

A FIRST MANUAL OF COMPOSITION

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PREFACE

Two years ago the writer published a small volume called "A First Book in Writing English." He did so on the hypothesis that all the rhetorical theory necessary for college entrance may best be given in simple form to students in the first two years of the high school, in order that it may later be assimilated by practice. After watching the book in use by pupils of very different ages, he believes the hypothesis to be essentially correct. The chief principles of rhetoric can be grasped very early, but only long practice can transform them into a workman's instincts.

He has now attempted to apply the principle a little lower down; to connect grammatical with rhetorical study in the eighth and ninth grades; to present sentence-analysis as a means of naming and revising what the pupil himself has instinctively written; and to arouse a desire of reasoning soundly about matters interesting to the reasoner. Leaving the "First Book"

unchanged, in the hope that it may sometimes be found available where a single volume must serve throughout the high school course, he has prepared a "First Manual" and a "Second Manual," the two designed to suggest a system of rhetorical theory and practice for the entire secondary period. The "First Manual," intended for students of thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen, contains 170 short exercises. It may be used daily for one year, or less often for two years. If studied daily for one year, it should be employed as a handbook throughout at least another year, during which the exercises may be referred to, by number, in the margin of themes.

One thought has dictated much in the plan of the book; namely, that the student concerned is neither wholly child nor wholly adolescent. He is a human being in the most significant of mental moments, that in which the transition begins from the irresponsible, sensory child to the responsible, rational adult. He needs to write freely, fluently, even imaginatively; and yet he must be taught that the person who expresses himself too freely and inexactly will unintentionally bear false witness and make trouble for his fellows. His

logical powers are developing, and he is not without desire of learning how to think; but he is unable to follow bitterly long and close chains of reasoning. He needs to know new words and how to spell them, but not a bookful unavailable for his compositions. He must gain the power of constructing decent sentences, but he cannot gain it in a week. In view of these needs, the aims and devices of the present manual are roughly as follows:—

1. *Interest.*—Most of the material used for illustrative purposes has been chosen with regard to intrinsic interest and value, and has been winnowed by being submitted to pupils themselves.

2. *Spontaneity.*—(1) Almost every written task is preceded by one or two oral tasks on the same subject. (2) Almost every written task is short. (3) Certain exercises call for play of the imagination. (4) Simple principles of invention are offered as helps in composing. (5) Every theme is to be composed with an eye to invention only; it is to be revised when first finished, or later. (6) Some part of a suggestive vocabulary studied the day before is required in many themes. If spontaneity means mere haste to shed innocent ink,

this device will but hinder; not so if spontaneity means invention and eagerness to express it. With some classes it may be wise to suspend the set tasks occasionally, and encourage mere garrulity. But, in spite of daily exercise of their imaginations through reading news and fiction by highly "extensive" methods, most boys have little to say, and hate to spin it out.

3. *Drill in reasoning.* — An attempt has been made to simplify the subject of paragraph structure by approaching it from the point of view of a chain of thought. The logical paragraph is regarded as a chain of reasoning from a topic to a conclusion about that topic. Practice is afforded in thinking to a conclusion before writing the paragraph. The imposing word "logical" is given and explained, because it is easily understood by young students, and is of immense value to them — just as "x" is valuable to them in mathematics. Drill is also given in the logical use of conjunctions, the logical arrangement of words, and the reduction of unimportant paratactic sentences to their proper hypotactic rank. All this may sound too hard for the age under discussion, but it has seemed other-

wise in the experiments on which the exercises rest.

4. *Spelling and vocabulary.*—Certain rules for spelling the more difficult common words are inserted at intervals. The exercises insure oral and written use of vocabularies valuable to pupils of this age, but hard to spell. There is also a chapter on the correct use of common expressions.

5. *Sentence-structure and punctuation.*—The method of treating sentence-structure and punctuation in a chapter or two by themselves has been abandoned. Every week or so one principle touching these matters is to be reached inductively, and then is to be used as a guide in revising past themes, as far as time will allow. The student takes his pack of papers and examines it with reference to the detail of theory which he has acquired that week. Thus his attention is fastened part of the week on invention, part on revision. The teacher can easily go about the room while the revision is in progress, and satisfy himself that each pupil has detected at least some instances of observance or violation of the principle. Of course there is a certain tedium for the student in so much revision; it is folly to think that any writer,