

we must have those works that are acknowledged on all hands to be models in pureness of language, in clearness and simplicity of thought and arrangement, and in strength and felicity of expression. Where we have so much to choose from, it may be difficult to get the best, but we must have it if we wish to deal well with those keenly imitative beings, children.

In this respect I do not think our authorities have chosen wisely; for while I heartily approve of the introduction of the study of Literature; while it delights me beyond measure to study and talk over with my pupils the works of Scott, or Goldsmith, or Milton, or Shakspeare; and though my own warmth is met by a corresponding warmth in my class, I yet feel that the real aim is being missed; I feel that we are familiarising the pupils with a style of language, beautiful in itself, forcible, and enshrining the loftiest thoughts, yet not one that is to be employed in the daily round of this prosaic, commonplace life of ours. The language of active life, as well as that of hours of relaxation—a pure, forcible, full language for daily use—can be found only in the study of our prose writers. It seems hardly necessary to insist upon this fact. In prose the meaning of the writer is generally evident; there is not, or there should not be, the turning and comparing that poetry often requires to become intelligible; and thus the mind is left at liberty to take in the thought without being first obliged to pick it out.

Poetical diction is a thing by itself, —it is a language apart from that which we use in our ordinary intercourse with each other; its inversions, its peculiar use of words, in short everything that may come under the head of the so-called “poetical license,” is so far removed from what we call prose, that it should not be

made the exclusive literary study for our students, nor even form a prominent part of it. The school-room vocabulary, or that of home, is so limited in its range that it cannot counteract the influence of this literary study. Our study of Milton, no doubt, has made for our youth an opening into a practically sealed book, and a great deal of pleasure has been thus obtained for them. But I have no hesitation in saying that the effect upon their language has not been good; this will undoubtedly be shewn in their compositions; the imitative spirit of the young will copy everything, the bad as readily as the good; for as yet they have not learned “to choose the good and refuse the evil.” The crowded participial constructions, the forced Latinized inversions or forms, of Milton, are not at all wanted either in the language of our young people, or in that of men and women.

But dwelling still further upon this difference. If a child has heard bad English at home from his infancy; if his associates use bad English, it is not by putting into his hands the writings of our poets, grand as they may be, that his language will be purified; unless indeed he is to be trained up as a prodigy of “fine writing” so much affected by a certain class of people. If the purification is to be made, he must have a correct standard of a form of speech like his own,—for we cannot compare like with unlike,—we cannot correct the child’s bad prose by giving him poetry to study. I am speaking now of our pupils only; for I know very well that the remedy for a bald, dry style of writing in grown up people, is the careful study of poetry. But resuming: We may compare a simple, natural style of poetry with an ornate or a bombastic, stilted style, and readily perceive the difference; and if we are poets, we may learn much thereby. We may indeed require