

* Correspondence. *

ANNOTATED ENGLISH TEXTS.

To the Editor of the EDUCATIONAL JOURNAL:

SIR:—I gladly comply with your invitation to give the reasons which have forced upon me the conviction that "with ready-made notes and comments in the hands of the pupils no teacher can do the best work" in teaching English Literature. In stating these reasons I shall confine myself to the teaching of poetry, as that has been prescribed for University Matriculation and Second-Class examination work for 1890-91. I assume that as prose texts are now prescribed solely for the purpose of getting subjects out of them for essay writing at the examination, and as the examiner is expressly prohibited from basing on them any questions of any kind whatever, no teacher will think of making an elaborate analysis of them as part of his school work. All that is needed is to see that they are read carefully and frequently by the pupils, and as they are inherently interesting that may safely be regarded as reading for recreation, and be left, as such, to the pupil's private convenience. Annotated editions of the prose texts are, therefore, out of the question. For the sake of brevity I will state my views on the subject of annotated poetical texts in a series of dogmatic propositions, making no attempt to controvert the views of others. The selections for 1890-91 are Longfellow's "Evangeline" and a number of his minor poems, making an aggregate of about 3,000 lines. The propositions are:

1. The chief end in view in the study of poetry should be æsthetic culture—the development in the pupil of the faculty by which he discerns the beautiful, and through which beauty arouses in him pleasurable emotions. In other words, the aim in teaching poetry should be to cultivate the taste. I do not stop to argue this point, for I feel quite sure that it will be generally, if not universally, conceded. Nor will I stop to argue the question, whether poetry of certain kinds is well adapted for this purpose, because on that point also there seems to be something like unanimity among teachers.

2. The chief object being kept in view, a second one should be to instil into the pupil a love of literature. This will be impossible apart from appreciation of it, and since appreciation is as inseparably blended with culture, as culture is with enjoyment, there is little need to insist on this at any length.

3. The teacher should also aim at so dealing with poetical texts as to furnish his pupils with a method of studying poetry for themselves. If he fails to do this his teaching must be pronounced extremely defective from an educational point of view.

4. For æsthetic culture the teacher can do little in a positive way. He cannot teach a pupil to appreciate the beautiful, though he may be able to skilfully and suggestively draw his attention to beauties that might otherwise have passed unnoticed. Only the author, through his works, can do positive teaching and force appreciation. If the poetry has been judiciously selected he will do that, and if there is no beauty in the selections the time might better be devoted to something else. No matter what other excellences the poetry may have, this cannot be dispensed with. The thought wrapped up in the verse may be ennobling, the morality may be sound, the language may be vigorous, and, yet, if there is no beauty in the poetry, there can be no æsthetic culture. The æsthetic faculty grows by what it feeds on, and its appropriate food is the beautiful in art.

5. Nor can the teacher by positive instruction instil a love of the beautiful in literature; that, too, is the author's function. If the selections have been wisely made, and if they are wisely used, there need be no fear of the result. But if there be no beauty there, or if unwise efforts are made to cram the pupil with ready-made opinions instead of letting him form his own, the tendency will be to produce a feeling of disgust, instead of a feeling of love. In all matters of taste, each must be a law unto himself. The pupil has as good a right to his likes and dislikes in literature as the teacher has—as good a right as he himself has to his likes and dislikes of certain kinds of bodily food. A person prefers a chromo to the finest painting, and it is desirable to educate him into a better æsthetic condition. Positive instruction will do little for him. The best way to treat him is to bring him for a

time into close contact with what is superior, and let the beautiful in the artist's work impart the education and inspire the love of itself. And so it is with the beautiful in literature. If the pupil is ever to love Longfellow's poetry with a genuine and enduring love, Longfellow himself must teach him to do so.

6. The teacher can furnish the pupil with a method of studying Longfellow's poetry, and this method will serve not merely for subsequent and more extensive reading of his works, but for all the pupil's subsequent reading of poetry in general, and of prose that has in it some of those artistic qualities which make poetry attractive. It is useless to go into minute details here, but a few general features of the method may be specified:

(a) The pupil's first acquaintance with the prescribed work should be made without any interference whatever. Let the author have a chance. Self-repression is the first law of good teaching in every subject on the programme, but this is pre-eminently true where the questions that must arise are mainly questions of taste. Set the pupil at reading the poem in hand without a word or a hint of preliminary explanation of any kind whatsoever, and require him to read it over by himself until he has had a chance to become familiar with it. By a few well-directed questions the teacher can and should ascertain whether the reading is being effectively done, and this need not take up much of the time of the class in school. Longfellow's poetry is simple and attractive enough to be treated as reading for recreation, and there is no need to have any of it read in class unless it is deemed desirable to make use of it for elocutionary purposes.

(b) The pupil should be directed to read each poem as a whole. Every selection for next year can be read through at one sitting, except, perhaps, "Evangeline," and that should be read as continuously as possible. The largest view that can be taken of any work of art—a poem, a statue, a building, a painting, a musical composition—is for æsthetic purposes, the most valuable view if the work is artistically constructed; if it is not so constructed it should not have been chosen. "Evangeline" is a beautiful work of art, not merely in its exquisite details of rhythm, tone-color, scenic description, and analysis of human feeling, but also in its entirety. We enjoy the details at every reading, but only that familiarity, which is the result of frequent perusal from beginning to end, can give us a clear and abiding impression of that which is after all most beautiful and most attractive about it.

(c) The pupil will find difficulties in the poem, and will no doubt misunderstand parts of it. Encourage him to make known his difficulties, and endeavor, by questioning him on the parts most likely to prove stumbling-blocks, to ascertain where he has formed erroneous opinions. Do not thrust information on him that is not needed, and, above all, do not thrust any information on him before giving him a chance to find out whether he needs it or not. Difficulties that present themselves on a first reading will vanish on subsequent readings. The residuum can be explained away by the teacher when the proper time comes, and even if he cannot clear all remaining difficulties away, what matter? They are not likely to affect the pupil's standing at any examination he may have to pass, and so long as they do not affect his enjoyment of the poem they may be passed over without any great amount of uneasiness. I am not putting in any plea for slovenly work. All I want is to make clear that the important thing is to appreciate and enjoy the poem, not to make it a means of conveying information. The teacher may not know precisely what the "angelus" is, or the "plain-song." All the better for both himself and his pupils if he does; but if he does not know and cannot find out by means of books of reference at his command, he can get along very well with such meanings as the context of "Evangeline" suggests. He may not know or be able to find out where the Ozark mountains are. I never did know, or if I ever did I have forgotten, and though I am now reading "Evangeline" with a class I shall not take the trouble to find out. The general impression of extensive travel over this continent is not heightened perceptibly by going into minute geographical details, and this general impression is all that the poet needs to produce for artistic purposes. No linguistic difficulties occur in Longfellow's poems that cannot be overcome by a good English dictionary like the "Concise Imperial," the "Imperial" or the "Century."

(d) The pupil should be required to compare one work of art with another—a method of study peculiarly effective with Longfellow. Poems that lend themselves to instructive comparison or contrast with those selected are to be found in abundance among his writings, and, therefore, the whole of his poems should be in the pupil's hands. They cannot be so if annotated editions are to be used. Routledge's complete edition of Longfellow can be had in convenient size and fair type for thirty-five cents retail, in paper covers, and seventy cents retail, in cloth. Any annotated edition of the selected poems will cost more than the former of these sums if not so much as the latter. With a complete edition the teacher can advise the pupils to read such poems as "The Courtship of Miles Standish" and "Hiawatha," for the purpose of comparing them with "Evangeline"; he can ask them to read the "Legend of Rabbi Ben Levi," with a view to comparison with "King Robert of Sicily"; he can direct their attention to several other obituary poems when he has "Auf Wiedersehen" under consideration, and so on. Without going beyond Longfellow the pupil can be made familiar with the comparative method of artistic study, and to make him familiar with it is to do more for him than can be done by any acquaintance however thorough with formal categories or canons drawn up to be memorized, or with critical opinions which have not necessarily any more value than his own. The comparisons may be made to include other artists besides Longfellow, and for this purpose the teacher should read, not opinions about Longfellow or other poets, but the works of Wordsworth, Tennyson, Whittier, Lowell and other poets of this century, between whom and Longfellow points of contact are most likely to be discovered. Side reading is of less importance in the training of a teacher of literature than wide reading.

I do not expect that the views thus briefly and imperfectly expressed will be generally adopted and acted on. I cannot even say that I desire their immediate and universal acceptance. It has taken me a long time to reach my present standpoint in these matters, and it would be unreasonable in me to expect others to see eye to eye with me on short notice. That the tide of opinion is rising against annotated texts, however, is quite certain, and that before long they will disappear from our schools is almost equally so. I am quite sure that in many of our best High Schools this year they will not be used even if produced, and I hope the number of schools requiring pupils to get the whole of Longfellow's poems will increase so rapidly as to warn both publishers and editors out of the field.

In conclusion let me express the hope that if any one feels disposed to criticise my opinions he will first take the trouble to understand them. I have tried to make my position as plain and intelligible as a brief statement will permit. I am quite willing to defend that position against all comers, but I dislike the idea of renewed explanation. It may be that the course of treatment I recommend would be open to objections which have not suggested themselves to me; if so, I shall be glad to have them pointed out. Yours,

WM. HOUSTON.

TORONTO, Jan 14, '90.

ENGLISH vs CANADIAN HISTORY.

CAN any good answer be given to the question so frequently asked, "Why is there so much importance attached, in Canada, to the study of English History?" England is a country with which we are rather loosely connected, with a tendency to a greater degree of separation.

Why should the Department in all its examinations give so much attention to the historical knowledge of that country and so little to our own? While we concede that it is well to have a knowledge of English History, yet we think it is not necessary to commence at the beginning and follow each reign, and be able to account for each individual's claim to the throne from Boadicia to Victoria. Would it not be sufficient, from a Canadian standpoint, to deal with the Roman Conquest,—the Coming of the Saxons—Danes and Normans, and the evolution of law and order during this period; pass briefly on, touching on the Magna Charta, Establishment of the Parliamentary System, etc., till we come to the Reformation; deal with that subject carefully, also with the Stuart Period, and the leading points from that on? Of