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THE PLACE OF IMITATION IN COMPOSITION.

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TO any one at all acquainted with the teaching of Composition in Ontario High Schools, the Latin phrase, "Quot homines, tot sententiae," may well occur, at aptly describing the methods in vogue among those teachers who have charge of the classes in this important subject. Again if any one will take pains to ascertain the state of feeling among Public School teachers in regard to methods in the same subject, it will generally, I believe, be found that there exists the greatest uncertainty in regard to the matter,—many even openly avowing that they have no clear conception of any definite principles which should govern their teaching in this branch of their work. If any one doubts this, let him broach the subject among the teachers of his acquaintance at a County Convention. While the latter will usually be found clear in their ideas as to the best methods of teaching most of the other branches of the Public School course, and will exhibit a certain uniformity of opinion in regard thereto, it will be manifest that the majority have no such settled convictions regarding the most effective methods of dealing with the subject of Composition. If, moreover, the seeker after information on this subject should consult the Reports of the

Proceedings of the Ontario Educational Association for past years, in the hope of getting hints from any papers relating to Composition which may have been read before any section of the Association, he will find further evidence of the neglect of this branch of study. In searching the indexes of seven volumes of these Reports, all published since the year 1891, I find only one reference to Composition, and that in a title in which Grammar occupies the prominent place.

The state of things indicated by these facts would seem to be attributable to a lingering belief that the art of making prose, like that of writing poetry, is one dependent almost entirely on natural aptitude,—a sort of "nascitur, non fit" theory—and to the consequent lack of systematic teaching of the subject in our Secondary Schools. This latter, I believe, can seldom be done properly without the use of a text-book by the pupils. Especially is this important in the case of those who are themselves at a later date to assume the role of teachers. Without this adjunct, the preceptor's methods, even if fully comprehended at the time, become, with the lapse of years, a tradition, incomplete and uncertain.

The theory just mentioned in regard to the art of Composition, though