

SENTENCE-MAKING AS DISTINGUISHED FROM THE
DISSECTION OF SENTENCES.*

PRACTICAL methods of teaching are gradually gaining the ascendancy over the old system of cramming, and our schools are being taught by hard experience that the human mind is not a mere bag to be filled with knowledge, but that its several parts must grow in proportion, keeping touch and time together in the unity of a common sap and circulation, else growth itself is but decay in disguise. Losing sight of the fact that education is from within, we frequently, alas! destroy the productive, living power, by *pouring in too much and drawing out too little*. A farmer may till the ground, after the most approved fashion, the rains may water it, and the sun may diffuse his heat upon it; but if no seed has been deposited in the soil, the farmer will look in vain for a harvest. So is it in the cultivation of the mental soil: if we put in no seed we shall look in vain for an intellectual harvest. Again, our Canadian champion does not strengthen his muscle for boat racing by pounding iron on an anvil, but by getting into a boat and taking hold of a pair of oars. As in the education of the body so is it in the education of the mind: whatever we desire our pupils to *do* or to *know* we must set them right at it. While we believe that Canada has reason to be proud of her educational institutions, and while we believe, too, that her schools are giving their pupils much useful instruction, yet we fear that in many instances they are entirely failing to impart to them the most important

and fundamental power—that of using their native tongue readily and well. If language is the most useful instrument of the human family, and the widest avenue to man's highest and noblest study, is it not of great importance that our schools should spare no pains in imparting to their pupils this all-important and fundamental power; and if the sentence is the foundation, so to speak, of grammar and composition, and the threshold, too, of the golden palace of literature, is it not of vital moment that such a foundation should be of the choicest material and firmly laid? Some would have us believe that grammar teaches language, but experience, which is higher authority, furnishes ample demonstration of the fact that such is not the case. If it be true that grammar teaches language, how is it that high proficiency in this art has been acquired by those who have had a very limited acquaintance with the technicalities of the art, but who have had a loving acquaintance with the words of some favourite authors—masters of expression, and models of beauty in style? On the other hand, how is it that men who have spent their lives in the study of language and languages have fallen into error and ambiguity in the use of their mother-tongue?

We hold that an acquaintance with technical grammar is not indispensable to a practical understanding of language, which in all its aspects is a matter of habit rather than of rule. The present occasion moves me to protest with all possible earnestness against the introduction of technical grammar in the earlier stages of a Public School course, as I am fully persuaded that it is unprofitable and,

[* The Editor has inadvertently mislaid the communication that accompanied the MS. of this article. He is therefore unable in the present issue to give credit to its author. If the contributor will be good enough to communicate with the office, the acknowledgment will appear in next issue.]