

made for their support and efficiency, a change in our ideas is taking place as to what is the proper aim of education among us, and what are the means best adapted to secure that aim. The idea that the study of the Latin and Greek classics alone constituted education has passed away: these could not satisfy the demands of our busy, practical times. We have not yet fully decided upon the comparative merits of the competitors for the place vacated by classics. All parties, however, are agreed upon one point,—that the study of our own language must hold an important position in the education of our children,—they must learn to speak it correctly and write it correctly; and furthermore, this end, a very important one, is to be obtained through the study of English grammar.

The question may be fairly asked whether this method of obtaining a knowledge of our language is the best one,—or rather, whether the method in vogue in our schools will secure the end aimed at. The term "the study of English grammar," or "English," as it is now commonly called, though including several things, as parsing, analysis, derivation of words, synonyms, &c., is practically regarded as meaning parsing and analysis alone. It is to be feared that this way of dealing with "English" fails to meet the required result.

When the child for the first time enters a school-room, he has already a good supply of words; he can tell all his wants, make known all his thoughts in language nearly, if not quite, as good in its way as that of the teacher,—fully as good as that of the home from which he came. The task, then, that lies before the teacher is to increase the number of the child's words as the understanding will bear it, and to improve the style of his language if needed. This is fairly stating the question. As soon, therefore, as the child can well read, our educational system requires that he should take up the study of English grammar. How this is done we all know. With some few variations in the mode of starting, the child commits to memory a number of technical terms with their definitions, and then does his best to apply them. He learns, for instance, that "a Noun"—and this is the easiest of all the terms—"is the name of any person, place or thing;" it has a Nominative Case, a Possessive Case, an Objective Case—singular and plural; he picks out tolerably well all the nouns in his reading-lesson when they refer to tangible objects; when this is not the case, he is wholly at a loss. And so it goes on from one "part of speech" to another,—from one term to another—Adjective, Pronoun, Case, Relation, Mood, Government—words lacking in all intelligent meaning to the child, and which no amount of pains and patience in the teacher can make clear. If "parsing" and "analysis" mean anything, they mean an examination into the structure of language, the reason of form and arrangement,—in short, the philosophy of language. Thus our system of education forces upon the undeveloped mind the study of one of the most abstruse of sciences; and what at a later time affords the keenest pleasure is now but a meaningless task. The study of language as a science—its structure, the forms and relations of its words—yields in interest to no other: it demands as mature powers as the study of any other science does. The deeper we study the more we feel that words are not dead things that move as we move them; they are the expression of the living thought within; and he who would study language must study thought itself.

It may seem unnecessary to say, but it is important to be borne in mind, that in studying English we are dealing with, not a foreign tongue, but our own native one. Its words first fell upon our ears; we imitated it from those around us; it grew with our growth, associating itself with everything we hold dear. No "rule" for form or position was given us: we watched, we imitated—that was all. In short, language seemed to come to us as

if it were a natural development of our organization. It is quite certain that this same method, in principle, must be carried out in our schools before our youth can obtain a sound knowledge of our language. Far different is the course pursued in learning a foreign tongue. Instead of being a natural, unconscious process, everything is artificial. The idiom of no two languages is alike; forms and constructions are different; hence rules, &c., must be given—for the process is mechanical—telling what different forms the words assume, when to use them, and how they are to be arranged in a sentence. The distinction between the two processes is wide, and patent to everybody. Yet our grammar-books say in effect that the method is the same in both cases—that English must be studied as a foreign tongue is studied! We owe this, doubtless, to the fact that when compelled to give instruction in English, the teachers of Latin knew no other way to do it than that employed with this foreign tongue. Thus a mechanical process is forced upon us when the natural should be the only one.

Our teaching of English proceeds upon a false theory. It supposes that a knowledge of the technical terms of grammar is necessary to a knowledge of the language. In what way does this knowledge of terms increase our grasp of language? No one will say it extends the vocabulary; it cannot improve the style, it adds nothing to the force and clearness of expression; and no one will pretend that the amount of fact is increased thereby;—these things must all be sought elsewhere than within the covers of a grammar-book, and they are alone what an ordinary school education should be required to give in language; all else is a waste of most precious time. An appeal might be made to the common sense of educationists in this respect. Let them not be carried away by prejudice where so much of vital interest is at stake; this subject must be tested by its merits and so judged; it is time we gave up these traditions in teaching. We laugh at the subjects of grave dispute among the mediæval schoolmen and cloister-philosophers; but the learned discussions on the "parsing" of such words as "blow" and "sweet" in "John struck George a blow" and "Sugar tastes sweet," are equally absurd from an educational point of view: teacher and scholar and disputant each knows what the sentences mean, and knows no more: if they think they do know more, they are only deluding themselves.

It may be urged that a knowledge of grammar is needed to prevent mistakes in the use of the different forms that words assume. This touches a point of practical importance. But surely it will not be said that our elaborate system of grammar is necessary to meet that difficulty, more especially when those forms in the use of which errors may be made are only five or six! Some other way than the one pursued can assuredly be found—a way that will not require this year after year of weary, meaningless plodding in "parsing." Many teachers seem to have the idea that the rules laid down in the grammar-book make the language, and that every sentence must be framed in accordance with them. Soberly puzzling is it then to find in all the masters of our tongue expressions and forms that set "rule" at defiance; and very entertaining are the discussions that these "violations" give rise to. Yet language goes on its way, grammarians and pedagogues notwithstanding. Let it once be thoroughly understood that "rule" does not make language, and our teachers and pupils will learn to look for "grammar" elsewhere than in books bearing that name. The principles and practices that guide the use of our few grammatical forms will be readily, almost insensibly communicated in an informal manner by the teacher who knows his work. Subject, and word, and illustration can be pitched to the capacity of the pupil; voice, and look, and gesture, all combine to send home to the understanding ideas that the dead letter of the book would fail to do. What I plead for in education is intelligence: that nothing should be given