

the definition of it was called for along down the line in a similar manner. And so on till all had given out their selections.

That was not a bad plan, was it?—Many a worse thing may be done in school than learning the dictionary.—Have you never heard how Daniel Webster answered one who inquired in what way he could become skillful and fluent in the use of language? “Read dictionaries,” said he; “I read dictionaries.” Are such books too dry to read, think you? There is great benefit in reading them, nevertheless; I know that from my own experience. Anybody might know as much from his own common sense. Why, just think a minute. A good English Dictionary, for instance, contains all the words in our language, together with an exhibition of their meaning and use. What readier way, then, can one take, to form an acquaintance with our language, and to gain a full command of it, than to study the dictionary, and transfer its treasures to the mind?

This, though, is not what I set out to say, exactly. I had in mind a little incident connected with our spelling and defining, that amused us prodigiously one day. A certain scholar, remarkable for nothing in particular, except for a quantity of sense a little less than common, when his turn came to deliver the word he had selected, roared out with considerable vigor, “*b-u-t, but.*” Instantly we all put on a broad grin, and turned our eyes to the teacher to see what turn affairs would take. We had to wait but a short time for that. Mr. Brownjohn soon began, as usual, to call for the definition of the word. I suspect he did so just for form’s sake. If he really thought we could give the meaning of such a word as *but*, he must have had a pretty high opinion of our abilities, or, at least, of our acquaintance with the niceties of language. Had we thought of it, we might, indeed, have referred to Noah Webster’s famous old spelling-book, where, next to “*butt, a barrel,*” stood “*but, except.*” In fact, however, none of us thought of it; nor would that account of the matter have thrown much light into our minds, had some one chanced to have refreshed our memories with it.

Down went the word along the class, one frankly owning that he could tell nothing about it, and another shaking his head in sign of ignorance; till at length a fellow who stood away toward the foot, began to show symptoms of having caught the idea. His eye twinkled, a smile of satisfaction beamed in his face, and he stood with one foot advanced, ready for a movement along up the line. His whole look and manner thus declared to us, about as plainly as his tongue could, “Ah! now I have it.” He seemed impatient to deliver himself, and the instant his turn came he sounded out boldly—“*but end of a log;*” and before the word was fairly out of his mouth, he made a spring for a considerably higher place in the class. Mr. Brownjohn gave him a check, however, and told him that his definition of the word would hardly do. If we had not then a hearty laugh all round, then we never had one in that old brown school-house.

“Did not that fellow pass among his companions for a genius?” I rather think not. I never heard anything of the kind. If I remember right, we considered him remarkable for nothing but this: he had a way, both in speaking and in reading, of putting what we called a *hook* on to the end of a word; as, for example, “All men think all men mortal but themselves—*eh.*” It may be, though, that he had genius, and that it began to bud on that very day when that little incident happened. At any rate, I know that he grew to something afterward. Only three or four of those who attended our school at that time ever got a liberal education; and he was one of them.

After leaving college, he worked himself up in the world to—I can’t tell you where. The last time I heard of him, which was several years ago, he was labouring as a teacher in a high-school.—You see there is no telling beforehand what a boy will make. Sometimes dull scholars, and those who are despised and laughed at, yet wake up and outstrip their fellows, and come to shine as lights in the world.

SNAKE CHARMING.

Our incredulity on this subject was entirely put to flight not long since. While riding on the post road between

Tower Hill and Kingston, England, our attention was suddenly attracted by the fluttering of a robin, which appeared to try “each fond endearment,” to distract the attention of something. Looking over the wall, the mystery was solved at once. About a rod from the first bird in such distress, raised, a foot or more above the grass, we saw the head of an enormous black snake. His “arrowy tongue” was flickering back and forth—his head waved gently to and fro, and all the time his basilisk eyes glittering like little diamonds with their fatal fascination. The other robin hovered over him, flying round and round in a circle, and drawing nearer and nearer, every stroke of its wing, to open destruction. Our astonishment was broken by the still piping of the mate, endeavoring to break the spell, and not without some reluctance did we interrupt the scene. The bird, joined by its faithful companion, sprang away like Noah’s dove, while his snakeship, angry and sullen, crawled away to look for some ignoble game.

INFLUENCE OF TREES UPON CLIMATE.

Joachim Frederic Sahouw, Professor of Botany at Copenhagen, speaks as follows of the influence of forests upon the atmosphere: “We find the most evident signs of it in the torrid zone. The forests increase the rain and moisture, and produce springs and running streams. Tracts destitute of woods become very strongly heated, the air above them ascends perpendicularly, and thus prevents the clouds from sinking, and the constant winds (trade winds or monsoons), where they can blow uninterruptedly over large surfaces, do not allow the transition of vapors into the form of drops. In the forests, on the contrary, the clothed soil does not become so heated, and, besides the evaporation from the trees, favors cooling; therefore, when the currents of air loaded with vapors reach the forests, they meet with that which condenses them and change into rain. Since, moreover, evaporation of the earth goes on more slowly beneath the trees, and since these also evaporate very copiously in a hot climate, the atmosphere in those forests has a high degree of humidity, this great humidity at the same time producing many springs and streams.