

FIRST LESSONS IN COMPOSITION: IN WHICH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE ART ARE DEVELOPED IN CONNECTION WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF GRAMMAR; EMBRACING FULL DIRECTIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF PUNCTUATION; WITH COPIOUS EXERCISES

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First Lessons in Composition: In Which the Principles of the Art Are Developed in Connection with the Principles of Grammar; Embracing Full Directions on the Subject of Punctuation; With Copious Exercises by G. P. Quackenbos

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G. P. QUACKENBOS

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PREFACE.

A COUNTY superintendent of common schools, speaking of the important branch of composition, in a communication bearing date July 27, 1844, uses the following language: "For a long time I have noticed with regret the almost entire neglect of the art of original composition in our common schools, and the want of a proper text-book upon this essential branch of education. Hundreds graduate from our common schools with no well-defined ideas of the construction of our language." The writer might have gone further, and said that multitudes graduate, not only from common schools, but from some of our best private institutions, utterly destitute of all practical acquaintance with the subject; that to many such the composition of a simple letter is an irksome, to some an almost impossible, task. Yet the reflecting mind must admit that it is only this practical application of grammar that renders that art useful—that parsing is secondary to composing, and the analysis of our language almost unimportant when compared with its synthesis.

One great reason of the neglect noticed above, has, no doubt, been the want of a suitable text-book on the subject. During the years of the author's experience as a teacher, he has examined, and practically tested the various works on

composition with which he has met: the result has been a conviction that, while there are several publications well calculated to advance pupils at the age of fifteen or sixteen, there is not one suited to the comprehension of those between nine and twelve; at which time it is his decided opinion this branch should be taken up. Heretofore, the teacher has been obliged either to make the scholar labor through a work entirely too difficult for him, to give him exercises not founded on any regular system, or to abandon the branch altogether—and the disadvantages of either of these courses are at once apparent.

It is this conviction, founded on the experience not only of the author, but of many other teachers with whom he has consulted, that has led to the production of the work now offered to the public. It claims to be a first-book in composition, and is intended to initiate the beginner, by easy and pleasant steps, into that all-important, but hitherto generally neglected, art.

A brief account of the plan and scope of the work may not be out of place. It presupposes no knowledge of grammar, and is intended to be put into a pupil's hands, as a first-book in grammar, at whatever age it is deemed best for him to commence that study; say from nine to twelve years, according to the degree of intellectual development. In the first fifty pages, by means of lessons on the inductive system, and copious exercises under each, he is made familiar with the nature and use of the different parts of speech, so as to be able to recognize them at once, and to supply them when a sentence is rendered incomplete by their omission. After this, he is prepared to take up a more difficult treatise on grammar; while in this work he is led to consider the different kinds of clauses and

sentences, and is thus prepared for punctuation, a subject not generally treated in elementary books with the consideration which its importance demands. The rules for punctuation have been condensed, arranged on a new plan, and, it is hoped, rendered intelligible to all. Directions on the subject of capital letters follow. A few pages are next devoted to rules, explanations, and examples, for the purpose of enabling the pupil to form and spell correctly such derivative words as *having*, *debarring*, *chatted*, and the like, which are not to be found in dictionaries, and regarding which the pupil is apt to be led astray by the fact that a change is made in the primitive word before the addition of a suffix.

This done, the scholar is prepared to express thoughts in his own language, and he is now required to write sentences of every kind, a word being given to suggest an idea for each. He is taught to vary them by means of different arrangement and modes of expression; to analyze compound sentences into simple ones, and to combine simple sentences into compound. Several lessons are then devoted to the various kinds of style. The essential properties, purity, propriety, precision, clearness, strength, harmony, and unity are next treated, examples for correction being presented under each. The different kinds of composition follow, and, proper selections having been first given as specimens, the pupil is required to compose successively letters, descriptions, narrations, biographical sketches, essays, and argumentative discourses. After this, the three principal figures receive attention; and the work closes with a list of subjects carefully selected, arranged under their proper heads, and in such a way that the increase in difficulty is very gradual. The author has aimed throughout to awaken thought

in the pupil, to discipline his mind, and by precept and practice to make him acquainted with the construction of his native tongue.

The distinctive features of the work may be briefly enumerated as follows: the development of the principles of composition in connection with those of grammar; the easy steps by which it proceeds according to the inductive system; the illustration of every point with exercises, not taken, as has hitherto been the general practice, from the time-honored text-book of Murray; the method of analyzing subjects; and the frequency of reviews. Suggestions are scattered through the book, to which it may be well for the teacher to attend. The pupil should, in all cases, prepare himself to answer the questions in each lesson, before he proceeds to the exercise.

With these brief remarks the author commits his work to his professional brethren, respectfully asking them to submit it to that practical trial, which is, after all, the only true test of a school-book's value.

NEW-YORK, Jan. 1st, 1851.

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FIRST LESSONS IN COMPOSITION.

LESSON I.

LETTERS, VOWELS, CONSONANTS, SYLLABLES.

WHAT is a letter ?

A letter is a character used to represent a sound of the human voice.

How many letters are there in the English language ?

Twenty-six.

Repeat them.

A, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s,
t, u, v, w, x, y, z.

What are the letters, when taken together in their regular order, as above, called ?

The Alphabet.

How many of these letters can be sounded alone ?

Five.

Which are they ?

A, e, i, o, u.

What do we call these ?

VOWELS.

What is a vowel ?

A vowel is a letter that represents a complete sound.