

# The Study of English in Our Public Schools.

BY ONE OF THE TEACHERS.

**I**N recent years a great deal of criticism has been directed against the instruction given in our public schools. It is asserted, especially, that the study of English does not go hand in hand with the other branches of the curriculum ; that it is made a matter of secondary importance—a kind of side entertainment or specialty between the regular acts of school life.

If what everybody says is true, then the evil of inferior English teaching exists. But the majority of these critics stop with a bare statement of so called facts. They blame the teachers ; they blame the text books ; they blame everything, in short, yet blandly refuse to advance any original idea which might improve the literary status of the rising generation.

Now, in the first place, we should not blame our teachers too harshly. As far as this Province is concerned we have good teachers in our public schools ; sbholarly men and women who have shed, and are shedding lustre on their profession. Again, the text-books in themselves are not wholly to blame. The present revised edition is not uninteresting ; it is a decided improvement upon the old edition by the same authors of a few years ago. But they are all too meagre—this is where the trouble lies ; they do not in themselves contain a sufficient variety of intellectual food.

Here in my opinion, is the real source of any trouble that may possibly exist, as a solitary reading book is not at all sufficient to satisfy the literary needs of any

boy or girl attending the classes of the senior division in any of our public schools. Some auxiliary reading books are necessary ; some standard works of fiction, poetry, or general literature are needed to supplement the regular reading book, the teacher using his own discretion in this respect.

"The Sketch Book," by Washington Irving, for instance, the works of Longfellow, or others of a similar nature, might be used to good advantage as auxiliary reading books either in the classroom or in the home. Such books have a certain refining influence upon the youthful mind ; and the early springtime of life, let me add, is the time when the seeds of refinement can be most successfully implanted.

It has often been remarked that the real education of a boy or girl begins after they leave school. This is a strange statement, but it is, to a certain extent, true. This after education is due largely, to a keen observation of the world and humanity in general, to extensive and varied reading, and to cultured home associations.

To the average student, history is one of the driest of studies ; yet, how interesting it becomes when woven into the annals of romance. "History repeats itself," we often hear. What does this expression mean ? Does it not mean the repetition of social as well as political life ? Are not the ambitions, the weaknesses, and the passions of humanity the same to-day as they were in the ages that are gone ? Decidedly the same. We live under different conditions it is true, but the conflicting passions of our poor human nature remain unchanged. For this reason, therefore, the young man or woman going out into the world needs to be acquainted with the ways of the world, and the people with whom he or she shall come in contact ; to study, not only the characteristics of the kings and queens who are given the greatest prominence in history, but

also to become thoroughly acquainted with a variety of other characters who moved in an equally useful if less exalted sphere—characters similar to those whom they meet, or expect to meet in everyday life.

A supplementary course of general reading like that which I have suggested, would broaden the pupil's intellect. He would imbibe the sentiments of the leading authors, whose names are legion, and whose works shall live for all time. He would be able to speak intelligently of the literature of the past or the present—a knowledge so essential to every person professing intellectual refinement ; and, incidentally, he would acquire a more thorough grasp of language, and a graceful and ready expression.