

or even not at all. The reading of composition in class is of little avail except as furnishing opportunity for criticism of expressions whose faultiness is patent to the ear of a listener. Just as college instructors examine and report to us the condition of applicants as to skill in writing English, so should we do by pupils sent us from the primary schools. *How* we are to begin our instruction in the art of expression depends wholly on the question, *where* we are to begin.

The point in doubt is not usually how much the pupils know, but how well trained are they in correct habits. The question is not whether they can and will spell isolated words correctly, when startled, as it were, into thought on the spelling; but whether they have an abiding ambition to appear well in their writing, and whether this ambition has been nursed in them so long that it has developed into fixed habits that may be trusted to take care of themselves without perpetual admonition. The question is not whether the pupils know that each sentence should begin with a capital and be followed by a period, but whether they use capitals and periods with unvarying accuracy. The question is not whether they know many things, but whether they know when they do not know, and are moved by an irresistible inner prompting to use dictionaries and other sources of knowledge when the need arises.

The case may occur that pupils entering a high school appear strangely apathetic about their appearance in their English writing, and need sharp stimulus of some kind to make them realize that the teacher is thoroughly following out their careless writing, and will surely bring school discipline to bear upon them for negligence in this duty. It is manifestly wrong for a high school teacher to pass condemnatory judgment on the work of the preceding schools, where doubt-

less extenuating circumstances could be shown to account for a considerable degree of apparent laches. But the apathetic habit in pupils is so unnatural to youth that its existence must be accounted for in some way, and in this case it seems unavoidable to refer it to the practice that is said to be common in primary and grammar schools of not examining pupils' work. If it is indeed the case that the earlier teachers of youth have accustomed themselves to such a practice, it will account for more evils than merely the one of slovenly writing.

The teacher who exacts of his pupils the composition of English themes and then omits to read these themes, is of course not thereby teaching English at all. If he selects, or takes by lot, two or three out of many, and comments upon these, leaving the rest untouched, the case is not much better. Nothing can take the place of certainty in the pupil's mind, the absolute foreknowledge that his work is to be scrutinized, its faults brought to light and reproof, and his own school status to be determined, here also, as in other things, by his performance. What the teacher neglects the pupil will neglect. This is a fundamental maxim in school-keeping, as no teacher will deny. For such neglect the teacher may plead lack of time, and thus relieve himself from personal censure. But the effects remain always the same, lamentable apathy inbred and at last well nigh ineradicable.

If the habit of *making anything do* in their written exercises shows itself in pupils who yet care for their appearance in their oral deliverances in class, the high school teacher's first case must be to get rid of this deadness of ambition by concentrating his efforts upon composition, even though literature and elocution receive for a while less attention. The number of pupils who care little or nothing for