

Metaphors and Similes.—A simile is comparison by means of which anything is illustrated or explained. A metaphor is a condensed simile, or the substitution of an idea which properly applies to one thing for some other idea associated with the first, but which applies to another thing. So the simile in "he checked his anger as one who bridled a horse" is condensed into a metaphor in "he bridled his anger," the idea of bridling which applies to a horse being substituted for the associated idea of checking, which applies to anger. A metaphor or a simile may aid the understanding, call forth or intensify a feeling, or give an agreeable surprise. As Mr. R. G. Moulton has said,* the main interest of metaphor, as of all imagery, belongs to the actual association of the two ideas, one of which is substituted for the other—the way in which that association assists the vividness of poetic realization, or appeals, by its newness, quaintness, intrinsic beauty, to the imagination. It is plain that the teacher should be continually conscious of this, and endeavour, by expanding, questioning out, and picturing out the metaphors, to bring their force and beauty home to his pupils. Keats' "nest of woe" where the wounded Titans lie and writhe—which reminds one of Shakespeare's "nest of death" (in "Romeo and Juliet"), and Tennyson's "high nest of penance" (in "St. Simon Stylites"). But it is hardly necessary for me to give examples. The whole language is alive with metaphor, and gains much of its force by this means. Very much of this metaphorical meaning, however, has now become

unconscious; and it is only when it is conscious that we can reckon it as a poetic implement. We must therefore be careful to consider how far this is likely to have been the case when the poet in question wrote. For example, horrid, hideous, secure, etc., are almost certain to be metaphorically alive in Milton, and not very likely to be so in Tennyson.

It is even more important for us to pay attention to similes, not only because they play so prominent and so varied a part in general speech, and above all in poetry, but because experience tells us that our pupils (like ourselves) are very liable, especially when the simile is pretty in itself, to pass on, content with a very hazy notion as to what the comparison really implies, and so to lose much of the beauty, and not a little of the meaning. Poets themselves sometimes get lost in their own similes, and go on elaborating them without any thought of their original purpose. Keats, and even Milton do so occasionally. I cannot but think that, even in so simple a case as "like summer tempest came her tears," it is worth while to pause and ask the children what the most marked characteristic of the coming of a summer tempest is, and how the coming of her tears resembled it. In this matter it would be well for the teacher to make some little study of the use of similes—in such a book as Bain's "Rhetoric and Composition," for instance; or to specially observe their varying literary purpose in some such master of similes as Homer, Virgil, Spenser, Milton or Pope. The picture-making simile—as when Milton makes the council-hall in Hell rise like an exhalation, or Satan in Chaos spring upward like a pyramid of fire, or cherubs descend on Eden like evening mist; the expository simile, to help the understanding, as that of scale, when Milton compares Satan to

* In the spring of 1890, Mr. R. G. Moulton delivered an admirable course of lectures on "Milton's Poetic Art" to large audiences in the North of England. In these lectures he treated Milton's similes and metaphors very fully.