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*VI—English as She is Taught at College*

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IT is an amazing fact, but it is nevertheless true, that Mr. Rudyard Kipling or, Sir James Barrie, or, let us say, ex-President Eliot of Harvard, would fail hopelessly in English if they tried to pass the entrance examination of any American or Canadian University. King George, from whom presumably the King's English flows as from its fountain source, might get perhaps half-way through a high school in the subject.

As for Shakespeare, I doubt if he knew enough of what is called English by our education departments to get beyond a kindergarten. As to passing an examination on one of his own plays, such as is set by our colleges for matriculation, he couldn't have done it; he hadn't the brains—at least not the kind of brains that are needed for it.

These are not exaggerations, they are facts. I admit that when the facts are not good enough

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*College Days*

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I always exaggerate them. This time they don't need it.

Our study of English—not merely in any one State or Province but all over North America, except in happy Mexico—begins with years and years of the silly stuff called grammar and rhetoric. All the grammar that any human being ever needs, or that is of any use as an intellectual training, can be learned in a few weeks from a little book as thin as a Ritz-Carlton sandwich. All the rest of the solid manuals on the subject is mere stodge. It serves no other purpose than to put royalties into the pockets of the dull pedants who elaborate it.

Rhetoric is worse. It lays down laws for the writing of sentences and paragraphs about as reasonable and as useful as a set of directions telling how to be a gentleman, or how to have a taste for tomatoes.

Then comes English Literature. This is the last stage, open only to minds that have already been debilitated by grammar and rhetoric.

We actually proceed on the silly supposition that you can "examine" a person in English

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literature, torture it out of him, so to speak, in the course of a two hours' inquisition. We ask him to distinguish the "styles" of different authors as he would the colour of their whiskers. We expect him to divide up authors into "schools" and to sort them out as easily as a produce merchant classifies fish.

The truth is that you cannot examine in English in this way, or only at the cost of killing the very thing that you wish to create. The only kind of examination in the subject I can think of would be to say to the pupil, for example, "Have you read the novels of Charles Dickens and do you like them?" and when he answered that he didn't care for them but that his uncle read them all the time, to send a B.A. degree to his uncle.

We make our pupils spend about two hours a day for ten years in the silly pursuit of what we call English, and yet at the end of it we wonder that our students have less real appreciation of literature in them than when they read a half-dime novel for sheer artistic joy of it.