

the difficulty of training the youthful mind to the art of composition. With a view to remove this difficulty, and to answer various inquiries, we desire to offer the following few simple hints on English Composition. We would commence by remarking that the great bugbear in the way of teaching English Composition, has been that the subjects given out by the master have not been adapted to the mental powers of the pupil. Any one may be convinced of the truth of this remark, by turning over the pages of any ordinary composition class-book, in which, among the list of subjects for essays, he will find such nice abstractions as "*Virtue is its own reward*," "*Honesty is the best policy*," "*Benevolence*," "*Charity*," "*Beauty*," "*Envy*," "*Vice*," "*Truth*," "*Justice*," "*Time*," &c. Now these nuts are rather hard for any one to crack; and to set any ordinary man—far less a child, with its feeble, undeveloped powers—to write about such airy, fleeting abstractions, is simply absurd. The food is too strong, and not adapted to the intellectual digestive organs of the child. You must tempt it by a lighter, simpler, and more nourishing diet; and that you can easily procure, by adopting the following recipe:—Take a short, pithy fairy tale, or heart-stirring deed from history; read it carefully over once, or twice if necessary, to the little fellows, who will listen to it with breathless attention. Then encourage one of them to repeat, as he best can, on the spur of the moment, the same story; and when he has done so, tell the whole class to reproduce it as carefully as they can, but to use *every freedom* in the handling of the subject. In this manner you will help to cultivate—what in a young class it is most essential to cultivate—the habit of attention and sustained intellectual effort; and the fact of one of their class-mates having repeated the story, will encourage the dullest to persevere. You can then cause two or three boys to reproduce, on the black-board, their essays, in whole or in part, which you can thus publicly criticize.

After warning the class against similar errors, you may send them all to their seats, to write a second or improved copy, by which means you bring vividly before the boy the fact of his progressing—one of the greatest levers in self-education. When in this manner they have had sufficient practice in composing in a variety of styles, so as to be able to punctuate correctly (which may be taught in a very few lessons by the analysis of sentences), and to write pretty fluently, the next step is to throw them more on their own resources, by suggesting to them various subjects for original composition, taking care, however, that these be confined to things which they have seen or handled, or can easily imagine. They may thus describe a shipwreck, fire at sea, cricket-match, boat-race, battle scene, holiday excursions, &c. The teacher can thus allow full scope to individual taste and talent, and can help the backward,—but let him beware of compelling his pupils to write a theme nicely cut up and dissected into so many dry morsels, labelled with equally dry names, and thus attempt to force every boy to *think* alike and in a regular order.

The higher style of composition may now be safely entered upon by the more advanced pupils, to whom the master may give critical or parallel biographies; historical, imaginative, or other themes, which require a fairly cultivated mind and taste, and powers of nice discrimination. In these higher subjects he will find it almost indispensable to have at his command a fair school library, to which he can refer the pupils for consultation or preliminary reading. Let them have full time to digest what they read, so that their thoughts may not be mere crude repetitions of the ideas of others.

Such is a rough outline of the manner in which we conceive English Composition may be taught. The judicious teacher may also avail himself of other means to aid the pupils in acquiring that art. Thus, by making it a rule, at least in the junior classes, to admit no answer which does not contain a clearly expressed definite proposition,—by teaching history not so much by questioning as by demanding an oral or written account of a particular lesson or subject,—by requiring in the classics a full, good English (not Latin-English) translation of every passage, instead of allowing both languages to be murdered piecemeal by that curious grammatical hybrid termed "*construing*," by causing the pupils themselves to comment on and recite choice pieces of our best authors; by avoiding the pernicious habit of correcting pages of bad grammar, which is one of the surest methods of teaching a boy bad grammar, by familiarising him with it; by instituting among the senior pupils a carefully conducted debating society: by these and such similar appliances as will occur to every one who has studied the philosophy of the human mind, in connection with instruction, the art of English Composition can be easily and pleasantly acquired, and a good mental training be at the same time secured. In conclusion, we would draw the particular attention of every teacher to the orthography of his pupils, and the necessity of curbing their spasmodic effusions.

2. THE FIRST ERROR OF TEACHING.

The first error is teaching men to imitate or repeat, rather than to think. We need to take but a very cursory glance at the great theatre of human life, to know how deep a root this radical error has struck into the foundation of education. Look abroad among men, and ask yourselves how many of the moving multitude inquire into the springs of action; how many seek to know the causes and consequences of those scenes in which they themselves are actors; or, to descend to details, how many attempt to understand the true principles of the business in which they are engaged, how many can correct a blunder arising merely from the application of a principle. Analyze this boasted liberty of ours; look again upon republican society in the freest land of the earth; separate the living agents from the mere automata in this game of life, and tell me how many of the latter—how many of the former! And if you are not pleased with the result, tell me whether this is a decree of nature or a fault of education; whether you believe if men were taught to be independent thinkers, and that, while they revered all that was good, or glorious, or valuable, in the works of their ancestors, they, too, had an indwelling spirit whose high prerogative it was to extend the conquest of mind, they would cease to inquire, and remain dull floats upon the ocean of being.

But if you would know what the effects of thinking are, compare Athens with China. Here are three hundred millions of people—more than one-third of the human race—whose history goes far back into remote antiquity, and who commenced with no small share of arts and sciences, but who have added not a single particle to knowledge, nor taken one step in improvement; whose only policy is to prevent innovation, and whose only power is to perpetuate succession. Here is another people, whose population does not exceed one-tenth that of Ohio, whose place can scarcely be found on the map, who commenced barbarians, yet who have given to the world new sciences and new arts, and whose mighty men infused into language

"Thoughts that breathe and words that burn;"

who reconquered their conquerors by the spirit of eloquence, and whose renown has filled the earth.

What makes this mighty difference? The one learned to repeat, the other to think.—*Connecticut School Journal*.

3. FALLACY OF PREMATURE EDUCATION.

When we are considering the health of children, it is imperative not to omit the importance of *keeping their brains fallow as it were, for several of the first years of their existence*. The mischief perpetrated by a contrary course, in the shape of *bad health, peevish temper and developed vanity*, is incalculable. Some infant prodigy, which is a standard of mischief throughout its neighbourhood, misleads them. But parents may be assured that this early work is not, by any means, all gain, even in the way of work. I suspect it is a loss, and that children who begin their education late, as it would be called, will rapidly overtake those who have been in harness long before them.

And what advantage can it be that a child knows more at six years old than its compeers, especially if this is to be gained at a sacrifice of health, which may never be regained? There may be some excuse for this early book-work in the case of those children who are to live by manual labour. It is worth while, perhaps, to run the risk of some physical injury to them, having only their early years in which we can teach them book knowledge. The chance of mischief, too, will be less, being more likely to be counteracted by their after life. But for a child who is to be at book-work for the first twenty-one years of its life, what folly it is to exhaust in the least its mental energy, which, after all, is its surest implement.

A similar course of argument applies to *taking children early to church*, and to over-developing their minds in any way. There is no knowing, moreover, the disgust and weariness that may grow up in the minds of young persons from their attention being prematurely claimed.—*Arthur Helps*.

4. A PLEA FOR DULL SCHOLARS.

A writer in the *Rhode Island School Master* gives an incident in his experience with just reflection, which we commend to every teacher who is tempted to be impatient with dull scholars:

I once saw a teacher engaged in hearing a brilliant recitation, where all was prompt and successful. The class was in high spirits, the teacher in fine temper; but when it came the turn of an honest looking boy at the foot, with large heavy eyes, and a troubled look, I saw the smile of satisfaction leave the teacher's face before he had finished putting the question; I saw the class sneer in anticipation of the blunder; and I saw too the poor boy finching from the gaze