

3. Bodily aspect, general bearing, complexion, looks, voice, gesture, manners.
4. Qualities of mind and heart, virtues, vices, inclinations.
5. Intercourse with superiors, equals, inferiors, relations, friends, enemies, strangers.
6. Influences acting on him, and exerted by him on others. Etc.

For an analysis of Parallel Characters see "Socrates and Seneca," in *Zanders' Outlines of Composition* (p. 167).

417. **Exercises:**

- 1 Write a general character of a fop, a troublesome friend, a politician, a spendthrift, a miser. (Compare Saxe's "My Familiar.")
2. Write an individual character of Washington, Napoleon I., St. Francis Xavier, Mary Queen of Scots.
3. Write a contrast between a rich man and a poor man from the cradle to the grave.

## CHAPTER V.

### ESSAYS.

418. **Essays** are attempts to state one's own reflections upon a given subject. They are of different lengths and kinds, ranging from learned treatises to the first attempts of a school-boy at putting his own thoughts on paper. **As school exercises**, to be beneficial they require careful management. Nothing is easier than for a teacher to tell a pupil to write an essay "On the beautiful" or "On the sublime," etc.; but nothing is more difficult for a pupil than, unassisted, to carry out such an order. Or, if he finds no difficulty in the task, it is perhaps owing to the fact that sense and nonsense are equally welcome to his youthful mind, provided he can cover a few pages of foolscap with well-sounding sentences.

419. **The main difficulty** in this matter is that the boy is thus called upon to express his thoughts on a subject on which he has no clear thoughts to express, and he has not been instructed how to gather thoughts for himself. The first step, therefore, in treating of essay-writing is to teach pupils how to collect appropriate thoughts by a thorough study of the subject assigned.

420. We have said **appropriate thoughts**, for we wish to warn both teachers and learners against an error which has gained ground in our day, and which directs pupils to write down any thought that comes to their minds, no matter how little it be to the point. "At first," says a modern rhetorician, "aim only at copiousness, correcting no faults

except those of grammar and punctuation, and encouraging the pupil to write freely whatever thoughts come up about the subject, and in whatever order they happen to come up." This will teach fluency, no doubt, but not excellence of composition. Let all remember that good sense is ever the foundation of literary success; that, as Quintilian remarks, nothing but what is excellent should be proposed for the imitation of the young, and children should learn nothing which they are afterwards to unlearn (b. i. c. i. 4, 5). A boy who can write ten lines of good sense on a given subject is really further advanced in composition than one who can dash off a hundred lines of mixed sense and nonsense. The first task, then, is to collect appropriate thoughts.

#### ARTICLE I. COLLECTING APPROPRIATE THOUGHTS.

421. **To study a subject** is to consider carefully all that belongs to that subject, its nature and its name, its causes and its effects, its circumstances and its antecedents, its resemblance to other subjects or its contrast with them; recalling also to mind, or reading, what others have done or said concerning the matter in question, etc., etc.

These are called by rhetoricians the **topics of thoughts**; they are fully explained in the study of oratory (see *Art of Oratorical Composition*, b. ii. "On the Invention of Thought"). We shall confine ourselves here to a brief explanation of them.

##### § 1. *The Nature and Name of the Subject.*

422. When we begin to study a subject **four considerations** are apt at once to present themselves: 1. What is really meant by the subject—its *definition*; 2. What class of things it belongs to—its *genus or kind*; 3. Of what

portions it is made up—the *enumeration* of its parts; 4. The *name* by which it is called.

423. 1. A **definition** is a brief explanation stating what is meant by the subject, and how it is distinguished from all others. This is often the most important of all the topics. It makes the writer conceive a clear idea of his subject, and enables him to write a sensible explanation of the same. Thus the essay "On Honor," in the *Guardian*, is mostly taken up with the discussion of the true idea or definition of 'Honor'; that "On Modesty," in the *Spectator*, discusses the definitions of 'Modesty,' of 'Assurance,' and of 'Impudence'; while Addison begins his essay "On Cheerfulness," in the same paper, by a brief explanation of what 'Cheerfulness' is, showing how it differs from 'Mirth,' with which unreflecting minds often confound it.

"I have always preferred cheerfulness to mirth. The latter I consider as an act, the former as a habit of the mind. Mirth is short and transient, cheerfulness fixed and permanent. Those are often raised into the greatest transports of mirth who are subject to the greatest depressions of melancholy. On the contrary, cheerfulness, though it does not give the mind such exquisite gladness, prevents us from falling into any depths of sorrow. Mirth is like a flash of lightning, that breaks through a gloom of clouds and glitters for a moment; cheerfulness keeps up a kind of daylight in the mind, and fills it with a steady and perpetual serenity."

These last lines show how figures may be used to set off a definition to advantage.

424. 2. **Genus or Kind.**—It is often useful to examine to what kind or class of things the subject belongs. Thus Cardinal Wiseman, in his essay "On the Miracles of the New Testament," shows how these may be viewed either as exhibitions of Christ's power, proving that he was God; or as works of mercy, wrought to relieve the sufferings of men; or as teachings of certain truths, as when He healed

the paralytic to prove that a man may receive from God the power to forgive sin.

425. 3. **Enumeration of Parts.**—This topic opens a wide field for the development of thought. In our chapter on "Object-Lessons" we have suggested a useful exercise, which consists in pointing out the parts of an object presented to the senses (b. i. c. i. a. 2). A similar process may often be applied to moral subjects. Thus Henry Giles begins his essay "On the Worth of Liberty" with this paragraph :

"What is the worth of liberty? Within the limits of this inquiry all that I propose to say on the present occasion will be confined. Of course I refer mainly to civil liberty, although I do not exclude all reference to liberty in its more spiritual relations. I do not attempt to define liberty either civil or moral. What civil liberty is we all practically comprehend ; and if we do not, defining it would not enable us. I will simply mention the following as a few of the attributes that belong to it : supremacy of the law ; equality of all before the law ; the representation of all in the enactment or changes of the law. To these we may add the provisions which wisdom and experience suggest by which such conditions can be most thoroughly attained and most inviolately preserved."

In the last lines he enumerates the attributes or moral parts which make up liberty. He would have done well to begin with a good definition of liberty ; for it is not true that "we all practically comprehend what civil liberty" or any other kind of liberty is. Many think it is the absence of all restraint, whereas it is only the absence of all undue restraint.

426. 4. **Name.**—Sometimes the very name of the subject will suggest some appropriate thoughts. For instance, if the subject were "The United States, a Land of True Liberty," the name 'United States' may remind us that the wisdom of our forefathers knew how to combine in the

Union all the advantages of a strong government, respected by all the world, with most of the advantages of independent legislation for the different States of the Union, so that every part of the land may enjoy as large a share of independence as is compatible with the common good.

### § 2. *Causes and Effects.*

427. 1. **Causes.**—The author of the essay "On Cheerfulness," in the *Spectator*, raises the question, what causes produce this happy disposition in the mind, and devotes to these causes a considerable portion of his paper. The consideration of the causes throws much light on every kind of subjects. The essay "On Gratitude," in the *Tatler*, examines in particular the reasons why we should be grateful to the Creator :

"If gratitude is due from man to man, how much more from man to his Maker? The Supreme Being does not only confer on us those bounties which proceed more immediately from His hand, but even those benefits which are conveyed to us by others. Every blessing we enjoy, by what means soever it may be derived upon us, is the gift of Him who is the great Author of good and Father of mercies."

The essay of Addison "On Laughter," in the *Spectator* (No. 52), is almost entirely drawn from the topic of causes.

428. 2. **Effects.**—Effects suggest still more abundant thoughts, and such as are more easy of development. Often a whole essay is nothing more than a description of effects. Such is an essay in the *Spectator* "On the Advantages of a Good Education," and one in the *Rambler* "On the Disadvantages of a Bad Education."

**Exercise.**—Write an essay on bad company, on intemperance, on war, on music, on steam, on electricity, drawing all the thoughts from this one topic of effects.

§ 3. *Circumstances and Antecedents.*

429. 1. **Circumstances.**—Every subject may be viewed as connected with various circumstances, under which it exists or may be supposed to exist. For instance, if I am to write an essay on "Our National Banner," I may speak of it as displayed in war and in peace, on land and on sea, at home and abroad, and in various events of our national history. If I write on "Water," I may view it in the rain, in the ocean, in the destructive torrent, in the quiet stream, in the bubbling brook, in the refreshing spring, in the clouds of heaven, in the form of falling snow or of the floating iceberg, etc.

"How common, and yet how beautiful and how pure, is a drop of water! See it as it issues from the rock to supply the spring and the stream below. See how its meanderings through the plains and its torrents over the cliffs add to the richness and the beauty of the landscape. Look into a factory standing by a waterfall, in which every drop is faithful to perform its part, and hear the groaning and rustling of the wheels, the clattering of shuttles, and the buzz of spindles, which, under the direction of their fair attendants, are supplying myriads of purchasers with fabrics from the cotton-plant, the sheep, and the silkworm."

430. **Exercise.**—Describe a good-natured man, a peevish man; the display of heroism, of cowardice; the power of music, of eloquence viewed in various circumstances or situations.

431. 2. **Antecedents.**—It may often be useful in an essay to describe what a man or a thing was at a former time, in order to conjecture thence what may be expected from the same on future occasions. Thus in an essay "On the Early Propagation of Christianity," I may invite the reader to go back in spirit and consider that those wonderful men, the Apostles, who established so sublime a religion in so many lands, had been ignorant and timid fishermen, and

that they could never have accomplished their great mission without the assistance of a higher power, that of God Himself.

From this same topic an essay on Hume, in the *Dublin Review* for May, 1842, shows that this writer was utterly unqualified by his antecedents to become the historian of England, and therefore that truth cannot be expected from such a source.

§ 4. *Resemblance and Contrast.*

432. One of the readiest means to understand a subject clearly and to explain it to others is to compare it with other matters and trace out certain points of resemblance or opposition.

1. **Resemblance.**—We may take as an example the labors of an educator, and compare them with those of the gardener, who raises young plants. The consideration of what the latter does to foster, to protect from harm, to quicken, to prune, etc., the objects of his assiduous care, may suggest many analogous duties incumbent on the educator of human hearts and minds. Again, the enriching of the soul for heaven may be compared to advantage with the indefatigable industry of merchants, who gather wealth for earth, etc.

Our American essayist, E. P. Whipple, in his essay "On Words," illustrates the various styles of English writers by playfully comparing them to various kinds of soldiers.

"Words are more effective when arranged in that order called style. The great secret of a good style, we are told, is to have proper words in proper places. To marshal one's verbal battalions in such order that they may bear at once upon all quarters of a subject is certainly a great art. This is done in different ways. . . . The tread of Johnson's style is heavy and sonorous, resembling that of an elephant or a mail-clad warrior. He is fond of levelling an object

by a polysyllabic battering-ram. Burke's words are continually practising the broad-sword exercise and sweeping down adversaries at every stroke. Arbuthnot 'plays his weapon like a tongue of flame.' Addison draws up his light infantry in orderly array, and marches through sentence after sentence without having his ranks disordered or his line broken," etc.

Addison, in the 153d number of the *Tatler*, compared different characters in conversation to different instruments of music.

433. 2. **Contrast.**—Many subjects may be appropriately illustrated by contrasting them with their opposites, as when modesty is inculcated by making boastfulness odious, when the useful citizen is praised by contrasting him with a man who is a burden to the state. Thus Addison, in the *Guardian* (No. 111), makes the indolence of the British youth of his day odious by contrasting it with the love of knowledge displayed by Julius Cæsar, by Alexander the Great, and by King Solomon.

#### § 5. *Authorities and Examples.*

434. Lastly, it may be very useful to consider what others have said and done in connection with the subject on which we are to write. For this purpose we must study authorities and examples.

1. **Authorities** are the sayings of men whose word inspires confidence. Now, though an essay-writer is supposed to give his own views on the subject before him, he is not expected to form those views without considering what thoughtful and well-informed men have said on the same matter. He will exhibit a pleasing modesty by leaning on the judgment of others; and the authorities quoted, besides showing him to be possessed of learning, will often inspire much more confidence than his own speculations could command. An appropriate quotation of some excel-

lent authority is like a gem in a composition, adding considerably to its brilliancy and its real value. Notice the happy effect of this topic in the following passage of Washington Irving:

"How vain, how fleeting, how uncertain are all those gaudy bubbles after which we are panting and toiling in this world of fair delusion! The wealth which the miser has amassed with so many weary days, so many sleepless nights, a spendthrift heir may squander away in joyless prodigality. The noblest monuments which pride has ever reared to perpetuate a name the hand of time will shortly tumble into ruins, and even the brightest laurels gained by feats of arms may wither and be for ever blighted by the chilling neglect of mankind. 'How many illustrious heroes,' says the good Boethius, 'who were once the pride and glory of the age, has the silence of historians buried in oblivion!' And this it was that induced the Spartans, when they went to battle, to sacrifice to the Muses, supplicating that their achievements should be worthily recorded. 'Had not Homer tuned his lofty lyre,' observes the elegant Cicero, 'the valor of Achilles had remained unsung.'"

435. 2. **Examples** are remarkable actions of great men proposed for imitation, or referred to as confirming our opinion. Addison, in the *Tatler* (No. 133), begins his essay "On Silence" thus: "Silence is something more magnificent and sublime than the most noble and expressive eloquence, and is, on many occasions, an indication of a great mind." He then refers to several facts of illustrious personages to confirm his proposition, in particular to the silence of the Son of God under calumny and defamation.

#### ARTICLE II. VARIOUS KINDS OF ESSAYS.

436. The topics just explained will furnish appropriate thoughts for every kind of essays. But the use of these topics, and the treatment and development of them, will differ considerably for the various kinds.

§ 1. *School Essays.*

437. Essays have been written as **school exercises** from time immemorial. The ancient rhetorician Aphthonius explains them with some detail, and in a manner well suited to develop in the student habits of orderly and sensible composition. He proposes to the pupils what he calls a *chria* (*Χρεία*)—that is, a pregnant or suggestive sentence, borrowed from some author and developed by certain rules. There are three species of this *chria*:

438. (a) The **verbal chria** proposes a wise maxim, as would be the advice Shakspeare puts on the lips of Wolsey:

“Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition.”

439. (b) The **historical chria** proposes a fact which implies, though it does not express, an important lesson; as:

“Pythagoras required of his disciples that, to learn how to speak, they should be silent for five years.”

440. (c) The **mixed chria** proposes a fact containing the statement of a maxim; as:

“The mother of the Gracchi exhibited no gold nor pearls; but pointing to her young boys she said, ‘These are my jewels.’”

441. To develop any of these species of *chria* Aphthonius proposes **eight heads** or considerations:

1. A *Commendation* of the sentence proposed, or of its author, by way of introduction. Let it be brief and modest.
2. A *Paraphrase*, expressing the meaning of the sentence in other words, with some further development or explanation.
3. The *Cause* or reason why the maxim is true, or why the fact is such as stated.

4. *Resemblance*, illustrating by comparison with similar things.

5. *Contrast*, illustrating by comparison with contrary things.

6. *Examples*.

7. *Testimonies* or authorities.

8. *Conclusion* addressed to the mind or the heart of the reader. Care should be taken that the transition from one point to another appear natural.

442. One **advantage** derived from so regular an exercise is that the young learn to think and write in an orderly manner, which result is, or should be, one of the great aims of all literary education; for it is one of the chief elements of literary excellence. Still, it is not necessary that the same amount of regularity be observed in all essays, whether written as school exercises or not.

443. There is, besides the regular *chria*, the free or **loose chria**, as some rhetoricians call it, which allows much more variety of arrangement. Sometimes one or two topics will supply a sufficient amount of appropriate thought, and there is a special advantage in fully developing a few points. In fact, it may be laid down as a rule that one consideration well developed will produce a more effective composition than a great number of separate reflections, each briefly expressed. If we analyze the essays of great writers we shall find that they usually confine their treatment of a subject to few topics.

444. **Example 1.**—Let us consider how Blair does this in his third lecture on Rhetoric. In it he treats of four subjects, giving us, as it were, four different essays, on “Criticism,” on “Genius,” on the “Pleasures of Taste,” and on “Sublimity in Objects.”

On *Criticism*, he examines its definition and its nature.