

# **A STUDY OF THE PARAGRAPH**

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A Study of the Paragraph by Helen Thomas

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**HELEN THOMAS**

**A STUDY OF  
THE PARAGRAPH**



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THE PARAGRAPH

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THOMAS'S PARAGRAPH.

W. P. I

2010

## PREFACE

THE principal aim in teaching the art of Composition is that the pupil may learn to write effectively. That his written words should be well chosen and grammatically arranged is not enough. What he writes must be clear and forcible. He must write so that his meaning cannot be misunderstood and so that what he has to say will interest the reader. If the reader understands what is written and is interested in what is said and in the way in which it is said, we have effective writing.

The principles of the art are embodied in many textbooks. On my desk I count (before me) thirty-eight, which I have selected from a much larger number, as best fitted for the use of colleges and secondary schools. So numerous are these texts that I have long felt that there could be no real excuse for another, that any new work could be only a new arrangement or combination of those already in existence, and that there was no new thing to be said. All these textbooks insist upon the same qualities of writing, upon the same rhetorical principles for attaining these qualities; all show the difference between artistic and scientific styles, between argument and exposition, narration and description. They all discuss and offer exercises upon the choice of words, the construction of sentences, the methods of paragraph construction, and the outlining or planning for the unity of the whole composition. What more, one might ask, could be needed?

These books, it may be repeated, are good books and well fitted for classroom use. In general, the pupil who uses them, under an intelligent teacher, will learn how to write good sentences, and perhaps how to combine his sentences into good narratives, or expositions, or arguments. But even with the best books and with excellent teachers, the novice in composition is liable to find his greatest difficulty in the logical arrangement of his thoughts and ideas, hence in the effective presentation to the reader of what is very clear in the writer's mind.

It is just at this point of paragraph structure that Miss Thomas's little book will prove a valuable supplement to the excellent texts already in use. It is not intended to supplant them, but to be used in conjunction with them. It is the embodiment of an original idea, startling at first in its very simplicity, but eminently logical, sane, and practical. Miss Thomas has found the method by which great masters of the language, perhaps unconsciously, have wrought the fabric of their thought, and by this book makes it feasible to teach that method to pupils in secondary schools. It is so easily to be understood by teacher and pupil alike as to make it valuable for school use. Its clearness of arrangement, logical development step by step, number and variety of exercises, and, most of all, its interest to the pupil, will serve to make it popular among teachers of English.

The method proposed is the outcome of experience in teaching, and has already been used with enthusiasm in several schools, by a number of instructors, all of whom are enthusiastic in commending it as the most practical means of teaching the development of the paragraph.

So sure do I feel that this book is original, teachable, and



valuable, that I wish to make use of it in teaching college classes, in the endeavor to correct one of the greatest faults of college students' composition, — ignorance of proper paragraph construction. That students will profit by this study and practice, is certain.

F. P. EMERY.

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Purpose of the Book.*—In offering this book on Paragraph Writing, I have in mind my own High School boys and girls. Indeed, inasmuch as they have been my inspiration and guidance, it is for them I write. It is for them that I have taken up an old subject in a new way; their needs have demanded this exertion on my part; their appreciation has been sufficient reward. So I am indebted to an outside stimulus for this attempt to solve an intangible, elusive subject, and to put into the pupils' hands a practical method of approach to such a vital subject as Composition. That such a method has met with their approbation and approval, and that it has elicited practical results, are sufficient facts to make the pragmatist feel that his work is worth while.

It becomes necessary, then, to discuss briefly the Paragraph in its usual presentation in order to show, if possible, wherein lies the difficulty which renders the subject still intangible to the average High School boy and girl.

In the first place, let us look at the definitions of the Paragraph. We find various, of which the following are examples: "A Paragraph is a short passage in a written discourse containing a complete and unified statement of a particular point." Or, "it is the extreme limit of the expansion of a single articulated idea; an expanded sentence which contains a topic corresponding to the subject of a sentence, and predicate matter corresponding to the predicate of the sen-