

**STUDIES IN ENGLISH FOR THE  
USE OF MODERN SCHOOLS.  
PROSE AND POETRY TO BE  
LEARNT BY HEART**

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# *STUDIES IN ENGLISH.*

· FOR THE USE OF MODERN SCHOOLS. ·

*PROSE AND POETRY TO BE LEARNT BY HEART.*

EDITED AND ANNOTATED BY

H. COURTHOPE BOWEN, M.A.,

LATE SCHOLAR AND MATHEMATICAL PRIZEMAN OF CORP. CHRIS. COLL., CAMB.  
TWICE UNIVERSITY PRIZEMAN IN ENGLISH (I.E. HAS, 1872; MAITLAND, 1873).  
SECOND MASTER AT THE CITY OF LONDON MIDDLE CLASS SCHOOL.



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## INTRODUCTION.

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IT is a matter of deep importance in education,—in drawing forth, that is, and training to finest growth the finest properties of our nature,—that method and style of thought and expression should be closely attended to. The mere accumulation of facts may come at any time ; but the wise and right treatment of a few, and those the simplest, should be our constant teaching, while the learner's mind is young. Afterwards, as this power grows and becomes strong, new and higher facts should continually be added. *Some* facts there must be of which to treat ; but the mere piling together of facts is as the piling together of loose stones without mortar and without design,—as the attempt to build a house without tools, or without a knowledge of their use. While, again, the best, if not the only way to learn what tools there are, and how to use them, is to study what tools master-builders have used, and with what effects.

Now, this is true in learning of all kinds, but in the learning of language it is truer than in any. Vocabulary and grammar will give us the stones and the tools ; but to learn how to use these with highest effect and noblest meaning we must study and thoroughly take to heart and memory what has been built with these by the wisest and most cunning builders. It is with the hope of offering an opportunity of such a study that this small book has been put together. Only such specimens have been chosen as seemed worthiest ; and though in so small a space many others of equal worth must perforce have been omitted,

and though fragments at no time are very satisfactory, still it is hoped that no worthy kind of style is here left without a representative, and that the fragments—unavoidable in prose, but in the poetry made as few as possible—are so chosen, as not entirely to fail in giving *some* glimpses, at least, and touches of works which can only be *fully* known and felt when studied as *unbroken* wholes. Furthermore, such helps as were possible and advisable have been given in the notes and criticisms towards the appreciation of each man's style, in order that the learner, while committing the words to memory, may be made somewhat, if not completely, alive and awake to the special excellence and beauty of the author with whom he has to do.

Let it not be idly imagined that the power and knowledge of any man's tongue will come to him unstudied and unsought. Language is a musical instrument of wondrous and intricate make, from which the simplest and sweetest, the grandest and most sonorous sounds, may be called forth, with meanings manifold ; and he who would learn to play thereon must learn its notes and stops, its range, its possibilities of depths and heights. There is no study nobler than this : the study of that by which men, through so long years, with patience and with pain of great longing, through silences and hopeless bursts of tears, have striven to utter things well-nigh unutterable—till at length, as with a rising of the sun on misty hills, music arose, and filled for them the spaces where the thought was dumb. What a history of passionate yearning and manful striving, of long travail of thought, and unhopèd success, may there not lie in a word !—filling it even for us now with dim echoes of strange music. If but for this, surely it can be of no small gain to lead minds still fresh and young to an early and earnest study of language—language which is, be sure of it, as wonderful as all the suns and stars ; in which all thought lives, and moves, and has its being ; by means of which alone man can profit by the experience of his forefathers, or bridge over to his fellows that deep tract of sea which circles each man's life, and makes each life a solitude. But let none, puffed up with scant or skilled knowledge of other tongues, of Latin or Greek, of Hebrew or Hindi, despise his own native tongue—the tongue of Shakspeare and Milton, of Coleridge and Shelley, of Burke



and Carlyle, and Ruskin ; such a one indeed were poor fool enough. Rather let us, whilst remembering that all languages are divine, honour all ; but not for that despise our native worship to follow after any strange gods.

It is clear, too, what must be gained by bringing those whose minds are fresh and open to all noblest impulses, whose ears have not yet forgotten the sounds, nor their eyes the sights of heaven—which still they hear and see, and smile at in their sleep—into closest contact with true greatness, earnest longings, noble purity and strength, passionate or tender love of beauty. These will not, cannot fail to keep alive within their hearts the memories of that home they have left : these, at least, will give them something to love and reverence in man, something to reverence and love in nature. And may it not be that, when some quiet evening one of these is listening to the music, and wondering at the beauty of great hearts and minds, and all his blood is astir within him, and his spirit awake, suddenly he may, in the silence, catch the sound of the same music in his own heart, suddenly or slowly become aware of his own possibilities of nobleness and beauty ? And so, henceforth, life shall become a reality to him, and a thing holy and wonderful ! There is no limit to the gain that thus may be.

One word to those who are to learn. In making the acquaintance of great men and great books, you are gaining an introduction to, and a knowledge of, those who can be and will be your truest and noblest friends,—unchanging through your lives ; you are gaining an insight into, perhaps a fellowship in, a world full of wonders and beauty, of laughter and tears ; in which, it may be, the greatest happiness of your lives will have to lie : a world apart from the dreariness and heaviness which must at times follow toil ; yet one from which you may do noblest work for your fellows and yourselves ; where, with Shakspere and Milton, and all great and joyous souls, amidst a quiet, such as the ancients fabled of their gods, you may live and laugh and love ; where sorrow is only heard afar off, and the storms of life fall silent.

To masters and teachers I would say : Remember that accuracy is

not the *only*, nor indeed the *chief*, thing to aim at in teaching of this kind—of accuracy, indeed, you can *teach* but little, though you should *praise* it much. Aim above all things at teaching your pupils to appreciate a work of art and the thought it holds : teach them most carefully *the right use of pauses, tones, and accents*, that the music and the meaning of the words may be brought out to their fullest. There is endless variety of exercise and use in this ; and it is well worth the greatest care and thought. For to endeavour to teach a right appreciation of literature or language without it is as the endeavour to teach music by a timeless strumming on notes out of tune.

**MUSIC, POETRY, AND PROSE.**—[It is hard to give any satisfactory explanation of the differences of these, and yet still to remain simple and intelligible to young learners. It is hoped, however, that the following may be of some use to those boys in higher classes who may be interested in the matter.]—*Music and Poetry* are alike in *this*—that they are both the expression of the emotions ; but in *this* they differ—that *Poetry* is the expression of them when they have assumed a distinct and articulate form ; have in fact become *thought*, in the strictest sense : while *Music* is the expression of them when they have *not* assumed this definite articulate form. Each of these expressions will obey, or be made to obey, certain laws not very different in the one case from those in the other. The emotions will have had their origin in, or have been excited by, *some idea* ; but it is not at all necessary that they should in certain individuals, and in certain cases, be of a nature to assume a definite form, so as to be expressible in words. For example, the idea of death excites certain emotions, and these may in one case, or in one individual, take the form whose expression is a “Dead March in *Saul*,” or “a funeral sonata ;”—in another, becoming definite thought, take that form whose expression is an “Adonais,” or an “In Memoriam.” From this we see how, at times, *Music* may become almost *Poetry*,—almost definite speech,—as in the “Songs without Words ;” while, again, when the emotions have not been allowed quite to become definite thought, or were incapable of becoming so, we get poetry which is almost pure music, and not

definite speech at all; as in some of Shelley's poems, or more noticeably in the works of some living poets. But of these two, poetry and music, we cannot say which is before or after the other.

*Prose* is simply the *direct* expression of a definite *idea*. But as every idea must, to a greater or less extent, excite emotions, these will to a greater or less extent affect the expression of the idea; and we shall have prose as *musical* and *poetical* as Milton's or Burke's, or as flat and unmusical as a modern newspaper, or a parliamentary report. Prose, too, will have its laws of expression, just as music and poetry have. While, on the other hand, we see that when the thought and its expression are almost absolutely definite, and are little, if at all, influenced by the emotions, we get that which, though it may be forced to obey the outward laws of poetry—the laws of its expression (metre, rhythm, etc.)—is not *poetry* at all, but plainly *prose*; as very noticeably in Pope and his followers, and occasionally in parts of a few of Wordsworth's poems. We also see from this the force of the objection against *didactic* and *philosophical* poetry;—because they must, by the nature of their subject, aim at the *direct* expression of some absolutely *definite* thought, and this can only be injured and disturbed by the interference of the emotions. And, lastly, we see that the more definite and *direct* we wish the expression of our thought to be, the less poetical must we make our prose.

**IMAGINATION AND FANCY.**—*Imagination* is the *creative* power of the mind, and the prime agent in all man's power of perception; that is, imagination *sees into* things and thoughts; perceives their properties and essence, and having mastered these, re-creates from them—gives form or image to what was before disconnected and indefinite. *Fancy* is an effort of the memory, by means of which certain things, or thoughts, are connected with others, because of their likenesses. It does not create or perceive, but it sees, and speaks of what is already there, actually existing. For example, when Milton writes of "the pale primrose that forsaken dies," he is using *imagination*; for, from perceiving its inobtrusive growth, and how its colour grows paler as it dies away, and that it dies when the gayer flowers arrive, he *creates*