

guished British scholar of the last century declared that he had known but three or four of his countrymen who spoke their native language with uniform grammatical accuracy, and that the great French writer, Paul Louis Courier, asserted that in his day there might have been five or six persons who knew Greek thoroughly, but that the French who could speak or write French correctly were still fewer in number."

In our day it may be said with still greater truth—as applied to the writing of English—that, of the great multitude of writers whom the extension of elementary education and the vast increase of periodical literature have produced, few take the trouble or possess the taste and ability to write their native language as it ought to be written by all who aspire to see their compositions in print.

Thousands of articles are published every day in the newspapers, and possibly thousands of novels and volumes of verse are annually given to the world without the excuse of haste which may be accepted on behalf of periodical writers. In consequence of this profusion of literary work performed by neophytes, who write as fluently as they talk, and with as little preliminary study, the standard of literary taste has fallen. Men and women who adopt the literary profession without adequate qualification, except a little smattering of everything, or who, having the qualification, are not able to afford themselves the time to give their talents fair play, seldom or never take the trouble to study critically the language which is the vehicle of their thoughts. A man may not practise as a physician or a surgeon, a barrister or an attorney, without qualifying himself for his vocation by time and study, and the approval of the heads of the profession to which he aspires to belong; but any man or woman can become an

author—or a cook—without leave asked of anybody; and the cookery in these instances is often better than the authorship.

At the same time it would be unjust to deny that many leading articles and many books, written by careless and imperfectly educated people, reflect the highest credit upon the ability of their authors. A slipshod and even a vulgar style of writing is quite compatible with persuasive power, critical acumen, irrefragable logic, and even with eloquence, inasmuch as all these intellectual gifts are sometimes found in the possession of wholly illiterate people, and even of savages. But, granted the possession of the critical acumen, the logical power and the eloquence, all these qualities would be enhanced and adorned if they were accompanied by a thorough mastery of the language in which they were exhibited, and by the graces of style which distinguish all writers of genius, and even of commanding talent.

In the days in which our lot is cast, days when in consequence of the annually increasing multiplicity of our numbers in the limited area of these islands, creating a pressure which a copious emigration does but little to remove or even to alleviate, the struggle for bare subsistence is abnormally severe; and when that for wealth and social pre-eminence is severer still, all literature of the highest order, requiring thought and study, stands but a slender chance of appreciation. People are too much pre-occupied with all-engrossing and grinding cares to find time or inclination for much reading beyond that which the newspapers supply. And the newspapers, without meaning any disrespect to them, are so prolix that, not contented with telling the news once, they make *crambe repetita* of it, by telling it again in their editorial columns, interlarding the narrative