

for carrying on studies in philology, is in my account just putting the cart before the horse. Here the end is, or should be, to make the pupils understand and relish what the author delivers; and whatever of philological exercise comes in should be held strictly subordinate to this.

With my classes in Shakespeare and Wordsworth, as also in Burke and Webster, I am never at all satisfied unless I see the pupils freely taking pleasure in the workmanship. For such delight in a good book is to me a sure token and proof that its virtue is striking in and going to the spot. Rather say, it is a pledge, nay, it is the very pulsation, of sympathy and vital magnetism between the mind within and the object without. And without this blessed infection beaming in the face and sparkling in the eyes, even the honest striving of duty on the pupil's part rather discourages me. So, unless I can get the pupils to be happy in such communion, I am unhappy myself; and this, I suppose, because it is naturally unpleasant to see people standing in the presence and repeating the words of that which is good, and tasting no sweetness therein. For "what is noble should be sweet;" and ought, if possible, to be bound up with none but pleasant associations; that so delight and love may hold the mind in perpetual communion with the springs of health and joy. And if I can plant in young minds a genuine relish for the authors I have named, then I feel tolerably confident that the devils now swarming about us in the shape of bad books will stand little chance with them; for I know right well that those authors have kept legions of such devils off from me.

From all which it follows, next, that in teaching English literature I would have nothing to do with any works in formal rhetoric, or with any general outlines, or any rapid and wide surveys, or any of the school reading-books now in use, which are made up of mere chips from a multitude of authors, and so can have little effect but to generate a rambling and desultory habit of mind. To illustrate my meaning, it may not be amiss to observe that some years ago I knew of a programme being set forth officially which embraced little bits from a whole rabble of American authors, most of them still living, but not a single sentence from Daniel Webster; who, it seems to me, is perhaps the only American author that ought to have been included in the list. The programme was drawn up for a course in English literature to be used in the public schools. Instead of such a miscellaneous collection of splinters, my thought was then, and is now, Give us a good large block of Webster; enough for at least two exercises a week through half a year. This would afford a fair chance of making the pupils really at home with one tall and genuine roll of intellectual manhood; which done, they would then have something to guide and prompt them into the society of other kindred rolls: whereas, with the plan proposed, there is no chance of getting them at home with any intellectual manhood at all; nay, rather, it is just the way to keep them without any intellectual home—a nomadic tribe of literary puddle-sippers.

As for the matter of rhetoric, all that can be of much use in this is, I think, best learned in the concrete, and by familiarizing the mind with standard models of excellence. For the right use of speech goes by habit, not by rule. And if people should happen to use their vernacular clearly and handsomely without knowing why, where is the harm of it? Is not that enough? What more do you want? If you would learn to write and speak the English tongue correctly, tastefully, persuasively, leave the rhetorics behind, and give your days and nights to the masters of English style. This will tend to keep you from all affection of "fine writing," than which literature has nothing more empty and rapid. Besides, it is only after the mind has grown largely and closely conversant with standard authors that studying rhetorical rules and forms can be of

much practical use, however it may do for showing off in recitation. And I am in doubt whether it were not better omitted even then: for such study, in so far as it is trusted in for forming a good style, can hardly work anything but damage in that respect; and this because it naturally sets one to imitating other men's verbal felicities, which is simply a pestilent vice of style. Therewithal the study is but too apt to possess the student, perhaps unconsciously, with the notion that men are to "laugh by precept only, and shed tears by rule;" a sort of laughter and tears from which I shall beg to be excused. On this point, my first, second, and third counsel is—

the live current quaff,
And let the groveller slip his stagnant pool,
In fear that else when Critics grave and cool
Have killed him, Scorn would write his epitaph.

Against the course I have been marking out, the objection is sometimes urged that it would cut pupils off from contemporary authors. It would do so indeed, and I like it the better for that. I have already implied that no literary workmanship, short of the best there is to be had ought to be drawn upon for use in school. For the natural alliance of taste and morals is much closer than most people suppose. In fact, taste is, in my account, a kind of intellectual conscience: downright, perfect honesty is the first principle of it; solidity its prime law; and all sorts of pretence, affectation, and sham are its aversion: so that it amounts to about the same thing as the perfect manliness which I find in Webster's style.

Now, for the due approval of excellence in literary art, a longer time than the individual life is commonly required. Of the popular writers now living, probably not one in five hundred will be heard of thirty years hence. I have myself outlived two generations of just such immortal writers—whole regiments of them. Of course there are fashions in literature, as in other things. These are apt to be bad enough at the best—bad enough anywhere; but the school is just the last place, except the church, where they ought to be encouraged. Be assured that, in the long run, it will not pay to have our children in school making acquaintance with the fashionable writers of the day. For, long before the pupils now in school reach maturity, another set of writers will be in popular vogue; their tenure to be equally transient in turn.

Unquestionably the right way in this matter is, to start the young with such authors as have been tested and approved by a large collective judgment. For it is not what pleases at first, but what pleases permanently, that the human mind cares to keep alive. What has thus withstood the wear of time carries solid proof of having strength and virtue in it. For example, poetry that has no holiness in it may be, for it often has been, vastly popular in its day; but it has and can have no lasting hold on the heart of man. True, there may be good books written in our day; I think there are: but there needs a longer trial than one generation to certify us of the fact, so as to warrant us in adopting an author for standard use. And that a new book seems to us good, may be in virtue of some superficial prepossession which a larger trial will utterly explode. We need better assurance than that.

It is indeed sometimes urged that, if the young be thus trained up with old authors, they will be in danger of falling behind the age. But it is not so. The surest way of coming at such a result is by pre-engaging them with the literary freaks and fashions and popularities of the day. To hold them aloof from such flitting popularities, to steep their minds in the efficacy of such books as have always been, and are likely to be, above the fashion of the day—this is the true course for setting them in advance of the time; and unless they be set in advance of it, they will certainly fail to keep abreast with it. For the wisdom that has had the long and short approval of the past, is most likely to be the wisdom of the future; and the way to keep pace with the age is by dwelling