

# **HANDBOOK TO THE MASTERY SERIES**

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Handbook to the Mastery Series by Thomas Prendergast

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**THOMAS PRENDERGAST**

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Joseph Peabody 1868  
*Gutta cavat lapidem non vi sed sæpe cadendo.*

HANDBOOK

TO

THE MASTERY SERIES.

BY

THOMAS PRENDERGAST,

AUTHOR OF 'THE MASTERY OF LANGUAGES; OR, THE ART OF SPEAKING  
FOREIGN TONGUES IDIOMATICALLY.'

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1868.

## PREFACE.

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WHAT TO LEARN and HOW TO LEARN a great deal in a small compass—these are the questions which perplex every person who is intent upon qualifying himself to speak a foreign language.

There is a profusion of elementary works, but it is hard to determine which to select, because no method has been singled out and stamped with the approval of the learned.

It is only by the study of nature that we can hope to discover the true method, whether for arranging what the beginner is to learn, or for laying down principles for his guidance in learning it. The simplest and most effective course that can be pursued, as an initiation, is to keep in view the natural process of hourly ringing the changes upon a few sentences, with occasional additions.

The most successful of all linguists are children who have already learned to speak their mother-tongue. When taken abroad and left among foreigners, they acquire two new languages at once, without any assistance, and speak them idiomatically, although with a very limited vocabulary. They do not philosophise,

nor do they form any plans for their procedure, but in pursuance of the dictates of instinct, they imitate and repeat with unflinching perseverance, chance combinations of unfamiliar sounds, and afterwards analyze them at leisure. But the true method underlying their operations, and the causes of their success, have never been detected, nor has their procedure been accurately observed and adopted. After some weeks of great perplexity, during which their speech is full of imperfections, they begin to deliver a few idiomatic sentences with intelligence, decision, and fluency. By means of imitation and repetition, they not only fix them in the memory, so as to reproduce them with great accuracy, but also multiply them by transferring the words and phrases from one sentence to another. This is the whole process, so far as outwardly discernible action is concerned. The stage of progress above described is one which every person who has ever learned to speak any language idiomatically, whether child or adult, must inevitably have passed through.

The Mastery System adopts their procedure at that stage, eliminating the ingredient of chance, and discarding all those irrelevant and embarrassing preliminaries which are generally considered essential. The beginner is placed at once on an equality with a child who has been struggling for some weeks against stupendous difficulties. But he has this advantage—that he is exempted from the perplexity created by confused and conflicting recollections of a mass of unconnected words, and from that humiliating sensation of incapacity, which

is always experienced by an adult so bewildered when he first endeavours to express his thoughts with unfamiliar words.

The beginner is not allowed to compose any sentences for himself, the transpositions of the words into their proper combinations being effected for him. He is merely the recipient of a stock of practical sentences, which he recites as fluently as if they were English, and these in due course become receptacles for other words, and models for other sentences. The English versions of the foreign combinations which he has learned are always kept before him, and no other exercise is allowed than that of retranslating them from memory in irregular succession, with the words of each new lesson interwoven among them. The oftener he recurs to this exercise during each day, the more expeditiously will he form the habit of reproducing the idiomatic sentences with accuracy and fluency. As he advances, this habit gradually extends itself to the whole language, because the sentences so arranged ought to include all its constructions, and thus to leave nothing else to be acquired but additional words.

The whole mechanism of the language is presented to him in a compact form, and without seeing a grammar, or hearing a single technical term, he obtains a practical and intelligent appreciation of the constructions not less effective in every sense than that resulting from the most careful study of the theory. He is relieved from all exertion of the memory beyond that of reproducing sentences, which he is required either to hear or to read



at the commencement of each exercise, before he attempts to rehearse them. This ensures the accurate retention of every word of every sentence in its genuine idiomatic order of arrangement.

The Classical Languages may obviously be treated in a similar manner; the study of grammar being wholly excluded, while this initiatory course of Mastery is going on. Under the classical system we learn the grammar and study the language, instead of learning the language and studying the grammar. Children learn languages without studying them, but we study them for many years, without even approximating to the colloquial attainment, or, in other words, the power of oral composition. This is, in reality, the true beginning, because it is the simplest, the most direct, the most natural, and the most conducive to the ulterior attainment of the other branches of the study. This is the true beginning, but for certain weighty reasons it is never attempted in our schools, and therefore we never master Greek and Latin, even on a small scale.

Mastery is calculated to impart to learners, at any stage of their career, that thorough grounding, the want of which is so helplessly deplored by teachers. In fact, it is the missing link between the perfect process of nature on the one hand, and all the wrong systems now in vogue on the other.

The Mastery System is designed to secure economy of *time* and labour, by compressing a great deal of the language into a small compass;—to point out the simplest mode of acquiring a good pronunciation;—

to familiarize the beginner with the characteristic constructions and the inflections of the foreign language embodied in a set of comprehensive, or, if possible, exhaustive sentences;—to regulate his course, so that he shall have the consciousness of making definite daily progress in oral composition;—to call forth self-reliance, by showing him how to initiate himself without a teacher;—to exclude everything non-essential;—to aid the memory so as to secure perfect accuracy; to test its power of retention, in order to determine with precision how much ought to be learned in each day;—to qualify the learner, by the frequency of his daily exercises, to reproduce all that he has learned with fluency, accuracy, and promptitude, and to develop his command of the language by evolving from the sentences in his possession a large variety of useful idiomatic Variations, by mastering which he obtains a great facility in oral composition, founded upon a thorough acquaintance with the syntactical constructions.

In the German Manual, the sentences are devised so as to show in what manner this system can be applied to Greek and Latin. In the French Manual, the same amount of grammatical knowledge is conveyed distributively, but not less effectively, than in the more scholastic plan of the German.

## PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION.

THE digestion and the absorption into the mental tissues of foreign languages by adults has ever been regarded as an operation of great difficulty, an impression which is mainly derived from the discouraging results of misdirected efforts.

During the summer of 1867 the writer had occasion to make a critical examination of the systems of deaf-mute instruction in central and northern Europe.

French, learned in the old-fashioned way, was the only foreign language at his command. Of German he knew absolutely nothing; and yet to examine the articulating deaf-mute schools in Germany was one of his most important objects.

The acquirement, therefore, of some facility in the German language was a necessity, and it was important that the time devoted to its study should be made to yield the largest possible results.

Most opportunely making the acquaintance of Mr. Prendergast and of his theory before leaving England for the Continent, the writer determined to put the Mastery system to the test in Germany.

He had not the advantage of the valuable manual recently given to the public, but was compelled to prepare his own specimen sentences, more applicable, it is true, in some respects to the objects he had in view, but naturally far less effective in the acquirement of the language for general purposes. The theory, however, of the Mastery system he followed implicitly.

The results which crowned the labor of the first week were so astonishing that he fears to detail them fully, lest doubts should be raised as to his credibility. But thus