

THE WRITING OF ENGLISH

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The writing of English by Philip J. Hartog

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OF ENGLISH**

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BY

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*Why not all in English, a tongue of itself both depe in conceit
and frank in deliverie?*

SECOND EDITION

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
1908

Why not all in English, a tung of itself both depe in conceit and frank in deliverie? I do not think that anie language be it whatsoever is better able to utter all arguments either with more pith or greater plainesse then our English tung is if the English utterer be as skillfull in the matter, which he is to utter, as the foren utterer is.

R. MULCASTER, *Elementarie*, London, 1582, p. 258.

... Education is the greatest problem and the hardest that can be given to man to solve. For insight depends on education, and education again on insight. Hence education can only advance slowly, step by step; and it is only through the continued handing down by one generation of its experience and knowledge to the next, each adding something in turn to the common stock, that a right idea of educational method can be formed.

KANT, *Ueber Pädagogik*, ed. Willmann, p. 66.

HENRY FROWDE, M.A.
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

1. The plan of this book, as it was originally conceived, may be briefly summed up as follows :—

- (1) The English boy cannot write English.
- (2) The English boy is not taught to write English.
- (3) The French boy can write French.
- (4) The French boy can write French because he is taught how to write.
- (5) Historical reasons for the foregoing facts.
- (6) How the French boy is taught to write.
- (7) How the English boy may be taught to write.

To this plan I have kept fairly close; but the whole substance of my essay has been modified by the conclusions arrived at in working it out.

In dealing with the 'writing of English' it is the practical aspect of the question that strikes one first. The scandalous incapacity of the English boy to write clear English carries with it such obvious disabilities that we look at once for a practical remedy. Chapter I (together with other parts of the book) is intended to bring home the bare facts to those head masters, Governing Bodies of Schools, and public authorities generally who still ignore them, and to help in the fight for the introduction of English into the curriculum of our Secondary Schools for boys.

It will not unreasonably be asked how the opportunity for teaching the mother tongue is to be used when once it

has been gained. The answer to this question at first seemed to be simple : we have only to follow the methods by which the French attain such conspicuous success. But the deeper I got into the problem, the more complex and elusive and far-reaching I found it to be ; and I soon realized that it could not be properly attacked without doing two things :—

(1) Investigating the French method not only from the practical point of view, but also from the historical, so as to distinguish, if possible, the meaningless or even harmful survivals of tradition from the elements that are not only effective but good.

(2) Experimenting *de novo* with English children.

The results of my investigation and experiments, carried on in the intervals that could be spared from work necessarily devoted to other subjects, are recorded in Chapters II–IV.

The historical part might no doubt have been extended very greatly. But it was my object to write a directly practical rather than a historical essay ; and, while I hope that nothing of real importance since the seventeenth century has been omitted, I have attempted to sketch only such of the facts as seemed more immediately necessary for an understanding of present practice and tradition in the teaching of writing in the French schools. Further information with regard to the classical and mediæval history of the teaching of rhetoric will naturally be sought elsewhere.

I regard as the chief conclusions arising out of my work (1) that English children seem to have no less aptitude than French for writing well ; and (2) that in the teaching of the mother tongue, properly conceived, we have the most powerful instrument in the whole range of intellectual education, as it has been in this country the most neglected.

The Socratic question and answer (and the text-book) lead the pupil, as it were, by the hand. In the silent dialogue of the person trying to express himself in writing, in the advance of the imagination and the making sure of each step by question and answer of the intellectual conscience, we have the method of the master put into use by the pupil himself.

This subtle and delicate process, half-conscious, half-unconscious, I take to be the essential process of all composition. It is, I believe, capable of influencing more deeply than any other the whole working of the adolescent mind for good or for evil. A striking example of its deforming power when misapplied is shown by the influence on style of examinations. But the radical defect, as it appears to me, of nearly all methods of teaching composition, from the earliest days to our own, lies in this—that for the exact fitting of the written words to an ideal conceived by the pupil, the teacher is apt to substitute an imperfect matching of the written production with a literary model; quite oblivious that the model, admirable as it might have been for its purpose, had in fact a purpose altogether different from that of the schoolboy exercise. Cicero in ancient times, Burke in modern, spoke or wrote in dead earnest to bring home a particular conviction to a particular audience; the schoolboy only tries feebly to imitate a Cicero or a Burke; he has no object and no audience in view. To ask a pupil to imitate the results of a great master without providing him with the definite stimulus and aim which made those results possible, is indeed to set him to make bricks without straw. And so it has gone on for centuries. Hence the futilities of the rhetoric denounced by Locke, the futilities still living in

that ridiculous imitation of great writing, the purposeless school-essay, set in almost every English school, asked for at almost every examination in English.

The question of the teaching of the mother tongue is part of an even wider question; for the whole process of education, intellectual and moral, involves a delicate adjustment of the necessities for acting like others and for acting differently from others.¹ The unintelligent use of the model is probably the central fault of European education. If we may trust certain competent observers (I may quote Mr. Graham Wallas), the danger in the United States lies rather in the unchecked development of individual caprice. In the method of class-teaching described below I have attempted to develop simultaneously both the imagination and the self-criticism of the individual pupil, and to secure the help at each point of the appreciation and judgement of the class as a whole. It should be said that the intellectual libertinism criticized in American schools is not, at any rate so far as I have been able to ascertain, to be found in the teaching of the mother tongue, which has assumed such great importance in that country during the last thirty years.² Finding nothing in England, it was to the Continent, and especially to Germany, that the Americans went for their example. A brief note on the systems of teaching the mother tongue in the United States and in Germany is added at the end of the book. I regret that I have been unable to make a detailed study of those systems on the spot. But if we have much to learn from

¹ Cf. speech delivered by President Nicholas Murray Butler, reported in the *Morning Post* for July 6, 1905.

² Cf. G. R. Carpenter in *The Teaching of English*, by G. R. Carpenter, F. T. Baker, and F. N. Scott (Longmans & Co., 1906), p. 46 and *passim*.

France, and something from the United States, Germany, and other countries in this matter, a great and worthy tradition of teaching English to English people must, I think, be ultimately founded on English experience.¹ The problem of the teaching of the mother tongue is indissolubly bound up with questions of social conditions, national temperament, and national requirements. In the last chapter I have attempted to point out some of the larger aspects of this problem.

2. I have embodied in my text the substance of a paper on 'The Teaching of Style in English and French Schools' read in Manchester in 1901 and published in the *Fortnightly Review* for June, 1902; of an address given to the Education Section of the British Association at Belfast in 1903; of an address to the London County Council Conference of Teachers of January, 1906; and of other addresses given on this subject at Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Haileybury, and elsewhere. I had, through Mr. Lyttelton, formerly Head Master of Haileybury, now Head Master of Eton, the opportunity of discussing the matter in the autumn of 1902 with the Haileybury staff; Mr. Lyttelton shortly after introduced the teaching of English throughout the school, and I am indebted to him for reports on the progress of this teaching. He has, I understand, since introduced teaching of a similar kind at Eton.

3. In the kind of work which I have described the observant teacher will learn more perhaps from his pupils than from the outside. I have gladly to acknowledge my debt to an enthusiastic class of working men at Manchester Ruskin Hall (now merged with the Manchester Art Museum

¹ It is to be hoped that the 'English Association' recently formed may do good work in building up this tradition.