

**PRECEPTS OF
LITERATURE:
A TEXTBOOK**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649441938

Precepts of Literature: A Textbook by Patrick A. Halpin

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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TEXT-BOOK.

By

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"Pauca praecepta, multa lectio, plurima exercitatio."

NEW YORK:
BAKER & GODWIN, PRINTERS,
No. 25 PARK ROW.
1881.

Educ, T 798.81.448



Education by Ed. Quincy

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1898, by the
President of St. John's College, N. Y.,
In the office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

PREFACE.

THE compiler of the following pages puts forward no claim to originality. He has drawn, sometimes in substance, sometimes verbatim, from so many sources, that he is unable to make any other than a general acknowledgment. His only aim has been to place in the hands of professors and of students a Text-Book, in the literal sense of the word. He has endeavored to make each number of the treatise a text for the professor to expound and develop, and illustrate in his lectures, and for the student a leading principle to which he may refer the difficulties he meets with in the study of literature. He has not multiplied examples, as they may be readily found in the popular manuals, and he trusts that the plan of the compilation is of a nature to suggest the necessary exercises. Moreover, it is his intention to prepare, shortly, a companion book of examples, references and exercises. For evident typographical reasons he has preferred to set down the questions at the foot of each page.

PRECEPTS OF LITERATURE.

CHAPTER I.

SECTION I.—*General Notions.*

1. The precepts of literature are rules teaching the art of writing in prose or verse, and enabling the student to pass judgment on anything written in prose or verse.

2. Literature is the result of the operations of the human mind embodied in written language.

3. Poetry, therefore, narration, whether historical or otherwise, eloquence, when displayed in written productions, is included in literature.

4. The end of Literature is to please and instruct, or rather to instruct by pleasing.

5. Every written production is made up of sentences; every sentence can be resolved into words; every word is the external representation of what we have in our minds—of our thoughts.

6. When we sit down to write, we think, we arrange our thoughts, we give them expression, or, what is the same thing, we choose our words.

1. What are the Precepts of Literature? 2. What is Literature? 3. What does Literature include? 4. What is the End of Literature? 5. Into what may every written production be resolved? 6. Describe a writer's process in composing.

SECTION 2.—*Qualities of Thoughts and Words.*

7. What qualities, then, must our thoughts and words have in order to reach the end of all writing, *i. e.*, in order to please and instruct?

8. Our thoughts must be true, *i. e.*, represent nothing otherwise than it is; they must also be clear, that is, represent objects in such a manner as to prevent confusion.

9. If our thoughts are false or obscure, they fall short of the twofold end of literature; they neither please nor instruct.

10. For the same reason, the words we use must be pure, that is, belong to the language in which we compose.

11. Barbarisms, or words of other tongues; words which have fallen into disuse; newly coined words, not sanctioned by standard authors; finally, words which are only corruptions of words in vogue, are to be rejected.

12. We must pick out the words which will most exactly express our thoughts, and distinguish between words which differ from each other by a mere shade of meaning, and which are called synonyms.

SECTION 3.—*Figures.*

13. We notice in the use of words and in their

8. What Qualities must our thoughts have? 9. Without these Qualities what is the result? 10. Why must our words be Pure? 11. What words must be rejected? 12. What words must we select? 13. What do we notice in the use and arrangement of words?

arrangement, deviations from the ordinary modes of expression.

14. The form of speech differing from the ordinary mode of expression is called a Figure. Its aim is to produce greater effect.

15. Hence, to test the value of a figure, we must examine its effect. Everything in literature must have the effect of pleasing or instructing. A figure, therefore, which neither pleases nor instructs, is valueless.

16. We have figures of words and figures of thought. The former are those which drop their nature as figures, when the words which compose them disappear. Take the repetition—a figure of words which consists in using the same word more than once in the same sentence. The following instance is from Halleck :

“ Strike—till the last armed foe expires;
Strike—for your altars and your fires;
Strike—for the green graves of your sires.”

Drop the word “strike” in the second and third positions and the figure no longer exists.

17. Figures of thought are those which remain as long as the thought does, no matter how the expression of that thought may vary. In the subsequent example of comparison you may change at pleasure the words ; provided you retain the thought, you keep the figure.

14. What is a Figure ? 15. What is the test of the value of a Figure ? 16. What is a Figure of words ? of thought ? 17. What is a Figure of thought ?

18. The more important figures are those of thought. We will mention only those which are more effective and of more frequent occurrence.

19. *Simile* or comparison is a figure by which dissimilar objects are compared in that wherein they are similar.

"Noiseless as fear in a wilderness."—KEATS.

20. *Comparisons* should be clear, correct, short, elevated, new, and not too frequent.

21. *Metaphor* is a figure implying comparison; it likens two or more objects to each other, but dispenses with the expressions: like, as, and other phrases of comparison.

"The woods were in their winter sleep."—SHELLEY.

22. This is a metaphor. Had he said: "The quiet of the woods in winter resembles sleep," it would be a comparison.

23. Two different metaphors should not be used in the same sentence, in reference to the same subject.

24. It is in this respect that the expression attributed by some readings to Shakspeare: "To take up arms against a sea of troubles," is faulty.

25. In the second place we must not strain the metaphor by details that are out of keeping.

18. What Figures are more important? 19. What is Simile? 20. What Qualities should Simile possess? 21. What is Metaphor? 22. Show the difference between Metaphor and Simile. 23. Give the rule for the use of Metaphors in the same sentence. 24. Give an example of a violation of the preceding rule. 25. What is the second rule for the use of Metaphor?