

rhythm, without a gleam of imagination, without a touch of fancy, they have been set down to write verses; and these verses are to be in an unknown tongue, in which they scarcely possess a germ of the scantiest vocabulary, or a mastery of the most simple construction; and, further, it is to be in strict imitation of poets, of whom at the best they have only read a few score of lines. English passages of varying difficulty, but to them for the most part hopeless, are then placed in their unresisting hands, accompanied by dictionaries mainly intended for use in prose composition, and by those extraordinary herbaria of cut and dried "poetical" phrases, known by the ironical title of *Gradus ad Parnassum*. The bricks are to be made, and such is the straw of which to make them. And since the construction of the verse often depends on the knowledge of phrases or constructions which a boy either never knew, or is unable to apply, what wonder that in the "Latin," which he endeavours to torture into rhythm, "changes of seasons" takes the form of "*condimentorum mutationes*," and "the sunbeams" are metamorphosed into "*Phœbi trabes?*" Over such materials the unfortunate lad will sit glowering in dim perplexity, if he be diligent, or vaguely trifling, if he be idle, ready with the indisputable defence of "I can't do the verse," when the *Deus ex machinâ* appears in the shape of some weary and worried tutor.

In the natural course of things, a boy, long before he has mastered these elementary difficulties, will be promoted into a higher form, and presented with a more difficult phase of work. This is very frequently embodied in verse books consisting of old prize-exercises, baldly re-translated into English, of which some portion is withheld in every line, until, towards the end of the book, a word or two stands for an entire period. In these narrow grooves the boy's imagination is forced to run. He is required, under all the inexorable exigencies of metre, to reproduce in artificial and phraseological Latin the highly elaborate thoughts of grown men, to piece their mutilated fancies, and reproduce their fragmentary conceits. In most cases the very possibility of doing so depends on his hitting upon a particular epithet, which presents the requisite combination of longs and shorts, or on his evolving some special and often recondite turn of thought or expression. Supposing, for instance (to take a very easy line, typical of many thousands of lines), he has to write as a pentameter—

"Where Acheron rolls waters,"

he will feel that his entire task is to write—

"Where something Acheron rolls something waters."

His one object is to get in the "something" which shall be of the right shape to screw into the line. The epithet may be ludicrous, it may be grotesque; but provided he can make his brick, he does not trouble himself about the quality of the straw, and it matters nothing to him if it be a brick such as could not by any possibility be used in any human building. It is a literal fact, that a boy very rarely reads through the English he is doing, or knows when it has been turned into Latin, what it is all about: hence, for the next year or two, his life resolves itself into a boundless hunt after epithets of the right shape to be screwed into the greatest number of places; a practice exactly analogous to the putting together of Chinese puzzles, (1) only producing a much less homogeneous and congruous result.

At the next stage of promotion, or often earlier, a boy is forced to begin a far more desolate and hunger-bitten search, for something, sarcastically denominated "ideas of his own," to clothe the skeleton, or the "vulgus," presented to him for his "copy of verses." Now, long and laborious as this course is, dreadful and unremitting as is the miserable drudgery which it entails upon

1 "The same instinct which guides the infant in putting his wooden bricks together, or a little girl in clothing her doll, lies at the bottom of verse-making." I take this sentence from a deliberate defence of the practice by one of the ablest of our modern classical scholars!

the tutor, yet it is so universally unsuccessful, that by the time such a boy is required to do "originals," or to turn English poetry into Latin, he either succumbs in hopeless desperation, or only with cruel sweat of the brain succeeds in achieving a result which both he and his tutor equally despise. What wonder that many bright and promising boys, whose abilities do not lie in this direction, are either crushed under this worse than Egyptian bondage, or require the entire fortitude of their best principles of honour to abstain from using such means of deliverance as lie most easily within their reach. Many do not do so. I have known some who left school in sheer weariness and disgust, or deliberately chose one of the unlearned professions: some, who losing all ambition, and all regard for intellectual culture, contented themselves with the baldest and meanest minimum which would save them from positive disgrace; and many, who with few or no twinges of conscience, availed themselves of old vulguses, borrowed lines, rough copies, corrected copies, and every form of illicit aid, direct or indirect, which could get them, without detection and punishment, through a labour which they believed to be useless, and knew to be impossible.

It may, however, be hinted that I have been unlucky in my experience; and, therefore, as I take no sort of credit to myself for the result, let me be allowed to say that I have, on the contrary, been very far from unfortunate in the number of brilliant composers whom I have had the good fortune to call my pupils; and yet, out of reams and reams of verses which it has been my lot during the last twelve years to correct, I do not believe that there have been half a dozen which I should think worth preserving for their intrinsic merit. I have heard teachers of long standing express the most perfect contentment while admitting that they have never produced a single good composer; but if any one thinks that a tutor may fairly plume himself on the development, here and there, of a Porson prizeman or Camden medallist, he little knows the mysteries of our system! In it alone are things taught with no hope of their being learnt, and with no expectation of their being subsequently practised. In it alone no tutor is held responsible for the vast multitude who fail—the failure is due to innate incapacity; in it alone no tutor gets any credit for the few who succeed—the success is the result of heaven-born talents which would have been developed equally well by any teacher under any system! In a word, everybody seems to be content, though the thing nominally taught is but very rarely learnt, and though the tutor's failure on the one hand involves no discredit, and his success on the other earns no praise.

(To be continued.)

On Teaching English Grammar.

(By E. T. D. CHAMBERS, CHAMBLY.)

In a former paper on this subject, I endeavoured to point out to teachers, the great necessity which exists for the devotion of more time and attention on their part to the teaching of English Grammar.

From the Report of the Ontario Inspector of Grammar Schools, extracts from which were quoted in the "Journal of Education" for June, under the heading "Reform in the Schools of Ontario," it is evident that the majority of pupils attending school in the neighbouring province are likewise very deficient in a knowledge of our mother tongue.

But as it does not well become a teacher to dwell on the imperfections and short comings of his brethren of the scholastic profession I shall endeavour to exculpate myself from blame on this point, by stating that I consider the necessity which I have spoken of for greater attention to the study of grammar, necessary to justify me, in venturing to make further remarks on the manner of teaching it.

For the benefit of teachers then and others, who take an interest in finding out the simplest and best way of teaching the