

## Hints on English Composition.

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In a country, like Canada, where every one who aspires to occupy any position is more or less called upon to express his sentiments publicly, either orally or through the medium of the press, we should imagine that English Composition would hold a prominent place in the schedule of our school duties. But our daily experience tells us that such is not the case, and that we are generally left to acquire that art in a loose, non-descript manner, after we are supposed to have finished our education. We believe, however, that many of our zealous teachers are fully sensible of this defect, but have been deterred from giving this branch a prominent place in the regular curriculum of studies, from an exaggerated idea of 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 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 abstraction, 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 story, 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