

## BOOK IV.

### VARIOUS SPECIES OF PROSE COMPOSITIONS.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### IMITATION.

294. The young are gifted with a remarkable power of **imitation**; it is the most important instinct which the all-wise Creator has provided for their early development, and it suggests the method to be followed by the educator. No kind of exercise is better adapted to their age than the imitation of whatever is excellent in thought and style. It must be noticed, however, that they can be made to imitate advantageously those literary beauties only which they can to some extent understand and appreciate. Hence some exercises in imitation are suitable to children, others to those whose judgment is more mature and whose education is more advanced.

295. The **importance** of imitation is even greater than that of precepts: precepts without models to imitate would not carry a learner far on the road to literary excellence; while many have become skilful writers without the guidance of precepts, by the sole means of imitation, supposing, of course, a fair amount of natural talent.

*Longum iter per præcepta, says Seneca, brevis et efficax per*

*exempla*—"The way that leads through precepts is long, that through examples is short and direct."

296. Still, **imitation is not all-sufficient**, for its productions are usually inferior to the originals, not having their naturalness and their power. Besides, what is most valuable in a writer, his genius, ease, tact, etc., cannot be imitated. Exercises of imitation may be almost infinitely varied, but all may be reduced to **two kinds**. We may imitate a model either by writing on the *same subject* or on *another subject*.

##### ARTICLE I. IMITATIONS ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

297. The ways in which learners may imitate a model by **writing on the same subject** are chiefly five:

I. They may read a composition, or hear it read, and then try to **reproduce the same thoughts** in their own words; and they may even attempt to improve on the original.

These models should be suited to the age, degree of progress, and other circumstances of the pupils; a judicious choice of the proper models must be made by the teacher. He will find a supply of such pieces in readers, selections for elocution, etc.

This exercise may be improved by dictating a brief **analysis** of the model, so that the pupil may develop it more regularly.

298. II. Pupils may write a **prose** composition, reproducing in their own style the thoughts contained in a piece of **poetry**. For instance, let them write a description of a happy village, or of the village inn, the village schoolmaster, etc., in imitation of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village." Or let them read the poem "Evangeline" of Longfellow, and then narrate the same story in prose.

299. III. They may **translate** a masterpiece of composi-

tion from an ancient or a modern language into their mother-tongue. Such exercises are of constant use in a classical course of education. They are highly recommended by Cicero (*De Or.*, i. 34) and by Quintilian (x. 5). Pliny points out the following **advantages of such translation**:

"It gives the learner propriety and beauty of expression, a copious supply of figures, facility in explaining every thought; and, by the power of imitation, it stimulates him to invent for himself beauties similar to those of his models. Shades of thought which a reader might not notice cannot escape the attention of the translator, and thus his understanding and his judgment are improved by constant practice."—*Letters*, vii. 9, § 2.

300. That these and other advantages may be secured, the translation must be carefully and **judiciously done**, so that the full and exact meaning of the original be expressed with great propriety in the vernacular. It is not at all necessary that there be a word in English to correspond to every word of the original, nor that the sentences in both be of the same length and construction. But two extremes must be avoided: on the one hand, we should not give a mere paraphrase instead of a translation, and, on the other, we should not follow the original so closely as to do violence to our own idiom.

301. **Two further directions** for translation may usefully be added:

1. The manner of translation should be **regulated by the object** to be attained: thus for a legal or theological document fidelity and closeness are more important than beauty of style; while the latter should receive more care in works of less exact thought which are translated for the general reader.

2. In works of literary merit the translation should **retain the characteristic beauties** of the original style; for instance, Cicero's fulness, fluency, and harmony; Demos-

thenes' closeness and energy; Livy's ease; Cæsar's exactness; Ovid's sweetness; Homer's rapidity and fire; Virgil's delicacy, etc. (See Newman's *Historical Sketches*, vol. ii., advertisement.)

302. IV. A fourth kind of imitation consists in a **double translation**. If the object is, for instance, to perfect one's self in Latin composition, a passage of Cicero or Livy may be translated into English; then, after some interval of time, it is to be translated back into Latin, and the result to be compared with the original. This exercise is well suited for self-improvement, especially with persons of more mature minds.

303. V. A very useful kind of imitation consists in first **analyzing** a model—for instance, an oration—and then **developing this analysis**, so as to produce a composition resembling the original. (See for the preparation of such analysis our *Art of Oratorical Composition*, b. iii. c. iv.)

#### ARTICLE II. IMITATION ON A DIFFERENT SUBJECT.

304. We may strive to reproduce the beauties of a model by applying them to a **different subject** in three principal ways, of which the first two are suited to younger persons, the third to more advanced students.

305. I. The first manner consists in taking the **elegant words and phrases**, constructions and figures of our model, and applying them, with some judicious changes, to a similar subject. Take as an example the following extract from a speech by Patrick Henry (March, 1775):

"They tell us, sir, that we are weak, unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week? or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction?

Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot? Sir, we are not weak, if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. Three millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us."

In close imitation of this write a strong appeal to sinful men who put off their conversion :

" You may tell me that you are weak, unable at present to subdue your unruly passions. But when will you be stronger? Will it be the next week? or the next year? Will it be when these passions shall have grown still stronger by more protracted indulgence? when your wills shall have been further weakened by habitual excesses? Will you gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Will you acquire the means of effectual resistance to your depraved inclinations by lying supinely on your backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope that you shall be able to shake off the yoke at some future day, when your passions shall have bound you hand and foot? No; you are not too weak now, if you make proper use of those means which a merciful God has placed at your disposal. Men so intelligent and noble in many other respects, men accustomed to make sacrifices for other purposes, which they fully appreciate, are capable of accomplishing any object to which they generously devote their attention. Besides, you are not to fight your battles alone. There is a good God who earnestly wishes every sinner to be converted, who speaks to your hearts this very day, and who is ready now to second your earnest efforts"; etc.

306. II. The second is a much **looser method of imitation**: it consists in reading carefully a story, a description, a letter, or any elegant passage of a good author, and then endeavoring to compose on a similar subject, profiting by any hint which the model may suggest with regard to style, or plan, or anything else that may improve the composi-

tion. This method of imitation is not subject to definite rules, but it relies on that instinctive power of imitation which is productive of the happiest results, provided the models be judiciously chosen; that is, provided they be excellent in themselves and well suited to the stage of the learner's progress. An **example** would be The Combat of Goliath and David written in imitation of The Combat of the Horatii and Curiatii, as related by Livy (ii. 10).

307. III. The **more advanced exercise** consists in first studying a model thoroughly, examining its excellences of various kinds—the beauty and appropriateness of the thoughts, the order in which they are developed, the harmony of the periods, the elegance and power of the figures, the closeness of the reasoning, the clearness of the arguments, the delicate politeness of the refutation, etc.—and then writing a similar composition on another theme which is capable of analogous treatment.

308. For instance, in imitation of the **first oration of Cicero against Catiline** a speech may be written denouncing some evil practices or some wicked men that are ruining the youth of the country, such as the reading of obscene literature or the wretches who spread it broadcast over the land. It is not necessary that the imitation follow the entire model step by step. Sometimes we may imitate the main division only and the general spirit of a model.

309. Thus we find, for instance, that Demosthenes, in his **Third Olynthiac Oration**, 1. Shows the necessity of seizing the proffered opportunity; 2. Explains how it is to be improved; 3. Enforces these measures by proving that success is certain, if that plan be adopted, and that action is imperative (*Art of Orat. Comp.*, p. 120). Now, on this plan an address to the members of a debating society may readily be composed: 1. Showing the necessity of profiting by

the opportunities for self-improvement which the society affords; 2. Explaining what must be done to derive fruit from the exercises; 3. Enforcing these suggestions by proving that the task is easy, but that earnest application is absolutely necessary to insure success.

The greatest writers of all ages have made use of such imitations while striving to improve on their models. Cicero imitated Plato in his dialogues; Virgil imitated Homer and Theocritus; Horace, Pindar; Pope imitates Virgil's Eclogues, etc.

#### ARTICLE III. SELECTION OF MODELS.

310. Much depends on the **judicious choice of models** to be proposed for imitation. Even for the youngest children none but excellent examples should be selected, suited to their tender age, of course, but exquisite in their kind. In fact, perfection in the model is more necessary in proportion as the pupils' judgment is less developed; for such learners have no other guide than the instinct of imitation, and cannot discern what should be imitated in the model from what is unworthy of their imitation.

311. Besides, what is thus learned in early years can scarcely be unlearned later on. Very many children have their taste depraved for life by their first picture-books or sensational stories. Quintilian, in his excellent work on the *Education of an Orator*, insists earnestly on the necessity of putting nothing before children that they may not imitate to advantage. *Optima quidem et statim et semper*—"Choose the best models at once and ever after." He would have the very talk of the child's nurse to be grammatical:

"First of all, let the talk of the child's nurses not be ungramma-

tical. Chrysippus wished them, if possible, to be women of some knowledge; at any rate he would have the best chosen that circumstances may allow. To their morals, doubtless, attention is first to be paid; but let them also speak with propriety. It is they that the child will hear first; it is their words that he will try to imitate. We are naturally most tenacious of what we have imbibed in our infant years, as the flavor with which you scent new vessels remains in them; nor can the colors with which wool is stained be effaced hereafter. Those very habits which are of a more objectionable nature adhere with the greater tenacity; for good ones are easily changed for the worse, but when will you change bad ones into good? Do not, then, accustom the child, even when yet an infant, to phraseology which must be unlearned" (b. i. c. i. 4, 5).

312. Those writers, as a rule, are the **best models for imitation** who combine regularity of plan with ease and naturalness of development. Such are chiefly Cicero and Demosthenes, Livy and Herodotus, Cæsar and Xenophon, among the ancients; and among the moderns, Edmund Burke and Erskine, Pitt and Chatham, Webster and Calhoun, Clay and Everett; Lingard and Alison, Prescott and Irving; Addison and Walter Scott, Dickens and Cooper; Cardinals Wiseman, Manning, and Newman.

313. Some writers are useful models for the acquisition of **special excellences**; thus we may learn vigor and condensation of thought from Thucydides and Tacitus, vivid description from Sallust, a forcible and direct style from Macaulay, Brownson, and Father Burke. While perhaps no author is commendable in every respect, beginners especially should confine themselves to those who approach nearest to perfection; or, better still, such passages from any good author should be selected for them by a prudent teacher as are every way fit models for imitation.

314. **The teacher will, besides,** 1. Vary his selections to suit the capacities and circumstances of his pupils; 2.

Point out in what the beauty of those pieces consists, and in what particular respects they are chiefly to be imitated; 3. Vary his selections so as to improve, now some, then other talents of his pupils. A learner trained on one model or to one kind of style only, would not bring all his powers into play; he would not acquire a well-developed mind nor all the beauty of language which is within his reach.

## CHAPTER II.

## LETTERS.

315. A **letter** is a written communication on any subject from one person to another. Letters deserve most careful study; for, 1. No species of composition is more generally used by all classes of persons. 2. A negligently written letter may entail very injurious consequences. 3. Many will judge of a person's character and attainments from his epistolary correspondence.

It makes a considerable difference in our style whether we write as officials or business men, or as individual members of society. We may, therefore, usefully distinguish letters into **two kinds**—*official* or *business* letters and *unofficial* letters. We class official and business letters together, because they are mainly subject to the same rules.

## ARTICLE I. OFFICIAL OR BUSINESS LETTERS.

316. We call **official** or **business letters** all those written by a person in the capacity of an officer, a professional man, a merchant, or a tradesman. In all such correspondence the following are the leading rules:

*Rule 1.*—Be very **clear**, so that your exact meaning cannot fail to be understood at first sight. Read your letter over with close attention to see that all your thoughts are correctly, fully, and clearly expressed.

*Rule 2.*—Take care that the **handwriting** be legible, else you may get *boots* for *books*, *matches* for *hatchets* or *latches*, *two ponies* instead of *100 pansies*.