

ON every hand throughout the educational world we find the question of the teaching of English Literature being discussed. This question agitates the atmosphere of the Public Schools, the High Schools and the Universities alike, though the phases in each are different. But notwithstanding all that has been spoken and written concerning this question, and though there is probably no subject for the teaching of which more elaborate preparations have been made of late years in the way of texts and analyses, yet it is almost certain that there is no subject which is more poorly taught, or from which the student derives less permanent benefit. Before anything in the way of improvement can be suggested the ground of the difficulty must be discovered. We may note some of the conditions which seem to us to place English Literature in its present unenviable position. We believe that the chief source of the evil in this as in other subjects is to be found in the forcing system, whether it be in the schools or the Universities. The reason why English fares worse than the other subjects is to be found in the fact that it has greater difficulty than almost any other, except Philosophy, in accommodating itself to the educational machine. There is certainly no other subject in the High School course which requires such a special aptitude to teach it as it should be taught, or more time in which to accomplish this than English Literature; and yet how often it seems to be regarded as a subject which any one can teach. Not unfrequently it is handed over to whichever specialist in some other department has least work to do, or is even divided up among two or three.

Again, it is safe to say that the greater part of the English Literature teaching consists in going over the selections prescribed, grinding out barren grammatical analysis, for it is barren when no further use is made of it than merely to extract it, or

memorizing from notes certain dates and biographical, historical or geographical sketches centering round the proper names in the text, and, finally, hunting up the derivation of words, which latter may produce not the least useful knowledge which is obtained. And now when the six months', or year's, or two years' grinding is over, what knowledge of English Literature—or better, what method and impetus for the future study of English Literature has been imparted? How many students will, in the future, voluntarily and with an intellectual relish for their work, sit down to some new author and begin grinding out line after line and page after page of analysis, looking up, if they have any idea of where to look for them, the description of proper names and the derivation of words. But all these are necessary to the study of Literature, says some one. Certainly they are, to a certain extent, and so are bricks and mortar, wood and iron to the building of a house. But if you engage some one to show you how to build a house and he spends all his time in showing you how to collect materials until you are lumbered up with these and then leaves you without showing you how to make use of them, his direction and your labours are like to be of small benefit to you and to disgust you with building operations.

Evidently we require a new method or plan of teaching English Literature; and first of all we require that the teachers of this subject should have a special interest in their work. This is of course very necessary for the best teaching of every subject, but it is most necessary in the case of English Literature. Again, our teacher who has a natural interest in his subject must be capable of furnishing to his pupils a philosophic criticism of subject-matter and form in order that they may acquire a true insight into the meaning of the one and the æsthetic adaptations of the other, recognizing at the