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"I am going to see your father about you," said a teacher to a boy who had exhausted her patience.

"If you do you'll never come back," "Why?" demanded the teacher. "Cause pa's dead."—New York Tribune.

Our Literary Department.

The Masterful Thumb.

In our study of Rabbi Ben Ezra, attention was drawn to the use of the word "thumb" in "world's coarse thumb," Stanza 24, of the poem.

"But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,
That weighed not as his work, yet
swelled the man's amount."

"Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language
and escaped:
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel
the pitcher shaped."

The phrase, "thumb and finger" suggested, by way of digression, the curious significance that has, from very early ages, and among different peoples, been attached to this small member of the human body—the thumb.

Chaucer, in speaking of the "miller," (Prologue to the Canterbury Tales) says he "hadde a thomb of gold, pardee." Mr. Yarrell, in his "History of British Fishes," writes as follows, the association following from a reference to the Bullhead, or "Miller's Thumb" fish: "It is well known that all the science and tact of a miller is directed so to regulate the machinery of his mill, that the meal produced shall be of the most valuable description that the operation of grinding will permit. His profit, or his loss, even his fortune or his ruin, depend upon the exact adjustment of the various parts of the machinery. The miller's ear is constantly directed to the note made by the running-stone in its circular course over the bed-stone . . . and his hand is constantly placed under the meal-spout to ascertain by actual contact the character and qualities of the meal produced. The thumb, by a particular movement, spreads the sample over the fingers; the thumb is the gauge of the value of the produce, and hence have arisen the sayings of 'worth a miller's thumb,' and 'an honest miller hath a golden thumb,' in reference to the amount of the profit that is the reward of his skill."

Dr. H. MacCallum, in a thesis read before the Educational Association at London, referred to the thumb as follows: "In ancient times, men cut off their thumbs that they might avoid going to war. They were called 'paltroons,' derived from the Latin through the Spanish, viz.: 'Thumbless man.' The modern meaning is a characterless man, without principle or courage. It was noticed that men who did this mutilation, invariably degenerated, morally and mentally. An old Scotch saying is 'Beware of a thumbless man.' If man is distinctive at all in the hand, it is in his masterly thumb."

One more quotation from the notes taken by a kindergarten teacher while in course of training for her work:

THE THUMB—AN INDEX OF CHARACTER.

One who has studied the tendency of character, as indicated by the thumb, says that if the thumbs of every human being were amputated, the whole race would very speedily degenerate, and lose all the force and ambition that it possesses.

The student of human nature will find no part of man's anatomy so full of reliable data in the summing up of an individual's tendencies as the thumb.

To visit a hospital for the insane, to examine carefully this organ as possessed by the weak and vacillating in character, and compare them with those of strong and forceful, intellectual attainments, will readily satisfy any observer as to the importance of the indication. It is true that the indication affects more the moral than the mental nature, but mental strength or weakness is to such an extent dependent on the moral; that the value of thumb-development has come to be recognized by psychologists as a very important element in the building up of the healthiest mentality.

An employer, in a large way, who was observant, had experience with two lads, one possessing a short thumb, with a rather thick, soft palm; the other a strong, well-developed thumb, with the palm firm and elastic. The latter, by force of character, raised himself to respectability and wealth, while the other remained in his original position at a small wage.

The observer, in making investigations, will do well to note the natural tendencies without attracting the attention of the subject he studies. Almost anyone can spread his thumb at right angles to his index finger, and may do so if asked to spread out his hand, but the person who naturally opens his hand in this way, is possessed of an open, sincere disposition. A mean, selfish disposition, may safely be attributed to the person whose thumb naturally lies parallel to the fingers. The person who, in closing the fists, leaves the thumb on the outside, is possessed of vitality and strength of character, while he who naturally closes the hand on the thumb, is morally dwarfed, and possibly of a weak physical nature. There is no more certain sign of approaching death, in illness, than the closing of the fingers over the thumb, while, of course, the action may frequently be indulged in by a healthy person when suffering from intense cold.

It has been pointed out that man's superiority over the lower animals is summed up in his being a tool-using animal, and while the thumb gives the natural opposing force, in conjunction with each of the four fingers, in the gathering up of any material, so it makes the completion of the tool-using power in conjunction with the other fingers.

In the lower animal kingdom, the highest development is shown by those species that exhibit the nearest approach to the human-thumb development; the kangaroo, the monkey, and the gorilla, being instances. Prof. Henry Drummond refers to the hand as one of the most perfect pieces of mechanism in the human body. He traces its evolution from the lowest form in the Amosba—a speck of protoplasmic jelly, headless, footless and armless; when it wishes to seize the microscopic particle of food, on which it lives, a portion of its body lengthens out, and, moving towards the object, flows over it, engulfs it, and melts back again into the body. This is its hand. At any place, and at any moment, it creates a hand. Passing upward in the scale, he calls attention to the Sea-anemone, in which the hand is no longer extemporized, as occasion requires, but lengthened portions of the body are set apart and kept permanently in shape for the purpose of seizing food. In this quivering pillar of the body, we get the rude approximations of the most useful portion of the human hand—the separate fingers. The professor then passes over a multitude of intermediate forms, until he notes the hand of an African monkey, the added usefulness of which is increased by the muscular arm upon which the hand is now extended, and the extraordinary capacity for varied motion afforded by the three-fold system of jointing at shoulder, elbow and wrist. The hand itself is almost the human hand with palm, nails and fingers, the important point lacking being the thumb. If the monkey has a thumb, it is but a rudiment.

To estimate the importance of the thumb, one should try for a moment, without using this organ, to hold a book, to write a letter, or to do any piece of manual work. The thumb is not merely an additional finger, but a finger so arranged, from its opposite nature, to possess the practical efficacy, greater than all the fingers put together, and in it is the crowning feature of the finished tool-using hand. To the thumb, we may attribute all the possibilities of mechanical invention.

The kindergarten system, and the promoters of all the newer educational methods, have given great consideration to thumb-development, and, at the present day, the manual training being introduced into the schools of towns and cities, is to some extent compensating the children who have not the natural advantages of the country boys and girls in the matter of dexterity in handicraft and the moral development attendant on the power of the thumb."

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Much of the above may be somewhat

far afield from the reference in Browning, but it has been read with interest, no doubt, especially by those who sought to find the precise application of the word, when engaged upon Study IV.

The Literary Society Prizewinners.

While the races were going on at the Woodbine, Toronto, a much more interesting race (to a few of us, at least) was going on here in the office. As the marking of the final papers of the Literary Society went on, and the marks were added to those previously recorded, excitement grew apace, the more especially as there were sixteen competitors whose marks had come close enough to make the result doubtful. Finally the list stood complete, with Mrs. Wm. Bacon, Simcoe Co., Ont., standing first; "A Lesser Spark," Bruce Co., Ont., second; and "Milla," Rouville, Que., third.

Following these quite closely came "A. C.," Glengarry Co., Ont.; "G. H. S.," Middlesex Co., Ont.; "J. M. C.," Carleton Co., Ont.; Miss Hume, Halton Co., Ont.; "Meg MacCallum," Algoma, Ont.; Mrs. McBean, Lambton Co., Ont., who are entitled to lesser prizes.

This list, however, by no means exhausts the names of those who did excellent work. We had to draw the line somewhere, but we have pleasure in assuring the following that they came very little behind the above: Mrs. Dakin, Prince Edward Co., Ont.; Miss McKim, Truro, N. S.; J. D. Taylor, Waterloo Co., Ont.; Miss Tupling, Grey Co., Ont.; "Wentworth Mugwump," Wentworth Co., Ont.; Miss Sinclair, Grey Co., Ont.; J. Shaw, Hants, N.S.; Miss Griffith, Welland Co., Ont.; "Un Eleve," Waterloo Co., Ont.; Miss Allan, Wentworth Co., Ont.; "A. B.," Dufferin Co., Ont.; Miss King, Oxford Co., Ont. These all took 70 per cent. or slightly over of the total number of marks.

A long list is left, most of whom did creditable work, but who came lower than those already mentioned. A few of these last took uniformly medium marks throughout; others, while taking marks so low on the first two studies as to throw them out of the innings, yet made remarkable progress, seeming to work into the spirit of the poem more and more as time went on. One, for instance, worked from 15 marks, out of 50, on the first paper, to 37, out of the same total, on the last.

Several, again, who took excellent marks as far as they went, fell out through not completing the course—no doubt through pressure of other things. Among these may be mentioned H. J. Brillinger, Donald MacCallum, "Alberta," C. R. Albright, "E. M. A.," H. Laidman, Miss Govenlock, Miss Kidd, Miss McFaden, Miss Mackay, E. M. Neff, and a few others. Next season we shall try to begin the work earlier in the fall, in order to leave ample time to complete the studies before the spring work on the farm begins.

We must add, also, that on the last study three papers arrived minus either name, nom-de-plume, or address. As we had no way of identifying or differentiating these, we simply had to leave them out of the reckoning. . . . Again, in answer to the student who asked why we did not give some idea as to the length of the answers required, we may say that, although the shorter answers were in some cases published, no difference was made in the marking. Some people require more words than others by which to express their thoughts; others like to add a little embellishment. We have sought to give every opportunity for expression of individuality, and have given equal marks for long or short, provided the grasp of the poem was equal.

Now, in regard to the work done, we can only say that we have been most agreeably surprised. "Rabbi Ben Ezra" is not easy, yet our students have shown themselves able—and more than able—to cope with it, and we feel that they must have been conscious of increasing mental strength, in so doing.

We should have liked more space, and more time, in dealing with this poem. Many questions remain, of necessity, unasked in regard to it; many interesting side-issues undiscussed. But we are assured that, in spite of all limitations, the effort has not been in vain; and we