

as this is different from note-taking in oral lessons or lectures. Then clear and explicit directions to the necessary book—to the heading, if in an encyclopædia, to volume, chapter, even page of a long history or biography, will prevent waste of time. A list of points to be looked up will open a path through the trackless waste of a long article. At this stage no references should be given with which the teacher is not thoroughly familiar.

To illustrate: If a mere sketch of Nelson's life is wanted, such as can be got up from any biographical reference book, some such list of points as this might be given:—Date, place of birth, father's name, entrance into navy, service as a junior (briefly), as captain, as commodore (more fully). State chief engagements, injuries sustained, honors gained, Battle of Cape St. Vincent, Admiral Nelson, Battle of the Nile, Copenhagen—these last three with some detail. (The essential points about a battle will already have been learned). Napoleon's plan for invading England, how Nelson defeats it, Battle of Trafalgar more fully, and some detail about the hero's death.

Such a list would ensure the inclusion of essential facts and guard against waste of time over subordinate ones. The material obtained should be brought to the class, submitted and criticized, before it is arranged and made into a composition.

In planning the arrangement and proportion of such a sketch the principle to be impressed upon the writers is, in Professor Wendell's words, "To make plain why Nelson was worth the attention we are called upon to give him."

Help of this kind—like all other help in school work—should be gradually lessened, and finally withdrawn altogether when the pupil is capable of getting up and arranging a subject for himself, using his own choice of books. But such work belongs to a late stage, after the elementary technical work of composition has been mastered.

In considering subjects to set for reflective and imaginative compositions, it must be borne in mind that in a school course purely original writing should bear a very large proportion to reproduction. If the young writer has learned to write by reproducing the thoughts of others, he will know how to express his own thoughts, when he has any. And it is time enough for him to draw conclusions and express opinions on matters of fact, when he knows how to state the facts clearly and arrange them in an orderly way.

So I would suggest that the setting of subjects for purely reflective compositions be postponed until the later years of school life, and that, even then, they be stated, not in general or abstract terms, but as concrete and personal questions.

What is needed is a definite starting point, and this may be suggested by the wording of the subject.

When I went to school a stock composition subject was Friendship. No one knew where to begin. The class either stubbornly balked, or obediently wrote down a string of platitudes, hackneyed quotations and weak sentimentalisms. But put the subject something like this: "What is the good of an intimate friend?" and every girl and boy who is lucky enough to have a chum will find something real and honest to say about it.

A definite starting point is also supplied where subjects for composition arise naturally out of discussions over situations or statements in history or literature lessons. But I should never set a subject for this sort of composition without first discussing it vigorously and informally in class.

For example, I think I have never read Gray's "Elegy" with a class without more or less discussion arising over the lines:—

"Chill penury repressed their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of their soul."
"Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest."

Someone is pretty sure to ask, "If they really had 'a noble rage,' would poverty repress it?" or "If he really were a Milton, would he remain mute and inglorious?" Questions that may stimulate discussion are: Does it depend on the *degree* of poverty? or on the degree of enthusiasm or talent? or on the possession or lack of some other quality—as physical strength, or perseverance, or diligence, or selfishness? Can you give instances of men who have not let poverty repress them? What difference do you think it would make in your own progress if you were in great poverty? and so on. A few pupils will probably do all the talking, but all may be called upon to write. The title should be discussed, and a perfectly definite one decided on. It is best to keep it as near as is compatible with definiteness to the form in which the question first arose. "If Milton had been born and bred in poverty would he have written 'Paradise Lost?'" is neither a concise nor an elegant title, but it will probably draw out more writers than the more