

## FIRST PART

### I—MATTER

#### Generalities

How often has the unfortunate boy or girl said, when given an essay as home-work: "What shall I write? I cannot find anything to say!"

When to the difficulty of finding ideas is added the difficulty of expressing them in a foreign language, it is little wonder that essay-writing in French is not always a general favourite. In examinations where it is compulsory, it is tackled with reluctance; where a choice is permitted, the alternative of translation into French is generally preferred.

Yet translation is a fine art, for it requires at once a perfect knowledge of both languages and constant practice in their use; as such, it is beyond the reach of any but advanced students. In its stead we generally get the approximate reproduction which is so often offered under the name of translation, and in which the original text, far from being skilfully and elegantly rendered, has not always even been understood; and it is probable that practice in writing French essays would have afforded a better training from the standpoint of general education and of the acquisition of the foreign language.

#### Chapter I.—Ideas

*Il faut manger pour vivre, et . . . vivre pour penser.*—(With apologies to VALÈRE.)

THERE is no royal road enabling anyone to acquire a stock of ideas about any and every subject and to treat it adequately. We may, however, assert that the training of certain faculties,