

judgments can hardly consist with each other. But their self-contradiction is really only on the surface. Dogberry's remark very well expresses the fact that without an overpowering natural instinct to expression, no one can become a distinguished writer. On the other hand, the saying of Pope emphasizes the truth, which all literary history bears out, that mastery of language comes only of the most strenuous endeavor. It has often been remarked that writers of the very highest order are far more rare than musicians or painters of the same high rank in their respective arts. During the last two thousand years the world has seen only some half dozen poets of the first rank; whereas, even during the last two hundred the number of first rate musical composers is considerably larger than this. The usual explanation given of the fact seems entirely satisfactory. What forms the materials of the writer is clear and definite thought ranging over the whole field of human life, with language adequate to it; and a moment's consideration shows that to master such materials implies a vastly greater effort than is demanded of the painter or musical composer.

It is interesting to consider the various methods by which great writers have trained themselves to perfection in their art. The other day a contemporary took the world into his confidence, and gave us a curious history of the apprenticeship he served as a man of letters. The account of Mr. Louis Stevenson is doubly interesting, from the fact that it is specially in style, as distinct from matter, that he has won the praise of critics. The wonderful range of his vocabulary and his singular felicity in the choice of words arrested attention at the very outset of his literary career. In his case, therefore, the method he followed in attaining this perfection has a special interest.

From boyhood, he tells us, it was his habit to carry about with him a note-

book and pencil, and on every possible occasion to set himself to write a description of the objects around him. Such exclusive attention to mere expression for the subject, he tells us, was entirely indifferent to him—must, it is evident, bring with it its own drawbacks. The critics, as might have been expected, have not been slow to find in the work of Mr. Stevenson distinct evidence of this peculiar self-discipline. They have all along seen, they assert that his capital defect as a writer is that his expression much outruns his thinking; and they point to his early training as the evident cause of the disproportion.

It is curious, however, that a somewhat similar discipline was pursued by the most exquisite of American prose-writers, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne, as is felt even by those who find little interest in his stories, is unapproachable in the art of saying the subtlest things in the simplest and most graceful way. His art in this respect is so consummate that it can be best described in Dogberry's words, as coming by nature. Yet so far is this from being the case, that all through life, Hawthorne had that habit which Mr. Stevenson practiced in his youth. Whenever circumstances would permit, he made a point of elaborately noting all the experiences of each day. At home, for example, he set himself to describe the minute changes of nature in his daily walks. His American notebooks are filled with trivial details, which can have interested him only as affording scope for practice in writing.

The method of acquiring a good style practiced last century—by Adam Smith, amongst others—was assiduous translation from great foreign writers. From this practice it was supposed that two good results must follow. In translating a sentence, we have a definite thought before us, for which we must find an exact equivalent in our own speech. Hence, it was supposed that the assiduous practice of translation must necessarily teach that prime