

Monographs on Education

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ENGLISH

IN THE

PREPARATORY SCHOOLS

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## ENGLISH IN THE PREPARATORY SCHOOLS.

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THE changes that have taken place in recent years in the methods of language study have done much to advance the cause of good learning. Every teacher owes a lasting debt to those who have wrought out, and to some extent perfected, these new and practical methods. The debt of the teacher is, however, but a tithe of that due from those who have thus been spared laborious and well-nigh fruitless gropings through the labyrinths of a complex grammar and the blind by-paths of inexplicable idioms. Where the new methods have been wisely held in check by a recognition of the legitimate functions of grammatical study, the results have been in the main entirely satisfactory. Languages are now learned much more rapidly and easily than was the case a few years ago, and are thus the earlier brought into requisition as the means to some other and better end. Parrot-like knowledge of inflections and rules has ceased to be the goal of linguistic scholarship: the ability to use a language as a medium between the possessor and something to be sought in literature or life, is now more generally recognized as the purpose of such studies and the main reason for them.

It is somewhat astonishing that, in view of all this, some more practical and rational method has not been adopted in the study of our own language as a vehicle of thought. In many of the colleges and universities there is, to be sure, a well-defined mania for philological research and an abnormal

appetite for Anglo-Saxon roots. In our common schools this tendency is to some extent imitated by an unwearied attention to the minutiae of grammatical structure and the puzzles of syntactical forms. Of practice and humdrum drill in the use of English, there is little, in either school or college, in comparison with the importance of the subject and the needs of the students.

This lack of proper training in the use of English is due largely to two causes; first, the want of some efficient method in the teaching of English; and, second, the reluctance shown by our best teachers to engaging in this branch of work. Possibly the second reason may be the result of the first; possibly it is the result of some inherent prejudice, or some unconfessed doubts as to the dignity of this kind of work. As to these last reasons, it must be acknowledged that, under the existing methods, the work is far from agreeable or inspiring to either teacher or taught, and no teacher can justly be blamed for preferring to avoid it whenever possible. The question may well be asked, however, whether this very reluctance is not one main cause why this important branch of work has been so long neglected, and whether, if our best-equipped and most earnest teachers were to apply themselves to a solution of the problem, it would not soon be solved as easily as were numerous other knotty problems in educational methods.

The writer has had occasion to test at college entrance-examinations the familiarity of applicants with the forms and use of their mother tongue. The results have been in the main unsatisfactory, and at times discouraging. The commonest grammatical forms seem entirely unfamiliar; a composition of a dozen sentences exhibits the most utter disregard of the simplest grammatical and rhetorical constructions. Students who construe Virgil with ease, who are on familiar terms with Homer, and see no serious difficulties in Euclid, stumble and hesitate and fail in the use of their own language. To illustrate. At

a recent examination the students were asked to decline the pronoun "thou." A large per cent of those examined failed utterly. Here are a few examples of how this inoffensive pronoun was treated:—

1. Thou, thine, thou; their, theirs, them.
2. Thou, yours, thou; same.
3. Thou, thine, thy; they, theirs, they.
4. Thou, thine, thee; they, theirs, them.

These four are fair examples of the whole list of failures. Nor must it be supposed that these young gentlemen had not been prepared in schools that stand fairly well. One was a graduate of a Massachusetts high school; one was a graduate of the preparatory department of one of the largest colleges in Ohio; two were prepared in New York high schools: the four taken together represent the educational system of three of the wealthiest, most populous, and most progressive states in the Union. In other simple grammatical forms a like ignorance was displayed; as, for instance, when one student declined Moses thus:—

Moses, Moses, Mosaic.

Such examples might be multiplied indefinitely, but these will suffice to prove how utterly inadequate is much of the preparatory instruction in the simple forms of our almost grammarless tongue.

When the work of writing English is considered, the results are almost equally barren. Scarcely an applicant for admission can write the simple essay required at the examination, without some blunder in orthography, punctuation, capitalization, and, what is worst of all, grammatical accuracy. I say nothing of the faults in logical arrangement and rhetorical effectiveness. These qualities might, and indeed should, be taught in the preparatory schools; but I am sure every teacher of English in

the colleges will be fully satisfied if students are sent up well equipped for writing English with grammatical correctness and some degree of ease. Such a foundation as this would enable the teacher to begin at once the work of aiding the student to acquire a clear and forcible style, instead of wasting time, as is now necessary, in doing the work of the preparatory schools.

The trouble seems to be that the preparatory schools do not, as a rule, give enough attention to the study of English. There is in the grammar schools a certain amount of grammatical drill and of analyzing and parsing. Much of this is good; much is worthless. So far as any useful end is concerned, the mere ability to analyze and parse an intricate English sentence counts for little. The ability to write a simple English sentence with accuracy and effectiveness would be of vastly greater advantage to the student. When the student attempts to pass an examination in any first-class college, this fact is made clearly evident. The main requirements at such a time are three, — first, the ability to recognize the few grammatical inflections that still persist in English, and to illustrate these, together with certain sentential constructions, by examples written at the examination; second, the ability to point out in sentences given at the examination the examples of false syntax and of offences against idiomatic English; third, the ability to write, on some familiar subject, a short composition which shall prove that the applicant possesses a reasonably full vocabulary, and is able to construct grammatical and idiomatic sentences and to combine them with ordinary skill. Of the three tests the last named is by far the most important.

This brings us to a consideration of the work necessary to be done in the preparatory schools, in order to fit students for college entrance-examinations in English, and to give those who do not enter college a fair working knowledge of their mother tongue. In sketching this I shall not attempt to be exhaustive, but simply to indicate the main lines on which preparatory work ought to proceed.

## I.

THERE ought first to be a thorough grounding of pupils in the inflections of English. This does not imply that pupils should be put through a severe course of training in all the niceties of grammar, but simply that the necessary inflections should be made perfectly familiar. For the accomplishment of this end, any one of the numerous "methods" of language study may be profitably employed; but it is my conviction that patient drill, accompanied by constant practice in the use of the various grammatical forms, is the best and simplest method. It cannot be too emphatically impressed upon the teacher that there ought, under any method, to be constant illustration, in actual work, of all difficult points in grammatical structure. It is especially important that the student be thoroughly drilled in the use of idiomatic English, and be taught to observe the distinction between closely related forms, — as, for instance, "shall" and "will," "may" and "can," and other forms which persons ignorant of the idiom of the language are likely to confound.

It has become fashionable of late years for educators to decry the study of English grammar, and to echo Jack Cade's indignation against men "that usually talk of a noun and a verb, and such abominable words as no Christian ear can endure to hear." Nor can it be denied that there has been much provocation for this reaction. The old senseless routine of nomenclature learning, the droning march of the parsing class through *Paradise Lost*, the long and fierce conflicts waged between contending factions regarding the exact syntactical relation of some disputed word or phrase, were indeed abominations calling for invectives as fearless as those of Jack Cade. But after all, the reaction may, perhaps, have gone too far or too much astray. English has grown by revolution and evolution from a synthetic and unmixed language into a highly analytic and composite

one ; but such remnants of grammar as persist have their roots deep in the soil of the earlier and more synthetic tongue.

For most of the apparent absurdities and anomalies of modern English there are reasons, the discovery and discussion of which would prove of the keenest interest to students. The dry husks of grammar will, if properly examined, be found to contain wholesome and pleasant food. A method of grammatical study, such as that at which Professor Gilmore has made a successful, but by no means final, attempt in his "Art of Expression," would prove of great interest and value to every bright pupil in the secondary schools. A similar system, less dependent upon a knowledge of Latin and Greek, would do much for the cause of English, and, it is to be hoped, will be soon supplied by some competent educator. In the meantime, however, teachers of English can use the prevailing text-books to better advantage by adapting them to a historical and logical study of the language.

## II.

THERE should be a reasonable amount of instruction in the simple intellectual qualities of English style. Dr. Abbott says, "Almost any English boy can be taught to write clearly, so far at least as clearness depends upon the arrangement of words. . . . [It] is a mere matter of adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, and auxiliary verbs, placed and repeated according to definite rules."<sup>1</sup> Clearness is simply an intellectual quality, not depending, like strength and elegance, upon emotional or æsthetic gifts. Clearness, therefore, may easily be taught in the preparatory schools, and the principles and rules upon which it rests may be made a part of the intellectual equipment of the student. Beyond this it is useless to go. The study of rhetoric, in any proper sense of that term, is a waste of time, a

<sup>1</sup> How to Write Clearly, pp. 5 and 6.

source of confusion to students, and often an absolute hindrance to the acquisition of a good English style. It is a study difficult to grasp, and should accordingly be taken up only after the student has acquired a solid basis in the more elementary subjects. It should, in fact, be postponed until late in a college course. Bacon perceived this truth when he said, "Scholars come *too soon* and *too unripe* to logic and rhetoric, arts fitter for graduates than children and novices." Every teacher of English in our colleges has doubtless met a number of students every year who have completed in a preparatory school a course in some rhetorical text-book, and yet cannot put together ten consecutive sentences without some flagrant violation of the laws of discourse. In no other subject is theory unsupported by practice more utterly worthless.

"Half a dozen rules," says De Quincey, "for evading the most frequently recurring forms of awkwardness, of obscurity, of misproportion, and of double meaning, would do more to assist a writer in practice, laid under some necessity of hurry, than volumes of general disquisition."

The whole purpose of rhetorical training may be summed up in two words, — accuracy and effectiveness. To secure the first should be the aim of the preparatory schools. The second will result from continued practice and greater maturity of thought ; it can certainly never be acquired through the parroting of a meaningless nomenclature and the conscious application of inflexible rules. The time spent in the preparatory schools in the study of rhetorical text-books could be more profitably employed in the reading of good modern authors, thereby enlarging the pupil's vocabulary and presenting to him examples of what is commendable in English style. A discriminating use of Macaulay, Arnold, Hawthorne, or Lowell, would be infinitely more valuable than the closest study of Campbell, Whately, or Blair, or any of their more modern imitators. Whatever use such works may have in the higher classes of a

college, they are certainly out of place in any of the classes of our secondary schools.

### III.

The third and most important branch of the instruction in English is that which has to do with the teaching of English composition. Throughout the entire course of a pupil's studies, from the time he can construct a simple sentence to the time he leaves the highest grade, there should be constant and rigorous drill in the writing of English. This part of the instruction is by far the most important, and is, at the same time, the part most frequently neglected.

It is probably speaking within the bounds to say that no one subject gives the teachers in our public schools more trouble than that of English composition. Mathematics, languages, physics, natural history, are all pursued with more or less interest and profit, and are found to be comparatively easy subjects to teach. But when the hour for English composition arrives, the teacher goes to the work with misgivings, and the pupils with dread. The work is hastily got through with, — perhaps a recitation in rhetoric occupying a large share of the hour, — and is dismissed with inward relief by both instructor and instructed. The same unsatisfactory routine is repeated day after day until the work becomes a terrible incubus to all concerned.

Why is it that there is such avidity shown in other subjects and such reluctance in this? The reason, though simple, is not, perhaps, generally understood. In all other subjects the student occupies the position of a receptacle into which a certain amount of information has been pumped by one process or another, and from which it is easy to draw forth what has previously been put in. In English composition the student is, on the other hand, put for the first time in a constructive rather than a receptive attitude. He must now give information, instead of receiving it. For the first time, perhaps, in his

school-room experience he is made to feel the importance and responsibility of his own separate individuality. He has felt before the responsibility of his position as one unit in the aggregate of his class, but now he becomes a single, unattended personality. Nor is this all. Heretofore he has rarely been called upon to state his own views regarding any question, but has simply been required to repeat from text-books the views of some author.

Thus, in class-room work in general, there is a double support: first, the support of numbers; and second, the support of authority. When a student recites in mathematics, he states what every other member of his class must state. There is nothing new to awaken thought or challenge opposition. He is responsible only for a fair interpretation of the author. In composition, however, the support of numbers and of the text-book is wanting. The student becomes individually responsible for what he writes. He is now John Smith or Thomas Brown reciting from John Smith and Thomas Brown, and not simply one boy in a class of fifteen or twenty reciting from Robinson's "Arithmetic" or J. Dorman Steele's "Physiology." It is this feeling of individual responsibility which first overwhelms the student when he begins his work in composition.

The wide difference which exists between composition and the other branches usually taught in our schools has been thus particularly emphasized, because it is, doubtless, a very important element in explaining the difficulties in teaching composition, and may prove to be the key to some natural and logical method. It will be the aim of this paper to point out to teachers some reasons why the methods which have long been in vogue have not been more successful, and to outline, so far as possible, a system which is believed to be more in accord with the best methods of instruction. Such a paper must necessarily omit many things that it would be useful to mention, but it is hoped that the experience and ingenuity of teachers will

supply all such deficiencies, and will adapt the methods here suggested to the needs of their individual classes.

All teachers of composition have doubtless noticed that students who recite easily and well in some text-book subjects, can with difficulty be persuaded to read a composition in the presence of a class. If called upon to give an account of the muscular system or the circulation of the blood, the pupil will do so in tolerably good English and with no apparent embarrassment. But why is it that an hour later he blushes and stammers, pleads a sore throat, an uninteresting composition, or, perhaps, openly rebels, when asked to read his essay on Honesty, or Heroism, or Charity, or some one of the other numerous virtues! Is it diffidence? Not at all. He was overheard, only yesterday, telling easily and naturally all the particulars of the ball game between his club and the rival nine of a neighboring town. And isn't he by common consent one of the freest talkers in the school? And doesn't he declaim without any hesitation? And doesn't he speak well in the debating club, and everywhere else save on this one trying occasion?

The simple truth is, that same bright student doesn't know anything about honesty, or heroism, or charity, or any of the other virtues, as *abstractions*; and being such an excellent living example of honesty, he has the heroism to acknowledge the fact.

Now let the perplexed and discouraged teacher put the question frankly to himself, whether he has not been guilty of a great folly, in asking the pupil to write a composition on such a subject. Would he have asked him, when reciting in arithmetic, to demonstrate that the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides? or, when reciting in plane geometry, to solve a spherical triangle? He would as soon have asked him to square a circle, or prove the existence of quadrimensional space. Yet the teacher was guilty of just as great an absurdity

in asking him to write on Honesty or Heroism. These things are to him intangible and vague. To the wisest of us they are, when unsupported by concrete examples, mere general notions. What are they, then, to a boy of fifteen, or even twenty! Which one of us would like to stake his literary skill upon an essay on Honesty? Why demand so difficult a task of a boy or girl, whose experiences have not yet led them to understand the nature or value of generalizations? The teacher who asks this is guilty of requiring a student to tell something about a thing of which he knows nothing. The result is, the pupil writes words, words, words; and being withal an honest youth, is heartily ashamed of his performance.

The first thing, then, to be learned in teaching English composition is, that there is no known process whereby a teacher can draw out of a pupil's mind what is not in his mind. In other words, the requirements must be adapted to the experiences and attainments of the pupil.

Here may be seen the application of the distinction with which we began. The pupil is, in English composition, constructing, building up,—and it is unreasonable to expect him to build without materials or to build anything for which his materials are not adapted.

Just here it may not be amiss to speak of a widespread popular error with regard to composition in general. There is a very general notion that it is possible to separate the *matter* of composition from the *manner*. To a certain extent, and in a restricted sense, this is true. The matter contained in any book may be stated in a hundred different ways, but change the original work in any marked degree, and you find that, after all, you have not the same matter. The matter contained in Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar" had all appeared before in one form or another, and Shakespeare himself took it almost bodily from a translation of "Plutarch's Lives"; yet will anybody say that the matter in the play could be separated from the immortal

form into which the master moulded it, and be to all intents and purposes the same matter? This is taking altogether too gross and material a view of a great art. It is as if one should exclaim when a beautiful statue is demolished, "The form is destroyed, but after all the matter remains." He is too dull to see that the true matter, that which gave the statue value, was not the stone which could be seen and touched, but the idea and ideal which existed in the mind of the artist. So in composition, it is impossible to separate the matter from the manner without destroying at the same time the *idea* which had given the work value. Style and matter are so interwoven, one is so essential to the other, that no separation is possible.

It is plain, however, a pupil must have his materials at hand and in the rough, before he can produce a composition which shall at all represent his literary skill. If he have not such matter, he must create his composition out of fictions, out of mere fancies and conceits. The result will be a work without purpose,—a string of generalities delivered in a style utterly foreign to the pupil. Give the same boy something tangible, something with a genuine, living interest, and he will make of it a composition worthy of himself, and valuable as an example of his real style. The mere facts do not constitute the matter, but they are essential to it. It is after they have passed through the mind of the writer, and received the stamp of his individuality, that they come forth as the matter of which his composition is composed. But until they exist and form a part of his knowledge, he can never hope to produce anything more valuable than vague nothings.

Having thus pointed out the true relation of composition to the other branches taught in our schools, and having shown, in a general way, the necessity of adapting the work to the ability of the student, we have next to consider more specifically some of the methods to be employed in conducting an

exercise in this subject. Let us start fairly at the beginning, and take up, step by step, the processes of a teacher's share in the preparation of an essay.

First, then, as to the choice of a subject. Many teachers leave this entirely to the pupil, but not, I think, wisely. It is sometimes wise to leave the choice to the pupil within certain clearly defined limits, but even this should be the exception rather than the rule. If the student be given the responsibility too often, it will soon be found that he is either grappling with subjects too strong for him, or else is quietly availing himself of some questionable assistance. I remember, for instance, a young student whose first essay of three octavo pages was entitled "Prehistoric America." Other examples of this precocity in the choice of subjects might easily be given. It is to be regretted that there is not an equal number of examples of precocity in the treatment of subjects.

The teacher, having convinced himself of the necessity of selecting subjects for the class, has the less easy task of deciding what subjects to choose. Here he must exercise great tact and reasonable good sense, for a mistake at the outset may prove fatal to the value of the whole exercise. From what has already been said, teachers will see the necessity of breaking away from the traditions which have clung to this work for so many years. Every schoolboy has written his essay on the virtues, and every schoolgirl has filled her allotted number of pages with vague generalities regarding Sunshine and Shadow. Consign all such subjects to the limbo of Dr. Quackenbos' "Rhetoric." If you doubt that that is the proper place for them, read his list of five hundred and sixty-six subjects for essays, among which one finds such as Spring, Peace, War, Death, Life, Anger, Astronomy, Jealousy, Conscience and Law, Earth's Benefactors, The Stoic Philosophy, The Comparative Influence of Individuals and Learned Societies in Forming Literary Character in a Nation, and finally, as if neither this world

nor the limits of time could confine the knowledge and imagination of a schoolboy, the learned doctor seriously announces as a suitable subject for class-room use, The Immortality of the Soul. We must avoid a little disappointment at not finding something about the Kantian Philosophy, Esoteric Buddhism, or Transcendental Physics; but perhaps these omissions are compensated for by the inclusion of the subjects, Mesmerism, Psychology, and Spiritualism.

The teacher of composition should studiously avoid all such subjects as these, and be careful to select something in which the pupil will be interested. Let it be a subject about which he knows something. Let it be specific, concrete, not too broad in its scope, and capable of simple and direct treatment.

As teachers have more trouble in selecting subjects than in any other duty connected with this work, it may not be out of place to consider briefly the precise nature of a good subject for an elementary class. In order to make the remarks on this point more intelligible, it will be necessary to remind the reader that

1. Narration, or the relating in language of some incident or series of incidents.
2. Description, or the picturing in language of some object, real or imaginary, or the characteristics of such object.
3. Exposition, or the defining, explaining, and illustrating of some general notion or abstract idea.
4. Argumentation, or the establishing of the truth or falsity of some proposition.

Now, of these four kinds of prose composition, that known as exposition is by far the most difficult, and calls for the exercise of careful thought, and of trained discipline in the choice and collocation of words. It is under this class that the extensive branch of knowledge known as metaphysics is included. Yet exposition is the very class under which fall the great

majority of the subjects chosen for essays in the elementary schools. Of the five hundred and sixty-six subjects given by Dr. Quackenbos, over four hundred are expository subjects, while those which are subjects of narration are broad enough to call for a large volume, — such, for instance, as, Ancient and Modern Greece, The Reign of the Emperor Nero, and The Era of Haroun Al Raschid.

The easiest class of subjects is that embraced under narration. The child begins to talk in narrative, as, for instance, when he gives an account of how he went out in the road and made mud pies. It is an easy and natural form of composition. Hence it follows that in the lower classes the subjects should be those of narration. Ask the pupil to tell the incidents of his morning walk to school, the incidents connected with the ball game of yesterday, the incidents of a fishing excursion, or any one of the events of his daily life. It will be found that he has something to say, and will say it in an easy and natural style. For many reasons it seems best to persist in this form of composition throughout all the grades of our common schools. The subjects can, of course, be adapted to the increasing knowledge of the student; and description, exposition, and argumentation can be introduced as incidental to the narrative.

Perhaps, after the simplest and commonest experiences of everyday life, the easiest subjects are those adapted from some interesting story or poem. Paraphrase and metaphrase should early form a part of the work in composition. Take, for instance, a chapter from "Robinson Crusoe," or from one of Miss Alcott's or Mrs. Whitney's books, and let the pupil tell the same incidents in his own way, carefully avoiding the language of the author. With somewhat advanced classes, this kind of work may be made profitable in more ways than one. Fiction, history, biography, travels, may all be made to contribute to the usefulness and interest of the work.

To illustrate. Suppose the teacher puts into the hands of a bright pupil Motley's masterly account of the siege of Leyden, and asks him to relate the same incidents in his own language and with somewhat less of detail. What is the result? The boy becomes intensely interested in the story; learns, perhaps for the first time, that history is more fascinating than fiction; is eager to reproduce the story, and does so with good and useful results. Nor is this all. He has probably dipped into other portions of the story of the "Dutch Republic," and is eager to paraphrase some other interesting chapter.

Now, how does this differ from the old methods? Dr. Quackenbos would, doubtless, have assigned as a subject, The Dutch Republic, or, possibly, William the Silent. The boy would have gathered a few encyclopædic facts, strung them together in a hurried and unnatural style, and then gladly dismissed the whole matter from his mind.

Take another example. Suppose that instead of giving the subject "Tennyson's Poetry," the teacher asks a class of bright girls to make a metaphrase of "The Princess." The result will be that the girls will read one poem of Tennyson's, instead of reading some article about Tennyson, will invariably be charmed by the poem, and will tell the story in natural and wholesome prose.

Let the same plan be pursued with other authors, and the teacher will soon find that he is no longer vexed with the sighs and complaints of his composition class. There need be no limit to this kind of work for want of material. The short stories of Hawthorne are admirably adapted to this purpose. Lowell's "Vision of Sir Launfal" cannot fail to delight and interest an advanced class. The story of young Marlow in "She Stoops to Conquer," or of Portia in "The Merchant of Venice," or of Evangeline, or of Miles Standish, will be certain to arouse enthusiasm.

I am aware that in the common schools, and especially in the

country districts, some difficulty will be experienced in procuring the necessary books. Wherever it is possible the book should be put into the hands of the pupil, but where this cannot be accomplished, one or two exercises may be devoted to reading some short poem or story which is to furnish the material for an essay. There are, however, at the present time, so many cheap editions of good authors that many excellent books may be procured at a slight expense. It is not necessary that all the pupils in a class should write upon the same subject during the same week. Let such books as may be had circulate among the class for one week, and at the end of that time effect an exchange. This will give variety to the exercise, as well as decrease the expense of the scheme.

Perhaps it may not be amiss to suggest a list of books, say for a class of fifteen, and indicate the expense connected with the experiment. Suppose, for instance, the following books were selected:—

1. Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales. (Lovell's Edition.) Three at 20 cts. . . . .	\$0.60
2. Studies in Longfellow. (Riverside Literature Series.) Three at 15 cts. . . . .	.45
3. Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer and The Good-Natured Man. (Cassell.) Three at 10 cts. . . . .	.30
4. Longfellow's Evangeline. (Riverside Literature Series.) Three at 15 cts. . . . .	.45
5. Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice. (Cassell's National Library.) Three at 10 cts. . . . .	.30
Total, fifteen books, . . . . .	\$2.10
Or an average of 14 cents for each member of the class.	

With such a list as this, the work could be carried on for a term, or even two terms, without wearying the students or exhausting the material. At the end of that time, more fruitful results would have been achieved than would have followed ten

years of writing on expository subjects. Of course the list is merely suggested as a possible one. There are hundreds of other books that might be secured at the same expense. The "Riverside Literature Series," and the school edition of the "Modern Classics," both published by Houghton, Mifflin, & Co.; "The Classics for Children," published by Ginn & Co.; and the standard works published by Cassell & Co. in their "National Library," all afford a wide range from which to choose, at a very moderate price, some of the best works in our language.

If the teacher wishes to advance beyond narration, he can announce subjects in description; but beyond that point no elementary class ought ever to be asked to go. The student may be asked to describe, for example, the schoolhouse, or the village, or some mechanical contrivance, or some form of farm or household work. Anything with which he is familiar, or may easily become so, will furnish an excellent subject for a composition; but no subject in pure description should be assigned that is outside of the range of his personal observation. In general, the rule ought strictly to be adhered to, that no subject shall be announced which is beyond the reach of the student's experience or reasonable investigation.

Having disposed of the matter of a subject, the teacher has devolved upon him another equally important duty. He must give some plain and intelligible instructions as to the best methods of putting together an ordinary class essay. Although this duty is very generally neglected, a moment's thought will convince any one of its importance. Until such directions are given the pupil has only the vaguest notion of what is required of him. This notion generally materializes into the unwelcome thought that he must produce, on some fixed day, and that an alarmingly near one, a certain number of written pages on some given subject. So he puts off his task until the last moment,

and then sets about it blindly, and is as likely to build a wind-mill as anything else. What would be thought of a mother who should request her daughter of fifteen to go into the kitchen and make a loaf of bread, without having first inducted her into the mysteries of that most precious art? or of a father who should tell his boy to put together the newly purchased reaper and binder, without supplying him with any directions regarding the parts and relations of the complicated machine? or of a carpenter who should command his green apprentice to build a house? Yet this is what nine teachers out of ten do, when they tell a boy or girl to write a composition.

It cannot be too constantly borne in mind that composition is constructive work, and as such is guided by certain principles, easy of comprehension, but without which the student is only experimenting, and is usually foredoomed to discouragement and possibly utter failure. The directions for the preparation of an essay ought to be as few and as clear as possible, and ought to be thoroughly impressed upon the pupil's mind before he begins the work of composing. It is impossible, in a paper of this character, to touch upon all the points which should be included in such directions, but a few may be mentioned as especially important.

In the first place, explicit directions should be given as to the methods of analyzing a subject, of gathering and arranging material, and of amplifying and revising the material thus arranged. In an essay of narration, the teacher should point out the necessity of narrating events in the order of their occurrence, of selecting important events and omitting subordinate ones, of avoiding needless descriptions, and of avoiding altogether the superfluous reflections and moralizings with which so many compositions are disfigured. Upon this last point the teacher cannot too much insist. The practice which has so long prevailed of requiring or encouraging pupils to write upon expository subjects, has led to methods of treat-

ment that are repugnant to the true spirit of literary work. Teach plainly and persistently that a literary production which is not so constructed as to carry its own "moral" without a foot-note or appendix by the author is a failure, and should be rewritten. Such stale platitudes are unworthy of any healthy-minded boy or girl, and tend to encourage in them a species of hypocrisy and cant. Boys and girls are apt to take a healthy, wholesome, and even an optimistic view of life. Encourage this by all means in your power. Do not dampen the ardor of a vigorous, manly boy of fifteen, by any sickly cant about his relations to God or man. Teach him the sanctity and responsibility of those relations, but do not force him to drag in his pointless moral as to these things at the end of every school exercise. The best and noblest morals evade any attempt at formal expression.

If the subject is one of description, the teacher should give directions somewhat as follows: 1. Select a point of view, and from that point describe what can be seen of the object in question. 2. Give first a general plan, by stating the form, outline, magnitude, etc. 3. Select characteristic qualities, and omit unimportant details. 4. Enumerate the qualities in some natural order. (If, for example, the student is describing a tree, show the necessity of proceeding logically, describing first the trunk, then the branches, then the leaves and fruit.) 5. Illustrate and make plain by comparisons with well-known objects.

By some such directions as these, and by illustrating the rules, the teacher will awaken in the pupils a desire for orderly and intelligent treatment. When once a boy sees how he is to go to work at his composition, has his material at hand, and has it arranged in some systematic order, he soon discovers that the supposed difficulties vanish. In order to encourage this habit of careful analysis on the part of the student, it is often advisable to require him to present an outline of the essay which he

proposes to write. By examining this the teacher is able to see whether the student has correctly grasped the subject and can make useful suggestions as to the order and scope of the treatment.

When the student is finally ready to begin the actual work of writing, the teacher should give some directions to the mechanics of the essay. That is, he should require that all essays be written on the same kind of paper and with a margin wide enough for corrections. A very convenient size is the quarto, which can be had with a ruled margin of an inch or an inch and a half. Students should be required to observe neatness in the preparation of the work. Space should be left between the subject and the beginning of the essay. Paragraphs should be properly indented. Only one side of the paper should be used. When completed the essay should be folded lengthwise, and the name of the writer and the subject properly placed on the outside.

These details may seem trivial, but the teacher will find that by insisting upon them he will be able to form in his pupils habits of orderliness and neatness, and will, at the same time, greatly lighten his own labors.

Having thus done his whole duty, previous to the preparation of the essay, the teacher has one more, and perhaps the most important duty of all. He must carefully read and correct the work of the pupils. In this, more than in any other branch of the work, the teacher needs to possess ready sympathy and a large power of adaptability. Two extremes present themselves, somewhere between which lies the golden mean so earnestly to be sought. The teacher may criticise very severely, and thereby discourage the pupils, or he may criticise too leniently and thereby confirm them in glaring faults.

Certain principles should be kept constantly in mind. In the first place it is to be remembered that a style may be

far removed from the standard of which the teacher most approves, and yet be a very excellent and forcible style. In other words, I would make a plea for individuality in style. "Style," says Buffon, "is the man himself." Pascal says that a simple and natural style, the eloquence of nature, justly enchants us; for while we are looking out for an author we find a man. ~~Let it be kept constantly in mind that composition differs from all the other school exercises in that it is, when highly treated, an expression of the pupil's own individuality. Any method of criticism which hampers or destroys this natural expression is faulty and often fatal.~~

I would not be understood, however, as condemning the criticism of those features of a pupil's style which are manifestly vicious. ~~Wherever a pupil offends in any way against the established canons of good writing he should be corrected.~~

It is clear that the nature and extent of the criticism will depend largely upon the grade of work that is doing. With the more youthful pupils the criticism should not extend at first beyond the faults of the individual sentence. The sentence is the unit of all composition. The aim of the teacher, therefore, should be to make sure that his pupils can first properly construct a sentence, and much time might profitably be given to this work in the lower grades. Let the child be required to express the same idea in as many ways as his ingenuity can invent. The result would be a collection of sentences which would furnish ample illustrations of faults to be corrected and excellences to be commended. One of the sentences might then be expanded into a paragraph, and the same method further pursued.

It is in criticising the completed theme, however, that the teacher will experience the most difficulty. By the time this grade of work is reached there should be some simple outline of composition to which reference is to be made. The book selected should be one which gives simple directions for writing

English without entering into the discussion of subjects which can in no way assist the student. Fortunately there have been published in recent years some works which are admirably fitted for this purpose. Dr. Abbott's "How to Write Clearly," Professor Gilmore's "Outlines of the Art of Expression," and Nichol's "English Composition," will all be found useful aids in this branch of the work. In addition to these, Meiklejohn's "English Language" deserves special consideration. The book is a brief compendium of all that the ordinary pupil ought to know regarding his mother tongue. It contains a good working grammar, an interesting chapter on word-building, a brief guide to composition-writing, a history of the language, and a history of the literature. A student thoroughly prepared on this book would be amply equipped for beginning the work of the college course. These books are, however, guides rather than textbooks, and should be used mainly for reference to principles and rules violated in the compositions.

Having, then, selected a book for class-room use, the teacher should prepare some simple system of abbreviations by which to refer to the different topics treated in it. If the work is divided into sections plainly indicated, reference may be made by writing in the margin of the essay the number of the section. If this plan is not feasible, a list of abbreviations could be drawn up and furnished to the pupils. The author, in his own work, has found the following list very useful if not entirely adequate:—

A. Ambiguity.	Ex. Expand.
Ac. Want of accuracy.	Eq. Equivocal.
C. Condense.	Gr. Bad grammar.
Cap. Capitalization.	Il. Inelegant.
Cd. Confused statement.	Inc. Incongruous construction.
Cl. Want of clearness.	Ind. Indefinite.
Com. Incompleteness of statement.	Ir. Irrelevant.
D. Strike out.	K. Awkward construction.

- I. c. lower case (no capital).
- O. Orthography.
- Ob. Obscurity.
- P. Punctuation.
- Pr. Impropriety in diction.
- R. Repetition.
- Red. Redundancy.
- S. Change in Construction.
- Sim. Want of simplicity.
- St. Want of strength.
- T. Bad taste.
- Tr. Transpose.

- Trans. Abrupt transition.
- Trt. Trite.
- U. Lack of Unity.
- V. Vague.
- X. Calls attention to some error not specified.
- ¶. Paragraph required.
- No ¶. No paragraph required.
- ? Questions the truth of a statement.
- MS. Manuscript badly prepared.

The teacher has next to read the composition and place in the margin such criticisms as may be thought best. When, for instance, there is an offence against clearness, let *CZ.* be written in the margin opposite the faulty sentence. If the offence is the use of a hackneyed phrase, let *Trt.* be written, and so on. If there is ample time, and the class is not too large, the teacher should go over each essay with the writer, and point out those *inherent* faults of his style which cannot be fully designated by abbreviations. Especially should the method of transition from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph be examined and criticised. De Quincey declares that the two capital secrets in the art of prose composition are, *first*, the philosophy of transition and connection; and *second*, the way in which sentences are made to modify each other. Now these are things that must be pointed out to members of a class individually. A paragraph must be taken up on the same principles as a sentence, for it is, in fact, as necessary to study the mutual interdependence of sentences in a paragraph as of phrases and clauses in a sentence. Unless the paragraph has unity of purpose and structure, and has a continuity of thought running through it, there will be inevitable confusion and obscurity. The corrected essay should be rewritten, and the corrections

embodied in the new copy. The rewritten work should be examined by the teacher, and the improvements in form noted and commented upon. An excellent practice is to copy a number of representative faulty sentences upon a blackboard, and to call upon the class to express the same ideas in other sentences which shall be free from these faults.

Finally, in closing, allow me to remind teachers that the knowledge which they may impart to a pupil will be of comparatively little use to society if he be unable to express clearly and forcibly the ideas which are his. In an age when newspaper English is almost the only written composition which the average citizen reads, it is highly important that schools of learning should point out a purer and more effective style. When an eminent critic charges that professional authors "are distinguished by the most absolute carelessness," and that "no excess of awkwardness, or of inelegance, or of unrhythmical cadence, is so rated in the tariff of faults as to balance in the writer's estimate the trouble of remoulding a clause, of interpolating a phrase, or even of striking the pen through a superfluous word,"<sup>1</sup> it is surely time for schools of learning to awaken to the importance of giving early, constant, and thorough instruction in the knowledge and use of the English language. Careful choice and collocation of words are the marks of culture in a written composition. The brightest and most deserving pupil may lose a desirable position because of a badly constructed letter. It is the teacher's duty to save him from that fault and its consequences; to encourage in the boys and girls a loyalty to the simple, yet strong and elegant forms of our sturdy mother tongue; to warn them, by precept and example, against the stilted, bombastic, and thoroughly worthless style which characterizes so much of our newspaper writing and our legislative and forensic eloquence; to point out to them good models,

<sup>1</sup> De Quincey, Essay on Style.

and insist upon their following them. Encourage in every way original and felicitous forms of expression, and avoid hampering the natural style of a pupil, if it be not utterly faulty; in any event, insist always upon simple, straightforward, strong, and idiomatic English.

In conclusion, it is only just to say that the charge of neglecting the proper study of English does not lie at the door of the preparatory schools alone. It is only within very recent years that English has begun to receive a fair share of attention in the colleges and universities. The tendency is beginning to be seen that the most useful weapon in the hands of any scholar is a thorough knowledge of his own language. This conviction is arousing our colleges to better methods of work in this department, and is, in consequence, making necessary better preparation in the secondary schools. This preparation they can and should provide.

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