



The Structure of English Prose: A Manual of Composition and Rhetoric

John G. R. McElroy

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From the PREFACE.

THE teacher of Rhetoric has a double office. First, and chiefly, he must make writers; secondly, he must so exhibit the laws of his art as to promote mental discipline. In other words, he must be practical, without being a mere empiricist; he must be rational, without for an instant losing sight of skill in composition.

With these views in mind, I have tried to fill what seemed to me an empty place among books on Rhetoric. None of them, I thought, aimed at practical results, without sacrificing too far the principles of the art; none of them taught these principles in their fullness, without sacrificing in part or in whole the practical side of the work. I have aimed to strike the happy medium,—to make a book that shall teach composition while it forces the student to think, and shall exhibit the principles of the art at the same time that it keeps uppermost the problem How to Write. I have adopted Dr. Shedd's words quoted on my title-page, accepting fully the doctrine that Thought is more than Style, and modifying this doctrine by only one other truth—a truth to which Dr. Shedd would doubtless equally assent—that worthy thought deserves, as it promotes, an excellent form. In other words, while, with Herbert Spencer, I extol practice, I also accept, with him, the doctrine that "some practical result may be expected from a familiarity with the principles of style. ... If in no other way, yet, as facilitating revision, a knowledge of the thing to be achieved—a clear idea of what constitutes a beauty, and what a blemish—cannot fail to be of service."

I have also tried to exhibit the laws of Rhetoric in their entirety, — not the laws of Style alone, but also those of Invention. However we may quibble about that word Invention in its rhetorical sense, Rhetoric does teach other laws than those of Form; and these laws must be exhibited, if the art is to be taught fully. I admit freely that, in a book whose chief aim is skill in composition, Invention will occupy a considerably less number of pages than Style; and, hence, even after saying what I have said of the superior importance of Invention [§ 32], I have given by far the greater portion of my whole space to Style. The questions discussed under the head of Invention are largely theoretical; and their full exposition belongs either to a distinctively theoretical treatise on Rhetoric or to the several sciences that furnish the theory of the art. Were Rhetoric now, as it once was, a purely disciplinary study of Senior year, my book would have taken an entirely different form; but, in view of the wholesome change in our college work which assumes, not that the men know their mother-tongue because they speak it, but that, sadly ignorant of this mother-tongue, they need lessons in English, even more than they need the discipline of foreign languages, ancient or modern,—in view of this change, I have tried to make a book that shall start our younger college students and the older students in high schools and academies on the only road, difficult as it is, to a mastery of English composition....

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