

they may be compared in their effects to that subtle fluid we call caloric, which, wherever it exists in any strong degree, passes insensibly into all homogeneous bodies, and introduces the same temperature into them all. Here, then, gentlemen, is an important principle to guide us in acquiring a good English style; and on the strength of it I would say to you—peruse the best English authors, that you may write with a like ease and elegance. Study those writers who have excelled in writing at once with beauty and with vigour. As the poet expresses it, “read them by day, and study them by night,” and you will insensibly, and almost without an effort, acquire a relish for their graces, and when you sit down to write, you will feel it to be natural for you to transfuse these into your own. It has been on this ground that many have argued the importance of the study of the classical writers of Greece and Rome, of Homer and Xenophon, of Virgil and Livy—not so much from the positive accession of knowledge we acquire by this means, as from the excellent models which such works present to the young student of chaste and eloquent writing. Nay, some writers on rhetoric, in recommending the study of the best models of composition as a highly suitable means of acquiring an easy and vigorous style, have advised a preparatory training in the way of translating passages from Greek and Latin authors into English—arguing that in this way the mind of the student is brought into close and immediate contact with the best models by which to form his taste and his style. Still, I do not think that the general student is required, for the sake of finding suitable examples of good writing, to commence the study of the language of Greece or Rome. No doubt there was a period in the history of our country when this was necessary—when our language was rude and ill defined*—then assuredly it was the duty, not merely of professional men, such as clergymen, physicians, and lawyers, to study the Greek and Latin classics, but of all, of every profession who aimed at writing with any measure of politeness and energy. In the fifteenth century, for example, when the best literature of our country consisted of little else than a few ballads chaunted by the rustic minstrel, there was a real necessity for all who thirsted for poetic or literary distinction, having recourse to the pages of Virgil or of Homer, those great masters of song; but now that our literature has been enriched by the writings of men of genius as great and accomplished as the world has ever seen—by the writings of Shakspeare, of the sublime Milton, of Addison, Pope, Thomson, Gibbon, Robertson, Burke, Dugald Stewart, Chalmers, and a hundred others of like fame—there exists not the same necessity as in the infancy of our literature. The general student, therefore, whose aim

* See Chambers' *History of the English Language and Literature*, Edinburgh, 1830, p. 4.