

quality in all good writing—precision. Again, in translating a great writer, we are carried beyond our own range of thought and feeling, from which it should follow that the range of our vocabulary should necessarily be widened. This method has one advantage over the other—it is not so apt to lead to the use of words as mere counters, but keeps constantly before us the organic connection which should hold between thought and language. Yet few would now-a-day recommend this practice to one really desirous of acquiring the habit of clear and simple expression. The translator in time inevitably acquires something of the tones and idioms of the language from which he translates. Gibbon is an example of a writer who lost something of the simplicity of his native idiom by his constant use of French. It would seem, indeed, that an equal acquaintance with any two languages precludes the perfectly idiomatic use of either. Readers of Benjamin Franklin's autobiography will remember how diligently he strove to acquire a good English style. The method he chiefly practised was one which many great writers have followed. His practice was to read over a passage from some approved author, and then in his own words strive to give the same sense. By a comparison of his own composition with the original, he was taught by that most effective of all forms of instruction the contrast between a good and a bad model. It cannot be said that Franklin with all his industry ever attained to what is called distinction of style; he writes plainly and simply and in entire keeping with his subject, but the dryness of his manner is perhaps in some measure due to the excessive practice of this mechanical method in his youth. It is easy to see, indeed, that all these methods carried to excess must result in the loss of that spontaneity and individuality which should mark every man's writing not less than his speech

and demeanor. When thought and experience do not keep pace with power of expression, we may have brilliancy indeed, but never that highest grace or power which belongs only to language coming straight from the heart.

There is still another discipline, to the practice of which many distinguished prose-writers have attributed much of their skill in the use of language. This is the practice of verse-making in youth. Undoubtedly, of all modes of literary training this is the one most likely to lead to best results. In the first place these writers practised it not in the spirit of mere mechanical exercise, but in the inspiring delusion that poetry was their natural mode of expression. The exercise practised in this spirit can never become a mere forcing process. Though't, emotion and language have in this case free, natural play; and the whole man grows as nature meant. The delusion soon passes; but in the meantime the mind has passed through a training which for the purposes of literature is invaluable. The most practised poets bear testimony to the intense mental concentration required to produce even fairly good verse. Byron who had greater facility than most of his brethren declared that it was necessary to write every day for years even to rhyme well. Besides the exigence of rhyme and metre, which make their own difficulties, the tests in the choice and rejection of words are infinitely finer in verse than in prose. In the composition of a single couplet the number of words called up and rejected is truly surprising, as any one who tries his hand will find. A curious notion once prevailed that it was impossible in the nature of things to be at once a great poet, and a great prose-writer. In view of the history of literature, it is strange how this idea should have arisen. For magnificence of prose style no English writer has surpassed Milton. Edmund Burke took Dryden as his