

of running up to join you still! But that is evidently *unfeasible* at present.

The opening of that burial-heap blazes strangely in my thoughts: these are the very jawbones that were clenched together in deadly rage, on this very ground, 197 years ago! It brings the matter home to one, with a strange veracity, — as if for the first time one saw it to be no fable and theory, but a dire fact. I will beg for a tooth and a bullet; authenticated by your own eyes and word of honour! Our Scotch friend, too, making turnip manure of it, — he is part of the Picture. I understand almost all the Netherlands battlefields have already given up their bones to British husbandry; why not the old English next? Honour to thrift. If of 5000 wasted men you can make a few usable turnips, why, do it!

The more sketches and details you can contrive to send me, the better. I want to know, for one thing, whether there is any *house* on Cloisterwell; what house that was that I saw from the slope of Naseby height (Mill-hill, I suppose), and fancied to be Dust Hill Farm? It must lie about North by West from Naseby Church, perhaps near a mile off.

You say, one cannot see Dust Hill at all, much less any farm house of Dust Hill, from that Naseby Height?

But why does the Obelisk stand there? It might as well stand at Charing Cross; the blockhead that it is! I again wish I had wings; alas, I wish many things; that the gods would but annihilate Time and Space, which would include all things!

In great haste, Yours most truly,  
T. CARLYLE.

Both Carlyle's letter to Fitzgerald and that to his mother from Cambridge are notable illustrations of the insatiable hunger of the eye which went far to make him the great writer he was. The print of those teeth on his mind is shown in Cromwell, where we read: "A friend of mine has in his cabinet two ancient grinder-teeth, dug lately from that ground, — and waits for an opportunity to rebury them there. Sound, effectual grinders, one of them very large; which ate their breakfast on the fourteenth morning of June, two hundred years ago, and, except to be clenched once in grim battle, had never work to do more in this world!"

*Charles Townsend Copeland.*

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### BOTCHING SHAKESPEARE.

"They aim at it  
And botch the words up fit to their own  
thoughts."

*Hamlet*, IV. v. 9, 10.

THE ascendancy which much of our English literature holds over us is too largely one of opinion. There is a certain range of the great books of it which we take on faith; if we do come to read them for ourselves, our enjoyment of them is derived too often from a consciousness that enjoyment is the right thing to feel under the circumstances.

But our reading is perfunctory, task-work, a lesson in culture. We pass along the beaten way, with its fingerposts of annotation and criticism, like pilgrims going to a shrine. There comes a time, too, when we cease even to make these perfunctory pilgrimages, and content ourselves with the serene recollection of past achievement. There is thus a sense in which we do not possess a great part of our literature, though we dwell, as it were, in the midst of it, like people who live in show places which they themselves

never see with other eyes than those of villagers.

Early in life we learn to style Chaucer "the Father of our English Poetry," and, conscious of our birthright, dutifully set ourselves to work getting acquainted with the Prologue and at least one of the Canterbury Tales. These we painfully read into monstrous English, sometimes catching a little of the beauty of Chaucer's rhythm where time has not played havoc with it, and often faintly discerning the play of Chaucer's humor through the veil of unfamiliar phraseology. But we do not really read Chaucer. We put that word in the vocabulary along with this word in the text, we fit that note in the back of the book to this difficult passage in the front, we ignore the sound of the language, we twist its inflection to suit a preconceived notion of its rhythm, and the net result is a jargon that Chaucer could not understand and a modern would not use. Our sole dependence for what little intelligence of Chaucer's meaning we get is upon a particular set of notes and a special glossary. When we come to read Chaucer later in life, and all the words and notes are forgotten, how tedious it all is! "Is it *Aprile* or *April-e*?" "What does *soote* mean?" (We pronounce it to rhyme with *boot*, but by calling the word at the end of the next line *root* matters are set right again.) "How is a *flower engendered of virtue*?" And so on. It does not take much of this sort of thing to tire out the best of resolves. We can find enough to justify all that has been said about Chaucer; but as to reading his poetry, we will leave that to somebody who has more time and energy for it than we have.

We fare little better with Spenser, though Spenser's speech is nearer ours than Chaucer's is. Two books of the *Faerie Queene* are prescribed (one is almost tempted to say "proscribed") for college reading in English literature; how many of us have read more than

the academic stint of it? How many of us have gone on and learned to know the sonnets, the purity of their thought, the sweetness of their mellifluous wording? To how many persons is Spenser more than a name?

Yet if called upon to give an account of our great poetry, we invariably start the list, in a burst of enthusiasm, with Chaucer and Spenser, although Chaucer and Spenser actually play a less part in the reading of most of us than Rudyard Kipling does. And what is true of Chaucer and Spenser is true of a deal of our literature: we read about it, listen to lectures about it, talk about it, without having read it for ourselves; nay, sometimes lecture about it, like the professor of English literature whose lectures contained an account of a short dramatic poem by Browning called *Pippa Pass-és*. Some of us do make a praiseworthy effort to keep up with our best literature, and we flatter ourselves that our effort is successful. But the very making of the effort smacks of the artificial, and the success of it too often sows the seeds of distinctions which soon grow up to choke with self-conceit and priggishness the little plants of culture we nurse so carefully.

There is a certain cant about the criticism of literature, too, growing out of this artificial way of treating it, that exasperates the more sensible of us. We recognize certain recurring phrases in all criticism, if we read much of it. We see Shakespeare so often sitting, finger on brow and pen in hand, gazing into the abysses of human despair and evolving a Hamlet as to grow tired of the picture. When we are told that "as a piece of psychological development Hamlet lacks the lucidity of classical art;" that "the hero's soul has all the untransparency and complexity of a real soul;" that "one generation after another has deposited in Hamlet's soul the sum of its experience," many of us cannot help feeling that such criticism is pretty close to nonsense. We recognize the cant

of a cultus, — a cultus that grows further and further from the interests of our every-day life. Again, a great deal of criticism is far from being critical. Its judgments, uttered with impressive conviction, are too often the result of mere personal opinion. No evidence is given; frequently, indeed, in the very nature of the case, none is obtainable. We are asked to accept a self-constituted authority. Having to do with practical affairs, having to distrust emotional opinion, having to ask searching questions of ourselves and others, it is hard to lull ourselves into a condition where we can take so much on trust. Rebellion is not worth the time and trouble; and we are not sure that rebellion would be successful. Controversy in these matters is so apt to become personal. We therefore take the easiest way out, and remove ourselves from the critic's jurisdiction.

Thus, as we grow older, we cease to be "literary." The people who leave these things more and more to others are not Philistines, either, as Matthew Arnold called them. You find them in Oxford common-rooms as well as in American homes. Nor has the age grown careless of the things of culture. That is an easy charge to make, but as groundless as such charges usually are. If one will only take the trouble to look for it, more culture can be found in a Western inland town nowadays than many of our large cities could boast of when culture was spelled with a capital C, and had Matthew Arnold for its apostle.

Why is it, then, that so many of us who have had the advantages of university training, who have passed, satisfactorily at least, various courses of literary instruction, who have been at times enthusiastic members of reading clubs, who can speak and write reasonably good English, who have some knowledge of life and affairs, — why is it that we must read lamely and haltingly the supreme poets of our race? The answer

is simple, but one we shall be most of us loath to admit: we have not the necessary English education to read English literature easily. Our training has been Greek, not English. Logically, as far as literature goes, we are citizens of Athens in the time of Pericles, not Americans and Englishmen of to-day. And it is not uncommon for us to boast of the fact. As a people we possess only our contemporary literature; we include Chaucer and Spenser by courtesy, but we do not really possess them; indeed, we do not even possess Shakespeare in the full sense of possession, though we call him our Prince of Poets.

Let us put aside the question of Chaucer and Spenser, and examine the matter as it concerns Shakespeare. We do not possess Shakespeare to the full, because we do not understand Shakespeare. And I do not only mean that there are isolated words or isolated lines in Shakespeare which we do not understand, but I would maintain that we do not read Shakespeare understandingly.

In the first place, let me explain what I mean by "understandingly." As we go through life and continuously add to our experience, we add at the same time words which are native to our thinking and fitting to our experience. Most of these words are generic, and have their place in other minds just as they have in ours. They represent pretty much the same objects of thought and pretty much the same relations for all who think in the language we use. Some of them we use often, others are as rare as the experiences they connote; but all are there, ready to rise at the proper call. It is the power of literature to call them forth and set them in what order the poet (for in this sense all literature is poetry) may choose. He weaves them together, and our lives are caught in the tissue whether we wish it or no. He uses words that have been in our hearts at times when feeling was strong and deep; words

which bitter memories cling to ; words which lovers use ; words fast knit into childish prayer ; words of homely comfort when death's hand was heavy ; words bound up with duty, hope, love, faith, and the best things we have known or hope to know. As they pass through our minds they stir us again, revealing us to ourselves as they reveal the poet's thought to us, and our hearts burn within us. They are English words worn by ages of English use, — the oldest, simplest words of the language, and therefore the richest in association. They are the words of Home, Sweet Home, America, God Save the Queen, Pilgrim's Progress, the Bible (would that they were there given their modern English form, so that they might be more homely still !), — our English birthright.

Such words make our best literature, and always will, as long as human hearts beat in our breasts. We cannot escape them : they are part of ourselves, the ghosts of our good deeds and our bad deeds that must abide with us ; we cannot get rid of them. For us they need no notes, no interpretation ; they go straight to our understandings without need of introduction ; when the poet uses them, they are intelligible, and immediately intelligible, conveying without risk of mistake exactly the thought of the poet's mind, and no other. The process of apprehending them to the full is what might be called, with a little stretching of the term, reflex action. This is what I mean by understanding, and reading in this way is reading understandingly.

Now there is another mental process which we go through in reading that is simply one of judgment. We do not possess a word as part of our thinking vocabulary, and must make an inference from the context, or from its similarity to some word we do know, in order to get at the idea probably embodied in it. This has nothing to do with literature, and if there is very much of

this sort of thing in our reading, what we read for us is not literature. We do not understand it ; we simply guess as to the probable meaning.

This process is entirely distinct from the one of understanding, yet we are constantly confusing the two ; we make the mistake of confounding the natural implications which are or ought to be purely mechanical, and which are due to the fact that answering chords of our experience vibrate with the string the poet has struck, — we confound these with the inferences we are compelled to make on account of our imperfect understanding of language. That is, to apply this to our Shakespeare reading, certain words or arrangements of words in Shakespeare are not really part of our thinking experience at all, and there is nothing in our minds to respond to them ; we recognize these blanks immediately, and fill them in with words and phrases which do provoke associations, and which seem to be those the poet might have used under the circumstances, had he spoken the language we think with. We generously set down the imperfection — for we know it is an imperfection — to the natural inequality of poetic genius and the natural faultiness of a human machine, or we attribute it to the dullness of our literary apperceptions. But the fault lies neither with Shakespeare nor with our dullness of apperception : it lies simply and solely in our ignorance of English.

Now, if you will take down your Shakespeare and read consecutively for a few pages anywhere, without resort to the usual helps and explanations, and will try at the same time to throw yourself out of a "literary" attitude far enough to discern surely what you understand immediately from what you do not understand, but infer, you will see that the mediate and secondary processes are more numerous than you had thought. Suppose the passage you turn to is Hamlet, I. iii. 58, ff., in the middle

of Polonius's long-winded good-by to his son. It runs :—

“ And these few precepts in thy memory  
 Look thou character. Give thy thoughts no  
 tongue,  
 Nor any unproportion'd thought his act. (60)  
 Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.  
 Those friends thou hast, and their adoption  
 tried,  
 Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel,  
 But do not dull thy palm with entertainment  
 Of each new-hatch'd unfledged comrade.  
 Beware  
 Of entrance to a quarrel; but being in,  
 Bear 't, that the opposed may beware of  
 thee.  
 Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice :  
 Take each man's censure, but reserve thy  
 judgment.  
 Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy, (70)  
 But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy :  
 For the apparel oft proclaims the man ;  
 And they in France of the best rank and  
 station  
 Are of a most select and generous chief in  
 that.”

Recognizing the unfitness of the commonest sense of *character* (59) you think of *character* in the sense of “sign” or “letter,” and by this inference arrive at the meaning of Shakespeare's word. “Character,” however, in Elizabethan English (frequently accented “charac'ter” as here), is a common synonym of “write.” The imperative *Look* followed by the subjunctive is now strange syntax, but its likeness to such an idiom as “See you do it well” makes it intelligible. *Proportioned* (60) in the sense of “made symmetrical” is still in literary use, though we usually put “well” in front of it, and will probably give you an inkling of Shakespeare's meaning. *His act*, however, can scarcely fail to suggest a personification; even if you remember enough of your Shakespeare training to recognize the pronoun as the genitive of *it*, the form is as unusual to your thinking as *its* was to Shakespeare's; *act*, too, in the sense of “execution” is as unfamiliar to you as *thought* in the sense of “intention” is. Polonius's advice to his boy, to keep his own counsel and mature his plans well,

thus becomes to your mind the “literary” equivalent of “Don't be talkative and don't act foolishly.” *Familiar* and *vulgar* (61) carry an ignominious sense which the words did not have to the ears of Shakespeare's audience: Polonius neither recommends familiarity to his son nor warns him against vulgarity. To *try an adoption* (62) leaves a gap in the thought that even “literary” interpretation fails to fill. *Grappling with hoops* and *dulling one's palm* (64, 65) are idioms quite strange to modern thinking; our *entertainment* like *entrance* (66) suggests but does not convey Polonius's meaning. *Comrade* (65) with the accent on the first syllable spoils the measure. *Bearing a quarrel* (67) is again an impossible thought in Modern English, and the only possible meaning of Modern English “bear,” namely, “endure,” which you can put with “quarrel” to patch out a “literary” sense is so obviously at variance with the rest of the verse that its absurdity is apparent even from a “literary” standpoint. You can perhaps still “give an ear” to a person (68), but you cannot “give him a voice.” *Opposed* (67), which we do not now call “op-pos-ed,” and should not use as a substantive, has an artificial sound that the word did not know in Shakespeare's time, when “oppose” still had its local meaning, “to place opposite.” *Censure* (69) will betray you into thinking that Laertes is to be silent under criticism; very good advice, but not that his father gave him. *Expressed in fancy* (71) does not now convey the idea “displayed fantastically,” though perhaps with the help of the context and generous inference such a meaning might be tortured out of the words. *Proclaims* (72), again, is not a figure of speech, which it seems to be in the modern reader's mind. *Are of a most select and generous chief in that* (74) is sheer nonsense. Numerous attempts have been made to doctor the passage into something like intelligibil-

ity. Taking it as it stands, it is likely that *chief* is a sophistication of *shef* (our *sheaf*). Spelling was not fixed in the sixteenth century as it is now, so that *ch* often represented the sound *sh*. For example, in Hamlet, I. ii. 82, *shapes* appears in the Quarto of 1604 as *chapes*. The spelling of the Folio *cheff* probably represents what is now *sheaf* (in Shakespeare's time it was called "sheif," rhyming nearly with our *safe*). That being the case, *sheaf* should be the word in our texts, and Staunton's citation of Ben Jonson's "It is found in noblemen and gentlemen of the best sheaf," and "I am so haunted . . . with your refined spirits that it makes me clean of another garb, another sheaf," sufficiently explains the passage. Shakespeare's *generous*, however, by no means corresponds to Modern English "generous."

So we might go on through Hamlet and through the rest of Shakespeare's plays, showing that modern reading of Shakespeare is largely botching the words up to fit the reader's thought. This is not a peculiarly difficult passage, and it is one of those oftenest read; it is perfectly fair, therefore, to assume its difficulties, both in number and in quality, as being fairly representative of those that would be met anywhere. Yet within the compass of these seventeen lines there are nineteen forms of expression which an average educated man would fail partially or wholly to understand in the sense in which "understanding" has been defined. Is it putting the matter too strongly, then, to say "we do not understand Shakespeare"? Suppose the mistakes we made were half the number: ought we not to blush when we declaim about our knowledge of Shakespeare and what we have done for Shakespeare? And it is not Homer or Virgil or Dante, but it is the supreme poet of our own race and our own language, that we are so ignorant of. What wonder? We devote most of our educational energy to studying foreign tongues and foreign

literature. We carry on the stupid prejudice of our ancestors against our vernacular, and study the language and literature of Greece and of Rome! When shall we shake ourselves free from the Renaissance, — the ball and chain of culture? Haven't we nearly served out our sentence? When shall we cease to educate ourselves as citizens of Athens, and learn to be American? How long shall we have to wait before there is a home made in our educational system for the intelligent study of our own language and its literature? How long shall we condemn our children to ignorance of that which they ought to know best of all? When shall we gain independence enough to point criticism to our own literature and say, "Go not to Athens, go not to Rome, seek not Italy or France or Germany, but weigh and consider this, and see if there be not here enough pure gold to furnish you forth with standards of worth?"

Most readers of Shakespeare sooner or later come to the conclusion that this vagueness, which they name the "literary" way of saying things, is one of the chief characteristics of Shakespeare. They call the same thing "quaintness" in Chaucer, where they are more often entirely out of their reckoning. It is really ignorance, — ignorance of English and lack of English culture. The danger of absolute mistake can be somewhat minimized, it is true, by constant resort to notes and commentaries; but the notes, many of which are historic absurdities, are written mostly by scholars who look upon Shakespeare as Modern English and are continually liable to misunderstandings just like those which beset the general reader; for too often, like him, they depend upon "literary instinct" rather than upon actual knowledge to guide them. But suppose the notes are in every case just what they ought to be, reading Shakespeare by their help is an artificial process: the knowledge the reader gets by it does not

abide by him; it is discrete, unconnected, so that every time he reads a new play of Shakespeare's he has to wade through more notes. What wonder, then, that he should get tired of hobbling along on these crutches! What wonder that, as in the case of Chaucer, he should leave Shakespeare to be read by those who have more knowledge and more time for it than he has. Is not Shakespeare in this way losing his hold on us? As his language grows more dim to our sense, and we continue to be careless about learning it, will not the time come when Shakespeare will be little more than a great name in our literature?

Now I would not say that we have already lost Shakespeare, or that we shall lose Shakespeare within the space of a generation. What I would say is that we can in this way lose Shakespeare, and more easily, too, than we think. We English-speaking people have already been advised to abandon Chaucer, — in a journal, it is true, whose advice is not usually worth the taking, but such straws show the way the current sets. Perhaps it will be some time before any one will boldly tell us to give up Shakespeare, and thus show that Shakespeare is already practically given up. But if it is true that we have lost Chaucer as popular literature, that we have lost Spenser as popular literature, that we are losing Milton as popular literature, how shall we ultimately escape losing Shakespeare? Of course, we can selfishly say that Shakespeare will last our time, and the future can take care of itself; or we can fall back on a narrow ideal of culture, and say that there will always be enough scholars among English-speaking people to keep the light burning before Shakespeare's shrine; or we can ignore the facts, and grandiloquently say that Shakespeare is for all time. But the day may come when Shakespeare will be added to Chaucer, and we shall have in literature a Rachel weeping for her children, and not to be comforted.

For, in the first place, it is the general reader who makes a national literature. Now the chief characteristic of great literature, and the one that gives it the strongest hold on experience, is the pertinence of its appeal. The mind of him who reads recognizes something that concerns him, an experience which is identical with his, though the person who has it is widely separated from him in space and time; thus a bond of sympathy is created, and the molecule of human experience gets hold of itself as part of humanity. In its last analysis, the bond is that clear, terse expression, that graphic picture, which reveals this outside experience to him not as words, but as life. The sharpness and clearness of this expression, while it is life, depends upon words. The words must be so aptly the right ones that they are recognized and understood by the mind without effort, because they are part of its own thinking machinery. But the words must be generic, also; that is, they must convey the expression not to one man only, but to thousands. They must be the embodied thought of a race fixed in forms native to its thinking. In other words, they must be immediately intelligible to the general reader.

It follows as a corollary that while a foreign literature can be read and appreciated by a process through which native words rapidly and fittingly take the place of foreign ones, a nation's best and most vital literature must always be that which is written in its vernacular. It might be added as a further corollary that a people's strength is in direct proportion to the strength of their native literature, and that a nation which neglects its literature to follow after a foreign one is sowing the seeds of national decay.

For purposes of literature, therefore, no thought is understood unless it is understood perfectly, with that sort of understanding which we have already spoken of, — understanding that is im-

mediate perception. The shaft must go straight to the mark and stick in the gold. All great literature has this directness and simplicity. It is this that makes it great. We may easily humbug ourselves into thinking that other writing which has not this quality is great, that Mr. Gigadibs is our modern Shakespeare. This humbug may even become general enough to make Mr. Gigadibs's book occupy for a while a place beside Shakespeare on our library shelves; but there comes a time, and it comes swiftly, too, when Mr. Gigadibs's book goes to the lumber-room, with other discarded toys of his generation. It is one of the marvelous things of history how unerring, in the long run, the selection of time is. If we go back to the very beginning of our own literature and examine what has survived, comparing it with contemporary Germanic literature, we discover that what we possess of it must have been of the best produced; or if we run over the ground of Middle-English literature, we find that *Piers Plowman's Vision* and the *Canterbury Tales* are the pieces which were oftenest copied, and so ran the least risk of destruction in coming down to us. Now the basis of this historical selection is universal pertinence, simplicity, directness. In the long run people read what they can understand perfectly, and they make this literature. It is not the best of what has been thought and said in the world, but what has been thought and said the best. No other piece of English writing has taken such a hold on the English thinking race as Hamlet's soliloquy on suicide. Its matter is the veriest commonplace,—the theme of the college sophomore for generations; parodied, hackneyed, declaimed, misquoted, it still stands the most magnificent piece of writing in English. Why? Because this common thought of this common man is clothed in common words; because the words come straight from his own experience, without garnish or ornament other than

that the thought itself wore; because they go straight to the core of the commonest experience of humanity, without other help or assistance than that the understanding alone can furnish. Hamlet, and indeed all of Shakespeare, is an appeal to the general reader. In fact, not much of Shakespeare would have come down to us, had we had to depend on a purely literary public for its transmission to posterity.

Not only does the general reader thus make a national literature, he also keeps it alive. It is but an artificial life which literature lives in school and university textbooks, and among special students and scholars. When the people who, by their previous education and present surroundings, are in a position to draw help and strength from the great books in their own language abandon those books to read something else in their moments of leisure, their literature is practically dead. Their children may study it in school; they themselves may talk about it, and glibly, too; but if they do not read it because they want to read it, preferring to read criticism of it, or to read contemporary fiction, or to peruse the newspapers, for them what they are pleased to call their literature is but a figment of the imagination,—it has no reality. In short, a people's literature is what they read, not what they read about, or talk about, or would like to read. It makes no difference what the reason for the abandonment is; the result is the same. It may be for idleness, it might be because the books of it were unattainable; but anything which serves to keep a people away from their literature will eventually cause them to lose it.

In the case of Shakespeare the obstacle might easily be the lack of a clear understanding of Shakespeare's language. Inferential interpretation has a certain attraction for the scholar, and his apparent success in it gives him continual ground for gratification; but it worries

and wearies the general reader, who is discouraged and humiliated by his obvious failure in it. It becomes with him a question between spending an hour or more over fifty lines of Shakespeare in order to understand them thoroughly, and reading five times as many higgledy-piggledy to get the best sense he can. What wonder that in nine cases out of ten he chooses the easier course! His schoolboy days are over, and he does not like to think that he must take a schoolboy's attitude to Shakespeare; it is not hard for him, therefore, to persuade himself that he can read it well enough. It is so fatally easy for any one, scholar or general reader, to persuade himself that he understands what he knows nothing about! But the kind of reading he does takes little hold on him; it is not Shakespeare, though there is some Shakespeare in it, — in many cases enough to hold his attention and keep his enthusiasm for a time, and when all is said, enough to justify to him the place Shakespeare holds in our literature. It goes in at one ear and out at the other. It is a thing apart from his life. His brain, active all day in schemes to educate his sons and daughters, refuses the extra burden such reading puts upon it. So as he grows older he reads Shakespeare less and less. This man is one of a class the most numerous and the strongest in our American life; when he ceases to read Shakespeare, literature is already among us a decadent art. Have we not some reason to fear, then, that we may lose Shakespeare out of our national literature?

The loss would be one which for some time we might be quite unconscious of. We all know how easy it is for the individual to excuse his own neglect of duty by assuming that every one else is doing what he knows he ought to do, and that therefore his effort is unnecessary. That it is thus possible for nobody to do what everybody ought to do has become fixed in the proverb, "Every-

body's business is nobody's business," — a proverb which might easily run, "What everybody reads, nobody reads." We all know that yearly a certain number of books are made and sold to be put "in every gentleman's library," but how many gentlemen read them? It is not necessary, then, to infer that good books are always read by the persons who buy them. We might lose Shakespeare from our national literature, and still go on talking about Shakespeare, and buying sumptuous editions of Shakespeare, and reading books of Shakespeare criticism; the danger is in forgetting to read Shakespeare.

And we shall lose this our richest literary possession if we do not take care. If we go on cajoling ourselves in the belief that, to read Shakespeare, all one needs is a knowledge of every-day English and a copiously annotated edition of Shakespeare's works; that it is not necessary to know the language of Shakespeare's time; that we have got along fairly well hitherto without much study of English, and things are good enough the way they are; that we can go on in our neglect with impunity, — we shall find one of these days that we have lost Shakespeare, that the kind of English literature Shakespeare represents really plays no more part in the lives of the mass of us than the Vedas do.

If we are going to keep Shakespeare, we must understand Shakespeare. Now, to understand Shakespeare, we do not need more notes on Shakespeare's text, more variorum editions of Shakespeare, more transcendental lectures on Shakespeare's life and work. Most of us will agree that in these respects abridgment with better quality is the thing we need. What we do want is a widespread understanding of Shakespeare's language, — nay, of English, — an understanding wide and broad enough to reach into the public schools and touch the masses; that for every child who can decline a Latin noun, there will be two

who know the rudiments of English historical grammar; for every boy who is reading Cæsar's Gallic Wars, there will be five reading Chaucer's Prologue; for every college student who can read Homer's archaic Greek and be unconscious of its archaic form, there will be ten who can read Beowulf without having to translate it into broken-backed, cumbrous, impossible New English compounds; for every critic who grows enthusiastic over the human and humanistic qualities of the Iliad, there will be a hundred who take these things and the knowledge of them for granted on every page of Shakespeare's plays.

Is such an end possible? Why should n't it be? Why should we be gaining a fresher knowledge and a deeper insight into the development of our political life, and remain ignorant of the development of our literature? Why should we be clever, shrewd, untiring, in the one field, and stand imbecile in the other? If we do not know these things, why can't we learn them? Is English such a perplexing subject that it can be understood only by the most scholarly professors in our best universities? The difficulty of attaining such a knowledge, granting that it is great, ought rather to be an invitation to energy than a temptation to despair; and when once it is attained, the task of presenting it ought to be easy; for English speech is the first thing we learn, and the last we forget. Let us grant for the nonce, though it is by no means true, that up to Shakespeare there is no literature in English, save a small part of Chaucer, that is worth the student's study. Let us admit all the poverty which people who cannot read it allege against our earliest literary efforts. If the study of it is going to teach us to understand Shakespeare, it is surely worth the wading through. Let your student who yearns after literary form try to get it from Greek and Latin if he wants to, but give your average student, who is going to turn into an American citizen before

long, some rudimentary knowledge of what the speech he uses is, how it has grown to be what it is, and how he can use it to the best advantage. Then bring him to the best literature in it, opening, perchance, a door that will never be closed all his life through. Make him read the great books of it intelligently, till they are instinct with life. Give him a knowledge of his language so that he can do this easily, unconsciously, so that the act of reading Shakespeare will be no guesswork, but a sure-footed progress to a distinct goal.

For it is the knowledge of Shakespeare's language as English, rich, vital English, that we want, not "notes and emendations." It is the knowledge of his speech as a living speech, to his purpose more pregnant than our speech is to ours, a familiarity with its sound and form such that there seems nothing unusual in it as we read, an acquaintance with its syntax so intimate that we could think Elizabethan syntax, if need were — in short, we want a knowledge of English that will enable us to read Shakespeare without translating it, to read Chaucer, too, without resorting to translation. For our translations of Shakespeare and Chaucer are always worse than those we make for Virgil and Horace, because we hold on to all the forms and words which have any resemblance to those we use now, and thus produce a sort of bastard-English that never existed in any English mind. And this sort of stuff we put into the mouths of Chaucer and Shakespeare! And we are English-speaking people, thinking with the language Chaucer and Shakespeare wrote! We prefer to go on in this way, reading some of our best literature lamely, haltingly, because in our educational system, planned out to suit mediæval conditions, no place is left for the proper study of our native language. We think we should be flying in the face of educational providence if we moved the study of a foreign lit-

erature far enough aside to make room for the intelligent study of our own. But no upheaval of our educational system is necessary: a few years of sound elementary teaching of English is all we want — just enough to let the student read Chaucer and Shakespeare (perhaps, too, Beowulf, though we do not need to add that yet), in the original, with a feeling of sureness and ease. If we are too timorous to do all this at once, let us start with Shakespeare and Elizabethan English. That will be good enough for a beginning. Let us set ourselves to teach our children to read Shakespeare in the original (that is, not in Modern English transcriptions), without notes and glossary except where they are necessary to explain passages that are obvious nonsense, or meaningless through ignorance of some contemporary conditions.

Now it is possible, and easily possible, to get in a short time a knowledge of Shakespeare's language such that the inferential process through which we arrive at an understanding of his words by substituting for them words of our own can largely be done away with for the average educated man who reads Shakespeare. Of course there will remain a number of passages in which careless transmission of Shakespeare's thought brings it to us in unintelligible form. But it is not too much to hope that common sense and a knowledge of English will do much to reduce the number. The knowledge that the form and content of English words are constantly changing, and that the ways of putting them together are likewise changing constantly, will be a thing that the student can start with. A familiarity with the sound and form of Elizabethan English presented in the light of its historical development ought to be easily obtainable by any one understanding the rudiments of English, from a year's study of a properly arranged textbook upon the subject, — a textbook which

could be used in elementary schools at a time when a student is usually initiated into the mysteries of Greek. For, like all grammatical study, this is elementary work, and ought to be finished before the student gets into the university. With these two things to start with, American common sense and American teaching ability might be left to wrestle with the problem alone without much concern as to the result.

We shall then be able to read Shakespeare without resorting to the subterfuge through which we excuse our lack of understanding on the ground that Shakespeare wrote in a "literary" way. We shall get the magnificent range and sweep of his words with a sure sympathy born of positive knowledge, not of literary affectation, and more of us will gain sureness and sweep in the use of our own.

Is not the effort worth our while? Is not Shakespeare's English worth more to us than Homer's Greek? Is not a scientific knowledge of the language that we think in, talk in, read in, buy and sell in, save and lose our immortal souls in, of more consequence to us than a superficial familiarity with the academic intricacies of Greek and Latin grammar? In Shakespeare we have a poet who has put into this language, as sensitive and tremulous under his touch as the strings of a harp, the deepest experience that we have yet known or are capable of, in terms of the life we live every day, and in words our mothers use to us all our lives through, — a poet who is rightly regarded, not as the supreme poet of our race and language only, but as the supreme poet of the whole world; and we devote a couple of years of dabbling, desultory, dilettante study to his work, and spend seven or eight on learning to read Virgil and Homer! If we have many and good courses in schools and colleges to teach us to understand Homer's Greek, ought we not to have more and better courses to teach us Shakespeare's English? We are told that we

go through this routine of classical study in order that we may better understand literature. But what good is such an understanding of literature to give us, if we cannot read intelligently and easily the language that the best of our own literature has been written in? What study of our literature will be of any avail that does not take into account its development and its continual relation to the life of the people that produced it? How long are we to listen to historians of our literature who cannot read it with perfect intelligence back of the eighteenth century? How long shall we remain deaf and blind to this our most vital interest?

Is not our duty, then, plain, to learn thoroughly this English we love, and to study deeply its literature in the light of our knowledge; to cease thinking of ourselves as a barbarian nation, and learn the language of the people? Is not our duty to our children equally plain, to hand on to them this language the better

for our having used it, this literature the clearer for our having taught it to them? This will require effort, strong and persistent; it means work for our educational system; it means courage in departing from ancient tradition and daring to make the future our own. But the gain! A people rich in the consciousness of their greatness, and strong in the power of their thought!

“Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself like a strong man after sleep and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam, purging and unscaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate” — a period of darkness and barbarism.

*Mark H. Liddell.*

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## THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A REVOLUTIONIST.

### VII.

To maintain such numbers of servants as were kept in our house would have been simply ruinous, if it had been necessary to buy all our provisions at Moscow; but in those times of serfdom things were managed very simply. When winter came, father sat at his table and wrote the following:—

“To the manager of my estate, Nikól-skoye, situated in the government of Kalúga, district of Meschóvsk, on the river Sirena, from the Prince Alexéi Petróvich Kropótkin, Colonel and Commander of various orders.

“On receipt of this, and as soon as winter communication is established, thou

art ordered to send to my house, situated in the city of Moscow, twenty-five peasant-sledges, drawn by two horses each, one horse from each house, and one sledge and one man from each second house, and to load them with [so many] quarters of oats, [so many] of wheat, and [so many] of rye, as also with all the poultry and geese and ducks, well frozen, which have to be killed this winter, well packed and accompanied by a complete list, under the supervision of a well-chosen man;” and so it went on for a couple of pages, till the next full stop was reached. After this there followed an enumeration of the penalties which would be inflicted in case the provision should not reach the house situated in such a street, num-