

THE STUDY OF ENGLISH IN AMERICAN COLLEGES.

BY T. W. HUNT.

THE study of English in its commonly accepted divisions includes the three essential subjects of literature, language, and rhetoric. The first of these necessitates the wider topic of comparative literature, in so far as English letters have been affected by the literary development of the nations of continental Europe, more especially of Italy, France, and Germany. In the province of English philology, also, history and criticism constitute the two main lines of study. Rhetoric, as a distinct branch of English work, discusses, on its more formal side, the laws and principles of written expression as a science of discourse, while, in its more practical character, it seeks to apply these scientific methods to the actual production of material in the form of essay, debate, and written oration. The English course at Harvard is a model in its completeness and adjustment of parts. Made up of twenty-five or thirty different sub-courses, and under the personal supervision of an English faculty of twenty-five members, president Eliot is fast realizing his high ideals along this line, and setting a noble example to all sister institutions. Nor is such a creditable exhibit of English studies confined to what are called the oldest and largest colleges; such institutions as Lafayette and Amherst being justly proud of their excellent showing in these directions, while it is but truth to say that, in not a few of the smaller and less widely known institutions of the country, the best work that is done at all is done along English lines. The special form of this expansion now in progress is in the remanding of the freshman year English to the curriculum of the secondary school, thus

requiring a corresponding enlargement of the collegiate work, with the double benefit of improving both the preparatory and higher courses. So marked is the advancement of English work in the best secondary schools that the colleges are simply driven to this concession, whether they will or not.

It is now in place to inquire as to the specific elements of excellence and promise. I note, first of all, a clearer affinity and interaction of collegiate and secondary school English. For the first time in our educational history, the earlier and later stages of English work are adjusted on a sensible and mutually operative method, through the medium of which the best results may be reached. This is especially gratifying in that no department, collegiate or secondary, has so suffered hitherto as the English has done by the absence of definite method and purpose; any man or woman with but scanty knowledge at hand and no experience, being regarded as sufficiently prepared to take up its teaching. A further element of promise in our English teaching is seen in the presence of higher ideals and better methods. Hitherto, these have been vague and impracticable, little understood by teachers or pupils; modified at random, and held subordinate to every other educational interest. All this has been changed, and permanently so. The true relations, in English teaching, of instruction, discipline, and culture, are observed. The connection of English as a study with all other liberal studies emphasized, while the mental independence of the student is not sacrificed to the demands of this or that particular literary theory.