

Hence it follows that language should be used and studied mainly in its representative character; that is, as a medium for conversing with things; and that studying it merely or even mainly for its own sake is a plain inversion of the right order. For words are of no use but as they bring us acquainted with the facts, objects, and relations of Nature in the world about us. The actual things and ideas which they stand for, or are the signs of, are what we ought to know and have commerce with. In our vernacular, words are, for the most part, naturally and unconsciously used in this way; except where a perverse system has got us into a habit of using them for their own sake, which is indeed the common bane of American authorship, making our style so intensely self-conscious that an instructed taste soon tires of it. But, in studying a foreign tongue, the language itself is and has to be the object of thought. Probably not one in fifty of our college graduates learns to use the Greek and Latin freely as a medium of converse with things. Their whole mental force is spent on the words themselves; or, if they go beyond these to the things signified, it is to help their understanding of the words.

I freely admit that language, even our own, ought to be, to some extent, an object of study; but only to the end of perfecting our use and mastery of it as a medium. So that the true end of mental action is missed where language is advanced into an ultimate object of study; which is practically making the end subordinate to the means. Here, however, I am anxious not to be misunderstood, lest I may seem to strain the point too far, for I know full well that in such a cause nothing is to be gained by breaches of fairness and candor. It is a question of relative measure and proportion. And I mean that our education treats language quite too much as an object of thought, and quite too little as a medium. Our students, it seems to me, are altogether too much brought up in "the alms-basket of words"; and of too many of them it may not unfairly be said, "They have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps."

I have said that our custom in this matter stands partly as a tradition from a long-past age when there was no English literature in being. But this does not wholly explain it. The thing proceeds in great part from a perverse vanity of going abroad and sporting foreign gear, unmindful of the good that lies nearer home. Hence boys and girls, especially the latter, are hurried into studying foreign languages before they have learnt to spell correctly or to read intelligibly in their own. I say girls especially, because, since the women set out to equal, perhaps to eclipse, the men in brain-power, a mighty ambition has invaded them to be flourishing their lingual intellectuality in our faces. Besides, the fashion now is to educate young women for any place rather than for home. Most of them hope some time to spend six months travelling in Europe; and they think far more of preparing for that holiday than for all the working-day honours and services of life. And I fear it must be said withal, that we are the most apish people on the planet. I wish we may not prove "the *serum pecus* of a Gallic breed." Be that as it may, parents among us apparently hold it a much grander thing to have their children chopping Racine and Voltaire than conversing with the treasures of wisdom and beauty in our own tongue, as if smattering French words were better than understanding English and American things.

Thus our school education is growing to be very much a positive dispreparation for the proper cares, duties, interests, and delectations of life. The further a thing draws from any useful service or common occasion, the more pride there is in studying it. Whatever will serve best to prank up the mind for flaunting out its life away from home, that seems to be their first concern. To this end, we prefer something out of the common way; something that can be turned to no account, save to beguile a frivolous and fashionable leisure, or to mark people off from ordinary humanity, and wrap them up in the poor conceit of an aristocratic style. In short, we look upon the honest study of our honest mother-English as a vulgar thing; and it pleases us to forget that this squeamish turning-up of the nose at what is near and common is just the vulgarlest thing in the world. Surely we cannot too soon wake up to the

plain truth, that real honor and elevation, as well as solid profit, are to grow by conversing with the things that live and work about us, and by giving our studious hours to those masters of English thought from whom we may learn to read, soberly, modestly, and with clear intelligence, a few pages in the book of life.

The chief argument in support of the prevailing custom is that the study of languages, especially the Greek and Latin, is a mental gymnastic. No doubt it is so. But the study, as it is managed with us, may be not unfairly charged with inverting the true relative importance of mental gymnastic and mental diet. Formerly the Greek and Latin were held to be enough; but now, by adding three or four modern languages, we are making the linguistic element altogether too prominent. We thus give the mind little time for feeding, little matter to feed upon; and so keep it exercising when it ought to be feeding; for so the study of words has much exercise and little food. Now such an excess of activity is not favorable to healthy growth. Substituting stimulants for nourishment is as bad for the mind as for the body. Supply the mind with wholesome natural food; do all you can to tempt and awaken the appetite; and then trust somewhat to nature. True, some minds, do your best, will not eat, but, if they do not eat, then they ought not to act. For dulness, let me tell you, is not so bad as disease; and from straining so hard to stimulate and force the mind into action without eating, nothing but disease can result. Depend upon it, there is something wrong with us here; food and exercise are not rightly proportioned in our method. In keeping the young mind so much on a stretch of activity, as if the mere exercise of its powers were to be sought for its own sake, we are at war with Nature. And a feverish, restless, mischievous activity of mind is the natural consequence of such a course; unless, which is sometimes the case, the mental forces get dried into stiffness from mere heat of gymnastic stress.

We are now having quite too much of this diseased mental activity. Perhaps our greatest danger lies in a want of mental repose. The chronic nervous intensity thus generated is eating the life out of us, and crushing the nobler energies of duty and virtue, aye, and of sound intelligence too. For, while we are thus overworking the mind, the muscular and nutritive systems of course suffer; so that, first thing we know, the mind itself gives out; and people go foolish or crazy from having been educated all into nerves. Composure is the right pulse of mental health, as it is of moral; and "a heart that watches and receives" will gather more of wisdom than a head perpetually on the jump. We need "the harvest of a quiet eye," that feeds on the proportions of truth as she beams from the works of Nature and from the pages of Nature's high priest. But now we must be in a giddy whirl of brain-excitement, else we are miserable, and think our mental faculties are in peril of stagnation. Of intellectual athletes we have more than enough; men, and women too, who think to renovate the world, and to immortalize themselves, by being in a continual rapture and tumult of brain-exercise, minds hopelessly disordered from the calmness of reason, and held in a fever of activity from sheer lack of strength to sit still. It was minds that Bacon had in view when he described man in a certain state as being "a busy, mischievous, wretched thing, no better than a kind of vermin." To be intellectual, to write books, to do wonders in mental pyrotechny, is not the chief end of man, nor can we make it so. This is indeed what we seem to be aiming at, but we shall fail; Nature will prove too strong for us here; and, if we persist, she will just smash us up, and replace us with a people not so tormentedly smart. It is to the meek, not the brilliant, that the possession of the earth is promised. My conclusion from the whole is, that, next to the elementary branches, and some parts of science, such as geography, astronomy, and what is called natural philosophy, standard authors in English literature ought to have a place in our school education. Nor am I sure but that, instead of thus postponing the latter to science, it were still better to put them on an equal footing with it. For they draw quite as much into the practical currents of our American life as any studies properly scientific do; and what is of yet higher regard, they have it in them to be much more effective in shaping the character. For they are the right school of harmonious culture as distinguished from mere formal knowledge; that is, they are a discipline of humanity; and to have the soul rightly alive to the difference between the noble and the base is better than understanding the laws of chemical affinity.

(To be continued).