

impart a good style to every pupil, than we can make every pupil a good scholar; but a great deal can be done even for the poorest. The ease with which the style of some writers can be copied, is well known. Every student of the literature of the latter part of last century, knows to what extent the style of Dr. Johnson was imitated; and in our own day, many an aspiring poet copies the style and expression of Tennyson, and dozens of writers are fond of breaking sentences, or jerking them forth, in imitation of Carlyle. Many a man has laboriously written out again and again some work of a favourite author, in order to acquire his style—I have read of one who re-wrote the greater part of Goldsmith ten times for this purpose. This practice is certainly not to be commended, for it leaves no room for originality; it binds the thought to a form not native to it—it does not reproduce the man. The writers whose style pleases us most, in addition to inborn genius, have invariably been wide readers and careful ones; from a wide field their taste has led them to select word, and form, and expression, best suited to what they themselves wished to utter. They have rarely dashed off their periods at random—they have worked with the greatest care, correcting and re-correcting, both in manuscript and in proof; or have carefully put their sentences together, before placing them on paper. But this repeated correction is possible only where there is a large store to draw from; the man of one word must always say the same thing in the same way—hence the necessity again of wide reading. This practice, then, of our best writers is the one, in principle, that I decidedly recommend.

Whatever power the pupil may have naturally, *that* must be brought out as much as possible; he should be left to himself, to write and speak just as

he thinks; the only condition imposed upon him should be of making his meaning clear; emphatically, he must have no *rules*, they are but fetters that bind the mind, or moulds into which thought, and expression, and mind, must be crushed and made shapeless things. It cannot be too urgently insisted upon, that Nature must be *free* in this respect, as in all others, if good is to be the result. Rambling and unconnected enough will be the first efforts; but under the care of the judicious teacher, this will in time be corrected.

Most of the elaborate works on "Composition" are not worth the paper they are printed on; the little work of Dr. Abbott, called "How to Write Clearly," is worth more than all the others I have ever met. It confines itself to giving specimens of bad English, indicating why they are bad; and shewing that in the main they violate the cardinal principle of all composition—the clear unambiguous transmission of thought from one mind to another;—or else that they involve some absurdity, readily perceived by everyone who has read much. These are not *rules*; they cannot be taught; an error cannot be picked out by rule; and if the pupil cannot perceive the error after his attention has been drawn to it, if he fails to see it, or *feel* it at once, no rule can make him see it in future; he *must know in himself* what the practice of the language is; and then, and not till then, will an error be obvious to him. This practice of the language can be made valuable only by wide reading. Hitherto our study of English has been upon a false principle. We have been studying it as if it were a foreign language, in which *rule* is a necessity—this is one of the vices bequeathed to us by the study of the Latin and Greek Classics.

I have said that a good style in writing cannot be imparted by rule, nor yet