

prejudice against speech-training—a prejudice that has been fostered by generations of bad speech teachers. This is not a reason—although it is an excuse with foundation in fact. But bad teaching of anything was never a reason for the willing acceptance of ignorance. Rather is it a challenge to those who can recognise it for what it is. I know that there is more “bogus” elocution teaching in this world than most people would believe. By their works these teachers are known. And we do well to shun the grotesque affectation that they cultivate.

The good teacher appreciates that he or she can hope to do no more than develop—or re-educate—the resources of the pupil's voice.

There are still some teachers who won't face it. As there are still some teachers who believe that speech-teaching consists exclusively of a detailed study of the mechanics of articulation. Whereas speech—even at its best—is merely a vehicle of communication. What is said is what matters.

No one is born able to speak. We pass, some of us more swiftly than others, through the stage when conversation consists of ingratiating noises whereby the “herd” recognises us as of themselves. Just as dogs accept each other on the evidence of other sense organs.

From that stage onwards, some form of speech-training is essential—in our schools, our universities, our adult centres.

And I am convinced that the success or failure of our efforts will depend upon our approach to the teaching of English.

We study English at school—that is we learn a lot of facts about grammar and metre, about the history of literature. We handle our language much as we handle Greek or Latin. It is dead. It is on the slab. The approach is by way of the dissecting knife and the microscope. The entrancing rhythms of our poetry are destined to produce little crooked symbols of desiccation that we call scansion. Shakespeare is become the battleground of annotators and the paradise of editors.

I have heard the Professor of English at one of our famous universities address his students for 40 minutes on the line “O that this too too solid flesh would melt.” The point at issue was whether or not the word “solid” was a corruption of the word “sullied.” A mighty and important problem, you will agree. Had his folly stopped there, we should have had to dismiss him simply as a pedant of the worst sort. But he proceeded to read the soliloquy. His efforts were so embarrassingly bad that only our traditional sportsmanship saved the man from being lynched.

There is no more certain way of killing a language than by regarding it as already dead. To isolate the written from the spoken word may be necessary in the upper reaches of scholasticism. But to introduce the young mind thus to the mysteries of the English language is a triumph of unimaginative teaching.

At every stage in English study, the spoken and written words must go hand in hand. As a corollary to this, I deprecate the institution of chairs of “Spoken English” in our universities because it encourages the belief that there is a generic difference between English spoken and English written. There is no such difference.

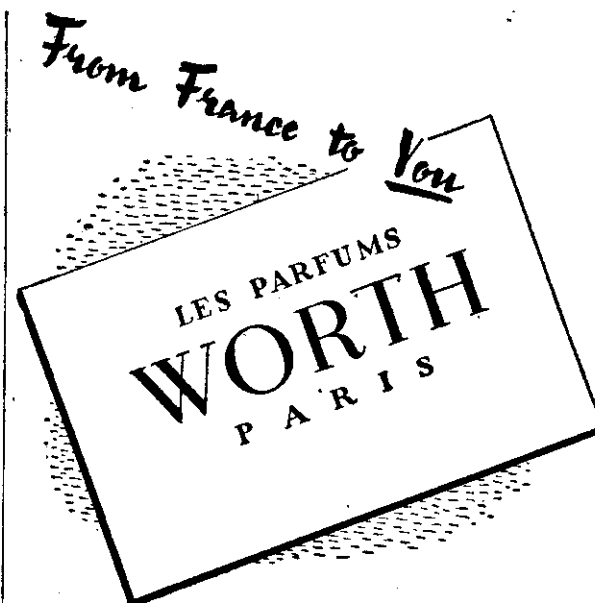
You will see how important I consider this “indivisibility of English” to be, when I assert that the greater part of the bad English that we commit to paper—the journalese, the civil service jargon, the legal clap-trap—these could only be written by persons insensitive to sound and rhythm. There is no more acid test of good prose than good reading. If it sounds bad—prolix, unrhythmic, obscure—when read by an experienced speaker, you can rest assured that it is bad.

So, too, I know of no poem, however obscure or difficult, that does not become immediately more lucid when read aloud—by a person of intelligence and training. English, that mighty tradition of the spoken and written word, loses incalculably if either be allowed to fall into disuse. It is a fine tradition. It is a tradition that has given us priceless gifts of literature, philosophy and scientific instruction. They say that old persons still living assert that they can remember a time when conversation was held by men of taste to be an art worthy of cultivation for its own sake. Those were happier days. English is more than a language—it is a way of life.

Griller Quartet Goes West

DURING recent months the Griller String Quartet, which is rated one of the best chamber music ensembles in the world, has been touring America, and a few weeks ago they signed a contract with the University of California to become “quartet in residence” there (for three years) to assist chamber music students. This decision will be as much of a loss to Britain as it is a gain to America.

The Griller Quartet has done a lot for British chamber music by ensuring that new works would get immediate, first-rate performance, and New Zealand radio listeners will be familiar with the Griller recordings of Bax's Quartet in G and Bliss's Clarinet Quintet and Quartet in B Flat. The group was formed in 1929 when its four members—Sidney Griller, Jack O'Brien, Philip Burton, and Colin Hampton—were still students at the Royal Academy. They decided that to attain perfection they should live together, break all family ties, and refuse engagements to play separately, and they have kept their resolve for 20 years. No other major quartet has remained intact so long.



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