

since I last saw you. I perceive you have read much, and with attention and a desire of knowledge. In the first place however, I must frankly beg you to examine your Latin, and to convince yourself that in this respect much is wanting. I will not lay a stress on certain grammatical blunders: on this point I agree entirely with my dear friend Spalding, whom such blunders in his scholars did not provoke, provided his pointing them out availed by degrees to get rid of them. A worse fault is, that you have more than once broken down in a sentence; that you employ words in an incorrect sense; that your style is turgid and without uniformity; that you use your metaphors illogically. You do not write simply enough to express a thought unpretendingly, when it stands clearly before your mind. That your style is not rich and polished is no ground for blame; for although there have been some, especially in former times, who by a peculiarly happy management of a peculiar talent have gained such a style at your age, yet in ordinary cases such perfection is quite unattainable. Copiousness and nicety of expression imply a maturity of intellect, which can only be the result of a progressive development. But what every one can and ought to do, is, not to aim at an appearance of more than he really understands: but to think and express himself simply and correctly. Here, therefore, take a useful rule. When you are writing a Latin essay, think what you mean to say with the utmost distinctness you are capable of, and put it into the plainest words. Study the structure of the sentences in great writers; and exercise yourself frequently in imitating some of them: translate passages so as to break up the sentences; and when you translate them back again, try to restore the sentences. In this exercise you will not need the superintendence of your teacher; do it, however, as a preparation for the practice of riper years. When you are writing, examine carefully whether your language be of one color. It matters not to my mind, whether you attach yourself to that of Cicero and Livy, or to that of Tacitus and Quintilian: but one period you must choose. Else the result is a motley style, which is as offensive to a sound philologist, as if one were to mix up German of 1650 and of 1800.

You were very right not to send the two projected essays which you mention; because you can not possibly say any thing sound on such questions. Dissertations on particular points can not be written, until we have a distinct view of the whole region wherein they are comprised, until we can feel at home there, and moreover have a sufficient acquaintance with all their bearings upon other provinces of knowledge. It is quite another matter, that we must advance from the special to the general, in order to gain a true understanding of a complex whole. And here we need not follow any systematic order, but may give way to our accidental inclinations, provided we proceed cautiously, and do not overlook the gaps which remain between the several parts.

You have undertaken to write about the Roman colonies, and their influence on the State. Now it is quite impossible that you can have so much as a half-correct conception of the Roman colonies; and to write about their influence on the state, you should not only accurately understand the constitution of Rome and its history, but should be acquainted with the principles and history of politics; all of which as yet is impossible. When I say this, I will add, that none of us, who are entitled to the name of philologists, could have treated this subject at your age; not even Grotius, or Scaliger, or Salmassius, who were excellent grammarians so much earlier than any of us. Still less suited to you is your second subject. You must know enough of antiquity to be aware that the philosophy of young men, down to a much riper age than yours, consisted in silent listening, in endeavoring to understand and to learn. You can not even have an acquaintance with the facts, much less carry on general reflections,—to let pass the word *philosophical*,—on questions of minute detail, mostly problematical. To learn, my dear friend, to learn conscientiously,—to go on sifting and increasing our knowledge,—this is our speculative calling through life: and it is so most especially in youth, which has the happiness that it may give itself up without hindrance to the charms of the new intellectual world opened to it by books. He who writes a dissertation,—let him say what he will,—pretends to teach: and one can not teach without some degree of wisdom; which is the amendment that, if we strive after it, God will give us for the departing bliss of youth.

What I wish above all things to impress on you, my young friend, is, that you should purify your mind to entertain a sincere reverence for every thing excellent. This is the best dower of a youthful spirit, its surest guide.

I must now say something more to you about your style of writing. It is too verbose; and you often use false metaphors. Do not suppose that I am unreasonable enough to require a finished style. I expect not such from you, nor from any one at your age; but I would warn you against a false mannerism. All writing should merely be the expression of thought and speech. A man

should either write just as he actually delivers a continuous discourse, expressing his genuine thoughts accurately and fully; or, as he would speak, if placed in circumstances in which in real life he is not placed, where he might be called upon to do so. Every thing should spring from thought; and the thoughts should fashion the structure of the words. To be able to do this, we must study language, must enrich our memory with an abundant supply of words and phrases, whether in our mother tongue, or in foreign tongues, living or dead, must learn to define words precisely, and to determine the idiomatic meaning of phrases, and their limits. The written exercises of a boy or lad should have no other object than to develop his power of thinking, and to enrich and purify his language. If we are not content with our thoughts,—if we twist and turn about under a feeling of our emptiness, writing becomes terribly up-hill work, and we have hardly courage to persevere in it. This was my case at your age, and long after. There was no one who would enter into my distress and assist me; which in my youth would have been easy.

Above all things, however, in every branch of literature and science, must we preserve our truth so pure, as utterly to shun all false show,—so as never to assert any thing, however slight, for certain, of which we are not thoroughly convinced,—so as to take the utmost pains, when we are expressing a conjecture, to make the degree of our belief apparent. If we do not, where it is possible, ourselves point out defects which we perceive, and which others are not likely to discover,—if, when we lay down our pen, we can not say, in the presence of God, *I have written nothing knowingly, which after a severe examination, I do not believe to be true, in nothing have I deceived my reader, either with regard to myself or others; nor have I set my most odious adversary in any other light than I would answer for at my last hour*,—if we can not do this, learning and literature make us unprincipled and depraved.

Here I am conscious that I demand nothing from others, of which a higher spirit, reading my soul, could reproach me with ever having done the reverse. This scrupulousness, combined with my conception of what a philosopher can and ought to be, if he comes before the world, and with my reverence for great scholars, made me so reluctant, long after I had attained to manhood, to appear with any work. Though often urged to do so, not without reproaches, by my friends, I felt that my hour was not yet come; which, had my life taken another course, might have come several years earlier.

From a young man, were it merely as an exercise of honesty, I demand the most scrupulous truth in literature, as in all other things, absolutely and without exception; so that it may become an integral part of his nature; or rather, that the truth, which God planted in his nature, may abide there. By it alone can we fight our way through the world. The hour when my Marcus should say an untruth, or give himself the show of a merit which he had not, would make me very unhappy.

I come now to another part of my task of giving you advice. I wish you were not so fond of satires, even of Horace's. Turn to those works which elevate the heart, in which you see great men and great events, and live in a higher world: turn away from those which represent the mean and contemptible side of ordinary relations and degenerate ages. They are not fitted for the young; and the ancients would not have let them fall into your hands. Homer, Æschylus, Sophocles, Pindar,—these are the poets for youth, the poets with whom the great men of antiquity nourished themselves; and as long as literature shall give light to the world, they will ennoble the youthful souls, that are filled with them, for life. Horace's Odes, as copies of Greek models, are also good reading for the young; and I regret that it is become the practice to depreciate them, which only a few masters are entitled to do, or can do without arrogance. In his Epistles, Horace is original, and more genial; but he who reads them intelligently, reads them with sorrow; they can not do good to any one. We see a man of noble disposition, but who, from inclination and reflection, tries to adapt himself to an evil age, and who has given himself up to a vile philosophy, which does not prevent his continuing noble, but lowers all his views. His morality rests on the principle of suitableness, decorum, reasonableness; he declares expediency (to take the most favorable expression) to be the source of the idea of right (Sat. I. iii. 98). Baseness discomposes him, and excites him, not to anger, but to a slight chastisement. That admiration for virtue, which constrains us to scourge vice, and which we see not only in Tacitus, but also in Juvenal,—in the latter disgustingly,—is not found in Horace. Juvenal, however, you must not read yet, with the exception of a few pieces: nor is this any loss; for even if you might be allowed to read him, it would not be wholesome at your age, to dwell on the contemplation of vice, instead of enriching your mind with great thoughts.