

thing to find interesting and exciting passages from the most idiomatic English writers, such as Deſoe, Bunyan, Swift, Steele, Goldsmith, Thackeray, Sir Walter Scott, and Macaulay, that the pupil may "get up," and then write from recollection. At first the pleasantest and most interesting narrative parts of his reading-books will do perfectly well. The chief thing to avoid is a "fine" or bookish style; the goal to aim at is the acquisition of an idiomatic and transparent English style—that is, a style which calls no attention to itself, but allows everything it presents to be seen in the distinctest manner—which is, in a word, merely the bearer of the ideas, and not a competitor with ideas for attention and remark. This style is of course the most difficult to learn, and requires long practice and many years. A very marked style—a highly Latinised or abstract style—is very easy to learn. I think a clever boy of fifteen could learn to write Carlylesque in a week, and Johnsonian in about a fortnight. But good natural easy English, like Goldsmith's or Steele's or Thackeray's requires much reading and long saturation in the style of the best books, as well as the opportunity of always hearing good simple English spoken. And there is the less motive for acquiring this style, that, when it is acquired, it is noticed by hardly any one; and the labour of years is sunk as it were underground. But the vicious and verbose styles look like striking monuments of hard labour in the field of literature, and are as tempting as they are easy to acquire. The great rule in Composition is, "If you have nothing to say, say it; if you have something to say, say it." And the practical corollary from this is, that a boy, sitting down to write anything, should have his head full of facts or ideas—should be interested in them—should be to some extent excited by them, and should be thinking about these facts and ideas, and not about the manner of stating them. After he has written all he can, he is then at liberty, to correct, to alter, and to prune. To ask him to produce the maximum of verbosity with the minimum of ideas—to hunt for words and phrases when he should be thinking of the connexion of his facts or arguments, when he should simply be thinking *what* to say next, is a distorted application of the art. The study of synonymes is very useful; but is not useful, it is encumbering, until the pupil has acquired a certain degree of vigour and freedom in the construction of his sentences. You don't want to guide until you have your vehicle in motion; and sailors will tell you that you can't steer a ship until she has got some way on. One aim of a liberal education is to give the scholar an extreme respect for words—to teach him that they are not merely counters, but powers; and one result of this respect for words is strict economy in the use of them, and the utmost care to eschew the vice of wordiness.

Let teachers pursue this method—the method of nature; and they will be astonished by the results. The old systems had every power of nature against them; their means were torturing and absurd, and their end was useless. Instead of the pupil having to go round and round in a hideous mill-walk of artificial practice, and find poverty of thought and barrenness of feeling as the result, he will gradually gain not merely the power of vigorous and clear expression, but with it an unconscious training in the highest of all arts—the art of thinking. For the art of marshalling phrases and clauses and subordinate sentences—so as to produce a clear totality of impression on the mind of the hearer, or reader, is not only one of the best propædæutics to the art of thinking—to logic, but is itself a very large part of the art. At any rate, perfect limpidity of style is one of the necessary preconditions of absence of fallacy. From this point of view, it is plain that what is called the *Analysis of Sentences*, which has been set forth with so much clearness and ability by Dr. Morell, in the best introduction to the grammar of thought—that is, to Logic. In fact, it is almost the only technical training in thinking that the vast mass of young people is ever likely to get at all. We may fairly apply to the two methods the words of Goethe:—

"Ich sag's dir; Ein Kerl, der componirt
Ist wie ein Thier auf durrer Heide
Von einem bösen Geist im Kreis herum geführt,
Und rings umher liegt schöne grüne Weide."

Don't ask your pupils to write themes or essays, for the sufficient reason that they can't. Few grown-up people can write an essay that is worth reading; and certainly no boy can. His ideas on *Solitude, Benevolence, Anger, Taste, Parental affection*, and a host of other virtues and vices, are worth the paper they are written on, and no more. The *Theme*—name and thing—ought to be banished from every good school, and with it all the wretched English and poverty-stricken pretension it included and symbolized.

III. In the next place, it is right to teach and to learn the literature of our native tongue. But here opens to us a vast and apparently illimitable field—which it would require a long life-time to settle in and to take possession of. But we cannot do this. What corner of the field, then, shall we occupy? And why one corner more than another? I do not think the answer is far to seek. It is with literature as with art; we should refuse to occupy a moment's time with anything but *the best*. And the names we should think it right to call the best names, stand out with sufficient prominence to enable us with tolerable certainty to decide which of their works we ought to study. When the pupil has given a fair amount of time and attention to some parts of their works, his taste will be sufficiently formed to enable him to go on without hesitation in the choice for himself of new paths and new studies.

There has, up to the present time, not been taught much of English Literature in schools. And the schoolmaster is not to blame for this. It would be unreasonable to ask him to teach his pupils and to write books for them at the same time; just as it would be unreasonable to expect a great musician to be able to make violins as well as to play upon them. But the want of the right books has been at length supplied, and in the most admirable and adequate manner. The school editions of the English Classics* which are now coming out from the Clarendon Press are capital specimens of what should be done to introduce young people to a thorough knowledge of the best literature. If a boy (or a girl), before leaving school, has read, in the last two years of his stay there, some of Chaucer, a book of Spenser, some of Bacon's Essays, the earlier poems of Milton, and the best parts of Dryden, Pope, Cowper, Wordsworth, and Tennyson,—and all this may well be done in two years, without interfering with more difficult and perhaps more pressing studies,—he will have gained a good foundation for something like a liberal education. And, knowing what I know of girls' schools, I believe that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, it is a girl's only chance of anything like a liberal education to be carefully taught in such subjects and in such books as these. Seldom or never does the average girl rise to an appreciation of the mental power or the style in a French or German book; and the chances in her favour are amazingly increased in the case of an English writer. There is not, perhaps, even in the writings of Chaucer—nay, even in the writings of a Saxon author, such as Caedmon or Alfred—sufficient *resistance* to create mental power in the student of their works; but there is sufficient beauty in the writings of any of the great English poets to evoke the power of appreciation,—that is, to educate taste. In the case of Chaucer, and still more so in the case of the Saxon writers, the teacher may ask almost as many questions on verbal points, on phraseology, on usage, and on philology, as he would do if he were teaching Virgil; and, as the language is to a large extent already known, the labour of the learner is considerably less, and his pleasure perhaps quite as great, in reading Chaucer as in reading Virgil. And the teacher in training his pupils to an appreciation of *the best*, need not degrade himself to the position

* Chaucer: The Prologue, &c., edited by R. Morris. Spenser: Book I. of the Faery Queene, edited by G. W. Kitchin, M.A. (Macmillan & Co.) Bacon is in the press.