

"Composition" by a rather clever man, in which this method is pursued throughout. We have consequently exercises like this:—
Make twelve sentences on the formula

$$A^2 + B^3 = C^4.$$

Now it is as natural to make a sentence as it is to walk or to dance; but nature will not allow her operations to be interfered with by a semi-algebraic consciousness like this. In teaching a child to march, you don't tell it to move the gastrocnemius and the soleus muscles; although these are the muscles which it does move when it attempts to walk. To introduce consciousness into either operation is to introduce disease—it is to introduce failure. The longer such a course of training is pursued, the more disastrous must be the result; the more must the mind of the pupil be enfeebled, and any healthy natural power of style that lay in him will probably be killed off. Let us fancy what kind of writings we should have had from Defoe, from Swift, or from Sir Walter Scott, if they had trained themselves on this wretchedest of all actual and possible methods. There can be no other goal to a road of this kind than poverty of thought, pedantic stiffness of expression, and unnatural affectation.

It requires no great profoundness to see this. It is plain that analysis is the opposite of synthesis; that the mind in creation does not and cannot analyse; that, when it begins to analyse, creation must stop; and that, in one word, the two—*ex vi termini*—exclude each other. Set a boy to produce sentences, and he can afterwards employ analysis as a test of their correctness and self-consistency—but it is impossible for him to make and to analyse at the same time. No man saw this more clearly than Göthe; and he put into the mouth of Mephistopheles an excellent exposure of this capital blunder. I can imagine a teacher falling into this blunder once, or, perhaps, twice; but what is to be said of a person who writes a whole book on this plan? The better and more complete the book, the worse and more deleterious are its effects. The fact is, it is in composition as in reading. In reading, as Archbishop Whately shows, the farther the reader can withdraw his attention from his own voice and confine it to the matter—to the feeling and to the logic of the matter—the better. In the same way, the farther the young writer can withdraw his attention from the form of the clauses he is writing—at the time he is writing—the more chance there is for him to express himself with all his natural vigour and clearness. Consciousness destroys grace; and yet here we have a book for the elaborate production of consciousness in the most natural movements of the mind. Who ever yet learned noble and graceful manners by studying eighteenpenny books on etiquette? The fact is, this gentleman has made the elaborate blunder of mistaking the helm for the motive power of a ship—the governing balls for motive power of the steam-engine.

II. The practice of Amplification, which is a very important part of composition as commonly taught, is quite as reprehensible. It is often combined with a process called *Variation*, which is not so bad as its twin-brother, but which has, nevertheless, a tendency to destroy the natural good taste of a pupil. There is high authority for the practice of this verbosity and phrase-spinning. Lord Jeffrey tells us, in one of his letters, that, when he was a briefless barrister, he was in the habit of spending five or six hours a day in amplifying and "translating" passages from great English writers, and that this practice gave him immense facility in writing for the *Edinburgh Review*. I have no doubt it did. I have no doubt that it enabled him to make double as much copy as he could otherwise have done. But what is the result? No one now reads Lord Jeffrey's criticisms; there is hardly an idea in the whole of his three volumes; or, if there is, it is but as a grain of wheat in a bushel of chaff. If we want to train penny-a-liners, if the maximum of copy be the aim of our endeavours, then by all means let us teach boys to call fire the devouring element, to use such phrases as signify assent for say Yes, to give utterance to a sentiment for to remark; and to say,

instead of "The sun shines," "The source of light disperses its rays." (1)

The central falsity in this process is the same as in the last. The attention of the pupil is forcibly and artificially concentrated on words and phrases, when he ought to have his mind full to the brim of the facts, the feeling, or the logical connection of what he is writing.

III. The third fault—that of *Paraphrasing*—occupies perhaps a still larger place in all systems of teaching Composition. It also goes by the name of "Turning poetry into prose." Special books have been written for the teaching of this vile art alone. I have one before me now; and this is what it makes of Shakespeare's Song of Ariel, the music and the style of which are of the most exquisite subtlety;—

"Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange."

"The general import of this passage may be readily apprehended; it is simply this:—A person, supposed to have been drowned, is described as undergoing various transmutations of his corporal nature, through some mysterious agency by which the sea assimilates to its own native products whatever is deposited in its depths.

"The meaning in detail, however, is not easily developed, on account of the indefinite allusiveness of the poet's fadocy.

"PARAPHRASE.—Thy father lies under the waves, fully five fathoms down. His bones are converted into coral; what were his eyes are pearls. His frame suffers no decay; but every part of him is changed by its new situation into some rare sea-treasure."

Such pitiable stuff condemns itself.

The following is the model given by another book of a paraphrased form from one of Gay's Fables:—"Two young bears setting out on one occasion from the covert of a forest, chanced, in what seemed to them a lucky moment, to light upon a beehive laden with the rich and inviting store of the laborious race of honey-makers. With joyful but inconsiderate eagerness," &c. &c. This is quite enough. This is the language spoken in "No Man's Land"; and it is not the natural language of any speaker or writer in this half of the nineteenth century. I am not here raising the old controversy under a new form between what is called Saxon English and Latin English; the question here and now is between English and no English at all—between the English of life and thought, and the so-called English of a cranky and effete pedantry.

Now, it may be at once granted that, by setting a pupil to write a paraphrase, the teacher may most easily find out whether the pupil understands the language of the poet. But at what a cost is this done? At the cost of destroying all natural taste and appreciation, of training him to despise all poetry whatsoever, of teaching him an abominable slang that he must unlearn as quickly as he can when he leaves school and begins to write with his eyes open. The very models of such paraphrasing ought of themselves to warn every teacher of sense and knowledge from a practice so demoralizing. And yet this practice is pursued in some schools with a fell perseverance that must destroy every germ of natural good taste. The habitual reading of good poetry ought to have preserved everybody against so glaring a blunder. For few critical dogmas are more firmly established than this: that the best poetry cannot be turned into prose; that it cannot properly be translated at all; and that the highest poetry exists only when the thought and the expression form one indissoluble whole. In what other words could we convey the ideas, and the force of the ideas, presented in Shakespeare's phrases—"Life's

(1) Parker.