

FOR THE REVIEW.]

Teaching English.

During the annual session of the Summer School of Harvard University there is always held a general meeting of all its members as constituting a summer school section of the Harvard Teachers' Association, for the consideration of some one educational subject. These meetings are attended by several hundred teachers from different parts of the United States, and offer an excellent opportunity for getting a broad view of the topic under discussion. They are conducted in accordance with a fixed plan, the programme running as follows: An address by some authority on the subject, who is not a teacher; two papers, limited to fifteen minutes each, by teachers from different schools; time is then allowed for volunteers to speak from the school standpoint; and these are followed by two members of the Harvard teaching staff, who speak as representatives of the University.

The subject considered at the meeting of August 9th, 1899, was "English in the Secondary Schools; with and without Relation to College Requirements." The first address was given by Mr. Walter H. Page, at that time editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and was on "Teaching the Art of Writing." Teachers who listened in hopes of some directions as to "Methods" were disappointed. Mr. Page wisely refrained from laying down any, but drew the attention of his audience to some points that he thought were not emphasized enough in the general regard of the matter. He insisted on the importance of recognizing that the art of expression in spoken or written language, while the most important of all the arts, is not one that we can practise or lay aside as we choose, like music or painting, but one that we are forced into constantly using or abusing; that all should cultivate a keen sense of the power and beauty of our own language, the instrument of this art, and of the meanness of degrading it by careless use; that obscure, ambiguous and dull expression either in speaking or writing, should no more be tolerated than ungrammatical forms or incorrect pronunciation; and finally, most emphatically, and in close connection with the foregoing thoughts, that this art of expression was the great social art, and the teaching of it a great social question, since upon it depend so largely our relations to, and our understanding of, our fellow beings.

The speaker wondered that among all the modern prophets of social millenniums not one should arise to conceive a millennium in which everyone should be able to express himself with perfect ease, perfect accuracy, and perfect grace. Mr. Page's paper was brilliant and suggestive throughout, and every teacher of English

present must have gained from it a deepened sense of the dignity of the subject; but we must pass from touching on it thus briefly to that part of the discussion in which the interest of most of the audience centred, the consideration of the "College Requirements in English." Several years ago the principal American colleges agreed upon uniform requirements in English for admission, thus simplifying very much the work of teachers in preparatory schools. The prescribed books, which are to be studied during the four years 1899-1902, in the high school course, or its equivalent, are the following:

Burke's Speech on Conciliation with America.
 Carlyle's Essay on Burns.
 Coleridge's Ancient Mariner.
 Cooper's Last of the Mohicans.
 DeQuincey's Flight of a Tartar Tribe.
 Dryden's Palamon and Arcite.
 Geo. Eliot's Silas Marner.
 Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield.
 Hawthorne's House of the Seven Gables.
 Lowell's Vision of Sir Launfal.
 Macaulay's Essays on Milton and Addison.
 Milton's L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, Comus, Lycidas.
 Milton's Paradise Lost, Books I-III.
 Pope's Iliad, Books I, VI, XXII, XXIV.
 Scott's Ivanhoe.
 Shakspeare's Macbeth.
 Shakspeare's Merchant of Venice.
 The Sir Roger de Coverly Papers from the Spectator.
 Tennyson's Princess.

The list naturally represents a compromise, and there is much difference of opinion as to whether the compromise is a successful one. The first teacher who addressed the meeting, Miss Helen M. Sweeny, from a girls' high school in New York city, made a frank attack on several of the books on the list on different grounds. The selections are supposed to fairly represent different periods and different kinds of literature. Miss Sweeny objected to the neglect of the lyric poetry of the Elizabethan age; to the choice of "Palamon and Arcite," as unfair to both Chaucer and Dryden; to Pope's Iliad, as representing neither Homer nor Pope; to the "Flight of a Tartar Tribe," as uninteresting to young people, and to the "Vicar of Wakefield," as appealing too strongly to an appreciation of delicate humour to be of much value to the average high school pupil.

She suggested as emendations, more lyric verse, especially of the sixteenth century, and the "Rape of the Lock," in place of the four books of the Iliad, as more fairly representing both the poet and his time. Miss Sweeny's opinion seemed to be that it was very difficult to interest pupils in many of the selections, and that there was a danger of giving them a distaste for good