AUTHORSHIP.

A LECTURES

BY

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BY THE

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Authorship.

A LECTURE
BY THE

REV. THOMAS BINNEY,
WEIGH-HOUSE CHAPEL.
DELIVERED BEFORE THE

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AUTHORSHIP.

WHEN it was proposed to me to deliver one of the Lectures in the present course, I felt obliged to decline the request. I durst not undertake an engagement which, from what may reasonably be looked for by an audience like this, would, I well knew, make larger demands both on time and thought than I could afford to meet. When, however, it was stated, that on two of the evenings two short⋆ papers were to be read, and I was requested to take one of these, I was induced to comply, feeling that less would be required, as less would be expected, than when a single mind has to be answerable for the whole of the evening's instruction. I

⋆ As this was the understanding, and as this paper will probably appear to be longer than such an understanding would warrant, I think it proper to explain how that came to pass. I got interested in the subject, and wrote much more than I have here given. What is here, however, is all that I took with me to the Hall. It was never my intention to read more of that than the time allotted to me might permit, and then to promise to send the whole of it to the printer. Though I wrote more than what is included in this paper, I did not write all that suggested itself to me; and as I endeavoured to give this portion of the essay a sort of completeness, I confine myself, in its publication in this book, to what lay before me on the night of delivery and was promised to the audience. Whether I may ever recast and enlarge the piece, and attempt to make it into something that might be useful to such young men as it may interest, I cannot tell. That will depend on many circumstances.

greatly regret that the reading of two papers at the same time is confined to one evening, instead of taking place on two, as originally proposed, because, so far as my part in the experiment is concerned, I very deeply feel that it will not, by such a trial, have at all a fair chance of success.

In addition to this, you must permit me to say, that I have another very serious source of regret. I greatly fear

that the word "Authorship" does not convey a correct idea of the object of this paper; it may have led to expectations which I did not mean to excite, and am not here to satisfy. The term, in itself, is vague and indefinite; too much so, for the use to which it has been put. It ought to have had some modifying epithet attached to it. The fault is mine,—but that only aggravates my regret. "Authorship" may be taken to signify so much,—the subject might be treated in such a variety of ways,—the word will have suggested sucli different ideas to different minds, and these, it may be, all so unlike anything *I* have thought of, that it is not only possible, but quite certain, the present essay will be productive of much more disappointment than pleasure. My sole object is merely to give a little plain, practical advice to some of these young men here, on a subject in which they happen to be interested, and on which, I happen to know, that a little advice is not unnecessary. From the apprehension, however, which I have expressed, of your coming here with other expectations, I frankly acknowledge that I have been greatly tempted to deviate from my original purpose, and to venture into that wide and fertile region which the word "Authorship" naturally opens to all who can reflect, and who have any knowledge of writers and books. Without meaning any offence, I believe it may be said that a popular assembly generally likes better to be pleased than taught; and it is especially impatient if the subject of the lesson can only interest a few, and is of such a nature that it should

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rather have been addressed in a more private way to those few themselves. This, unfortunately, is just my position in relation to what I have at present to say! It *would* have been better—far more pleasant and agreeable to myself—for this paper to have been read at the rooms of the Society to those only whom it may concern; and it would have been better for *you*—a great deal more entertaining, at least, and perhaps more acceptable—if I had decided on leaving my first object, and had launched out in pursuit of the thousand and one things which the word "Authorship" suggests. Why, one might have gone back, like a Welsh pedigree, and

have begun even *before* the beginning! The world once was without books,—without so much as a solitary author! Some may think that it would have been well for the world to have remained so; as a sort of author myself, *my* wonder is that it could live a day in such a state of melancholy destitution! Then, there were the faint, prophetic foreshadowings of Authorship,—the first rude embodiments of thought—of ideas that took hold of men—were regarded as memorable—got fixed in the general mind—and were, after a fashion, *published* and perpetuated in traditionary verse. Then, passing by pyramids and obelisks, and pictures and hieroglyphics, we might come down to alphabetical writing—that wonderful art (was it not an inspiration?—something divinely taught?)—that which gives visibility to sound,—catches it in the air as it issues from the lip, throws it on paper, and makes it stand forth in colour and form—which speaks to the eye—and which teaches language to become the guardian, in addition to its being the exponent, of thought! What questions, too, might be started in relation to the past! Whether the earlier invention of printing, for instance—in the times, say, of Plato or Cicero—would have been beneficial or otherwise for the world? Then, how wonderful it is, that by the instrumentality of a few written signs,—letters growing into

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words, and words into books,—men should continue to live after they are dead, and be felt as a power and a presence in the earth! Of many who have been dead thousands of years, it may be truly said that they are more *alive* now than they were when seen and heard by their contemporaries! Look at the thing in another light,—take it commercially. London and Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester, may alike say, or be invited to notice, how wonderful it is that persons who wrote and spoke in Greek and Latin, and who belonged to nations that for so many ages have ceased to exist, should actually be *giving employment* at this moment to thousands of workmen in different branches of headcraft and handicraft, and, as having produced a permanently marketable article, are to many the source of wealth,—to more the givers of bread!* Then, to think of the slow diffusion of books, the

limits to their popularity and multiplication, when all had to be copied by the hand; or when an author, instead of being published by others over the counter, had first to publish himself by reading his works to his assembled friends! How astonishing the difference *in these our times!* Millions upon millions of volumes are now annually produced. There were living in Germany, it was said, not long since, more than fifty thousand men who had each written a book, or *books*. How many *live* authors there may be at this moment in Europe and America, who shall say? Who can conjecture what is in reserve for posterity by the constant increase in the number of books, and the growing facilities for their rapid issue and extensive diffusion, when successful? Then, what a perfect marvel is the modern newspaper! and, through it, what a power is wielded by anonymous authorship!

* For this thought, and for some of the other points enumerated in the course of this long paragraph, the writer is indebted to Rogers's Essay on "The Vanity and Glory of Literature," in his collected pieces from the "Edinburgh Review." The article will richly repay perusal.

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Then, what interest there attaches to many departments of Kterary history!—lost books, forgotten books, neglected books; the royal and noble authors of books; the unlearned, the self-taught; dullness in wig and gown, and full-dress; genius at the loom, in the field, and at the forge. Voluminous authors, too, and authors of only one book,—authors whose title to distinction rests on a few pages, and whose claim society admits. Then, what topics open to us in looking at the peculiarities of the literary character, and at the personal history of literary men! How one might single out remarkable individuals,—one for his success, another for his misfortunes; one as the type of the poetical temperament, another as the representative and mirror of his age! Publishers might be extolled as the best and worthiest encouragers of literature; or the question might be started whether or not Campbell was right in toasting Buonaparte as a benefactor to his species (and especially to authors), *because he had hanged a bookseller!* So we might go on, touching on this and the other topic suggested by the word

which stands for the theme of the present paper,—the lights of philosophy, the eccentricities of genius,—fortune and fame,—beggary and disgrace,—the fright and attractive side of the vocation (for it has such),-—

"Or, all the ills the author's life assail,—
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail."

A speaker, or lecturer, would always rather be interesting than dull; he would rather have attention, excite sympathy, and impart pleasure, than be heard with listlessness, and voted a bore. He would rather keep people in good humour to the last, than have to hurry to a close amid the noise of a restless and retreating assembly, in the face of its murmured disapprobation, or its hardly disguised or repressed impatience.

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With all this, however, most distinctly before me, I have withstood the temptation to break faith with myself. I shall proceed, therefore, to attempt what, from the first, I proposed to do,—*and nothing else.* Confining myself to one topic, keeping to that, limiting my remarks to what belongs to it, and giving up the wide range I might have taken, I shall hope to be rewarded by one or two things which are worth a little self-denial to secure. I may be repaid, perhaps, by depositing in some minds a few of those seeds of thought which, one day, may come to have results far more valuable than any present, momentary pleasure; and I may find, moreover, myself, as Wordsworth has so beautifully sung in relation to his use of the sonnet, that my own part is not only easier but pleasanter, from my being confined to "a scanty plot of ground." Such "solace" may be found there as those only can understand—

("And such there needs must be,)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty."

II.

Some few months since I consented to be one of a small committee to examine a number of prize essays. These essays were to be written by young men—shopmen, clerks, and persons in some way connected with business. A large

number of manuscripts was sent in. Many of them were exceedingly creditable to the talents, skill, and industry of the writers. I was surprised, however, to observe that several were absurdly below what any man of sense would Buppose a real printed book ought to be! I could not but notice, too, that some, which were distinguished by unquestionable indications of originality and power, were blemished and disfigured, and rendered inadmissible, by carelessness

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or haste, by confusion of thought, or from inattention to style, and utter ignorance of composition as an art. A few of the essays were evidently thrown off, or *dashed* off. We were favoured, I fear, by some of these aspirants to the honours of authorship with their first copy—with what older men would call a rough draft—the faint, unformed elements of thought—on which toil and taste would be afterwards employed. There was one really clever essay that had not such a thing as a new paragraph, a rest, or break, for about twenty pages! It went on and on, like some ladies' letters (and gentlemen's, too), without pause, and without points. It put me in mind of Lord Byron's letter to Murray, in which he asked him, in relation to a piece of prose manuscript, "whether he knew anybody that could put in the stops?" In many there was the neglect of order and arrangement. Few indicated anything like an approach to the perception of harmony in the construction of sentences. In most of them, too, there was the want of compression; the general argument was not condensed; in particular paragraphs you looked in vain for what was terse, forcible, or suggestive. Ideas, really good in themselves, were feebly put, and loosely illustrated; the sense was so beaten out into verbiage that you lost sight of what got so thin, and your attention flagged under the tiresome prolixity. In many cases, if the labour which had been employed to write what was so long, had been resolutely exerted to make the piece short—to put all that was said into half the size—it would have been a great relief to those who had consented to read the manuscripts, and might have resulted in some of the "rejected addresses" getting into print.

I never wrote as a competitor for a prize, but I *have* written, and printed too! As an old hand, then, at this sort of work—blotting and spoiling good paper, by making but indifferent books—I could not help being greatly interested in the

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young authors to whom I have referred. I should have been a traitor and a renegade to the profession, if I had not felt that there was much to be commended in every one of them. I hold it to be a laudable ambition—the wish to send into the world a new book—a thing that can speak as soon as it is born (if the world will only give it the opportunity!) A new *man* cannot do that! It is a serious matter, though, the bringing forth of intellectual offspring. In looking at the great bundle of manuscripts which lay before me—written in all varieties of penmanship, and on all sorts and sizes of paper—I could not help thinking of the pangs and throes with which some of them, no doubt, had been produced—the parental partiality with which they had been welcomed when born in secret, and the fond affection which followed them still! I could well understand the tremulous anxiety of which they were the objects; the hopes and fears, the thoughts and dreams, which hung about, and hovered over them; the wishes that went with them, when they were sent forth to abide their fate; and the palpitating apprehensions, the strange mixture of fear and impatience, with which the decision and sentence were anticipated, which should either return them to whence they came, or advance them to the dignity of printed books:—

> "None but an author knows an author's cares,
> Or Fancy's fondness for the child she bears."

Thus, then, it came to pass that, when requested to read to you a short essay, instead of giving a lecture, the thought struck me that it might not be amiss to take up the subject of original composition. I am well aware that it is a thankless thing to give advice, and especially so if unasked. *When* asked, it is often unwelcome to men in general; and as to *authors,* the whole fraternity, even those in the earliest stage of development, in what Young would call "the

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bud of being," it is generally thought that they, of all men, are the least sensible of the value of such service, and are disposed to resent, with singular ingratitude, anything that comes to them in the form of advice. It is said that you must approach an author with extreme caution, and that even then you incur great risk. Your words may be pearls, every one of them, but the chances are that the unhappy man will "trample them under his feet, and turn again and rend you!" You will be glad to escape from his passion or impatience, and may possibly find that you have got a lesson instead of giving one! I am well aware that all this, and a great deal more of the same sort, is thought and said. But I was not to be deterred by such slander—by so base a calumny on my own craft. I don't admit the truth of the representation in respect to the constituted members of the guild; and I have more faith in those of you who aspire to membership than to admit it in relation to *you*. You all know that, as no man can command who has not been accustomed to obey, so none can teach who is not willing to learn. Knowing this, I am quite sure that those amongst you whom I more immediately address, will at once accord to me a listening ear, and listen with appreciating and, perhaps, grateful regard.

Authorship is a very different thing, in some respects, and in some departments, from what it used to be. The ability to write is far more general than it once was; the facilities for publication, in one form or other, are very numerous. In fact, invitations to write—invitations addressed specifically to the young, to artisans, to shopkeepers' assistants, and other classes, are now frequent; classes in which, formerly, if any one was found capable of writing, or addicted to it, he was thought a prodigy, or thought himself so—both things being about equally bad. A prize was offered, a few years since, for "Essays on the

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Sabbath," by working men—men literally engaged in the various handicrafts. There were sent in 1057—the most

popular of the successful pieces being written by "A Labourer's Daughter." The Evangelical Alliance offered prizes for essays "On the Principles and Operations of Infidelity among the Working Classes;" all competitors for these prizes being limited wholly to this class of persons. There were sent in one hundred and nine. The essays to which I have already referred, as having myself been one of the adjudicators, were called for by "Prizes offered exclusively to young men engaged in commercial pursuits." There were sent in forty-six. Some years ago prizes were twice offered to the same class of persons for essays "On the Late Hours' System in Shops, and the Advantages of Early Closing." There were sent in, on the first occasion, about fifty; on the second, above one hundred. Such facts seem to indicate the existence of a very general disposition, and also of a general ability to write. Young men—men engaged in trade and manufactures, in warehouses and workshops, are ready, it seems, to embody their thoughts in original composition, and even to anticipate their possible appearance in the palpable form of a printed book. I am willing to hope that it may be a good and an acceptable service to explain to such, *one* only of the necessary and essential conditions of success.

III.

On an occasion like this, and considering who they are whom I am anxious to serve, I think it proper to make the statement, and to affirm and insist upon the fact, that it is quite possible for one who is a mere English scholar to write well—with force, purity, eloquence, and effect. I have the highest idea of the importance of thorough clas-

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sical culture,—of the immense and incalculable advantages (the want of which, in some respects, nothing can supply) of a full scholastic and university education. I printed my views on that subject some twelve years since, and there is nothing in what I then wrote which I see any reason either to modify or retract.* In entire consistency, however, with those views—views expressive of the deepest sense of the

value and importance of classical learning—I assert, and I wish you young men to believe and remember it, that one who knows nothing but his own tongue, may (if he likes) learn to use it with far more effect than thousands of those *do* who have studied the languages, and read the masters and models of antiquity. There was a time when England had not much of a literature of its own, and did not sufficiently value what it had; then, partly from the fashion of the age, and partly from the necessities of the case, even ladies, if they read, or read much, had to read Latin and Greek, for thus only could great and good authors be reached. This reason, however, does not hold now; whatever might be the benefit to English ladies of their learning the ancient tongues, it certainly is not necessary for them to do so, from the meagreness of their own literature—the want of thorough good English books. In like manner, there was a time when, if a man was to learn to write well, it was incumbent upon him to study the great writers of Greece and Rome,—though, even then, he could not do much *in English* beyond what English writers had done before him; for no man can be very far beyond the style and fashion of his time. While the learned were writing for each other in Latin, English was gradually advancing upon them; it was getting moulded, improved, purified, enriched. Age after age saw it develope; ever and anon something was

* See "Education." Two Addresses delivered at Mill Hill School.

achieved; it kept growing in strength, stature, compass, refinement; it forgot some words—it learnt others; it got thoroughly formed, fixed, perfected; acquired fulness of tone, variety of cadence, force of character; so that now we have books in all possible styles of writing, to which every English reader has access, and by the study of which any one may be disciplined in English authorship. He who will put himself under these masters, and do justice to their lessons and their example, may acquire power over his own tongue, ability to embody and adorn his thoughts, to an extent far superior to what *they* will possess who have enjoyed

the advantages of a learned education, *if they have not gone and done likewise*. Whatever may be a man's acquaintance with other literature and other languages, to be attractive and classical as an *English* writer, he must study English; and England is now so rich in those who have used, or who use, her tongue, that He who knows only *that,* has ample means for learning *so* to speak in it, that the world shall listen—provided always that he has something to say.

"Provided that he has something to say;" of course. We assume that. If a man has not something to say, he better hold his tongue, and certainly he better refrain from authorship. But I wish you to understand that, even when a man *has* something to say, the "listening" will not follow, or not always, unless, there be something also in his mode of saying it. That there may be this, he must work and toil—toil and work. He must make it an object. He must labour upon style. He must give hours, and days, and nights, to *that*. His style must be his own, and it must be natural and simple; but, to be his own, it must be formed by the study of other men's; and to be simple and natural, it must be gradually arrived at by long devotion to composition as an art. This one thing,—the necessity for labour—for labour of this sort, and on this object,—*that*

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is the one lesson which I bring to you young men to-night. If you wish to succeed as the writers of prize essays, or as the writers of anything else, ponder the lesson, and profit by it.

It is of more importance to *you* than to those who receive a higher education; who, whether they aim at and think of it or not, cannot help acquiring, while learning other tongues, something of power and skill as to their own- In acquiring the knowledge of Latin and Greek, they come into contact with the masters of the world,—with the men whose writings are distinguished by every attribute, and include every species, of excellence,—who have supplied models in every department, and left behind them lessons for all time. Students are taught, among other things, to notice peculiarities of style and expression; they may be

required to write out careful translations of characteristic passages,—and if they have anything of spirit and enthusiasm, they will do this whether it be positively required or not. All along, as these classical scholars grow up into men, they necessarily become acquainted with the best writers in the English language. They cannot avoid reading a great deal. They must do so to acquire the knowledge which, as gentlemen, they are expected to possess. But in reading even with this view, they cannot be insensible to the characteristic peculiarities of our different writers. Their education and habits enable them to understand their excellencies and their defects; they can compare them with the works of the great authors to whom their daily studies introduce them; they read and hear discussions of various sorts, on everything connected with writing as an art; and hence, from the necessity of the case—without their having laboured at English composition, or made the attainment of an English style the object of specific and patient pursuit—such men can hardly help having skill and

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power when they come to write. By necessary consequence, taste has been formed, a spirit imbibed, an influence felt, a knowledge of, and power over, words acquired; all the elements of good writing are thus generated and developed as by a natural growth, with unconscious spontaneity, so that when the time comes for something to be written, it can *be* written, and written well. It is very different, however, with *you,* who are not subjected to this mental discipline, and who must do for yourselves, by the study of writers in your own language, what in a great degree is done *for* a man, who is thoroughly drilled in classical scholarship. True, however, to what I have already said, I adhere to my former statement, in spite of all that I have now advanced; and I beg to repeat it in another form. Let it be understood, then, that many classical scholars would be nothing the worse, but something very much the contrary, for some tolerably long and laborious study of our own writers, with a specific view to their writing English,—their purposed attainment of a thoroughly good English

style. I believe, moreover, that none of our great and distinguished men, who dazzle or charm, soothe or captivate, by the power, splendour, or graces of their diction,—none of them would ever have written as they do, if they had been content with what *they could not help,*—what was forced into, or came to them, as the unavoidable result of their training and education. Depend upon it, whatever the learning of our great authors, they became great, as English writers, by study and toil; by making the style in which they were to write the object at once of effort and ambition; giving—till they attained something like what they sought, or found out what they could do—their days and nights to the labour and the luxury. To such men it would be both.

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IV.

Independently of all idea of your becoming authors, by actually sending anything to the press—which, in respect to most of you, I do not seriously apprehend or contemplate—independently of this, I recommend and urge the practice of composition, and of very careful and laborious composition, on all young men devoted to self-culture, and determined on self-advancement. If you will not only read, but also write—and do all you can to write well—I am sure you will derive great and manifold advantage from this; and I think, too, that I can promise you, in addition, a good deal of intellectual delight. After reading, for instance, the history of some particular period, if you will set to work and write your recollections and impressions, or construct an original narrative of your own, you will see what you can remember, you will find out what you have forgotten, you will ascertain how the historical events and characters fashion themselves to your apprehension and judgment. Such an exercise will discipline the memory, call forth your powers of discrimination, test, your ability to record facts and to describe character, and in many ways may reveal to you something about yourselves well worth knowing. If you read the works of some poet, and then try to write an estimate of him, putting down your impressions of his genius,

—what strikes you, in his thoughts or style, his imagery or measures, as in any way peculiar,—or what you suppose, from their effect upon yourself, must be the probable tendency or influence of his writings,—you will bring out, I believe, by such an effort, thoughts and feelings which had been passing within you half-unconsciously, which never would have been recalled, and never caught, but for the exercise which seizes and detains them. It is very useful

to write an analysis of a book, or of some extended and elaborate discourse;—to put down with your own hand, and in your own words, what appears to you to be the order of the writer's ideas,—the cohesion, articulations, and success of his argument. After reading on any particular subject, either in one book or several (two or three are often to be preferred to, one, for in many departments, or at particular times, it is better to read *subjects* than books), after doing this, if you try to write something on the subject yourself, to arrange your thoughts and state your conclusions, to argue and illustrate it in your own way, you will find out whether you understand it or not, or how far you understand it; and, if you do understand it, you will get such a hold of it,—you will so see it, and so apprehend it, in all its lights, aspects, and accidents, that it will most likely never be lost—never forgotten. In this way original composition may be used as an instrument of mental culture; I believe it to be one singularly efficacious. It braces the faculties, it gives them strength, nimbleness, dexterity, by the tasks it imposes and the duties it demands; it is an enemy to self-deception, by the terrible disclosures it sometimes makes as to the crudeness of your conceptions, the treachery of your memory, the poverty of your knowledge, your inability to express, clearly and competently, even what you know: it is favourable to growth and progress, by virtue of the great law of our nature, that power shall be increased and good secured by every honest and hearty effort at using rightly the strength we have.

Whatever you do, in your attempts at writing, always do your best;—as to matter and manner, thought and style,

labour at this. I return, you see, to my one lesson. I do so because I believe that the results of what I am now recommending, depend upon it,—its results, both as to solid advantage, and to safe and allowable delight. You must

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work at the substance of your thoughts—their order and cohesion; you must see to it that they are just, true, full, select—accurately arranged as parts of an argument, artistically so, to awaken interest or secure impression. You must labour, also, at something more than merely expressing them—expressing them so as to make them intelligible. A great deal of your labour, in your first efforts at original writing, must be spent upon writing itself—on composition as an art. Severe, painstaking, prolonged effort, thus directed, will have its reward—a manifold reward. It will not only assist your main abject—intellectual culture, but it will be attended with great and intense pleasure. Time spent in testing terms, in moulding sentences, in observing the shades and colours of words, in finding out synonymous or parallel expressions, in forming the ear to harmony and rhythm, in compelling it to listen to march and cadence, and to become sensible to the niceties of measure and modulation;—time thus spent will not only *not* be lost, as to solid improvement, but will be rich in enjoyments of no common order. Always doing your best, you will soon learn to do things well. Your power over words will rapidly increase. Habit will give facility and command. Your style will get formed. When you sit down to write, you will easily find fitting phraseology; words will come at your call, or without being called—certainly without their being anxiously sought—and they will take their places without effort. You will not have to think about *how* to say a thing—you will say it; and you will often be able to write straight on without attention to style at all, except that inward, secret, sentinel-like attention, of which every practised speaker is conscious, who, in the very act and ardour of utterance, while apparently absorbed by the passion of the moment, is yet looking a-head, choosing and rejecting among different terms which suggest themselves to his mind, that he may clench his argument or close his appeal in the man-

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ner best adapted to his purpose. I must be permitted, further, to say, that the man who has paid attention to composition as a serious business, and who really knows something about it,—I must be permitted to say that he, in comparison with other men, will have an additional pleasure —a pleasure all his own—in reading anything well and artistically written. He looks at it as a painter can look upon a picture—who feels a thrill of delight or admiration, from the perception in the work of what is utterly unseen by the untaught eye. He who practically knows what authorship is, as a labour and an art, will derive a pleasure with which none can intermeddle from the contemplation of the successful efforts of others. I think, too, that he will be the most candid and tolerant, because he will be the most deep-seeing and discriminating of critics.

V.

The style of an author depends, it must be acknowledged, upon many things, though, whatever be its characteristic—provided it be an excellence—that, and everything else that is good about it must, I believe, have been attained, or perfected, by earnest labour at one time or other. I have no faith in anything else. I don't believe in inspirations and impulses—that is, I don't believe in them as the means of bringing things to perfection, though I know well their necessity or use in supplying or starting what effort must elaborate. A man's style is himself; it cannot but be marked by whatever belongs to him; it will betray his weaknesses, it will indicate his strength; it flows from his temperament, if it be peculiar; it is coloured by his genius, if he has any. Passion and earnestness, vigour or timidity, anything powerful or predominant in a man, will

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make themselves seen and felt in his style. It is like his walk, his step, his tone of voice, his manners, his dress, or anything else which, as an outward and visible sign, embodies and reveals the inward life. Still, admitting all this, I adhere

firmly to my lesson and my text. The way in which a man's style will be himself, will be greatly affected by his attention to it; by the kind and degree of labour he bestows upon it; by the books whose early or accidental influence directed, or misdirected, his efforts; by that culture which corrects and subdues instinct and impulse, which purifies taste, reveals the true idea of the perfect disrobed of eccentric peculiarities, and prompts the individual to reach and realise it. By long, patient, and successful service, a man comes to throw off his compositions, marked and modified by those qualities which it once cost him toil to attain, but which now belong to whatever is his, as by right and necessity—coming at his call with ease and naturalness. However, at one time, style itself may be a primary object; it is so for the very purpose that the man may get *above that,* and may so write as for it not to intrude upon him, and not to be permitted to intrude itself on others. All labour, indeed, on writing as an art, looks ultimately to this end. The composition must be distinguished by that which nothing but labour can bestow, but the labour itself must not be seen. Nature is the last thing that comes to us, or the last that we understand—the slowest to be acquired; to be really natural demands all the resources of the most consummate skill. No doubt the man, as we have said, may be seen in his style, as in anything else; but, in proportion as it is simple, and unaffected, and free from obtrusive and offensive mannerism, and all other literary vices and misdemeanours, he will have purified and perfected it by patient toil, by the exercise of principle, by intellectual conscientiousness, by adhering to a regal and righteous standard, by good sense, by honesty of purpose,

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and many other things which make the discipline of authorship something analogous to the discipline of virtue. "I trace my success," says Norreys, in Bulwer's novel,—"I trace my success as an author to these three maxims, which are applicable to all professions; first, never to trust to genius for what can be obtained by labour; second, never to profess to teach what we have not studied to understand; third, never to engage our word *to what we do not do our best to execute*."

In learning to write, you young men engage *with yourselves* to do something, and *to* yourselves you must be true and honest; in venturing on the composition of a prize-essay, or anything else that may see the light, you enter into serious engagements *with others;* and in either case it is incumbent upon you *to do your best* In addition to the thorough understanding of your subject, I urge the importance of your writing well; and I insist on the absolute necessity of labour in order to this. It is not enough that what you say is intelligible, if it be unattractive; it is not enough for it to be free from faults, if it be feeble, for feebleness will make it faulty throughout. I do maintain, that if a thing is worthy to be written at all, it is worthy of being written in the best possible way—in a way that will be auxiliary to your object in writing it; with such properties of style and illustration as shall give it effect, make it stick in the memory, sink into the soul, excite the imagination, carry the judgment, rouse energy, stimulate the feelings, or something or other besides merely being itself said,—which certainly may be after such a fashion as, while perfectly intelligible, shall be dull, heavy, tiresome, repulsive, without power to sustain attention, or anything to help the writer's end.

In learning to write, I don't think you will get much benefit from professed treatises on the art of composition. Such books, if very elementary, may be of use to those who really know nothing, at all of composition as a practical

thing, and who wish to attempt it. It would be a great advantage, however, in such a case, and a great saving of time, for a youth to have the aid of an intelligent friend, who could act occasionally as his teacher and guide, and give him the benefit of his own experience. After a person has made some advances in the practical knowledge of the art, he will read "Blair's Lectures," or "Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric," and similar works, with intelligent interest, and may do so with much advantage. The great thing, however, is, for a young man distinctly to understand that he can no more be taught to write by rules and directions than he can be taught to ride or swim, or to do any

sort of handicraft by theoretical, instruction merely, or by a philosophical or technical explanation of the nerves and muscles, which, by such and such an exercise, are to be brought into play. Your plan must be, to read good writers; to observe how *they* write; and to familiarise yourselves with their spirit and diction. Open your minds and hearts to their influence; place your souls in the sunlight of their power; their correctness will purify your taste, their excellence will elevate your ideal, their achievements will awaken your ambition, their inspiration will fire your purpose. Imitate them, if you like; not one only, but several; try your hand in various directions and on different models; you may eatcli something from each, while you must take care yourselves to be caught by none. They will combine in their influence and effects; they will draw forth and modify whatever original power you possess; you will find out what it *is* that is natural to that power; you will acquire the art of using it aright. In doing this, you will learn to do what will *be* nature; and it will be that because it will be *you,*—you, however, freed alike from the defects and the excesses which always deform what is untaught, and raised towards that into which your original power was intended to be

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developed—both parts of the process being the gradual result of slow elaboration.

VI.

Although the great authors, whose works are distinguished by some grand or striking peculiarity of style, which places them apart and by themselves, each from the other, and all from the common crowd of writers,—although these are comparatively few, yet style itself, as a thing distinguishable by some one or more characteristic attributes, is capable of almost endless varieties, or at least of being described by a great number of epithets or names. It may be called pure, mixed, simple, elaborate, splendid, ornate, forcible, sweet, smooth, sparkling, gorgeous, grotesque, strong, airy, light, massive, obscure, heavy, clear, plain, eloquent, grand, sententious, copious, fluent, nervous, muscular, robust,

weak, glowing, dull, attenuated, feeble, coarse, fine, superfine, tawdry, dry, bald, figurative, poor, rich, silvery, metaphorical, polished, elegant, chaste, florid, declamatory, natural, deformed, affected, twaddling, harmonious, harsh, firm, compact, sleepy, turgid, poetical, condensed, diffuse, prosy, ambitious, vicious, vulgar, pointed, flat, &c. &c. &c.!

Now, I believe that a man may often go through a good many of these varieties before he settles down into that which belongs to him. If that be something bad, it belongs to him because *he* is so, intellectually speaking; if it is the contrary, it is because he has got over the errors and faults into which young writers for the most part fall (as youth falls in relation to goodness), has come to a better mind, and learnt to be willing to do his duty like an earnest and honest workman. But depend upon it, young men, this is never the result of mere nature,—unregulated impulse, untaught and

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untrained effort,—nor is it ever attained without toil and conquest, though the indications of this may not be seen, nor even the struggle itself suspected,—never, any more than the highest virtue is natural to man, — can ever be secured without a battle,—or ever become fixed, settled, established, without our committing in the pursuit many a fault, and suffering in the process many a fall and many a failure.

Familiarity with the best writers will help you in forming your style; designed imitations of these, at one period of your progress, may greatly contribute to your ultimate object; but you must not become the copyist of any. Mannerism is bad, even when original; it is a thousand times worse in an imitator or a mimic. The great thing is, to succeed in realising a designed result, to the idea of which others may contribute, but not to betray the thought of the models by which it may have been suggested, nor the instruments and appliances by which it may have been reached. A similar principle to this, which belongs to the acquisition of style, applies to the substance of your attempted compositions. When you have something on hand which you are engaged in writing, you may read anything upon it, or on kindred subjects, reading only for stimulus and excitement.

You are not to read to borrow or steal; but you may read, and frequently must, for suggestion and inspiration. The thing sought, is not what you will get out of the author, but what the author will enable you to find in yourselves. A word or thought, a metaphor or allusion, will excite your mind, and set it off on something which had occurred to you, or on something akin to it, or may even suggest something new; and you will thus come to enrich your work, or to adorn and perfect it, with some conception novel to yourselves, which you had not thought of, which the author you were reading had never thought of, but which, nevertheless, never would have been produced but for the spur applied to

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your invention or memory, your heart or imagination, by something or other which that author said. The thing is not his, but yours; yet it would not have been yours, or you would not have known that you had it, or could create it, if it had not been for *him*. This is one of the great secrets of authorship—one of the deepest mysteries of the craft! It may account for things that look like thefts; but it has, done far more to adorn books by originality than it ever did to debase them by imitation. It is like the harp and hand of the Hebrew minstrel, in the analogous case of the Hebrew prophet. The external operations of another's skill influenced the soul, and awoke to action the dormant energies of the gifted seer. The sound of the instrument aroused and animated the prophetic impulse; it drew forth from the soul it touched what it did not put there, but what would not have come, nevertheless, but for the external stimulus it brought I shall conclude this paper by a single extract, which will sustain and fortify everything I have said. It is taken from one who has an unquestionable right to be heard. There is a small railway volume entitled, "Essays from The Times." It consists of articles and reviews which originally appeared in that newspaper. The book is anonymous, though the author is supposed to be pretty well known. Be that, however, as it may, the book itself, considered as so much English writing, is attractive "and admirable in the highest degree. The style is terse, compact, easy, forcible.

The book abounds with sentences exquisitely constructed, chiselled and polished to the utmost perfection,—with passages and paragraphs surpassingly beautiful. You meet with nothing like prolixity or carelessness; nothing that appears feeble or dull, or as if flung off in wantonness or haste. Time has been taken to condense and compress; labour has been bestowed in selecting and detaining what was fitting to be said, and in rejecting at once irrelevant

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thoughts and superfluous expressions. Hard as I can suppose such a writer to have laboured once on composition as an art, and easy as I can imagine he may now find it to throw off, if occasion require, a strong, pointed, eloquent article, worthy of being perpetuated just as it flows from his practised pen, without transcription and without revision, I yet cannot, I confess, believe but that such pieces as compose this book, and such as I fancy I sometimes see from him in "The Times" still, are even now the result of somewhat slow and careful elaboration, of constant recurrence to the principles of his art by the accomplished writer, and of his continued labouring on style itself as one of the conditions of literary success. This critic, then, in a review of Grote's "History of Greece," delivers himself on the subject of the present essay, in a way worthy of the attention of every writer who aspires to anything like artistic excellence. Listen to his words. After speaking highly of the substantial value of Mr. Grote's work, he proceeds to notice a defect in the workmanship. I extract from the passage the following sentences:—

"It is pity that such high intrinsic merits should be marred, both as regards the pleasure and the instruction of the reader, by a fatal deficiency of style. It is pity, but it is true. Mr. Grote seems to have lived in the works of the Greek writers till he has almost forgotten the forms and cadence of his mother-tongue. It is not only that he so frequently has resort to an uncouth Greek compound when he might easily express the same idea in two or three English words, if not in one; there is a perpetual clumsiness in his construction of common sentences and his

use of common words. Clarendon himself is not harder or more tortuous. Even in purely narrative parts, which ought to flow most easily, the understanding of the reader can seldom keep pace with his eye. Cyclopean epithets are

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piled together, almost at random, on any substantive which will have the complaisance to receive them. The choice of expression and metaphor is sometimes such as almost to rival the achievements of Castlereagh in his happiest hour. "We have people existing, 'not as individual names on paper, but simply as an imposturous nominal aggregate,' [and such like.] ⋆ ⋆ ⋆ We are sorry to say that these instances are taken from the last two volumes, so that Mr. Grote does not improve as he advances. ⋆ ⋆ ⋆ The redeeming point, and a great redeeming point it is, is the total absence of anything like affectation. All the peculiarities arc genuine, and everything that is genuine in composition, though it cannot be admired, may be borne. But for this, we should be compelled to class one of the best of English books among the very worst of English writings. Mr. Grote must remember, that no man who writes for posterity can afford to neglect, the art of composition. The trimmer bark, though less richly laden, will float farther down the stream of Time; and when so many authors of real ability and learning are competing for every niche in the temple of Fame, *the coveted place will assuredly be won by style*."

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