

ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS.*

The republication of one volume of Mr. Hudson's essays on "English Literature in Schools," affords teachers the opportunity of obtaining, at a trifling cost, a book of great merit. Its value consists in this, that in it a great Shakespearian scholar, who is both a forcible writer and one of the best of living teachers, has laid down the principles of his method of instruction, and his views as to the place of his special subject in the school programme. There is no teacher who will not be benefited by reading it.

All agree that a certain amount of reading, writing, and arithmetic should be the basis of every course of mental training. But there are great diversities of opinion as to what should be given in addition. Practically, both here and in the United States, teachers have gone in for mental gymnastics. That is to say, their attention has been directed almost exclusively to the sharpening of the logical faculty to the neglect of the others, and without any attempt to regulate the mental diet. The most extensive course of solving mathematical problems, of parsing and analysing, of memorising historical, geographical and scientific facts, and of acquiring the words, idioms and grammars of other languages will do little towards furnishing the mind with ideas, towards developing nobility of soul, towards building up a taste for that which is substantial and of lasting interest, instead of for that which it is the vulgar and fleeting fashion of the time to admire. The effect of this one-sided cultivation of the intellect is to be seen in the intolerable flippancy and vulgarity of the great majority of those who have been educated in the public and high schools. And how could it be otherwise? No pains are taken to set up any lofty standard of thinking or living before the pupils, and with faculties sharpened by the drill of the school, they are turned out to feed on what may turn up, be it the ambrosia of the gods or the vilest garbage. "I suspect," says Mr. Hudson, "it has been taken for granted much too generally that if people know how to read, they will be apt enough to make good use of that knowledge without further concern. A very great mistake! This faculty is quite as liable to abuse as any other; probably there is none other more sadly abused at this very time; none that needs to be more carefully fenced about with the safeguards of judgment and taste. Through this faculty crowds of our young people are let into the society of such things as can only degrade and corrupt, and, to a great extent, are positively drawn away from the fellowship of such as would elevate and correct. Most probably, not less than seven-eighths of the books now read are simply a discipline of debasement; ministering fierce stimulants and provocatives to the lower propensities, and habituating the thoughts to the mud and slime of literary cesspools and slop-cooks."

For correcting this evil nothing can be better than to endeavor to implant in the young a taste for good reading. The next question is, to what place in the school programme the

relative importance of English literature entitles it. On this point Mr. Hudson says: "My conclusions from the whole is, that, next to the elementary branches, and some parts of science, such as geography, astronomy, and what is called natural philosophy, standard authors in English literature ought to have a place in our school education. Nor am I sure but that, instead of thus postponing the latter to science, it were still better to put them on an equal footing with it. For they draw quite as much into the practical currents of our American life as any studies properly scientific do; and, which is of yet higher regard, they have it in them to be much more effective in shaping the character. For they are the right school of harmonious culture as distinguished from mere formal knowledge; that is, they are a discipline of humanity; and to have the soul rightly alive to the difference between the noble and the base is better than understanding the laws of chemical affinity."

The principal object with which pupils should read an author is to commune with him and drink in his spirit. They are to be brought into contact with a great soul and with noble thoughts. They should read, therefore, enough of that author to become well acquainted with him. Books made up of selections from a great many authors are not likely to be the most useful in inspiring a taste for good reading. Nor are works on rhetoric, histories of literature and voluminous notes likely to be other than hindrances. The teacher, when in charge of the literature class, must cease to be an instructor in mental gymnastics. If he bring his pupils to take delight in what they are reading, and to feel the beauty or the grandeur of the thoughts, he is successful. But he cannot accomplish this by any process of analysis; he must himself feel, and infect his class with his feelings. All exercises in grammar, philology, figures of speech or metre—all explanation or catechizings as to proper names, allusions, and the literary or other history of the work, the author, or his epoch—all critical discussion of various readings, should be made strictly subsidiary to this one aim.

It is clear that the subject cannot be dealt with by the method of recitation. To tell a class to prepare a certain portion of the author, with the notes thereon, is to defeat the very object with which he should be read. The time and mental force of the class are devoted to the words and thoughts of obscure commentators instead of to those of the author. We are of opinion that when a class is reading a work for the first time, no questions should be asked which the notes will assist the pupils in answering. Let the time be devoted to gaining the meaning and to reading. A good reader, if he has literary taste, can do more to diffuse a love of sound, healthy literature among his pupils than any mere gerund or note-grinder.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN NOVA SCOTIA.

The Nova Scotia column of our March issue referred to pending questions of interest in relation to collegiate education in that Province.

This month we are informed that some of these questions have been temporarily, if not decisively and permanently, set-

* English in Schools: a series of essays by Henry N. Hudson, Professor of Shakespeare in Boston University; author of "Life, Art, and Characters of Shakespeare," Editor of the Harvard Edition of Shakespeare's Complete Works, and of the Annotated Series of English Classics for School Use. Boston: published by Ginn & Heath, 1881.