

I would have Boys kept wholly from this Sort of Exercise, etc.¹⁹ . . . The Scribbling of paulty, wretched *Verse*, is no Way for them to improve their Parts in.²⁰

I am, I must own, one of those that are very much affected with a good *Copy of Verses*, or a *fine Poem*; and think my self obliged to such as spend a few vacant Hours now and then, for the Diversion of the World that Way. Yet I am for having Things called by their right Names; and therefore cannot bear with it, that what is only an ingenious *Diversion*, should by Custom, and the great Stress laid upon it, be recommended under the Notion of a very useful, and a very laudable Employment. And I presume the sober and thinking Part of Mankind will not condemn me as guilty of any great Mistake, if I think such a Book as Mr. *Locke's Essay*, or Mr. *Chillingworth's* most rational Defence of the *Protestant Cause*, against the *Church of Rome*, preferable to twenty *Iliads* and *Aeneids* put together.²¹

Clarke then says he would be willing to swap these useless poets for the lost books of Livy, etc. He proceeds with his idea of a curriculum, ending with the advice that the boys should read the *Evening Post* or some other newspaper regularly²²—how ultra-modern! And how different from the benighted days of Erasmus and of Shakspeare!

The wheel has now come full circle. Perhaps its revolution will have shown the reader how excellently the eighteenth century had been prepared to misunderstand and even to condemn Shakspeare's education in poetry. Of course, we must remember that Clarke was an extremist. Nevertheless, the view which he presents in extreme form is a typical view. The Renaissance type of poetry was "but a *Diversion*, a *Degree* above *Fidling*." Pope *et al* were already experimenting in an attempt to put such subjects as Clarke professed to delight in into metre. I hope he liked them.

¹⁹ Clarke, *Essay* (1720), pp. 65-66.

²⁰ Clarke, *Essay* (1720), p. 67.

²¹ Clarke, *Essay* (1720), p. 68.

²² Clarke, *Essay* (1720), pp. 122-123.