

The unity which every young writer should seek is not the unity of perfection, but the unity which comes from the conception of a discourse as a whole, and from the harmonious arrangement of the parts in conformity with that conception. Every composition that he writes should be "a body, not a mere collection of members,"¹—a living body. Its life must come partly from the writer's natural qualities, and partly from his acquired resources whether of matter or of language. Familiarity with good authors will stimulate his powers of expression, and constant practice under judicious criticism will train them.

Whatever a writer's materials, whatever his gifts, he must, if he hopes to be read, awaken interest at the beginning and hold it to the end. Unless he succeeds in doing this, his work, whatever its merits in other respects, fails,—as a picture fails which nobody cares to look at, or a sonata which nobody cares to hear. A student of composition can receive no higher praise from his teacher than this: "I enjoyed reading your essay."

¹ Non solum composita oratio, sed etiam continua. — Quintilian: Inst. Orator. vii. x. xvii.

A writer
should interest
his readers.

PART II.

KINDS OF COMPOSITION.

FOUR KINDS DISCRIMINATED.

THUS far we have discussed the general principles that apply in varying degrees to all kinds of composition: we have now to consider the special principles that apply to each kind.

The four kinds of composition that seem to require separate treatment are: DESCRIPTION, which deals with persons or things; NARRATION, which deals with acts or events; EXPOSITION, which deals with whatever admits of analysis or requires explanation; ARGUMENT, which deals with any material that may be used to convince the understanding or to affect the will. The purpose of description is to bring before the mind of the reader persons or things as they appear to the writer. The purpose of narration is to tell a story. The purpose of exposition is to make the matter in hand more definite. The purpose of argument is to influence opinion or action, or both.

In theory these kinds of composition are distinct, but in practice two or more of them are usually combined. Description readily runs into narration, and narration

into description: a paragraph may be descriptive in form and narrative in purpose, or narrative in form and descriptive in purpose. Exposition has much in common with one kind of description; and it may be of service to any kind of description, to narration, or to argument.

CHAPTER I.

DESCRIPTION.

THE purpose of DESCRIPTION is, as has already been said, to bring before the mind of the reader persons or things as they appear to the writer. As a means to this end, language has certain limits, limits that are obvious to one who compares a verbal description of an object either with the object itself or with a model, a photograph, or a drawing of it. In the model or the drawing, as in the object itself, we see the parts in themselves, and we see them in their relations with one another,— we see them as a whole. Now, the only way in which words can give a complete idea of a whole is by a description of the parts. To make a whole these parts must be laboriously put together, and even then the part first spoken of may be forgotten before the last part is reached. The process, in the words of Coleridge, “seems to be like taking the pieces of a dissected map out of its box. We first look at one part and then at another, then join and dove-tail them; and when the successive acts of attention have been completed, there is a retrogressive effort of mind to behold it as a whole.”¹ In consequence of this serious drawback to the use of words for purposes of description, diagrams are added to the text of a scientific treatise, ground-plans and elevations to the specifications of an

Language
compared
with painting
and sculpture.

¹ Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria*, chap. xxii.