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LITERARY STYLE.\*

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WITHIN a few years a fresh interest has been awakened, among writers and critics, in literary style. It is beginning to be felt more keenly than for a long time before, that, as the value of the materials of a building, whatever their cost, depends mainly upon the skill with which they are put together, so in literary architecture it is the manner in which the ideas are fitted together into a symmetrical and harmonious whole, as well as adorned and embellished, that, quite as much as the ideas themselves, constitutes the worth of an essay, an oration, or a poem. As the diamond or the emerald—even the Kohinoor itself—has little beauty as it lies in the mine, but must be freed from its incrustations, and cut and polished by the lapidary, before it is fit to blaze in the coronet

of a queen, or to sparkle on the breast of beauty, so thought in the ore has little use or charm, and sparkles and captivates only when polished and set in cunning sentences by the literary artist. But there is another and more potent reason for the growing estimation of style. As an instrument for winning the public attention, for saving the reader all needless labour, and for keeping a hold on the grateful memory, its value cannot be easily exaggerated. A hundred years ago, in the days of stage-coaches and Ramage presses, when literature did not come to us in bales, and to be a man of one book was no disgrace, style might have been regarded as a luxury; but in this age of steam-presses and electrotype-printing, with its thousand distractions from study, and its deluge of new publications that must be skimmed by all who would keep abreast with the intelligence of the time, this element of literature is swiftly acquiring a new

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\* From "Literary Style, and other Essays," by W. Mathews, LL.D., author of "Getting on in the World," etc. Chicago: S. C. Griggs & Co., 1881.