

It to emulate the
powers of memory



**ASSIGN
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It was in this way that the ancient Greeks before the invention of writing were able to carry in their memories and hand down to successive generations such long poems as the Iliad and Odyssey. In those days any one who wished to possess a poem had to commit it to memory.

As the epics telling the story of the fall of Troy were very popular all over the Greek world, professional reciters found it well worth their while to learn them off by heart; and by constant labour at this task they trained their memories to a wonderful pitch of perfection. A similar account is given by Caesar of the powers of memory possessed by the Druids in ancient Britain. The invention of the art of writing and printing has lightened the burden laid upon human memory and thereby weakened it, just as the legs of those who continually ride on horse-back become less fit to bear the fatigue of walking.

Nevertheless, though ordinary men of the present day can hardly expect to emulate the powers of memory possessed by Greek rhapsodists and Druid priests, we may by practice train ourselves to be able to remember far more than can be remembered by untrained intellects. Practical usefulness is the standard by which we ought to fix the extent to which the memory should be cultivated.

Such wonderful mnemonic feats as the remembering of long lines of figures that have only once been repeated, are no more useful for practical purposes than the tricks of sleight-of-hand performed by jugglers, or the somersaults of a clown in the circus. Those who are endowed by nature with the faculty of performing such feats may earn for themselves large sums of money by exhibiting their powers in public, but are not thereby enabled to perform in a more efficient manner any of the ordinary duties of life. What

practical men require is only such powers of memory as will help them in their daily work, whether they are literary men, doctors, clerks, lawyers or shopkeepers. A serviceable memory may be acquired by almost any one who takes the trouble to try to remember a good deal of what he reads in his books or hears in conversation. Every lesson that the student learns at school or college affords useful training for the memory. It must not, however, be forgotten that the memory resembles the bodily powers not only in being improved by practice, but! also in being liable to be seriously impaired by over-pressure.

A wrestler, while making excessive efforts to increase his bodily strength by lifting great weights, may so overstrain himself as to become a feeble man for the rest of his life. In like manner, it sometimes happens that a child at school, by having excessive tasks imposed on his memory, is reduced to a state of mental weakness in which he is unable to remember the simplest facts and the shortest piece of poetry. Owing to ignorance of the danger of overwork, many a boy, who in his childhood give promise of a brilliant career has been intellectually ruined in the vain attempt to teach him more than his immature intellect had the capacity of mastering.