

Professor Roberts starts with the common-sense, though far from universally recognized, principle—that “all vital teaching of English with culture and enlightened citizenship for its object, must be conveyed directly through the literature of the language,” which is “teaching by example, and becomes a living influence.” He compares this with the old dry hand-book style of teaching rhetoric, which, even if its precepts are retained like dry bones in the memory, can only “furnish some ingenious but harmless weapons for the light warfare of pedantic criticism,” while the direct teaching “supplies incentive to effort and intellectual guidance in the effort,” and “the supreme essential of that teaching, which is to educate, not to coach, is *inspiration*.”

The purposes to be served by the teaching of English, Professor Roberts classes under three heads: “First, the discipline of the faculties, or mental calisthenics, an object to be attained with perhaps equal effect and with less effort to the instructor by means of certain other studies which serve this one purpose only; second, the power of effective expression in written or spoken words; and third, culture—intellectual and moral—whereby I mean a just perception of the relations of things, a social insight, a capacity for wise patriotism, and a realization of the essential unity existing between beauty and rightness.” The teaching of English, like the teaching of some other branches, is too often made a species of “mental calisthenics,” an aim which is sometimes unconsciously exposed when teachers talk of making a course “stiff”—making it “as hard as possible,” instead of making the study a delight, and consequently a labour of love, as English Literature ought to be, to all intelligent students under a really competent and inspiring teacher.

To go back to Professor Roberts article, here is another passage of much practical value: “To turn to the practical work of teaching English, my own view is that the avowed object of instruction should be literary, in a broad sense, and that the dryer points of language and structure should be instilled incidentally, though persistently, by a process of emphasizing examples. In these days, one of the most practically valuable equipments which education can furnish is the power of effective expression. As one’s conversation is more affected by the speech of his familiars than by the rules of his grammar book, so is one’s style influenced by the books with which he associates rather than by the directions of his composition primer. To the avoidance of certain palpable errors the composition primer may contribute, but its effects will hardly be traced to the formation of a pure and telling style. This is to be acquired by two means chiefly: by persistent and reflective study of good models, and by assiduous practice. The reading of many masterpieces will have less effect upon a student’s expression than will the oft-repeated searching of a few. The judicious teacher, therefore, seeks above all to make his pupils intimate with their model, impressing and re-impressing on their minds the various excellences to which its greatness is due.”

In regard to the too common practice of giving pupils “paraphrasing” for an exercise, Professor Roberts strictures are not too strong: “To set a pupil deliberately to the task of expressing feebly what has already found perfect expression at the hands of a master—be it in prose or verse—seems to me one of the strangest methods of instruction that ever seduced to itself the approval of instructors. To dismember and then hideously reconstruct a matchless paragraph; to torment the melody