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ENGLISH COMPOSITION
AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM**

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Andrus Leonard

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**ENGLISH COMPOSITION AS
A SOCIAL PROBLEM**

BY

STERLING ANDRUS LEONARD, A.M.

INSTRUCTOR IN ENGLISH, HORACE MANN SCHOOL

TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



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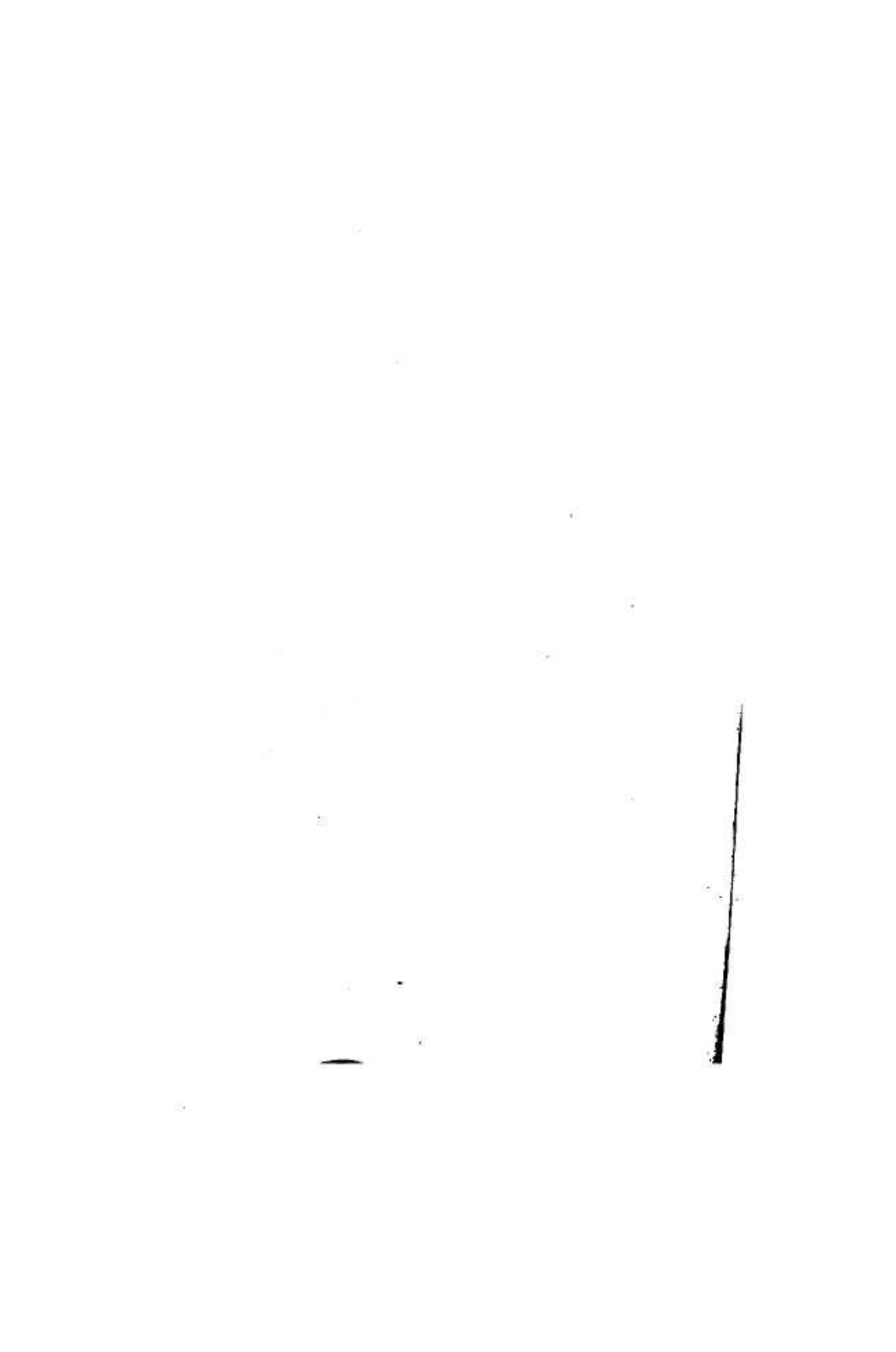
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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

ENGLISH composition has been one of the least interesting subjects taught in the schools. The ordinary student has found the task of linguistic expression a dull exercise. Largely because he was provided with no initial enthusiasm for composing, speaking and writing in the classroom have been formal matters unrelated to his personal need to express or communicate his feelings and ideas. The pupil has been forced to observe the rules and niceties of the English language without ever being aware in any vital way of their uses to him. The result is that expression through language has been the most formal and artificial of all the school studies. In spite of years of training, our students fail to become easy, clear, and forceful writers. We are told that the Americans who can speak and write with effective fluency have learned the art outside of classrooms.

There is something inherently wrong in our methods of instructing youth in the art of literary expression. As measured by the canons of modern psychology, our traditional modes

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of teaching are flagrantly faulty. It seems the tritest of suggestions to say that a child should have some knowledge of the subject which he has been asked to discuss. Yet it can scarcely be said that we heeded this commonplace truth until a decade or two ago. It was customary to assign him topics for composition upon which he had no real information. If knowledge was supplied, it was in the form of "more words about words." [The direct, personal, and vital experiences of Boys and girls were a resource seldom utilized by the teacher of thirty years ago.] Now, fortunately, we are asking our pupils to speak of the things they know in an intimate way, trusting that the ever-widening circle of interest will finally bring them to the ability to discuss topics which have a worth to adults.

But to have knowledge does not imply the desire or the power to communicate it. Wise men with minds filled with knowledge are not continuously revealing what they know. They are often silent in company because there is no need, no motive for bringing their intelligence to bear. To possess something to say is a fundamental condition of worthy expression, but it is by no means a final one. There must be a motive, a stimulation, which creates the desire or the need