securing the stability of the foundation. Finally, the proverb has an important moral application.

If we have determined to cure ourselves of a bad habit, it requires a great effort to conquer for the first time a temptation to which we have been in the habit of yielding. But after our first victory the power of the bad habit is broken, and resistance to future temptations of the same kind will be comparatively easy.