

much better still—and it is easy to see that the payment of interest on the amount borrowed will be an insignificant charge on the section in comparison with the relief it will afford the already overworked and overburdened teacher. No man, especially if he has a family dependent upon him, can be expected to discharge his duties as well while harrassed with care and anxiety as when he is by the wise forethought of his employers freed from all trouble of this kind.

—The English Literature for the December Intermediate and Second Class Examinations embraces one of Goldsmith's poems, "The Deserted Village," the "Traveller" being added for 1878. Those interested in the matter will find it useful to study these texts as edited by C. Sankey, M.A., and published by Rivingtons. They are published in one small volume, the poems being preceded by a good critical biography, and accompanied by elaborate notes and references. Even those who have no idea of going up for examination, but appreciate Goldsmith for his own sake, should study him in this admirable little edition.

Contributions and Correspondence.

THE STUDY OF ENGLISH IN OUR SCHOOLS.

BY G. A. CHASE, B.A.

II.

There arises now the important question, "How is our language to be taught in our public schools since grammar is ineffectual? What process is to be pursued in order to gain accuracy, clearness and forcibleness of expression, together with the mental training that grammar is supposed to give?" In principle the same process is to be pursued as the one with which the pupil has been familiar from his earliest years, and which gave him the power to express his childish thoughts simply and clearly.

In point of language, the beneficial effects resulting from cultivated society can scarcely be over-estimated. In our schools, the boy whose parents are educated is readily distinguished by his language from the one whose parents are not educated; the child on whose ears good English has always fallen, will use good English himself. He may not, indeed, be able to give the reason why one mode of expression under certain circumstances is better than another; or why one particular form of a word is right and another wrong; but his own language will be correct, age only being wanting to enable him to reason on the choice of words. In the school-room the children of the educated are found side by side with those of the uneducated; to correct the language of the one by means of grammar is a hopeless task, that of the other is good without the grammar. In the one case the language, being good already, has only to be extended; in the other it has to be both improved and extended. *The same method will exactly answer the requirements of both: put before both models of the best English.*

"E. K." in accounting for the archaic diction of Spenser's "Shephear's Calender," says, "In whom (i.e., Chaucer, &c.), when as this our poet hath bin much travailed and throughly read, how could it be, (as that worthy orator sayde), but that walking in the sunne, althouth for other cause he walked, yet needes he mought be sunburnt; and, having the sound of these ancient poets still ringing in his ears, he mought needes, in singing, hit out some of their tunes."

The same principle is emphatically insisted upon by Macaulay. "Give a boy," he says, "'Robinson Crusoe.' That is worth all the grammars of rhetoric and logic in the world." When the interest is engaged and the attention fixed, the turn of expression will be stamped upon the reader's memory; the language of narrative, of conversation, of oratory, of poetry; the inversions, the changes that bring the idea vividly before the mind, will all be grasped in their very life: a result that no rule, no reasoning, no philosophical discussion, no parsing could produce.

Apart from inborn aptitude, the power of using language well depends almost wholly upon imitation; or, as Professor Whitney puts it, "there must be a reference to direct authority." This power of not only using the words we employ in their accepted meaning, but also of having a wide and varied vocabulary at command from which to select words expressing the nicest shades of idea, is gained solely from extensive and careful reading over a wide field. My own experience as a teacher of language has, without doubt, been the same as that of others; in questions involving no grammatical "rule," but only of correct usage, or the reason of a certain usage, the boy who has read the widest and with the most care gives the best answer, although he may be comparatively ignorant of grammar. Dictionaries are good in their way, and grammars, and books of synonyms; but they fail, and necessarily fail, to reach the spirit with which our words are uttered. The object we have in view, the state of mind in which we are, must guide what we have to say, both in form and order. Will heartfelt sorrow make itself known in words chosen by art? Will joy or invective keep within the bounds of artificial rule?

No language can boast of a literature more extensive, more varied, or more excellent than ours; models of the best English in various styles are practically unlimited; every age and every taste can be readily satisfied, whether it ask poetry, oratory, narrative, fiction, or the essay; we may range from the Victorian English of De Quincey to the era of Shakespeare, or even of Chaucer. This wealth of literature is now practically forbidden to the vast majority of our pupils, and as they will have something they betake themselves to "Books for Boys," the "Boys' Own," and such like stuff. If we complain of the vitiated taste of our young people; if we lament, the craving for sensational literature, our schools and school authorities are chiefly to blame for it. The remedy lies within their hands, and we sincerely hope it will be applied. Give the science of language its proper place, but let it be the learner's first aim to acquire language itself, and that where it can be obtained in its richest, purest and fullest form, the masterpieces of our literature. If, instead of this, and under the fancied notion that we are taking the proper method for imparting a correct knowledge of our language, we put into the hands of our pupils, or even teachers, "composition books or grammars," we do harm where we wish to do good; for these books would have us to speak and write by art and rule, and teach that there is but one way to express a given idea. Some good, it may be readily granted, may have resulted from this way of studying English; but the amount has been exceedingly trifling to what would have been accomplished if the study of literature had been pursued in its stead. How few are our good writers or speakers now! Rules or forms of expression cannot be laid down to meet every idea that may rise in the mind, accompanied as it is by the varied emotions of the writer, the indefinite variety of time and place and circumstance. Instead of seeking to express our thoughts in one set form, the endeavour should be after variety; and no process can give this variety but that of wide reading, for by no other means can a command over the wealth of our language be obtained. It is not proposed that any one author should be set up as a model and imitated; but wide reading will bring the learner into contact with