

husk of words to stick in, as in studying a foreign language, they can hardly find where to stick at all.

This habit, I suppose, comes mainly as a tradition from a former age; a habit which, though begun upon good causes, has been kept up long after those causes were done away. The prevailing ideas herein got fixed at a time when there was no well formed English literature in being, when the language itself was raw and rude, and when the world's whole stock of intellectual wealth was enshrined in other tongues. The custom thus settled from necessity is continued to this day, when the English tongue, besides its own vast fund of original treasure, has had the blood of all the best human thought transfused into its veins, and when its walks have grown rich and delectable with the spoils of every earlier fruitage of genius and learning.

Three centuries ago Chaucer was the only really good English author, he was then two hundred years old, and the language had changed so much since his time, that reading him was almost like studying a foreign tongue. So much was this the case, that Bacon thought the English was going to bankrupt all books entrusted to its keeping. he therefore took care to have most of his own works translated into Latin, and now our greatest regret touching him is, that we have not all those works in his own noble English. Before his time, the language changed more in fifty years than it has done in all the three hundred years since. This is no doubt because the mighty workmen of that age, himself among them, did so much to "bolt off change" by the vast treasures of thought and wisdom which they found or made the language capable of expressing. The work then so gloriously begun has been going on ever since, though not always with the same grand results, until now the English is commonly held to be one of the richest and noblest tongues ever spoken, and the English literature is, in compass and variety of intellectual wealth, unsurpassed by any in the world.

How strange it is, then, that, with such immense riches at hand in our vernacular, we should so much postpone them to the springs that were resorted to before those riches grew into being. Because Homer and Sophocles had to be studied before Shakespeare wrote, why should Shakespeare still be ignored in our liberal education, when his mighty works have dwarfed Homer and Sophocles into infants. There might indeed be some reason in this, if he had been in any sort the offspring of these Greek masters; but he was blessedly ignorant of them, which may partly account for his having so much surpassed them. He did not conceive himself bound to think and write as they did, and this seems to have been one cause why he thought and wrote better than they did. I really can see no reason for insisting on learning from them rather than from him, except that learning from him is vastly easier.

Nevertheless I am far from thinking that the Greek and Latin ought to be disused or made little of in our course of liberal learning. On the contrary, I would, of the two, have them studied in college even more thoroughly than they commonly are, and this, not only because of their unequalled use in mental training and discipline, and as a preparation for solid merit and success in the learned professions, but also because a knowledge of them is so largely fundamental to a practical mastery of our own tongue. And here I am moved to note what seems to me a change for the worse within the last forty years. Forty years ago, besides that the Greek and Latin were made more of in college, at least relatively than they are now, the students had both more time for English studies, and also more of judicious prompting and guidance in their reading. But, of late, there has been so much crowding-in of modern languages and recent branches of science, that students have a good deal less time than formerly for cultivating English literature by themselves. In short, our colleges, it seems to me, did much more,

forty years ago, towards setting and forming right literary and intellectual tastes than they are doing now. I believe they are now turning out fewer English scholars, and that these are not so well grounded and cultured in the riches of our native tongue. The fashion indeed has been growing upon us of educating the mouth much more than the mind, which seems to be one cause why we are having so many more talkers and writers than thinkers. An unappeasable itch of popularity is eating out the old love of solid learning, and the old relish for the haunts of the Muses.

It may have been observed, that in this argument I distinguish somewhat broadly between a liberal and a practical education. Our colleges ought to give, and, I suppose, aim at giving, the former, while the latter is all that our public schools can justly be expected to give. And a large majority of the pupils, as I said before, are to gain their living by hand-work, not by head-work. But then we want them made capable of solid profit and of honest delight in the conversation of books, for this, as things now are, is essential both to their moral health and also to their highest success in work, to say nothing of their duties and interest as citizens of a republican State. And, to this end, what can be more practical, in the just sense of the term, than planting and nursing in their right intellectual tastes, so that their reading shall take to such books as are really wholesome and improving.

On the general subject, however, I have to remark further, that our education, as it seems to me, is greatly overworking the study of language, especially in the modern languages. From the way our young people are hurried into French and German, one would suppose there were no English authors worth knowing, nor any thought in the English tongue worth hearing. So we cram them with words, and educate them into ignorance of things, and then exult in their being able to speak no sense in several languages." Surely a portion of the time might be as innocently spent in learning something worth speaking in plain mother-English. When we add that, with all this wear and tear of brain, the pupils, ten to one, stick in the crust of words, and never get through into the marrow of thought, so as to be at home in it, our course can hardly be deemed the perfection of wisdom.

Our custom herein seems to involve some flagrant defect or error in our philosophy of education. The true process of education is to set and keep the mind in living intercourse with things; the works and ways of God in nature are our true educators. And the right office of language is to serve as the medium of such intercourse. And so the secret of a good style in writing is, that words be used purely in their representative character, and not at all for their own sake. This is well illustrated in Shakespeare, who in his earlier plays used language partly for its own sake, but in his latter plays all traces of such use disappear, here he uses it purely in its representative character. This it is, in great part, that makes his style so much at once the delight and the despair of those who now undertake to write the English tongue. And in other writers excellence of style is measured by approximation to this standard. This it is that so highly distinguishes Webster's style,—the best yet written on this continent. His language is so transparent that in reading him one seldom thinks of it, and can hardly see it. In fact the proper character of his style is perfect, consummate manliness; in which quality I make bold to affirm that he has no superior in the whole range of English authorship. And in his *Autobiography* the great man touches the secret as to how this came about. "While in college," says he, "I delivered two or three occasional addresses, which were published. I trust they are forgotten; they were in very bad taste. I had not then learned that all true power in writing is in the idea, not in the style; an error into which the *Arts Rhetorica*, as it is usually taught, may easily lead stronger heads than mine."