

THE STUDY OF LITERATURE, WITH ITS BEARING ON COMPOSITION.*

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IN the present paper I do not purpose to give a set of rules for the study of literature, or for guidance in composition; rejecting dogmatism in this instance as in others, and recognizing fully the importance of personal characteristics both in teacher and taught, whatever I shall refer to in the way of method will be what I think fundamental principles, or what has been my own practice in teaching.

In conversation last summer with a prominent teacher of a sister province, I remarked that Literature was taking an important place in the schools of Ontario. He replied that he also had tried to do something with that subject in introducing Collier's "English Literature." And on my saying that I meant the writings of the authors themselves, "Pray how do you do that?" was his question;—one, I am bound to say, is much easier asked than answered.

But before turning attention to this point it will be best to know what is the end meant to be reached by the study of Literature in our schools. Is it with the definite purpose of acquiring language, of cultivating the taste, of developing thought; or is it that the pupils may have it to say that they have read such and such writings—that they have *done* such and such authors, as some tourists *do* foreign countries,—that they have

read the books, parsed and analyzed them, and given the derivation of all the words, etc.?

I should not like to believe it was the latter. I should not like to believe that our educational authorities have this end in view, or that in prescribing Literature for us their only purpose was the indefinite one of "knowing something of our leading writers." But whatever may have been their object, one thing is certain, we have the literature, and it rests with us teachers to make it the greatest boon that could be conferred on our schools.

For my own part, I have no hesitation in saying that the leading object of the study of Literature in our schools is the acquisition of language—pure idiomatic English, such as is found in the works of the great masters of our tongue; not a mere vocabulary, but language in its fullest form, in its primary thought-expressing or thought-enwrapping power; gained by an imitation, more or less conscious, of the authors whose works have been read; for the principle of imitation is the one lying at the foundation of the acquisition of a language. Along with this go hand in hand, as necessary companions, the cultivation of the taste, and the development of thought.

It becomes, then, a matter of the greatest importance what works we put into the hands of the pupils; mere whim must not be our guide;

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