

country. "The authors and works selected," so ran the prospectus of the series, "are such as will best serve to illustrate English literature in its *historical* aspect. As 'the eye of history,' without which history cannot be understood, the literature of a nation is the clearest and most intelligible record of its life. Its thoughts and its emotions, its graver and its less serious modes, its progress or its degeneracy, are told by its best authors in their best words. This view of the subject will suggest the safest rules for the study of it."

Admirable words, worthy of the large-minded and large-hearted scholar who inspired, if he did not actually frame them; and we can well understand how they must have brought light and inspiration to many a schoolmaster and student, who had never entertained the idea of Chaucer and Bacon as possible factors in education, though it had seemed the most obvious thing in the world to study the masterpieces of Schiller, Dante or Molière. At the time we are speaking of, the average schoolmaster would have scouted the idea of an English classic becoming a text-book in his school. He might indeed give out a canto of "*Marmion*" to be learned by heart as a holiday task, but that was for a mere exercise of memory, or to keep the lad from being too noisy on a wet day. I remember how Dr. Arnold, in one of his letters, expresses an ardent wish that he might have the opportunity of studying a play of Shakespeare with his sixth form, on the same scale of attention and precision as they studied a book of Thucydides! But this was but an aspiration, and the times were not ripe for a change, even if the remorseless limits of years and months admitted of any diminution of the space allotted to Latin and Greek.

I do not at all say that the prejudice of the average teacher against the in-

roduction of English writers into the curriculum of his school was altogether unworthy, and to be laughed at. It had its root in a true conviction that nothing was worth teaching that did not involve some labour and trouble on the part of the learner—that did not awake and exercise in him some new power—that was not, in a word, a discipline. It was this feeling that was sound and worthy of all respect in the prejudice against English literature as an element in education. The picture of Addison or Pope in a boy's hands connected itself with that of a half-hour of idleness—harmless, perhaps, but still idleness—spent in an armchair by the fire or on a sunny lawn, a half hour withdrawn from more serious and profitable study. And if any one, reading these suppressed thoughts of the teacher, were to retort that after all Addison and Pope might be as worthy literature as Horace and Aristophanes, the answer would be ready: "Yes, but it takes some trouble to get at the meaning of Horace and Aristophanes. The language in which they wrote obliges the student to give thought and trouble to the subject. An English book does nothing of the kind."

And it was to those who cherished this conviction, and yet were quite aware that Hooker and Bacon, Shakespeare and Milton, De Foe and Swift must have an important message to those who spoke their tongue, that, as I have said, such words as Professor Brewer's came like something of a revelation. English literature, it now appeared, might ask some labour and attention on the part of the student, might evoke and train some new powers. It might link itself with history, or rather claim to be itself a department of history, and history had long ago been established as a necessary branch of education. And moreover, as such, it admitted of being examined in, and the final test by ex-