

Though, so far as we are able to learn, the subject of English composition is still very much neglected in the class-rooms of University College, the voluntary efforts of the students in their literary societies and their paper, are evidently doing much to remedy the defect.

Some recent utterances of Professor Hill, of Harvard University, set in a striking light the extent to which this matter of learning to write English is still neglected in some of the great Universities. Professor Hill has been since 1873 Examiner in this subject at Harvard. During those years he has read from 4000 to 5000 compositions on subjects drawn from books which the students were asked to read before examinations. Of the whole number he says that, "not more than a hundred—to make a generous estimate—were creditable" to the writers, in regard to either substance or form. Perhaps Professor Hill may have fallen into the essay error of trying the productions by too high a standard, but after all due allowance, the facts as he states them indicate a lamentable deficiency on the part of the average Harvard student in mastery of his own thinking powers, and of his mother tongue.

If we might be permitted to add to our congratulations, a mild criticism, we would suggest to the students of the University, that the name of their paper would be hard to defend on the ground of taste. No doubt they would repudiate the suggestion that the term "Varsity" is allied to slang, but to the uninitiated ear it is too suggestively like it. There is something in a name. Surely the resources which can give to the public a creditable book, can furnish an equally attractive and less harsh title for the College journal.

#### THE FORMATION OF HABITS.

The character might be not inaptly described as the sum total of the personal habits. As "the straw best shows how the wind blows," so the ordinary, comparatively unimportant act or speech affords a better guide to the real character than that which is studied and deliberate. In serious and critical cases the man has opportunity to take counsel with prudence, self-interest or expediency. He takes into account what the distant effects of his course of action may be, what others may think or say of it, how it will affect his reputation and future prospects, and governs himself accordingly. But the words spoken and things done on, as we say, "the spur of the moment," the perpetual succession of little actions which make up the bulk of every life, are more truly characteristic and may be regarded as the spontaneous outcome of what the man is in his own nature and training,

Education is largely a process of habit-forming. The most important work that is going on in the school room from day to day is the repetition of mental acts, which are gradually being crystallized into habits, under the operation of an irresistible law. These habits are all states of the one, indivisible mind, but may, nevertheless, for convenience-sake, be characterized as bodily, mental or moral, according to the modes in which they manifest themselves.

There is reason to fear that the tendency of the schools at the present day is in the direction of undervaluing bodily

habits. In the reaction from the stiff posturing and petty formalism which made many of the old time schools butts of vulgar sarcasm the pendulum has perhaps swung to the other extreme. To permit school children to occupy awkward or uncouth positions, or to indulge in disagreeable and offensive personal practices is to neglect an important duty, and to inflict often a life-long injury. To guard against whatever may be injurious to health, tend to physical deformity, or render the coming man or woman socially offensive, is surely one of the first obligations of the true teacher, an obligation springing directly from his superior knowledge, and his intimate relations to the pupil. Which of us has not met with individuals not lacking in intelligence or good sense, who yet are rendered personally disagreeable, and perhaps intolerable to the society to which they belong by place and education, simply because of some offensive habit, which could have been easily corrected in childhood or youth, but has become well-nigh inveterate.

Intellectual habits are of the very essence of education. By repeated acts of reasoning, comparing, discriminating, etc., the process becomes easy, the power is developed, and the habit established. This thinking habit is what chiefly distinguishes the educated from the uneducated. The man to whom the exercise of each faculty of mind has become easy through habit, brings all his powers of thought to bear instantaneously upon any matter of interest or importance, while he who has formed no such habit finds it laborious and fatiguing, if not impossible, to concentrate his mental forces at will upon any object, however worthy of attention.

The same law holds good in the moral sphere. One of the broadest moral differences between individuals is in regard to the habit of moral reflection. One is accustomed to think about the right and wrong of things. The other is not. Two persons may be conceived as equally conscientious, in so far as disposition to do what they see to be right and to avoid what they see to be wrong, is concerned. But, in a given case, the one unhesitatingly obeys self-interest, or impulse, or fashion, simply because he has not formed the habit of scrutinizing the moral quality of actions, while the other, clearly discerning a moral principle at stake, sternly refuses to do what is seen to be wrong.

Our aim is not to elaborate but merely to suggest else we might follow out the workings of this law of habit in a thousand ramifications in every-day life. A couple of illustrations must suffice.

Note the social and business value of the habit of mental accuracy. "Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well," is a law as forceful in its application to mental as to mechanical acts. The child should be taught to remember that everything is exactly this or that, and not indefinitely so. Some persons seem never able to fix any fact clearly and definitely in mind. They see every object as if through a kind of mental haze. They never can describe anything exactly, or remember any facts or figures definitely. Their minds have never been properly trained to clear, close, accurate observation.

Note again the incalculable value of such a habit as punctuality. The teacher who insists upon a time for everything and everything in its proper time is not only making his own