"THOU
THAT TEACHEST
ANOTHER
TEACHEST THOU NOT
THYSELF?"

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ENGLISH

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PROFESSORS IN THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENTS
OF TWENTY REPRESENTATIVE
INSTITUTIONS

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION,

BY

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

With the exception of the articles upon Johns Hopkins University and the University of Minnesota, the contents of this volume are reprinted from *The Dial*, for which they were originally written, and in which they appeared during 1894. They consist mainly of a series of twenty articles upon the teaching of English in as many American colleges and universities, prepared in each case by one of the leading department professors of the institution in question; and of an appendix, which includes a few communications and discussions germane to the subject. The great interest aroused in educational circles by these articles has made it seem desirable to republish them in book form. The volume has been edited by Mr. William Morton Payne, of *The Dial*, whose editorial articles in that review have supplied the basis of the general introduction to the present work, and may be taken as representing the general attitude of *The Dial* towards the more prominent phases of the discussion.

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THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH.

INTRODUCTION.

THE methods employed by our schools in the teaching of English literature have, for some years past, been in a transition stage, exhibiting a strong tendency towards more enlightened ways of dealing with this vastly important subject. The fermentation is of the healthful type, and a fairly clarified product may not unreasonably be expected to result. When Matthew Arnold declared the future of poetry to be immense, he expressed a truth whose full significance may be realized only upon considerable reflection, and the assumption of a broadly philosophical standpoint from which to view the coming conquests of culture. The same idea was expressed, with something of humorous exaggeration, by the author of *The New Republic*, who attributed to John Stuart Mill the opinion that "when all the greater evils of human life shall have been removed, the human race is to find its chief enjoyment in reading Wordsworth's poetry." To indicate the importance of a due appreciation of literature I hardly need, upon this occasion, to repeat the hackneyed quotations in praise of books, from Richard de Bury to Mr. Ruskin; it may surely be taken for granted that, allowing Arnold's demand on behalf of conduct for a good three-fourths of our life, a considerable share of the remaining fraction may be claimed for literature. But if literature is to count for so much among our higher interests, the manner

in which we set about to prepare the way for it is surely of the utmost importance, and any misdirection of energy in this preparation means an almost incalculable loss.

An excellent educational method, much in vogue among the more progressive of modern teachers, is based upon the principle of proceeding from the near and the familiar to the strange and the remote. It is a method that may be pushed to extremes, but it is fundamentally sound. In geography, for example, a child starts with the schoolhouse, the village, and the surrounding country made familiar by his wanderings, and afterwards extends to scenes unvisited the construction thus begun. In history, the happenings of the day, as narrated in the newspapers and talked about at home, provide the starting-point. In seeking to arrive at a comprehension of the nature of government and the organization of society, his attention is first directed towards the town-meeting, which he has possibly seen at work; towards the policeman or the constable, whom he has learned to recognize as the embodiment of executive authority before having learned the meaning of that term, or towards the tax-collector, about whose visits certain ominous associations have clustered, before the function of that *persona non grata* has been realized.

Is there not in the method thus illustrated a suggestion worth putting to the uses of literature? May not the young be led to a true perception of literary values by just this process of smoothing the ways that lead to a correct taste, this device of fitting the conscious achievement to the earlier unconscious one? Those having occasion to observe young people on their way through the educational mill know that literary taste and a genuine delight in "the authors" are not common, that they are the exception rather than the rule. Yet most children have, in the earlier stages of their school life, some germ of literary appreciation that needs nothing more than careful nurture to be brought to flower in the later

stages. But when they come to the serious study of literature in school and college, it presents itself to them as a part of the "grind"; it must be pursued in a certain prescribed way, which is likely enough the wrong way; it is treated as if it were geometry or linguistics, and the needs of the individual are lost sight of in the application of the system.

It seems to me a fundamental principle that anything like rigidity in the methods employed for the teaching of literature and the development of literary taste will necessarily prove fatal to success. In physics or in philology, the "course" is a perfectly rational device; it is of the essence of training in such subjects that the work should be logical in its development. The path of least resistance is in them the same, or nearly the same, for all normally constituted minds. It is obviously the path to be followed, and the treatment of a class *en bloc* becomes not only possible but desirable. With literature the case is very different, and the path of least resistance must be discovered for each individual separately. The imagination is a wayward faculty, and atrophy is likely to follow upon the attempt abruptly to divert it into channels other than those it listeth to seek. The facts of literature may be apprehended by the intellect thus constrained, but that emotional accompaniment which makes of literature a personal message to the individual, which enshrines it, along with music and religion, in the most sacred recesses of the soul, is not to be coerced. Mere didactics are as powerless to impart the message of literature as they are to impart the message of music or of religion. The reward of such an attempt may be theology or counterpoint, formal rhetoric or literary history; but not that spiritual glow which is the one thing worth the having, that kindling of the soul which comes, perhaps when least expected, with the hearing of some ineffable strain, or the reading of some lightning-tipped verse.

There are many, no doubt, poor in emotional endowment, and unresponsive to the finer spiritual vibrations aroused by the masterpieces of verbal art, to whom literature has hardly more meaning than nature had for the yokel of Wordsworth's hackneyed ballad. To one of this class, if he do not actually look upon Homer from the standpoint of Zoilus, or share in Iago's view of the character of Othello, it is at least true that the last agony of Lear is nothing more than the death of an old man; for him the solemn passing of Œdipus

"To the dark benign deep underworld, alone"

is only a sort of hocus-pocus; and his ears are deaf to the

"Sudden music of pure peace"

wherewith the stars seal the successive divisions of Dante's threefold song.

But even for such as these the case is not altogether hopeless. The appeal of literature to the human soul is so manifold that it must find in every nature some pipes ready to be played upon. Dull though the sense may seem, it is at some point waiting to be quickened. For literature is life itself, in quintessential expression; how then can it fail, in some of its many phases, to have both a meaning and a message for every human being? The earliest responsive vibrations may be rudimentary in character, and combined in the simplest of harmonies. The heart may first be stirred by some bit of sentiment that would be accounted cheap by a refined taste; the imagination may first be fired by some grotesque *Märchen*, or by some wildly improbable tale of romantic adventure. The ripest literary taste has such beginnings as these, and the surest appreciation of literature is built upon such a foundation. Between the child, made forgetful of his surroundings by the spell of *Robinson Crusoe* or the *Arabian Nights*, and the man, finding spiritual refreshment in Cervantes

or Molière, renewed strength in Milton, or solace from grief in Tennyson, there is no real break; the delight of the child and the grave joy of the man are but different stages of the same growth, and the one is what makes possible the other.

How far this development may go is a problem to be worked out for each individual separately; and there are doubtless, in each case, distinct limitations. What I have sought to emphasize is just this individual nature of the problem, and the fact that regimentation offers no solution that can be accounted satisfactory. The approach to literature is, in our current educational systems, hedged about with so many thorny obstructions, that not a few young persons start bravely upon it only to fall by the way, disheartened at sight of the forbidding barriers erected by historical, linguistic, and metrical science, for the purpose of taking toll of all wayfarers. Whatever the usefulness for discipline of such subjects, the spirit of literature is not to be acquired by making chronological tables, or tracing the genealogies of words, or working out the law of decreasing predication. We may even sympathize to some extent with those who so revolt from all such methods as to refuse literature any place in the educational scheme. Turn the young person loose, they advise, in a well-stocked library, and let him develop his own tastes in his own way. He will make mistakes, they admit; there will be false starts not quickly righted; but there will be, in the long run, a wholesome development of taste, and a steady ascent to higher levels of appreciation. In any case, assimilation will not be forced, and conventional judgments will not be made to parade as personal convictions. This view has the one great merit of allowing full scope to individualism, but to admit that it speaks the last word would be to abandon altogether the position that educational theory is bound to maintain. That the young may profit by the guidance of the older and wiser is as true in literature as it is in any other of

the great intellectual concerns. But the needs of the individual must be recognized as they are not now recognized, if literature is to play its proper part in education. Each case must be made the subject of a special diagnosis and a special prescription. We might apply to this problem the favorite formula of one of the schools of modern socialism — "From every man according to his ability; to every man according to his needs" — although it is curious to see a socialist precept doing service in an individualist cause.

While college and university English is the special subject of the volume to which these pages serve as an introduction, it seems to me that the subject of elementary and secondary English cannot here be wholly ignored. The subject of the teaching of English is a unity, however varied the details at its successive stages, and it is truer of this subject than of most that mistakes made in the earlier years are difficult, if they are not impossible, of subsequent correction. The English Conference named by the famous Committee of Ten on Secondary Education soon came to realize these facts, and their report differed noticeably from those of the Conferences upon other subjects, by covering, not only the period of secondary education, but also the years that come before. The Report of that Conference, and the Harvard Report on Composition and Rhetoric, made public a year or so earlier, are responsible for much of the recent awakening of interest in the subject of English instruction. In fact, the Harvard Report may be said to have given to the reform movement its strongest impulse, and made a burning "question of the day" out of a matter previously little more than academic in its interest. The subject was made to reach a larger public than it had ever reached before, and this new and wider public was fairly startled out of its self-complacency by the exhibit made of the sort of English written by young men and women supposed to have enjoyed the best preparatory educational ad-

vantages, and to be fitted for entrance into the oldest and most dignified of our colleges. The report was more than a discussion of the evils of bad training; it was an object-lesson of the most effective sort, for it printed many specimen papers *literatim et verbatim*, and was even cruel enough to facsimile some of them by photographic process.

The seed of discontent having thus been sown broadcast, the field was in a measure prepared for the labors of the English Conference named by the Committee of Ten; and the Report of that Conference, made public early in 1894, has kept the question of English teaching as burning as ever, if, indeed, it has not fanned the flame into greater heat. Not only the educational periodicals, but also many published in the interests of general culture, and even some of the newspapers — in their blundering way — have kept the subject before the public. Educational gatherings have devoted to it much of their attention, and it has been largely taken up by writers for the magazines.

The Conference recommendations for the eight years of instruction in elementary English are substantially as follows: For the first two years, elementary story-telling and the description of objects; for the next four, the use of reading-books, the beginnings of written composition, and a certain amount of informal grammar; for the last two years, formal grammar and reading of a distinctly literary sort. The "speller" is to be discarded altogether, and the "reader" after the sixth year. I wish, indeed, that the Conference had gone still farther in the latter case and rejected the "reader" altogether. There is little to be urged in its favor, although it has long been the main reliance of elementary education in English. The important principle seems to be that nothing but literature should be read at all, and the "readers" in current use certainly contain much matter that cannot by any courtesy be called literature. This criticism is altogether

apart from the other defect of scrappiness, inherent in the plan of the typical reading-book. Even *Mother Goose*, as Mr. Horace Scudder has convincingly argued, is a sort of literature, and there is no lack of other substitutes for the thin and innutritious pabulum of the graded (I was on the point of writing degraded) books called "readers" which enterprising publishers have forced upon several generations of over-complacent school authorities. Moreover, the use of the "reader" generally means wearisome repetition of a limited amount of matter, whereas a rational educational method would demand very little repetition. The jaded interest with which a hapless child cons the familiar and well-thumbed pages is fatal to that appreciation of literature which it should be the first aim of primary education to encourage. Why, in these days of inexpensive production of reading matter, should a child be forced to peruse the same pages over and over again until the very sight of the book is hateful to him? Why should not every day bring to him fresh matter for the stimulation of his growing intelligence and imagination?

As for the other point upon which I would insist, the reading of nothing that is not worth reading, there can be no possible excuse for the kind of literary gruel that is too commonly fed, by spoonfuls, to the young. When we consider the peculiarly receptive quality of the child's mind, the retentiveness whose loss he will so soon have occasion to mourn, the imagination so early to be dulled by the prosaic years to come, does it not seem a crime to make of these faculties or powers anything less than the utmost possible, to force the free spirit into ruts and waste it upon inanities? Having at hand the ample literature which gives expression to the childhood of the race, the literature of myth and fable, of generous impulse moving to heroic deed, how can a teacher be justified in substituting for this the manufactured and self-conscious twaddle that is the staple of most modern writing for children? Even

for the very youngest who can read at all, there is no lack of suitable material. And when a more advanced stage has been reached, there is the whole world of fairy lore, the wealth of religious and secular story-telling, the inexhaustible fund of historical incident, all of which must be included in the outfit of the adult mind, and much of which is better acquired at an early age than at any other. The child who has grown up in ignorance of the labors of Hercules and Siegfried's fight with the dragon, of the wanderings of Ulysses and the deeds of King Arthur, of Horatius at the bridge and Leonidas at Thermopylæ, has missed something that cannot be given him later, and may justly feel himself defrauded of a part of his birthright. The sense of injury is only aggravated by finding the mind filled instead with lumber worse than useless, with recollections of the worthless stuff, only too well remembered, that in childhood usurped the place that should have been filled by literature carefully selected for the value of its form or of its subject-matter.

In dealing with its subject proper — the subject of English in secondary schools — the Report of the Conference makes a number of highly important recommendations. To begin with, a demand is made for one-fourth of the time covered by the years of secondary education. Of this share literature proper should get rather more than half, the rest being given to composition, rhetoric, and grammar of the historical or systematic sort. The demand for a full fourth of the secondary school period does not seem to me excessive, and other reforms may well wait until the justice of this claim becomes generally admitted. Given such a recognition of the importance of secondary English, the accomplishment of its educational purpose must follow from insistence upon a few simple and well-understood principles rather than from any new devices or startling innovations of method. The Report rightly emphasizes the fundamental importance of requiring

good English in all school work, whether written or oral. As long as slovenly composition is allowed to pass uncensured in mathematical or natural science exercises, as long as slovenly speech is tolerated in class translations from foreign languages, the case remains hopeless. This is the root of the matter, and other reforms are of minor importance. Theme-writing in the English classes is useful, but written exercises in all the classes must be treated as themes, and bad English in a mathematical paper must count against it no less than bad logic. Teachers should also avail themselves to the utmost of the invaluable comparative advantages offered by the study of whatever ancient or modern languages are being pursued at the same time by the English student. The Conference was wholly right in asserting that "the best results in the teaching of English in high schools cannot be secured without the aid given by the study of some other language."

In secondary education, the old-fashioned treatment of English literature found its embodiment in a historical text-book, to be learned mostly by heart, accompanied sometimes by a hand-book of "extracts," in which each representative writer received an allotment of two or three pages. Sometimes the history and the "extracts" were jumbled together, to the still further abridgment of the latter. The better modern method, which has gained much ground of late, concentrates the attention upon a few longer works and their writers. This method is doubtless an advance upon the other, yet it sometimes means a reaction carried to extremes. We cannot afford to eliminate the historical text-book altogether, but we do need to have the right kind of book and to use it with intelligence. For the book that gives cut-and-dried critical formulas — a too prevalent type — the educator can have no use. What he wants is a book that shall stimulate the critical faculty in the student, not suppress it by supplying criticism ready-made. To direct, but not to force,