

THE ORIGINS OF
COMPOSITION
STUDIES IN THE
AMERICAN COLLEGE,
1875-1925

A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

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I

Introduction

THE COMPOSITION COURSE AS WE KNOW IT TODAY, like the university that teaches it, is a product of late-nineteenth-century America. Both began life in the 1870s, in the age of invention that saw the birth of the hydraulic elevator, the electric light, the telephone, and the phonograph, and both were shaped by the reform impulses that pervaded late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America during the Progressive Era.

Right after the Civil War the American college (there were no universities) was an institution in danger of becoming irrelevant to a rapidly changing nation. The small number of students who attended college were drawn mostly from a fairly narrow range of society, and the collegiate curriculum did not do much to broaden their horizons. Almost all colleges put their students through a four-year program of required courses. There were no majors, hardly any electives, no sections, and precious little course work outside of classics, mathematics, and some science. It was hard to find a course in English literature, history, or a modern language. Classes were conducted by the recitation method, with students mastering a text for homework and "reciting" it, upon the teacher's demand, in class. There was no discussion, no question period, and lectures were reserved mostly for seniors. The professors were rarely professional educators or scholars. Faculty were often Protestant clergymen; the college was dominated by the president, who customarily taught the seniors a course in "moral philosophy," a mix of religion and ethics. The purpose of the college was to build character, not to supply useful knowledge. This school, dominant in 1860, would be swept away by 1900.

The rise of the university took place very rapidly; in a single genera-

tion, from 1870 to 1900, the American college moved from a unified small, elite school to a diverse, large, fragmented university organized by academic disciplines. In the field of writing instruction, it is tempting to make a neat distinction between the old college and the new university on the basis of orality versus literacy. The evidence shows that orality was highly regarded in the pre-1860 college, while literacy became increasingly important from 1860 on. Oral examinations in the college were replaced by written ones in the university; public oral discourse gave way to written compositions. A curriculum that honored speech by providing opportunities for declamations, disputations, and debates became heavily weighted toward writing, toward the page of text. But such a distinction overlooks how large a role literacy played in the old college; it seems more accurate to say that the nineteenth-century college had a more balanced mix of oral and written work, and that the new university dropped much of the oral emphasis and consequently valued the written word much more. Plenty of writing took place in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century colleges. At Yale in 1766, "compositions" were handed in to the instructor before they were delivered orally (Wozniak 8). And the University of North Carolina's archives contain many early nineteenth-century compositions (Lindemann, "Student Writing"). Lab notes and lecture notes were rigorously kept. Attention to grammar, spelling, and punctuation were handled every day through work in Latin and Greek. In fact, the old college was much more language-based than the new university; classics masters taught grammar thoroughly and exactly, paying meticulous attention to detail through class exercises, recitations, and written compositions in Greek and Latin and in written translations into English. Proponents claimed that the ancient languages provided mental discipline and trained the powers of the mind, pointing to the extremely close attention to the details of language, both oral and written, that characterized college Greek and Latin classes.

Though the old college stressed language study, English rarely had an official presence in the curriculum. A few institutions made provision for a professor of English or belles lettres, and most colleges fostered speech making, essay writing, and literary readings in a host of extracurricular student-run clubs, but most colleges in 1860 had no course in composition or in English literature. By 1900, on the other hand, every college had an array of composition and English literature courses. What happened? The creation of the modern university transformed writing

instruction. Composition rose as an academic subject with the new university, and it took on the special characteristics it did because of the way the new university was formed. Of all the complex factors that influenced the university's formation, four stand out: the influence of the German university model, the changing nature of knowledge, the dramatic expansion of higher education, and the efforts of a few visionaries to update the university's purview. All of these factors were to shatter traditional rhetoric and to aid in the emergence of modern composition.

The German Model

BEGINNING IN THE EARLY nineteenth century, Americans in search of advanced degrees went to Germany and returned imbued with the university ideal. The German universities they studied at stressed research, the creation rather than the transmission of knowledge. In 1876 Johns Hopkins University was founded on the German model and overnight became the single most potent force for upgrading the educational standards of American scholarship.

The ten thousand or so Americans who studied in Germany between 1815 and 1915 (Diehl 1) quite naturally imported key parts of the German university when they could: lectures rather than recitations (lectures in American colleges had been mostly reserved for seniors); seminars for truly advanced work, including graduate instruction; and a model of conceptualizing academic subject matter that emphasized freedom of inquiry, fostered a high degree of specialization, and stressed the links between research and teaching. This German influence helped shape the American graduate schools, but it had a whole series of side effects on undergraduate rhetoric and composition programs. First of all, it encouraged specialization in place of breadth. The old liberal arts ideal stressed the essential unity of knowledge, a common set of courses, and a reliance on the tried-and-true classics of antiquity. The German model stressed innovation, electives, and specialization. Following this German ideal (if not the exact model, which was altered as it crossed the Atlantic), professors immersed themselves in their studies or laboratories to produce research; the disciplines organized themselves on scholarly rather than pedagogical lines, and universities slowly abandoned much low-level teaching to an underclass of instructors and graduate student

assistants. Finally, the German model did not include rhetoric; Americans interested in English studies came home with a German doctorate in philology, not rhetoric. And writing instruction was missing too; German (as well as most other European) universities simply did not teach composition. Students learned writing in lower schools; all who earned the coveted secondary school diploma passed a stringent series of written tests, and the tiny percentage who went on to university were usually quite competent writers. University professors did not study the process of composition, student writing style, topic selection, or audience. German, source of so much American scholarship, simply had no models for rhetoric and composition on the university level. Thus the adoption of the German model meant the breakup of old arrangements, and among those arrangements was the very prominent scheme of rhetorical education that would not survive the century.

Expansion of Knowledge

THE SECOND ENGINE behind the growth of the new university was the dramatic expansion of knowledge, particularly in the sciences. American ingenuity and the native intelligence of people like Thomas A. Edison (who attended school for all of three months) produced a stream of wonderful inventions, while universities were producing theoretical advances at an astounding rate in biology, geology, physics, and chemistry. Specialized training in these fields required specialized knowledge, and the nineteenth century saw a protracted struggle between the proponents of a classical education (codified by the Yale report of 1828, in Hofstadter and Smith I: 275-91) and those who favored the new science-based learning. Already by 1803 the new military academy at West Point trained engineers, and the founding of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1824 and the inauguration of a new scientific curriculum at Union College in 1828 had pointed the way to the future (Rudolph, *Curriculum* 141). The forces of this expanded knowledge led to the founding in the 1840s of the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale and the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard; both offered three-year practical programs that had lower admissions standards and omitted the specialized Latin and Greek curriculum. At Lawrence the presiding genius was the great zoologist Louis Agassiz; but one of the junior faculty was

German-trained Charles William Eliot, later to be Harvard's president. On the staff at Sheffield was Daniel Coit Gilman, also German-trained, who would become the first president of Johns Hopkins. These two scientists, soon to head major universities, believed strongly in specialization, in allowing students to concentrate their studies in electives rather than forcing them to take required courses. Until the Civil War the American college had succeeded in channeling the demand for scientific training and specialization into second-class academic institutions, but the dominance of the classical curriculum would not last much longer. As Richard Ohmann claimed in "Writing and Reading, Work and Leisure," the emergence of the new university would make a traditional, unified subject like rhetoric obsolete and replace it with a new, utilitarian writing course, more attuned to the times (see also Douglas, "Rhetoric for the Meritocracy").

Increase in Students

COLLEGES IN 1865 were small, hardly an important part of the American prospect. They did not play a large role in American intellectual life; that was the province of general circulation magazines, newspapers, lyceums, and theaters. Neither was culture dominated by colleges; many an eminent writer (Walt Whitman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, William Dean Howells) had never studied in one. The three traditional fields that colleges prepared for, the ministry, the bar, and medicine, all offered alternative means of certification, though naturally the college-educated still dominated. Americans were well aware that the president who saw the North through the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln, an acknowledged master of eloquence, was not a college graduate.

College enrollments were relatively static in the years 1850-80, growing much less than the population. Then came the boom. Between 1890 and 1910 enrollments practically doubled, and by 1920 almost doubled again (see Veysey 4; Gremin 545; Connors, "Modern University" 80-81). This explosion of students called for a vast increase in faculty members (with a huge rise in graduate enrollments to train them). College became a much larger part of the American scene by the turn of the century; college was important and exciting, even if it still enrolled a small percentage of the population.

Individuals with a Vision

THE FINAL INGREDIENT in the change stemmed from the determined efforts of many individuals to change American higher education. Lawrence Veyssey's *The Emergence of the American University* chronicles the efforts of the men who in the space of thirty years led their universities into a new era: Andrew White of Cornell, James Angell of Michigan, Daniel Coit Gilman of Johns Hopkins, David Starr Jordan of Stanford, and many others. Already in 1862, at the height of the Civil War, farsighted congressmen had passed the Morrill Act, which provided for the establishment of land-grant universities, with special attention to agriculture and technology. (Mining, engineering, and even farming were themselves becoming complex enough that trained expertise was seen as necessary.) The 1865 founding of Cornell University, a school which promised that anyone could learn anything there, was a sign that a determined philanthropist with enough money could influence the course of education. And the individual who seems to symbolize the change the most is Charles W. Eliot, Harvard's president from 1869 to 1909, the man who transformed Harvard into a modern university. Eliot had graduated from Harvard, studied in Germany, taught chemistry at Harvard's Lawrence Scientific School, then moved to the newly founded MIT. He had outlined a model of a modern university in two *Atlantic Monthly* articles (February and March 1869; excerpted in Hofstadter and Smith II: 624-41). His accession to the Harvard presidency was regarded at the time as a sign of dramatic change at America's most prestigious university.

By 1869, when Charles W. Eliot was inaugurated as Harvard's president, all the conditions were ripe for a transformation of the American college into a modern university. And with Eliot's accession came what we now know as English composition.

The Birth of the Modern Composition Program

THE FIRST MODERN composition program was begun at Harvard, with President Charles W. Eliot as its sponsor and his classmate Adams Sherman Hill as its creator. Other colleges quickly followed Harvard's lead, but it is to Harvard that we must look for the rationale behind the rise of

composition. Eliot's Harvard did not introduce English composition or English literature to the American college; as documents in chapter 2 show, there was extensive instruction in rhetoric and writing at Harvard and elsewhere well before 1869. What Eliot did was to ally the modern university with a new emphasis on English and to raise writing and English literature to the level of more hallowed studies like mathematics and classics. English for Eliot was to be the modern, up-to-date equivalent of the ancient subjects, a preparation for citizenship and productive work in the modern American democracy (Douglas, "Rhetoric for the Meritocracy").

To carry out his new emphasis on English, Eliot in 1872 appointed Adams Sherman Hill, a lawyer turned newspaperman, as assistant to Harvard's Boylston Professor of Rhetoric, Francis James Child, a German-trained Ph.D. who preferred collecting ballads and researching literature to reading student themes. Hill quickly set up the first change, a placement examination in English composition, based on literary topics, with writing linked to literature. (A description of that first examination appears in chap. 2, p. 34.) In this manner English entered Harvard's extensive entrance examination schedule, and all preparatory schools had to change their curriculum to accommodate Harvard. (The documents in chap. 2 link the new placement examination with Harvard's attempt to upgrade secondary school education.)

The traditional, pre-Eliot Harvard writing program, like that at most colleges, required a mix of oral and written composition throughout all four years of college, with a single rhetoric course to provide a theoretical grounding in the principles of effective prose, usually by way of brief examples from the English classics. Students did not learn to write in a single course, but got instruction at all stages of their academic careers. As David Russell has shown, this system was at risk with the rise of the disciplines and especially with Eliot's great innovation, the elective system. When students had a set curriculum for four years, a college could build in additional help or add on workshops, confident that the assistance would reach all students at the same stage in their studies. But when electives took a larger and larger share of a student's time, a workshop here or a required course there would intersect each student's career differently. What worked well in the old curriculum—small amounts of writing instruction strategically placed throughout a common curriculum—did not fit in with the new. Soon writing, like every-

thing else, was confined to well-defined courses, and at Harvard after the turn of the century, required composition dwindled to the first-year course and some very limited upper-level requirements that were soon to disappear entirely (Russell 51-56). A small number of elective writing courses would remain at Harvard and elsewhere, but they would have nothing like the enrollment of first-year composition and very little impact on the intellectual life of the English department.

If the elective system cordoned off writing instruction into single courses and inexorably did away with upper-level writing requirements, an even larger change loomed ahead. At Harvard and elsewhere, knowledge was being partitioned into departments; English organized itself as a distinct discipline, slowly but surely imbued itself with the research ideal (not without battles, as Graff's *Professing Literature* makes clear), and began to grow. Yet the single largest part of English studies in the 1880s, composition, did not have a research agenda of its own; the principles of teaching writing were not in question, so what was there for a scholar to study? Adams Sherman Hill's *Principles of Rhetoric* (1878), like most other nineteenth-century rhetoric texts, argued that rhetoric was an art, not a science (Kirtzhaber 76-81; Hill, chap. 5, p. 321). Over time, this was to be a devastating stance, for the art/science divide was what separated the old knowledge from the new; art was often related to skills that could be inculcated, while science was connected to knowledge, to research, in short, to the new disciplines that were embarked on expansion. To argue that rhetoric was not a science, not a way of knowing, was to consign it to trainings, to an introductory level of college pedagogy. If it was art, its instruction depended upon the skill of the teacher, not on a knowledge base built up by concentrated study, by research. There was nothing to discover, only some pedagogical arrangements to be worked out, some teaching methods to be made more efficient. And that is where the energy went, into teaching, correcting countless themes, and writing textbooks. Over the next twenty or so years, Harvard's English staff threw itself into the work of teaching writing, publishing widely in composition, and developing an ambitious and successful program. But the writing faculty did little rhetorical research, produced no advancement in knowledge, and earned themselves a reputation as teachers, not scholars, a serious handicap in the new university.

Over a relatively short time Harvard created a genuine composition

program, a system of instruction that stood out as an example to imitate or avoid. At that time Harvard was one of the largest and certainly the most respected of American colleges; in 1909 its enrollment of 5,558 was second only to Columbia's (Slosson 475). Its football team was dominant, its professors were eminent, its president was the most famous educational leader in the nation. It cast a shadow over the college scene as no American university ever has, before or since. And Harvard went about composition, like everything else, in a big way. At its height in 1880-1910, the Harvard system included three elements: a particular kind of writing; a wide array of course work; and an eminent, highly visible composition staff. Some colleges had one or two of these elements; no place had them all, or in anything approaching the depth of Harvard. The Harvard program marks the only time a major university made such a total commitment to student writing. For thirty years the United States' oldest and most prestigious college devoted the majority of its English teaching resources to composition from the first year to senior level, from entrance examinations to senior forensics, from advanced composition to writing across the curriculum. Some of the most famous scholars and critics in America devoted the best part of their intellectual energy to student writing. There has never been anything like it.

Harvard's standard, required composition course was English A, first given in sophomore year and then, after 1885, moved to the first year. In 1899-1900 its enrollment of 620 to 630 students and staff of eleven instructors made it one of the largest college courses of any type in the country (Copeland and Rideout 1). English A was a two-semester course in rhetoric and writing almost totally based on Adams Sherman Hill's *Principles of Rhetoric*; though plenty of literary topics were covered, there were no outside readings. In 1900-01 writing assignments included a mix of daily themes, which were brief two or three paragraph sketches, and more extended fortnightly themes; topics were up to the student and thus varied widely, but the dailies usually asked for personal experience while the longer ones covered a mix of general knowledge. Two characteristics marked English A and most other writing courses at Harvard: the insistence that students develop their own topics, and the absence of extended readings outside the textbook; hardly any teachers assigned essays or poems or plays for reactions. In fact, in contrast to other contemporary rhetoric programs (e.g., Genung's at Amherst, or Gayley's

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at Berkeley) there was hardly any emphasis upon reading at all. (Chapter 6, p. 439, presents the examination required in Hill's English A for the 1887-88 academic year.)

The writing course that Harvard is most famous for is daily themes, English 12 (see chap. 2, pp. 32 and 107), which was an elective course originated in 1884 by the young Barrett Wendell; elements of it were later transferred to the first year (Copeland and Rideout). In 1905 Charles T. Copeland took over English 12 and kept it famous until the late 1920s.

Upper-level writing courses played a major role at Harvard. In 1896 sophomores were required to take one of three one-semester courses, depending on their grades in first-year English: English B for the weakest or English 22 and English 31 for the strongest writers. Another writing course, English 5, was aimed at graduate students. Other important writing courses included senior forensics, which taught argumentative writing through the subject matter of the students' own upper-level work in other courses. Forensics were in many ways holdovers from the old era of rhetorical education and were a constant source of English department tinkering. David Russell's *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870-1990* gives an excellent overview of Harvard's advanced writing instruction at every stage in a student's career (see especially 51-61); at first it was much like the built-in writing instruction that characterized the old pre-1860 college. But in an environment increasingly hostile to writing instruction, Harvard's upper-level writing courses virtually disappeared after 1910.

Besides its distinctive writing course work, Harvard boasted the most famous array of rhetoricians in the nation. The Boylston Professorship of Rhetoric and Oratory, founded in the eighteenth century, had been filled by eminent professors from the very beginning, when John Quincy Adams, its first occupant, published his lectures. Edward Tyrrell Channing, occupant from 1819 to 1851 and the rhetoric teacher of Emerson, Thoreau, Motley, Prescott, and Parkman, also published his lectures (see Scott, chap. 3, p. 179). Francis Child, occupant from 1851 to 1876, published in literature and philology, not in rhetoric, and when almost lured away by a job offer from Johns Hopkins, was persuaded to become Harvard's first professor of English with the understanding that he would no longer have to read student themes (Kirtzhaber 33). He was replaced in the Boylston chair by Hill from 1876 to 1904. The next two

occupants were also extremely visible figures in the field: Le Baron Russell Briggs from 1904 to 1925 and Charles T. Copeland from 1925 to 1937, both revered men on campus, dedicated to undergraduates, eminent teachers (they were not Ph.D.'s and did not conduct scholarly research), and strong believers in the composition program. In addition to this string of Boylston professors, Harvard had Barrett Wendell, whose *English Composition* (1891) was by far the most elegant and urbane treatment of rhetoric and composition to date. These were true academic stars, known across the country in the profession, a formidable array of talent unmatched elsewhere. And besides those stars were others who worked in the Harvard program like Byron Hurlbut, who later served as dean, George Pierce Baker, who wrote *Specimens of Argumentation* before moving in 1925 to begin the drama program at Yale, and George Rice Carpenter, who wrote on composition at Harvard and later was a professor of rhetoric at Columbia. And of course there were many instructors and lecturers who taught composition while working toward a doctoral or a law degree, men who left Harvard with strong impressions of the writing program (see Phelps and Aydelotte, chap. 4; Manly, chap. 5; Valentine, chap. 6). The presence of eminent figures like Briggs and Copeland meant that by 1900, when composition was losing its luster elsewhere and men like Wendell were confessing that theme writing didn't seem to train students well enough, the Harvard program remained vital, perhaps past its time. Composition had more prestige at Harvard than elsewhere, and its prominence lasted longer. But when Copeland retired in 1937, Harvard marked a definite break in the tradition by appointing the poet Robert Hillyer, not a rhetorician, to the Boylston professorship. For half a century Harvard's program depended on powerful teachers, not scholars; it never developed a graduate research program in rhetoric that might have given undergraduate instruction the needed stability or theoretical sophistication.

Most colleges followed Harvard in replacing the traditional required rhetorical work spread over four years with a single year-long required first-year course; this is the freshman composition course that by 1900 had taken hold almost everywhere. (Other colleges also attempted to offer upper-level writing courses, mostly as electives.) The rapid spread of the freshman composition course has been described by John Michael Wozniak, who traces the transformation of traditional rhetoric into modern composition by following textbook adoptions at Eastern colleges.

Harvard's Critics

THE HARVARD CURRICULUM from 1875 to 1910 had its critics at the time and has had them ever since. Perhaps because it represented such a commitment to writing instead of to literature, the Harvard system gave rise to much dissent, both at home and at rival colleges. Essentially it was attacked for three reasons: for not making a difference in student writing, for being expensive in terms of a teacher's time and energy, and for distracting faculty efforts from more important things (i.e., literature). Chapter 4 contains some of the many attacks on the Harvard curriculum.

From the outset there was a traditional alternative to the Harvard program that persisted relatively unchanged for many years in smaller colleges. This was an old-fashioned rhetoric course that set an eighteenth- or early-nineteenth-century textbook by Blair, Campbell, or Whately to be mastered by students and tested in recitations and examinations. By the mid-1890s, fully twenty years after Harvard's program began, a few colleges in the East were using one of the traditional texts (Wozniak 145). Such an approach lasted because faculty members were wedded to it, or because a college prided itself on its traditionalism, or because the college was simply bypassed by intellectual currents. Significantly, the very traditional approaches survived at colleges, not universities, in the East and South.

Chapter 4 concentrates on a number of alternatives to the Harvard system, alternatives that would eventually overwhelm Harvard's method and in turn remain dominant for more than half a century. The first alternative to the Harvard method, as outlined by two strong articles in the popular press ("Two Ways of Teaching English," chap. 4, p. 238 and Lounsbury, chap. 4, p. 261), was to require no writing at all. Students would arrive in college with good writing abilities and would pick up additional writing practice as a function of their work in other courses. To operate this way a college would have to have extremely high entrance requirements and a reliable supply of good students from feeder schools. A few colleges could make this alternative work successfully for a long time (Princeton was one), and over the years some colleges, thinking their entering students good enough to survive without direct writing instruction, abolished required composition and assumed that students would improve their writing through course work in what were called

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the "content areas." This somewhat haphazard approach to writing instruction was understandably implemented at relatively few colleges, and only sporadically. The no-writing alternative was not what eventually displaced the Harvard system. What eventually prevailed was an eclectic mix of three other approaches: personal writing, writing about literature, and writing about ideas.

The personal writing course is often thought of as "pure" composition; it consists of just students and teacher, with no rhetoric textbook, no anthology of readings, maybe just a handbook for reference. This course's roots lie in the quite personal topics students wrote about in Harvard's writing courses, descriptive sketches that captured a moment or a mood (for samples see chap. 6, p. 514). At Harvard such themes were not meant to explore the inner self or to be regarded as truly expressive pieces of writing; rather they were to represent an individual perspective on experience, and so topics were never assigned. They are remarkably close to some forms of creative writing and also have affinities with an artist's sketchbook. In the late nineteenth century everyday experience was proving rich material for a new generation of American painters and writers, so it is no surprise that some influence shows up in theme writing, particularly in a program run by a former journalist like Hill and in the classes of a sometime novelist like Wendell; and they even show up in Genung's aims for his students' themes at Amherst. (See chap. 3, p. 133; Miller, *Textual Carnivals* 58-59, critiques this new type of theme topic.)

At the University of Michigan in the 1890s Fred Newton Scott argued for using such personal themes to connect writing to real experience. To be sure, this same rationale was used for the Harvard program; in fact, throughout this period it is fairly easy to find statements about how writing is best when it springs from real experience. Such statements, unfortunately, are not evidence that much raw, unfiltered experience was permitted in the classroom or in papers. The true test of whether student experience was valued comes not from statements of high purpose but from actual practice in the classroom and the writing itself. Scott's argument for a genuinely personal approach to writing has had a good many adherents over the years, but during the period 1875-1925 it was never close to dominant. At Vassar, Scott's student Gertrude Buck wrote articles that provided some of the most sensible rationale for this kind of writing (see chap. 4, p. 241) and wrote a text embodying it.

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The modern composition course devoted to writing about English literature predated the Harvard composition program; it was invented and popularized by one of the most prominent linguists of the late nineteenth century, Thomas Lounsbury at Yale, a man who had long experience reading student themes during his teaching career. Yale, which did not require composition, was in 1870 the site of Lounsbury's most innovative course, a literature elective requiring plenty of student writing. This in embryonic form was the kind of course that would be widely adopted throughout the country by 1900 and has persisted to this day, at Yale and elsewhere, a sort of introduction to literature which required writing about the literary points of the reading. This approach assumed that writing worked best when students had something substantial to write about, and that the most substantial thing an English department could provide was English literature. Cornell operated under this belief (see James Morgan Hart, "Cornell Course" 183), as did many liberal arts colleges. The literature course grew so common that there were any number of variations upon it, all of which contained some elements of the old rhetoric course's emphasis on belles lettres, style, and examples drawn from English literature. In the most common type of literature-based course students read a wide variety of English (and later, American) works: poems, some plays, plus a novel or two, and wrote critical essays about them. Indeed, it was often in such composition courses that students got their first English department exposure to current American authors, most of whom were excluded from literature course work.

By the time the literature-based composition course became popular a hierarchy began to develop: the better the student, the more literature in the composition course. We can see this operating at Yale at the beginning of our era, and at Wisconsin at the end. Throughout the era 1875-1925, literary works prevailed in elite colleges (with the exception of Harvard), while the least prestigious colleges concentrated more on grammar and mechanics drills. At Wisconsin in the 1920s, 65 percent of first-year students had some literature in their composition course, and the best students had all literature (Taylor, chap. 7, p. 555).

The third alternative, the idea course, became popular after the turn of the century and won many influential adherents; it consisted of close analysis of important essays, a sort of literary nonfiction course with the emphasis upon the structure of the ideas, definitely not the style, and

rarely the effect. The first such course was introduced at Indiana in the 1890s by Frank Aydelotte; by 1915 it had spread to Columbia, Wisconsin, and to many other schools that employed one of the popular anthologies stressing this approach, Foerster, Manchester, and Young's *Essays for College Men* or Steeves and Ristine's *Representative Essays* (Berlin, *Rhetoric* 51-53). One strain of the idea course would later imperceptibly slip into a course in "great ideas" or "great books" and become a key component of general education programs. After a time such programs stopped devoting much attention to direct writing instruction at all. But the other, more popular side of this course developed into the most common of all early-twentieth-century composition courses, the expository writing course stressing certain key works of serious nonfiction (there soon grew a sort of unacknowledged composition canon, with Arnold, Newman, Huxley, Ruskin, and Woodrow Wilson most common early on). Students would analyze the prose and sometimes react to its ideas, at other times imitate its structure or style, following the example of Robert Louis Stevenson's "sedulous ape" (Berkeley, chap. 5, p. 383). This canon was often embodied in a common textbook of the time, a rhetoric/reader like Fulton's *Expository Writing* (1912), which contained instructions on writing along with copious selections to read, imitate, and discuss. Other exposition courses assigned a separate reading text, which was often accompanied by a rhetoric textbook; sometimes a handbook was used as a reference, at other times the rhetoric contained a handbook section. (See chapter 5 for readers, handbooks, and rhetorics.)

From Rhetoric to Composition

THIS BOOK CHRONICLES the move from composition at every stage of a student's college career to composition confined to the first year, and from a saturation in a rhetorical tradition of some two thousand years to its replacement with a new, streamlined curriculum which, as later chapters demonstrate, emphasized error correction and the five modes of discourse. These were simplifications perfectly suited for the mass-production education carried out in so many universities after 1900. How did the rich and complex world of rhetoric get replaced so quickly with composition?

The first way to answer that question is to look at the relegation of

the authorities, or in fact the enforcer. The rules about plagiarism were a perfect example of this authoritarian system; chapter 6 contains the composition rules pamphlet from the University of Minnesota in 1913; its tone and contents display some of the strictness imposed at the time. At its worst there is a sense that in composition, students are on trial, that they are not really a part of things until they get through their ordeal. As Susan Miller's *Textual Carnivals* depicts the difference, composition was "low," while literature was "high."

And what was the actual classroom teaching like? A remarkably large amount of it seems to have been adversarial, with the teacher as a stern taskmaster skilled in rooting out falsehood and cant and the student in fear of the teacher's scorn. Accounts of the recitation system and paper evaluation sessions conducted by Hill and Channing (Briggs, cited in Kitzhaber 61; Scott, chap. 3, p. 179) at Harvard or Northup at Yale (Cross), and a host of others (see Simmons 106-29) suggest that students spent much of their time in fear of being called on in class and found wanting. On the other hand, personal accounts of the Berkeley program (Frank Norris in Graff and Warner 133-35) or of Fred Newton Scott's Michigan program (Theodore Roethke's experience as described in Seager 116-17) speak of teachers' blandness and students' lack of interest in theme writing.

Feminist Rhetoric

THE COLLEGE WRITING and reading curriculum depicted in these documents was overwhelmingly male. (Only 15 percent of college students in 1900 were female, though the percentage was growing throughout this period.) The early twentieth century was the site of a specifically female rhetoric, of course; the two great successes of the women's movement, temperance and suffrage, were achieved through old-fashioned oratory, brilliant pamphleteering, and highly sophisticated manipulation of public opinion. In short, they were triumphs of rhetoric. A whole generation of women participated in massive efforts to transform public opinion, and in the process developed a wide range of rhetorical skills. During these struggles there were distinctly different audiences involved. Since in most cases the electorate was male, a male-targeted rhetoric prevailed.

writing instruction to the first year, something Adams Sherman Hill worked hard for at Harvard; it took him from 1872 until 1885, because the classicists didn't want to give up their control of first-year course work. Putting composition at the beginning of a student's career earned it the right to be a "foundation" for all that followed. But along with the foundation came its reputation as a transition from high school to college, connected with introductory work, with bringing students up to the required level. In fact, putting composition into the first year was a recognition of its newly developed remedial overtones: freshman year was to make up for what preparatory schools had failed to teach. That goes a long way to explain composition's lowly status. Furthermore, colleges have long had an unspoken rule, "You are what you teach." Working with first-year students is a job for a teacher, not a scholar. And of course since even its proponents argued it was an art, not a science, the notion grew that just about anyone could teach it, and before long just about anyone did. Even before teaching assistants were common, teaching composition was an entry level job, one to leave behind after acquiring seniority.

Even worse, the composition course came to stand for a kind of teacher slavery—relentless correction and strict supervision of writing. The literature is full of complaints about the paper load (see chap. 4, p. 288, and Connors, "Overwork/Underpay"). Why did colleges pile the writing on, even when alternatives were available? Why process every single essay? (Some teachers did devise peer grading; see chap. 6, p. 458.) Could some writing tasks carry their own justification, be worth doing, and teach writing in the act of writing itself, yet not need to be read by the teacher? Why weren't such assignments even imagined in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century instruction? To address that question requires some understanding of how the relationship between teacher and student made the first year of college very much resemble high school. For years the gap between college student and professor was maintained rigidly, with strict rules of behavior, tight regulations for dormitory life, and distinct expectations of courtesy. All students were expected to listen, to be kept under control, and to be passive learners. Nowhere did these expectations come out more forcefully than in composition, which imposed incredibly strict rules and enforced them thoroughly. The composition teacher was, willingly or not, the accomplice of

At the same time, since much work needed to be done to convince other women to join these causes, signs of a specifically female-targeted public rhetoric were also emerging.

We still do not know enough about the connections between college course work and the public and private examples of female rhetoric. We do know that the women's colleges were the scene of a continuing debate over whether they should offer the same subjects as the men's colleges or whether they should offer subjects specifically tailored for women. M. Carey Thomas, for instance, argued that the subject matter of a woman's education should be the same as a man's; in keeping with this general idea, Harvard professors gave the same courses at Radcliffe as they did in their own departments. At some other colleges the stress for women was on a preparation in home economics and child-rearing. And we also know that the women's colleges did not always mirror the rapid rise of women's rhetorical skills. Controlled as they often were by male presidents (and overwhelmingly male trustees), many women's colleges had official policies against demonstrating, leafleting, or even speaking on behalf of suffrage. Even so, it is possible to detect the emergence of a distinctly feminist rhetoric among women professors at this time. Gertrude Buck's emphasis on personal writing (chap. 4, p. 241) helps to separate her from the mainstream of male rhetoric. Recent dissertations on Buck (Campbell; Weir) tend to emphasize her differences from her teacher Fred Newton Scott and stress her search for a distinct, specifically feminine community.

In the era 1875-1925 there were hundreds of women teaching composition and thousands of women students learning to write in college. But not surprisingly, the most widely circulated documents of the time, with very few exceptions, do not reveal very many distinct signs of a specifically feminist rhetoric, or even a feminist slant on writing. The male model dominated the national discourse about writing and the writer. This is true despite the fact that women professors produced some of the era's path-breaking textbooks—the first reader to use student papers, by Wisconsin's Frances Campbell Berkeley (see chap. 5, p. 378), and one of the first handbooks, by Oregon's Luella Clay Carson (see chap. 5, p. 353). These books reveal little of a distinctive female rhetoric, reminding us of the existence of a narrow range of attitudes among women writing college textbooks and of the continuing dominance of male discourse.

We need to ask many questions: To what extent did timorous publishing houses suppress signs of an identifiable feminist rhetoric in textbooks? Did feminists, eager to mount the platform and debate suffrage and temperance, avail themselves of the characteristically male oral rhetoric of the time straightforwardly, or did they give it their own personal dimension? Just what was the range of attitude and instruction among women rhetoricians? Answers to these and other questions will no doubt shed light not just on women's education but on the flexibility and adaptability of the whole educational enterprise to particular student populations.

Similarly, African-American writers were forging a distinctive voice (or series of voices) in nineteenth-century America, but any concerns black educators had about college writing instruction were not at all part of the general discourse. In writing, black college faculty and students were forced to assume the white world's styles and standards, as Fisk University graduate W.E.B. DuBois did when he elected Barrett Wendell's writing course at Harvard (DuBois 123). Arnold Rampersad (124) claims to discern some signs of the Harvard program on DuBois's prose style, but it is hard to find the opposite, a trace of a black writer or orator in composition's professional literature. Black or Latino or Native American concerns seem invisible in the professional literature of writing instruction between 1875 and 1925, while most black colleges seem to have taught writing in strict accord with the standards of white America.

Transition

AS COMPOSITION ENTERED the twentieth century, common patterns of professional work emerged, patterns that would remain until the 1970s and even beyond. Composition moved away from the Harvard model (which lost much of its credibility with Harvard's own faculty; see Perry, chap. 4, p. 311) and became the recognizably modern system that still prevails: professors teaching advanced literature courses, and instructors, part timers, and graduate students teaching composition. By 1910, composition had become almost totally apprentice work, and responsibility for its oversight became the province not of a scholar or curriculum expert but an administrator. Despite some well-known exceptions like Michigan and Wisconsin until the late 1920s, and some liberal arts

(3) break away from the English department. At this time, roughly from 1905 to 1920, some influential academics were mounting attacks on the research model, what William James had called "the Ph. D. Octopus." In modern language studies the most prominent critic was Irving Babbitt, a classicist with a position in Harvard's French department, whose *Literature and the American College* (1908) is a strong attack on doctoral studies in English and a plea for a genuine, humanistic understanding of "ideas." Babbitt had followers among intellectual conservatives who knew the current composition scene firsthand and who published significant writing textbooks: Norman Foerster of Wisconsin, North Carolina, and Iowa (see chap. 5, p. 390); Frank Aydellotte of Indiana, MIT, and Swarthmore (see chap. 4, p. 300), and John Erskine of Columbia. These men were not sympathetic to traditional rhetoric, and they certainly were not inclined to equate composition with personal expression. Instead they wanted their students to write about ideas, and all three tried to transform composition into courses in liberal culture or great books, an influence that would live on in many composition readers for over half a century. All three would found programs to infuse the undergraduate years with required humanistic training and counter what they regarded as the diluting effect of electives and premature specialization. At first Foerster and Aydellotte took the composition course seriously, putting first-rate teaching into it and giving entering students some meaty books to read. Soon, however, their courses crowded writing instruction out in favor of concentrating on the reading. Over time, someone interested in new thinking about writing instruction and rhetoric would find little of interest in their course work. Still, they displayed confidence in their students, and from our vantage point they look much more intellectually respectable than their English department mandarin counterparts who were happy shunting first-year students off to untrained teaching assistants.

The second option available to a composition specialist, to carry on high quality writing research, was taken by Fred Newton Scott, chair of the rhetoric department at Michigan and a tireless worker for composition's status. He ran a successful and highly popular doctoral program in rhetoric, began a scholarly series to publish promising dissertations, headed the MLA and its pedagogical section, edited works on rhetoric, literature, and criticism, and published articles and textbooks on rhetoric and composition. Scott had a department of his own, excellent gradu-

colleges which preserved a respect for teaching, English departments decreed that literature teaching—the serious intellectual occupation of the discipline—would get the rewards. In fact, literature itself came to be the reward; a long apprenticeship in composition would be rewarded with literature teaching once promotion came.

This hierarchy was practically inevitable given the fact that university English departments organized themselves on the German academic model, rewarding research and privileging the doctorate, the learned article, and the monograph. Textbooks, curriculum materials, and teaching had their place in this system, but ranked significantly lower. And, with the single exception of Fred Newton Scott's Michigan program, there was no doctorate in composition, no research, no learned journal, no research seminars. Some professional discussion about composition took place, of course, but it was mainly about pedagogical goals and administrative matters (see chap. 3, p. 233). The major professional organization, the Modern Language Association (MLA), long confined talk of composition to its pedagogical section, and abolished even that from its convention in 1903. It is tempting to think that the disappearance of this section in 1903 marked the decline of composition's professional place, but I would argue that the real damage occurred in the relegation of composition to pedagogy in the first place. Once it was determined that composition work was to be considered pedagogical, not the product of research or a province of the aesthetic imagination, writing instruction's place at the bottom was sealed. (While composition was being marginalized, many other topics in English studies were departing: speech, journalism, theater arts, and linguistics. The splits were often done on research verses nonresearch lines: those who researched the history of the Globe Theatre found a welcome in the higher ranks of the English department; those who actually directed plays were encouraged to take their business elsewhere. Those who published on language development and variation were grudgingly accepted; those who taught students how to give speeches were relegated to the lower ranks.)

Still, despite the imposition of a rigid hierarchy, some faculty remained interested in composition and rhetoric. What options did they have? In a department organized as English was on a research model, composition specialists faced three choices: (1) join the small but influential band of academics who attacked the research model as inadequate, (2) initiate what their peers would recognize as high-quality research, or

ate students, first-rate research, and the respect of his professional peers. But his program was essentially a one-man show; the people he appointed to teach in his program were not influential in the field, and he himself was stretched very thin, running composition, journalism, the MLA (president, 1907), and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE; founding president, 1911-13). And Scott also lacked successors; his program did not survive him. Upon Scott's retirement, Michigan's English department absorbed the rhetoric program, succeeded in reducing composition work to pedagogy, and relegated teaching to a minor role (Stewart, "Two Model Teachers" 128).

Little evidence shows that composition specialists besides Scott willingly followed the third alternative—independence from the English department. This was the route taken successfully by speech, which English had also reduced to the status of a support course. At the 1913 NCTE convention speech teachers voted to break free of English department domination and found their own association; their earliest manifestos speak eloquently of the need to conduct research, to be scientific, in a word, to compete in the university world on an equal footing with other academic disciplines (O'Neill 56-57).

Composition failed to take any of these routes; instead, it made its alliances across the gap between college and high school, casting itself as an ally of school teachers in the NCTE, an organization with distinctly pedagogic aims that fostered a Midwestern, egalitarian attitude toward education rather than the Eastern elitist approach. Such an attitude pervaded the newly formed *English Journal* (established 1912), where composition articles would appear for the next eighty years. (*English Journal* branched off into a college edition and later split into *College English*, which still publishes composition articles: *PMLA* hasn't published an article by a composition scholar in eighty years.)

It was no crime to select teaching over scholarship; in fact, it may have been the better choice. But given the way higher education worked, such a choice had severe consequences. It meant one was removed from the sources of professional glory: grants, released time, graduate students, the very things that conferred status and sustained research. It meant relegation to a service role, while the profession moved on to new frontiers of scholarship. It meant that administrative work became necessary for advancement. To be sure, there were notable exceptions. Hoyt Hudson published widely in rhetoric and moved from Cornell to Prince-

ton, while Charles Sears Baldwin had a distinguished career in rhetoric at Columbia. Many others made their mark in administration, including Porter Perrin at Washington and Frank Aydelotte at Swarthmore. But most promising rhetoricians' careers would resemble those of the many scholars who taught and published in rhetoric while young and migrated to literature when older. That was true of Barrett Wendell at Harvard, John Genung at Amherst, Gertrude Buck at Vassar, Norman Foerster and Karl Young at Wisconsin, Hyder Rollins at Texas, Stith Thompson at Indiana, and many more who published early work in composition and then moved on to more "important" work within English departments or in administration. And common too was the path taken by many women who did not establish names for themselves or become well known: Maria Louisa Sanford (1836-1920) of Swarthmore and Minnesota published articles on suffrage, religion, and public speaking but made her main contribution through years of teaching; Luella Clay Carson of the University of Oregon published composition texts but little else during a long career (chap. 5, p. 353); Frances Campbell Berkeley (later Young) left the profession when she married (chap. 5, p. 378). The early twentieth century offers very few examples of well-known professionals, male or female, who staked out composition as their field, published primarily in it, and persevered in it for their entire careers.

By 1920 composition had assumed the shape it would retain for the next half century. Many changes would occur, changes which are well worth investigating (and which the emphasis on current-traditional almost precludes). But these changes would occur within a universe determined by composition's fixed place within the curriculum. The half century from 1875 to 1925 had witnessed an enormous revolution in the relation of composition to students and to other academic subjects, all within the context of a transformation of American higher education. It is not surprising that this period of ferment should have been followed by a period of stasis. Laurence Veysey argues that for all higher education the period 1910-45 "was largely a period of drift, characterized by a sense of letdown" and "the continuing divorce of the entire curriculum from the wellsprings of student energy" ("Stability and Experiment" 9-10). Composition, like much in the American curriculum, had become stable, at a point very far away from the rhetoric of the 1850s.

academies and preparatory schools had been set up to provide them to young scholars. Now, with Eliot's new emphasis on English, the preparatory schools were faced with another task: teach English, and particularly writing, to their charges. And for the first time the schools were to be judged by a public standard, by writing *everyone* could understand. They had had a monopoly on Latin and Greek instruction; they set the standards and colleges had to accept their students, since there was no other source of supply. But with English the field was suddenly open; here was an achievement practically everyone was qualified to judge, and not surprisingly the public (and Harvard too) would judge by obvious marks of error in spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

HARVARD ESTABLISHED THE FIRST MODERN COMPOSITION program, and for two decades its faculty wrote extensively about the subject. This chapter contains articles and documents from the Harvard program, including large sections from the Harvard reports which are often cited in histories of composition. These reports were part of an attempt to get the secondary schools to improve their writing instruction; in effect, though, they diminished the role of first-year composition and expressed the hope of removing it entirely from the college curriculum and placing it in the schools. In order to understand the connection between the Harvard reports and the growth of composition, one needs to look at school-college relations in the 1870s.

Throughout most of the nineteenth century the great bulk of secondary education for the college bound took place at private academies and preparatory schools. Colleges that wished to improve the quality of their students had to raise admissions standards, yet colleges were totally dependent upon preparatory schools. Charles W. Eliot saw matters clearly in early 1869, just before he came to the Harvard presidency:

The higher and lower institutions are, indeed, mutually dependent; if the admission examiners of the colleges and polytechnic schools seem, on the one hand, to sharply define the studies of the preparatory schools; on the other hand, it is quite as true that the colleges and advanced schools are practically controlled in their requisitions by the actual state of the preparatory schools. They can only ask for what is to be had. They must accept such preparations as the schools can give. ("The New Education" 204)

For over two centuries Harvard had demanded knowledge of Latin, Greek, and mathematics from its entering students, and a group of

In the early 1870s, after Harvard set up a written examination in English composition, it began to prod its preparatory schools about improving their writing instruction, beginning a twenty-year-long acrimonious debate over composition in the schools. Faculty spoke to headmasters at professional meetings; professors wrote newspaper and magazine articles about the poor quality of writing; and finally Harvard published lengthy official reports pinpointing the problem and laying blame on the preparatory schools. (Midwestern colleges handled matters with less acrimony; colleges dominated their feeder schools by offering them official certification if they met certain standards. Students from certified schools were automatically eligible for admission to the local state university. See Gayley, chap. 3, p. 168, and Scott, "College-Entrance Requirements.") The shock expressed by Harvard faculty at the low quality of student writing on entrance examinations seems to have been mostly for effect. Everyone teaching English at Harvard had been an undergraduate there and was quite familiar with the quality of student English. And every year saw plenty of college writing assignments that demonstrated student abilities. The new examination in English did not reveal some long-hidden weakness so much as supply Harvard with new, objective evidence to use in the effort to improve the secondary schools, which was one of Eliot's lifelong ambitions.

Another part of Harvard's battles over writing instruction involved a long and ultimately successful fight with the classicists. Eliot's privileging of English and other modern languages was a direct attack on the hegemony of the classics at the college level, since English would thus be entitled to its own share of class time, time that had to be taken from classics. At the school level the battles involved a concerted attempt to

The First Composition Program: Harvard, 1870-1900

break the power of the classics as well. One element of this battle was Harvard's claim that the classics simply weren't doing their job in producing entering students who could handle English well enough. The traditional claim of the classicists was that their subjects provided the mental discipline students needed to succeed in all their subjects. The Harvard reports questioned whether skill in Latin and Greek would indeed transfer to those other subjects like English. In particular, Harvard had two specific complaints about the classics: students produced atrocious examples of "translation English" instead of idiomatic, straightforward English; and students could not master simple grammatical English despite years of a language-based curriculum. So it was no accident that the person appointed from the Harvard Board of Overseers to head the Committee on Composition and Rhetoric was the nation's most outspoken enemy of mental discipline through classical instruction, Charles Francis Adams (*Three Addresses* 33-34). The documents in this chapter, then, depict the rise of Adams Sherman Hill's powerful program, and Charles Francis Adams's equally powerful indictment of secondary education, an indictment that undermines the Harvard writing program's very reason for existing.

Rollo Walter Brown Dean Briggs (1926)

● Brown (1880-1956) received his B.Litt. from Ohio Northern in 1903 and an M.A. from Harvard in 1905, where he was befriended by Le Baron Russell Briggs. He taught at Wabash College, 1905-20, and Carleton College, 1920-23. His publications included *How the French Boy Learns to Write* (1915) and a memoir, *Harvard Yard in the Golden Age* (1948).

In this affectionate portrait of one of Harvard's most revered figures from the turn of the century, Brown supplies a nice overview of Harvard's role in establishing composition. Brown also makes a claim for Briggs as the originator of freshman orientation. The fact that Briggs could add such orientation on to composition instruction illustrates the dual nature of the writing course: important enough to require of every student, but unstructured enough that a third of it can be taken over by a semiacademic orientation to college life.

AS FAR BACK AS 1872, PROFESSOR ADAMS SHERMAN HILL HAD BEEN brought to Harvard to supplement the scholarly work already being done

in the Department of English. President Eliot, then a young man of thirty-eight, foresaw a greatly increased attendance at the colleges and universities of the country. Not only that; he felt sure that this attendance would be made up in large part of men and women who would work in the sciences and other subjects not linguistic or literary. Anyhow, the older literary training was rigid and artificial, and altogether too exclusively designed for state occasions. He would have students forearmed with such a working acquaintance with their mother tongue as would serve them unaffectedly in their daily lives.

So Professor Hill was brought to the College Yard to see whether or not such an acquaintance was possible. He was a thin, cadaverous man who had received his bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1853—in President Eliot's class. He had subsequently studied law, and then had worked on the *New York Tribune* under Horace Greeley. When he came to the college he shared President Eliot's belief that students should write with direct clearness, and his experience in a newspaper office had led him to the somewhat unorthodox conviction that there were certain practicable means of approaching this end. At first he had no sense of discipline—as the word is used pedagogically—and the students, carrying on the easy traditions of a course that had been under the direction of young men who taught transiently, were not inclined to look upon his work with overmuch seriousness. In truth, they sometimes hummed pleasant academic melodies while he read a man's themes in the classroom. He encountered, in addition, no little unfriendliness in influential quarters. But despite his frail health and the uninviting atmosphere, he persisted. By the early 'eighties he had made such progress that both he and President Eliot believed the time had come when he should have associated with him more men than a mere young assistant or two. By 1883 he had gathered about him three young men who were to undertake the further development of his "idea." These were Barrett Wendell, W. B. Shubrick Clymer, and Le Baron Russell Briggs.

In 1883-84 the prescribed course in English, at that time required in the sophomore year, was officially in the hands of Professor Hill and Mr. Briggs; but on account of Professor Hill's poor health, he delegated most of his authority to his young associate. From Dean Briggs's boyhood to the day of his withdrawal from all university duties he always gave people the impression that he was timid; yet quite as consistently, whenever anyone came to him with a difficult task, he was always ready to undertake it. So when Professor Hill handed him classroom lectures

and said, "I am too sick to meet the class, and you must lecture to them," he accepted the difficult commission and read valiantly. Students who were in the course at that time were so impressed by the pink-faced boy's efforts to fill the mature man's shoes, and by his deep, almost desperate earnestness, that they listened to him with more respect than they had supposed they could command.

At the end of that year he was to have the opportunity to show just how a new idea begins its earthly journey. He and Professor Hill believed that the prescribed English should come at the beginning of a student's course rather than in the second year. They proposed a change. If the course came in the freshman year, it would help the student when he most needed help, and it would not break into his other studies after he had taken them up. To a young man's unclouded vision, that was clear beyond question. But he had to encounter minds made heavy by too much wisdom. The older members of the faculty were engaged in a mad scramble to enlist recruits among the freshmen for their elective courses. They did not want Professor Hill and this young upstart to put a prescribed course back into the open field and hamper the early beginnings of a right pursuit of truth. And the young man had the audacity to ask for something more! He wished to make the prescribed English into a course that would meet three times a week instead of two. Some of the distinguished members of the faculty became savage. But Professor Hill and young Briggs promised that should the course be pushed back to the freshman year and made a three-hour course, they would see to it that no work outside the classroom was required for the third hour. Upon that basis the change was made.

Now how could this transaction, by any stretch of the imagination, become a matter of national significance? The answer is to be found in certain theories of democracy cherished by the American people. They wanted as much education as possible for everybody. They wanted their children well taught in the colleges and universities. Harvard, with an honorable past, attracted many men who expected to do college teaching. These men, when they went to their posts all over the country, carried with them, as every college graduate must, some memory of the way things were done by their Alma Mater. And when these newer institutions sought a means of preventing students from disgracing themselves every time they put pen to paper, they almost invariably made use of Harvard's experience and established prescribed freshman courses in

writing. A glance at the college and university catalogues of America will reveal how few of the institutions did not follow the precedent which young Briggs, after much opposition, was allowed to establish.

This simple change in the schedule of the university, moreover, enabled him to start another variation in college practice. He had agreed not to require outside work of students for the third hour of his course. He must, then, devise means of occupying this hour profitably. In casting about, he discovered, among other things, how little the freshmen knew about the college and the world in which they lived. They needed not merely courses in Greek and chemistry and German; they needed general information. They knew little about the social machine, and they did not feel their place in it with sufficient distinctness to give import to their college work. He would make use of this "third hour" by trying to give his freshmen some glimpses of the world in which they supposedly lived. And he called on others to assist him.

This practice likewise spread throughout the country. At first, many teachers in the colleges where young instructors in English attempted to carry out the practice declared vehemently that it was "unscholarly" and that it did not "fit into" any well-organized curriculum. In fact, it did fit into any curriculum that was not too well organized! And to-day, helping the freshman to orient himself is so generally regarded as a necessary part of a college education, that it is accepted as though colleges had always fostered the idea. The sequence is clear enough: first, occasional hours were devoted to what a freshman should know; then regular hours; then a separate one-hour course—in many colleges—with compiled volumes of liberalizing essays; then full-fledged courses in "orientation" in which freshmen are brought face to face not only with the world, but with the universe! Whatever else may be said about college freshmen to-day, they must be more alert than they were obliged to be thirty or forty years ago.

But see how Briggs and Wendell, working together, were able to enter still further into the educational life of America. The pushing of the prescribed course back to the freshman year inevitably left one sophomore class, that of the year 1884-85, without the customary instruction in English. So Barrett Wendell, under the direction of Professor Hill, undertook to give for the sophomores the identical course, so far as possible, that Le Baron R. Briggs, under the same direction, was giving for the freshmen. It was in that year also that Wendell first offered

English 12, an advanced course in writing that soon took a place next to Professor Hill's English 5 as a magnet for those who wished to learn whether they had any capacity as writers. While he was laboring with his classes that year he "invented" the daily theme. Although he was in his last years looked upon as something of a tory, he was as a youth and as a young teacher rebellious enough; and he rebelled against the incessant practice of imitating the stiff eloquence and, in some instances at least, the stiffer poetry of New England. He had kept a diary himself, and had profited by the daily writing. Why should not students write a little each day? From Briggs's practice of discussing many matters with the freshmen, he completed the idea: he would have his students look squarely at some little part of the world, try to catch the color or flavor of what they saw, and then write as significantly as possible. Longer themes of one kind or another were not to be given up, but if men were ever to write with any flexibility, they must have a certain amount of daily practice with a variety of manageable subjects.

Wendell's idea, which was closely akin to the entire conception of the freshman course as Briggs was developing it, likewise went to every part of the country. The idea had the good fortune, as Briggs's ideas had, of coming to birth at the time when institutions everywhere were drawing upon Harvard heavily in their efforts to establish adequate courses. Some years later, after the freshman course had been perfected by the touch of many skilled hands, the demand for information about it became so great that two of the men then teaching in it published a book in which the methods of the course were set forth in detail.¹ Teachers in hundreds of colleges wanted to know more about this method of helping men to see clearly and to write directly. Newspaper editors rejoiced that college men were learning to write straight sentences; and magazines and weeklies discussed the educational value of the "daily theme eye."

A "literary movement" is always too complex to be explained simply. Men, moreover, who find themselves better off as a result of any such movement, are pleased to feel that their increased well-being has emanated from their own virgin genius. Least of all are they willing to admit that men in an institution of learning have had anything to do with it. But when some one sits down to explain why in the early years of the twentieth century the younger readers and writers of America began to concern themselves with something less hollow, less conventionally formed than much of the literature conveniently styled "New England," he cannot

leave Briggs and Wendell out of consideration. They trained men to look at the world with their own eyes, and to write directly and honestly about what they saw, without regard for the traditional ways of looking at things. The men thus trained went all over the country to teach in the colleges and universities, and they carried with them the gospel that the world right where one lives is interesting if one will only look and think. And the students whom these men in turn trained went away from college by the thousands—and later by the tens of thousands—to find joy in the same unaffected experience. Only the blind can say that this fact has had nothing to do with our attempt, more or less national, to develop a literary art directly from the soil.

NOTE

1. Copeland and Rideout, *Freshman English and Theme Correcting in Harvard College*. 1951. [See chap. 6, p. 514.—Ed.]

Three Harvard Catalogue Course Descriptions from *Twenty Years of School and College English* (1896)

20. *The following curriculum descriptions document the evolution of the Harvard English curriculum in 1874-75, 1879-80, and 1896-97. They show how the Harvard of 1896 depicted the changes that had taken place in its own composition program and demonstrate four key trends: the growth of composition course work, the movement away from traditional rhetoric and toward modern composition, the expansion of the undergraduate literature curriculum, and the growth of the graduate program in literature. A close look at the 1896-97 listing also reveals a luxuriant growth of courses in writing without much differentiation in subject matter, approach, or form. Harvard's extensive composition course work does not seem to make up a coherent, easily grasped sequence. (One could always say the same is true of Harvard's 1896-97 literature courses, yet they have a built-in order in that they cover authors or periods or genres.)*

HISTORY OF THE REQUIREMENT IN ENGLISH FOR

ADMISSION TO HARVARD COLLEGE.

The first mention of anything approaching an examination in English as a requirement for admission to Harvard College appears in the Catalogue for 1865-66:

"Candidates will also be examined in reading English aloud."

For four years this sentence was, as Mr. Hurlbut says, "tacked to the end of the list" of prescribed subjects with nothing to call attention to it. In the Catalogue for 1869-70 we find for the first time the heading "English." The requirement for 1870 runs as follows:

"English."

"Students are also required to be examined, as early as possible after their admission, in reading English. Prizes will be awarded for excellence. For 1870 students may prepare themselves in Craik's English of Shakespeare (Julius Caesar) or in Milton's Comus. Attention to Derivations and Critical Analysis is recommended."

For the next three years this paragraph remains substantially unchanged except that Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield" is substituted for Shakspeare's "Julius Caesar." In the Catalogue for 1872-73 the candidate is for the first time informed that the quality of his written English will be taken into account:

☞ *Correct spelling, punctuation, and expression, as well as legible handwriting, are expected of all applicants for admission; and failure in any of these particulars will be taken into account at the examination.*

In the following year an examination in English composition was for the first time imposed on every candidate for admission to Harvard College. The requirement for that year as printed in the Catalogue for 1873-74 is as follows:

"English Composition. Each candidate will be required to write a short English Composition, correct in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and expression, the subject to be taken from such works of standard authors as shall be announced from time to time. The subject for 1874 will be taken from one of the following works: Shakespeare's Tempest, Julius Caesar, and Merchant of Venice; Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield; Scott's Ivanhoe, and Lay of the Last Minstrel."

The requirement for 1878 says that the "short English Composition" must be correct not only "in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and expression," but also in "division by paragraphs;" the requirement for 1879 precludes a common kind of misunderstanding by making clear that "Every candidate is expected to be familiar with *all* the books in this list."

In the Catalogue for 1880-81 the following paragraph appears for the first time:

"In 1882, every candidate will also be required to correct specimens of bad English given him at the time of examination. For this purpose the time of the examination will be lengthened by half an hour."

Although the time for the examination was lengthened to an hour and a half, the examination continued to count as a one-hour examination.

The Catalogue for 1886-87 says:

"English (after 1887) must be reserved for the candidate's final examination for admission. With this exception, candidates may offer themselves for the preliminary examination in any studies, elementary or advanced, in which their teachers certify that they are prepared."

The Catalogue for 1891-92 has the following addition:

"The English written by a candidate in any of his examination-books may be regarded as part of his examination in English, in case the evidence afforded by the examination-book in English is insufficient."

In the Catalogue for 1893-94 teachers are explicitly told how to deal with the prescribed reading:

"The candidate is expected to read intelligently all the books prescribed. He should read them as he reads other books; he will be expected not to know them minutely, but to have freshly in mind their most important parts. Whatever the subject of the composition, the examiner will regard knowledge of the book as less important than ability to write English."

In conformity with the recommendations made at a meeting of teachers held at Philadelphia in 1894, a change was made in the requirement. The new requirement was optional in 1895, but is prescribed for 1896 and subsequent years. As stated in the Catalogue for 1895-96 it is as follows:

"English. — English may be offered either as a Preliminary or as a Final subject. In 1896 and thereafter the examination will occupy two hours."

"The examination will consist of two parts, which, however, cannot be taken separately:—"

"1. The candidate will be required to write a paragraph or two on each of several topics chosen by him from a considerable number—perhaps ten or

fifteen—set before him on the examination paper. In 1896 the topics will be drawn from the following works:—

“Shakspeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*; Defoe’s *History of the Plague in London*; Irving’s *Tale of a Traveller*; Scott’s *Woodstock*; Macaulay’s *Essay on Milton*; Longfellow’s *Evangeline*; George Eliot’s *Silas Marner*.

“The candidate is expected to read intelligently *all* the books prescribed. He should read them as he reads other books; he is expected, not to know them minutely, but to have freshly in mind their most important parts. In every case the examiner will regard knowledge of the book as less important than ability to write English.

“As additional evidence of preparation, the candidate may present an exercise book, properly certified by his instructor, containing compositions or other written work.

“The works prescribed for this part of the examination in 1897, 1898, and 1899 are as follows:—

“In 1897: Shakspeare’s *As You Like It*; Defoe’s *History of the Plague in London*; Irving’s *Tales of a Traveller*; Hawthorne’s *Twice Told Tales*; Longfellow’s *Evangeline*; George Eliot’s *Silas Marner*.

“In 1898: Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Books I and II; Pope’s *Iliad*, Books I and XXII; the Sir Roger de Coverley Papers in the Spectator; Goldsmith’s *Vicar of Wakefield*; Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*; Southey’s *Life of Nelson*; Carlyle’s *Essay on Burns*; Lowell’s *Vision of Sir Launfal*; Hawthorne’s *House of the Seven Gables*.

“In 1899: Dryden’s *Palamon and Arcite*; Pope’s *Iliad*, Books I, VI, XXII, and XXIV; The Sir Roger de Coverley Papers in the Spectator; Goldsmith’s *Vicar of Wakefield*; Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*; De Quincey’s *Flight of a Tartar Tribe*; Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans*; Lowell’s *Vision of Sir Launfal*; Hawthorne’s *House of the Seven Gables*.

“II. A certain number of books will be prescribed for careful study. This part of the examination will be upon subject-matter, literary form, and logical structure, and will also test the candidate’s ability to express his knowledge with clearness and accuracy.

“The books prescribed for this part of the examination are:

“In 1896: Shakspeare’s *Merchant of Venice*; Milton’s *L’Allegro, Il Penseroso, Comus*, and *Lycidas*; Webster’s *First Bunker Hill Oration*.

“In 1897: Shakspeare’s *Merchant of Venice*; Burke’s *Speech on Conciliation with America*; Scott’s *Marmion*; Macaulay’s *Life of Samuel Johnson*.

“In 1898: Shakspeare’s *Macbeth*; Burke’s *Speech on Conciliation with America*; De Quincey’s *Flight of a Tartar Tribe*; Burke’s *Speech on Conciliation with America*; De Quincey’s *Flight of a Tartar Tribe*; Tennyson’s *Princess*.

“In 1899: Shakspeare’s *Macbeth*; Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Books I and II; Burke’s *Speech on Conciliation with America*; Carlyle’s *Essay on Burns*.

“No candidate will be accepted in English whose work is seriously defective in point of spelling, punctuation, grammar, or division into paragraphs.

“In connection with the reading and study of the prescribed books, parallel or subsidiary reading should be encouraged, and a considerable amount of English poetry should be committed to memory. The essentials of English grammar should not be neglected in preparatory study.

“The English written by a candidate in any of his examination-books may be regarded as part of his examination in English, in case the evidence afforded by the examination-book in English is insufficient.

“The attention of candidates who have passed in English at the Preliminary Examination is called to the subject of Optional Examinations for the Anticipation of College Studies (on pp. 210, 211*).”

*See the University Catalogue for 1895-96.

COURSES OF INSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH OFFERED BY HARVARD COLLEGE.

For 1874-75.

PRESCRIBED STUDIES.

Prescribed Rhetoric.—Asst. Professor A. S. Hill.

Sophomore Year.

Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Book 2, Chapters I-VI).—
Whately’s *Rhetoric* (Part 3).—Herbert Spencer’s *Philosophy of Style*.—
Written Exercises.

Two hours a week. First half-year.

Junior Year.

Whately’s *Rhetoric* (to end of Part 2).—Lessing’s *Laocoon* (Chapters 13-26).

Two hours a week. Second half-year.

Prescribed Themes and Forensics.

Sophomore Year. Six Themes: Asst. Professor A. S. Hill.

Junior Year. Six Themes: Professor CHILD.

Four Forensics: Asst. Professor PALMER.

Senior Year. Four Forensics.

Candidates for Honors may substitute for Forensics an equal number of Theses in their special departments, provided such substitution is permitted by the Instructors in those departments.

Electives.

English 1. — Professor CHILD.

English. — Hadley's History of the English Language. — The Elements of Anglo-Saxon. — Morris's Historical English Accidence. — Lectures.

Two hours a week. 1 Junior, 13 Sophomores, 1 Freshman.

English 2. — Professor CHILD.

Anglo-Saxon and Early English. — Beowulf. — Mätzner's Altenglische Sprachproben.

Three hours a week. (Not given this year.)

English 3. — Professor CHILD.

English Literature. — Chaucer. — Shakspeare. — Bacon. — Milton. — Dryden.

Three hours a week. 7 Seniors, 8 Juniors, 2 Sophomores, 2 Freshmen.

For 1879-80.

Prescribed Courses

Sophomore Year.

Rhetoric. — Hill's Principles of Rhetoric. — Abbott's How to Write Clearly. — Addison, Goldsmith, Irving, Macaulay, Scott. — Burke's Speech on Conciliation with America. — Exercises in Writing and Criticism. *Twice a week.* Mr. WARE.

Six Themes. Mr. PERRY.

Junior Year.

Six Themes. Professor HILL and Messrs. WARE and PERRY.

Four Forensics. Asst. Professor PALMER.

Senior Year.

Four Forensics. Professor PEABODY.

Elective Courses.

1. English Literature. — Chaucer. — Bacon. — Milton. — Dryden. *Three times a week.* Professor CHILD.

2. English Literature. — Shakspeare. *Three times a week.* Professor CHILD.

3. Anglo-Saxon. — Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader. *Twice a week.* Professor CHILD.

4. Early English. — Mätzner's Altenglische Sprachproben. *Twice a week.* Professor CHILD.

5. Rhetoric and Themes (Advanced Course). *Three times a week.* Professor A. S. HILL.

6. Oral Discussion. *Once a fortnight (three hours), to count as a one-hour course.* Open to Seniors only. Professor A. S. HILL.

7. Principles of Literary Criticism, in connection with English Literature of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. *Once a week.* Professor A. S. HILL.

Students wishing to take Course 5 or 6 must consult the Instructor in advance.

One hour of Course 5 can be used as an equivalent for Junior Themes, in which case the course will count as two hours of elective work.

For 1896-97.*

Primarily for Undergraduates.

A. Rhetoric and English Composition. — A. S. Hill, *Principles of Rhetoric* (revised and enlarged edition). — Lectures, recitations, written exercises, and conferences. I. *Mon., Wed., Fri., at 10; II. Mon., Wed., Fri., at 11; III. Mon., Wed., Fri., at 12; IV. Tu., Th., Sat., at 10; V. Tu., Th., Sat., at 11; VI. Tu., Th., Sat., at 12.* Professors A. S. HILL and BRIGGS, and Messrs. HURLBUT, COPELAND, COBB, J. G. HART, LA ROSE, and ———. (X.)

Course A is prescribed for Freshmen and for first-year students in the Lawrence Scientific School.

*A detailed account of the instruction offered by the Department of English will be found in the pamphlet of that department. The University issues each year special pamphlets of the courses of instruction offered by the various divisions and departments. These pamphlets may be had on application to the *Corresponding Secretary*.

In the daily exercises the class will be divided into six sections as indicated above; but at the Mid-year and Final Examinations the whole class will be examined together. Since these examinations are held on the same days with the examinations in Elective Group X, no member of English A is allowed to elect any course in Group X.

Bhf. English Composition.—Twelve Themes.—Lectures and discussions of themes. *Half-course.* I. *Tu., Th., at 12; II. Tu., Th., at 1, 30; III. Tu., Th., at 2, 30.* Asst. Professor WENDELL, and Messrs. ABBOTT and ———.

Course B is prescribed for Sophomores who, having passed in Course A, take neither Course 31 nor Course 22. It is open to those students only who have passed in Course A.

Chf. English Composition.—Forensics.—A brief based on a masterpiece of argumentative composition. Three forensics, preceded by briefs. Lectures, class-work, and conferences. *Half-course.* I. *Tu., Th., at 10; II. Tu., Th., at 12; III. Tu., Th., at 1, 30; IV. Tu., Th., at 3, 30, and other hours to be appointed by the instructors.* Asst. Professor BAKER, and Messrs. T. HALL, PRESCOTT, and ———.

Course C is prescribed for Juniors who have passed in Course B, Course 31, or Course 22, and who do not take Course 30. It is open to those students only who have passed in Course B, Course 31, or Course 22.

BChf. English Composition.—Written exercises and conferences. *Half-course.* *Wed., at 1, 30.* Messrs. HURLBUT, T. HALL, and J. G. HART. (XIII.)

This course, which corresponds in part to Course B and in part to Course C, is prescribed for students in the Lawrence Scientific School. It is open to those only who have passed in Course A.

Course B C cannot be counted towards the degree of A.B., except with the permission of the Deans of the College and the Scientific School.

31. English Composition. *Tu., Th., at 2, 30, and conferences at hours to be announced.* Messrs. GARDINER and DUFFIELD. (XI.)

Course 31 is open to those who, having passed in Course A, prefer an elective course to Course B. It is counted as the equivalent of Course B and a half-course of elective study.

Students who signify their intention at the beginning of the year may take Course 31 for the first half-year as the equivalent of Course B.

22. English Composition. *Tu., Th., at 1, 30, and conferences at hours to be announced.* Messrs. GATES, ABBOTT, and ———. (XIV.)

Course 22 is similar to Course 31, except that it is open to those only who have attained Grade C in Course A. It is counted as the equivalent of Course B and a half-course of elective study.

28*bhf.* English Literature.—History and Development of English Literature in outline. *Half-course.* *Tu., Th., at 10 (first half-year); Tu., (and at the pleasure of the instructor) Th., at 10 (second half-year).* Professors CHILD, A. S. HILL, BRIGGS, KITTREDGE, Asst. Professor WENDELL, and Messrs. J. G. HART and LA ROSE. (VIII.)

This course is for Freshmen and first-year Special Students only. It is open to those only who have passed the admission examination in English.

*30. Forensics and Debating. *Mon., Wed., Fri., at 3, 30.* Asst. Professor BAKER and Mr. HAYES. (VI.)

Course 30 is counted as the equivalent of Course C and a half-course of elective study.

*6*bhf.* Oral Discussion of Topics in History and Economics. *Half-course.* *Th., 3, 30–5, 30.* Professor TAUSSIG, Asst. Professors HART, E. CUMMINGS, and BAKER, and Mr. HAYES. (XII.)

Course 6 is open to Seniors only.

*10*bhf.* Elocution. *Half-course.* I. *Mon., Fri., at 10; II. Mon., Fri., at 12.* Mr. HAYES.

Course 10 is open to those only who are approved by the instructor as having already attained some proficiency in Elocution.

3*bhf.* Anglo-Saxon.—Bright, *Anglo-Saxon Reader.* *Half-course.* *Mon., Wed., Fri., at 1, 30 (first half-year).* Dr. GARRETT. (XIII.)

Course 31 requires no previous knowledge of Anglo-Saxon.

For Graduates and Undergraduates.

1. English Literature.—Chaucer. *Mon., Wed., Fri., at 9.* Professor KITTREDGE and Dr. GARRETT. (I.)

A starred () course cannot be taken without the previous consent of the instructor.

2. English Literature.—Shakspeare (six plays). *Mon., Wed., Fri., at 10.* Professors CHILD and KITTREDGE. (II.)

Course 2 may be taken in two successive years.

11¹*bf.* English Literature.—Bacon. *Half-course. Mon., Wed., Fri., at 10 (first half-year).* Dr. GARRETT. (II.)

11²*bf.* English Literature.—Milton. *Half-course. Mon., Wed., Fri., at 10 (second half-year).* Dr. GARRETT. (II.)

32¹*bf.* English Literature of the Elizabethan Period. From Tottrell's Miscellany to the Death of Spenser (1557-1599). *Half-course. Tu., Th., at 12 (first half-year).* Mr. GARDINER and an assistant. (X.)

32²*bf.* English Literature.—From the Death of Spenser to the Closing of the Theatres (1599-1642). *Half-course. Tu., Th., at 12 (second half-year).* Asst. Professor BAKER and an assistant. (X.)

[15³*bf.* English Literature.—From the Closing of the Theatres to the Death of Dryden (1642-1700). *Half-course.*] Omitted in 1896-97; to be given in 1897-98.

7¹*bf.* English Literature of the Period of Queen Anne. From the Death of Dryden to the Death of Pope (1700-1744). *Half-course. Mon., Fri., at 2.30 (first half-year).* Mr. HURLBUT and an assistant. (V.)

7²*bf.* English Literature.—From the Death of Pope to the publication of the Lyrical Ballads (1744-1798). *Half-course. Mon., Fri., at 2.30 (second half-year).* Mr. COPELAND and an assistant. (V.)

[8¹*bf.* English Literature.—From the publication of the Lyrical Ballads to the Death of Scott (1798-1832). *Half-course. Tu., Th., at 11 (first half-year).* Professor A. S. HULL and an assistant.] (IX.) Omitted in 1896-97; to be given in 1897-98.

[8²*bf.* English Literature.—From the Death of Scott to the Death of Tennyson (1832-1892). *Half-course. Tu., Th., at 11 (second half-year).* Mr. GATES and an assistant.] (IX.) Omitted in 1896-97; to be given in 1897-98.

12. English Composition. *Tu., Th., at 2.30.* Asst. Professor WENDELL and Mr. CORBIN. (XI.)

Course 12 is open to those only who have attained Grade C in Course B or in Course 22 or in Course 31 or in Course BC. With the

consent of the instructors, it may be taken as a half-course for the first half-year.

[*18*bf.* Argumentative Composition.—Eight forensics preceded by briefs.—Lectures and conferences. *Half-course. Fri., at 9.* Asst. Professor BAKER.] (I.)

Omitted in 1896-97; to be given in 1897-98.

Course 18 is open to those only who have passed with credit in Course C.

Primarily for Graduates.

19²*bf.* Historical English Grammar. *Half-course. Three times a week (second half-year).* Professor KITTREDGE.

16*bf.* History and Principles of English Versification. *Half-course. Fri., at 11.* Mr. GATES. (III.)

3²*bf.* Anglo-Saxon.—Béowulf.—*Half-course. Mon., Wed., Fri., at 11 (second half-year).* Professor KITTREDGE. (III.)

[25²*bf.* Anglo-Saxon.—Caedmon.—Cynnewulf. *Half-course. Three times a week (second half-year).* Professor KITTREDGE.] Omitted in 1896-97; to be given in 1897-98.

4. Early English.—English Literature from 1200 to 1450.—Mätzner, *Altenglische Sprachproben. Mon., Wed., Fri., at 11.* Professor CHILD and Dr. GARRETT. (III.)

Course 4 is open to those only who are acquainted with Anglo-Saxon.

21²*bf.* Early English.—The Metrical Romances.—Lectures and theses. *Half-course. Tu., 12-1, Th., 11-1, (second half-year).* Professor KITTREDGE. (X.)

Course 21 is open to those only who are acquainted with Early English and Old French.

[26²*bf.* Langland and Gower. *Half-course. Three times a week (second half-year).* Dr. GARRETT.] Omitted in 1896-97; to be given in 1897-98.

17¹*bf.* English Literature of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries in relation to Italian and Spanish Literature of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries. *Half-course. Tu., Th., Sat., at 10 (first half-year).* Mr. FLETCHER. (VIII.)

* 27¹bf. The English and Scottish Popular Ballads. *Half-course. Tu., Tb., Sat., at 10 (first half-year).* Professor CHILD. (VIII.)

This course is for Graduates only.

13bf. Literary Criticism in England since the Sixteenth Century. *Half-course. Mon., at 3.30.* Mr. GATES. (VI.)

14bf. English Literature.—The Drama from the Miracle Plays to the Closing of the Theatres. *Half-course. Wed., at 11.* Asst. Professor WENDELL. (III.)

Course 14 is open to those only who take or have taken Course 2.

9²bf. English Literature.—Spenser. *Half-course. Tu., Tb., Sat., at 10 (second half-year).* Mr. FLETCHER. (VIII.)

23bf. English Literature.—The works of Shakspeare. *Half-course. Wed., at 2.30.* Asst. Professor BAKER. (V.)

Course 23 is open to those only who have taken English 2.

29bf. The English Novel from Richardson to George Eliot. *Half-course. Wed., at 10.* Professor A. S. HILL. (II.)

24¹bf. The Poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. *Half-course. Tu., Tb., at 11 (first half-year).* Professor A. S. HILL. (IX.)

* 5. English Composition (advanced course). *Mon., Wed., Fri., at 12.* Professor A. S. HILL. (IV.)

With the consent of the instructor, Course 5 may be taken in two successive years.

With the consent of the instructor, Course 5 may be taken as a half-course during the first half-year.

Courses of Research.

20. During the year 1896–97 the instructors in English will hold themselves ready to assist and advise competent graduates who may propose plans of special study which shall meet the approval of the Department.

20a. English Literature in its relation to German Literature, from 1790 to 1830. *Wed., at 4.30.* Mr. GATES.

[20b. English Literature in its relation to Italian Literature in the Sixteenth Century. Mr. FLETCHER.]

Omitted in 1896–97; to be given in 1897–98.

Adams Sherman Hill

“An Answer to the Cry for More English” (1879)

20. Hill (1833–1910) graduated from Harvard with Charles W. Eliot, went to law school, then worked on newspapers in New York. Eliot hired Hill in 1872 and made him Boylston Professor of Rhetoric in 1876. Hill was the author of an important textbook, *The Principles of Rhetoric and Their Application* (1878; 2nd ed., 1895; see chap. 5, p. 320). During his years at Harvard, Hill taught literary criticism, modern literature, and a variety of composition courses.

Hill won a measure of fame not as a scholar but as a language critic, a proponent of good usage who could reach large numbers of educated people, much as his friend Charles W. Eliot did on educational matters. Hill's popular Chautauqua lectures, published as *Our English* (1889), aligned him with those who examined usage from a critical rather than a scholarly stance. Hill's student and colleague Barrett Wendell also derived a writing book, *English Composition, from a lecture series; so did Hill's student Arlo Bates, whose two popular volumes Talks on Writing English appeared in 1896 and 1901. Hill retired in 1904.* (Kitzhaber 60–63, has a brief biography.)

Addressing himself to secondary school teachers, Hill describes Harvard's experience with its new entrance examinations and complains of the low quality of writing among applicants. This strain of complaint was to increase over the next twenty years. In 1896 Harvard reprinted Hill's article along with similar complaints in *Twenty Years of School and College English. The Harvard teachers found little good about the preparatory school training in writing. Their definition of composition is quite narrow; if preparatory schools were to follow their advice, they would produce students who would write safe, dull essays without mistakes.*

WE CAN ALL REMEMBER A TIME WHEN OUR SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES gave even less instruction in the art of writing and speaking the English language correctly than is given at present, and that too without much complaint from any quarter. Children who learned their ABC's under the old system could call the letters in a word by name, but were often unable to pronounce the same word, or to understand its meaning. Boys and girls who were well on in their teens could talk glibly about “parts of speech,” “analyze” sentences, and “parse” difficult lines in Young's

"Night Thoughts" or Pope's "Essay On Man," but could not explain the sentences they took to pieces, or write grammatical sentences of their own. Those of us who have been doomed to read manuscript written in an examination room—whether at a grammar school, a high school, or a college—have found the work of even good scholars disfigured by bad spelling, confusing punctuation, ungrammatical, obscure, ambiguous, or inelegant expressions. Every one who has had much to do with the graduating classes of our best colleges, has known men who could not write a letter describing their own Commencement without making blunders which would disgrace a boy twelve years old.

Common as such shames were, they went on, not indeed without protest, but without criticism loud enough to disturb those through whom reform, if reform was to be, must come. The overburdened and underpaid teacher had every inducement to cling to the prescribed routine; the superintendent of schools was too busy to listen, too busy with the machinery of "the marking system," with his pet theory of education, with the problem how to crowd a new study into "the curriculum," or how to secure his own re-election; the professor, absorbed in a speciality, contented himself with requiring at recitations and examinations knowledge of the subject-matter, however ill-digested and ill-expressed; journals of the better class affirmed that, though such a book was not written well, it was written well enough for its purpose, and sneered at those who took pains to correct gross errors in others, or to avoid them themselves; and even some acknowledged masters of English held, with Dogberry, that "to write and read comes by nature."

Within a short time, people have partially opened their eyes to the defects of a system which crams without training, which spends its strength on the petty or the useless, and neglects that without which knowledge is but sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. Voices have been raised which command attention. At least one school-committee and one board of supervisors have moved in the right direction. At least one college has increased its force of instructors and its number of courses in English, and has done what it could to stimulate the schools; and one president of a university [Eliot—ED.] has gone so far as to say, in an oft-quoted sentence: "I may as well abruptly avow, as the result of my reading and observation in the matter of education, that I recognize but one mental acquisition as an essential part of the education of a lady or a gentleman,—namely, an accurate and refined use of the mother tongue."

We should, however, not blind ourselves to the fact that the reform has only begun. What a recent article in "The Saturday Review" says of England is at least equally true of America: "A large proportion of our fellow-creatures labour under the hallucination that they could write as well as Macaulay, Thackeray, or Dickens, if they chose to take the trouble." They are like the man who told Charles Lamb that he "could write like Shakspeare if he only had a mind to." "All he wants, you see," said Lamb, "is the mind."

The scepticism on this point which used to pervade the high places of education still lingers on the low ground, and must be dispelled before a healthy state of feeling can exist. So long as people think literary skill easy of acquisition, they will be unwilling to have their children spend time in acquiring "an accurate and refined use of the mother tongue." If the movement in favor of those things which make for good English is to be of much practical utility, it must spread widely and penetrate deeply; every school-committee must insist that, whatever else is done or is left undone, a serious effort shall be made to teach boys and girls to use their native tongue correctly and intelligently; all our colleges must put English upon a par, at least, with Latin and Greek, and must provide their students with ample opportunities for practice in writing and speaking the language they will have to use all their lives. If the schools and the colleges do this work thoroughly, a short time will suffice to bring parents to a sense of the paramount importance to every one of knowing how to read and write, and to show them how much labor that knowledge costs.

The better to understand what has yet to be done in order to secure the desired end, let us first see what is now done in the schools, as tested by the examination in English which all applicants for admission to Harvard must pass, and what is now done at Harvard.

In 1874, for the first time, every applicant for admission to Harvard was required to present English composition. The requirement was as follows:

English Composition. Each candidate will be required to write a short English composition, correct in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and expression, the subject to be taken from such standard authors as shall be announced from time to time. The subject for 1874 will be taken from one of the following works: Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Julius Caesar, and Merchant of Venice; Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*; Scott's *Ivanhoe* and *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

It was hoped that this requirement would effect several desirable objects,—that the student, by becoming familiar with a few works holding a high place in English literature, would acquire a taste for good reading, and would insensibly adopt better methods of thought and better forms of expression; that teachers would be led to seek subjects for composition in the books named, subjects far preferable to the vague generalities too often selected, and that they would pay closer attention to errors in elementary matters; that, in short, this recognition by the College of the importance of English would lead both teachers and pupils to give more time to the mother tongue, and to employ the time thus given to better advantage.

Naturally enough, these ends were not reached at once. Some of the schools did not, at first, take the requirement in a serious light; others failed to comprehend its scope; others still deemed it a high crime and misdemeanor to take an hour for English from Latin, Greek, or mathematics. In applying the requirement, moreover, the examiners gave it a liberal construction—as was proper while it was new—and the Faculty of the College, posted on the heights of the classics and mathematics, descended with difficulty to petty questions of spelling, punctuation, and grammar. This laxity of construction, coupled with the belief that a good writer had no advantage over a poor one in the studies of the Freshman year, and but a slight advantage in the subsequent years of the course, confirmed the schools in their disposition to slight the new requirement.

Within the last two years there has been a marked change for the better. More work is done in the schools; a greater proficiency is demanded from the candidate for admission; the Faculty frankly accept the requirement in English as standing upon a par with the other requirements; and many of the college instructors take account of a student's ability or inability to express his ideas with precision and clearness.

As yet, however, the amount of improvement in the schools is slight, as is shown by the results of the examination for admission to Harvard last June. For that examination the requirement was as follows:—

English Composition. Each candidate will be required to write a short English composition, correct in spelling, punctuation, grammar, division by paragraphs, and expression, upon a subject announced at the time of examination. In 1879, the subject will be drawn from one of the following works:—

Shakspeare's *Macbeth*, Richard II., and *Midsummer Night's Dream*; Scott's *Guy Mannering*; Byron's *Prisoner of Chillon*; Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*; Ma-caulay's *Essay on Addison*; the *Sir Roger de Coverley Essays* in the *Spectator*. Every candidate is expected to be familiar with *all* the books in this list.

The time allotted for the examination in this subject was an hour, and the paper set was as follows:—

ENGLISH COMPOSITION.

Write a short composition upon one of the subjects given below.

Before beginning to write, consider what you have to say on the subject selected, and arrange your thoughts in logical order.

Aim at quality rather than quantity of work.

Carefully revise your composition, correcting all errors in punctuation, spelling, grammar, division by paragraphs, and expression, and making each sentence as clear and forcible as possible. If time permits, make a clean copy of the revised work.

- I. The Character of Sir Richard Steele.
- II. The Duke of Marlborough as portrayed by Thackeray.
- III. The Style of "Henry Esmond."
- IV. Thackeray's account of the Pretender's visit to England.
- V. Duelling in the Age of Queen Anne.

The whole manner of persons who presented themselves for examination in this paper was 316—including those applying for immediate admission and those taking the first, or "preliminary," half of the examination, the rest to be taken in some subsequent year. Of this number 157, almost exactly one half, failed to pass, the percentage of failure being but slightly larger among the applicants for a "preliminary certificate" than among the candidates for admission.

The causes of failure were diverse. Some of the unsuccessful, an eighth or a tenth of them perhaps, avowed or displayed utter ignorance of the subject-matter: several, for example, confounded Steele with Sir Roger de Coverley, others the period of Queen Anne with that of Richard Cœur de Lion, others the style of "Henry Esmond," the novel, with the manners of Henry Esmond, the hero of the novel. Some—a smaller number, however, than in previous years—showed such utter ignorance of punctuation as to put commas at the end of complete sentences, or

between words that no rational being would separate from one another; and a few began sentences with small letters, or began every long word with a capital letter. Many, a larger number than usual, spelled as if starting a spelling reform, each for himself. Of these vagaries specimens are subjoined, including vain attempts to reproduce proper names that were printed on the examination paper itself:—*duells, jeloise, cheif, opposit, suprising, Collossus, compaired, repetedly, fourtb* (for forth), *to* (for too), *throun* (for throne), *ficle*, white-winged *angle, beaverage, broak, carrige, champaign* (for champagne), *insted, baled* (for hailed), *endevors, sucess, presant* and *presance, widly, wating, differance, superceeded, prepared, comand, conspiritors*, to *finnish, avaritious, undoubtibly, granfather, peice, fashionable bell, writen* and *writtings, maniger* (for manager), *untill, jovility* (for joviality), *fcitious, couard* and *couardise* (for coward), *exbisted, origen* and *origonal* (for origin and original), *kneedd* (for needed), *genious, marrid, mad* (for made), *wer* (for were), *cleaverly, differculty, existance, absent, lolier, repare, ennobling, agrived, of* (for off), *susceptable, proclaimed, loose* (for lose), *principle* (for principal), *lead* (for led), *Rip Van Rincle, Adison* and *Adderson, Queene Ann, Macauley, Thackery, Steel* (Sir Richard), *Henery, Harries* (for Harry's). Of these mistakes some are evidently much graver than others; but some of the worst were found in several books, and not a few are apparently due to an unconscious effort to represent to the eye a vicious pronunciation. Many books were deformed by grossly ungrammatical or profoundly obscure sentences, and some by absolute illiteracy.

To bring himself below the line between failure and success, a writer had to commit several serious faults; and even if he did commit such faults, he was allowed to pass if he offset them by tolerably good work in the rest of his book. Even apparent ignorance of the nature of a paragraph, or of the principle of sequence in thought or in language, did not of itself form an insurmountable obstacle to success. The books of many who managed to get above the line were, as regards all but the A B C of composition, discreditably to the teachers whose instruction they represented. If the examiner erred, it was in giving the candidate the benefit of too many doubts, in tempering justice with too much mercy. He meant to make the requirement more serious than in previous years, but he did not mean to demand as much as might reasonably be expected from boys between sixteen and twenty years of age.

The great majority of the compositions this year, as in previous years, were characterized by general defects, which, though not taken into

account by the examiner, point to grave imperfections in the method (or want of method) of the preparatory schools. The suggestions at the head of the paper were often disregarded in the letter, and almost always in the spirit. The candidate, instead of considering what he had to say and arranging his thoughts before beginning to write, either wrote without thinking about the matter at all, or thought to no purpose. Instead of aiming at good work, and to that end subjecting his composition to careful revision, he either did not undertake to revise it at all, or did not know how to correct his errors. Evidently, he had never been taught the value of previous thought or of subsequent criticism.

To the rule there were, of course, exceptions. A few boys showed the results of excellent training; but out of the whole number only fourteen received a mark high enough to entitle them to the distinction of passing "with credit."

On the whole, the examination makes a poor showing for the schools that furnish the material whereof the university which professes to set up the highest standard in America, has to make educated men. If she does not succeed in giving to all her graduates the one mental acquisition deemed by her president the essential part of education, the fault is not altogether or mainly hers. For her to teach bearded men the rudiments of their native tongue would be almost as absurd as to teach them the alphabet or the multiplication table. Those who call for "more English" in the colleges should cry aloud and spare not till more and better English is taught in the schools.

In the schools the reform should start. From the beginning to the end of the pre-collegiate course, the one thing that should never be lost sight of is the mother tongue, the language which the boy uses all the time as a boy, and will use as a man. Till he knows how to write a simple English sentence, he should not be allowed to open a Latin grammar. Till he can speak and write his own language with tolerable correctness, he should not be set down before the words of another language. Whatever knowledge he acquires, he should be able to put into clear and intelligible English. Every new word he adds to his vocabulary, he should know in the spelling and with the meaning accepted by the rest of the world. Every stop he inserts in a sentence should serve a definite purpose.

The work begun in the primary school should be carried on by the grammar school, the high school, the private tutor. No translation from a foreign language, whether oral or written, no examination book, no

recitation, should be deemed creditable unless made in good English. Gradually a boy should be led from the construction of a well-formed sentence to that of a well-formed paragraph, and from paragraph to essay. Gradually he should be led from the skillful use of materials for composition provided by others to the discovery and arrangement of materials for himself, from the practice of cloaking another's thoughts in his own language to the presentation of his own thoughts or fancies in appropriate language, —care being taken, of course, to provide, at each stage in his education, subjects suited to his powers and attractive to his tastes.

The teacher of English should be equally quick to detect faults and to recognize merits of every description, and should know how to stimulate his pupils' minds till they are as fresh and alert at the desk as on the playground. He should possess special qualifications, for his task is at once difficult and important. The best talent in each school—it is not too much to say—cannot be better employed than in teaching the use of the great instrument of communication between man and man, between books and men, the possession without which learning is mere pedantry, and thought an aimless amusement.

When schools of all grades are provided with instructors in English who are neither above nor below their business, it will be possible to make the requirement in this subject for admission to college decidedly higher than it is at present, and the work after admission correspondingly better. When the schools shall be ready to teach the laws of good use in language and the elementary principles of rhetoric, a great point will be gained.

The next best step would be to give to English two hours or more a week during the Freshman year. Could the study be taken up at the threshold of college life, the schools would be made to feel that their labors in this direction were going to tell upon a pupil's standing in college as well as upon his admission. Unfortunately, however, it has not been found possible to make room in the Freshman year for English, no one of the departments which now occupy the year being willing to give up any of its time, and each supporting the others in opposition to change.

While things remain as they are, the only way in which progress can be made is by a disposition on the part of those who instruct Freshmen in other studies to insist upon the use of good English whenever, in oral or written work, any English is used; and this to a certain extent is done,

some of those who are most unwilling to surrender a half hour of their own time to the instructor in English taking most pains to require good language from their pupils: but they have too many other things in hand to do this thoroughly, and there are obvious obstacles in the way of their achieving results that could easily be reached with younger boys in smaller classes.

At Harvard, then, a student receives no direct instruction in English till his Sophomore year. During that year two hours a week are given to the study of rhetoric. A text-book is used which aims at familiarizing the pupil with the principles that underlie all good composition, as deduced from the best authors and illustrated by examples or warnings from recent works; exercises are written and criticised; and writers noted for clearness, like Macaulay, or for strength of statement and logical coherence, like Burke or Webster, are studied to the extent that time permits. Every Sophomore, moreover, writes six themes on assigned subjects, which are corrected and criticised by the instructor, and are rewritten by the student to the end that he may seize the spirit as well as the letter of the suggestions he has received. The books studied ought to tell on the themes, and they do so tell with faithful students who assimilate what they learn.

Juniors are required to write six themes and four forensics. The themes are in the hands of three instructors. One has the A division, which is composed of the best writers in the class, and is small enough to enable the teacher to read each theme either with its author or aloud to a section of the division, and thus to make the criticism more searching and the revision more thorough than is possible under any system of notes on the margin. The B and C divisions, comprising the rest of the class, are so large that their themes for the most part have to be treated like those of the Sophomores.

The forensics, which, in theory at least, are exercises in argumentative composition, are read and weighed, but not criticised. For them candidates for Honors are allowed to substitute theses in their several departments, that is, writings which call for learning rather than for argumentative power.

Seniors have to write four forensics, which are criticised from a rhetorical as well as from a logical point of view. For them, as for the Junior forensics, theses may in certain cases be substituted; and for two of them a Commencement Part is accepted as an equivalent.

Commencement Parts themselves (with the exception of one or two written in Latin) may be regarded as exercises in English composition. Early in November, the professor of rhetoric meets those whose rank at the end of the Junior year renders it probable that they will receive degrees "with distinction" at the end of the course. He tries to impress them with the importance of the academic festival in which they are to take part, and with their duty to do their best, both for their own credit and for that of the University. Each is left to choose his own topic, subject to the approval of a committee of professors representing all departments of the University, and to treat the topic chosen in the way that best suits his powers. The Parts must be written by the first of May. The best of them are read by their authors to the committee, who select from the whole number the five or six best adapted to the occasion,—subject, treatment, and delivery, being all taken into account. Every year the honor of speaking is more highly prized; every year the competitors show better work and more thorough comprehension of the essentials of a successful essay; every year the committee find more difficulty in deciding which among several productions to select—a difficulty which is likely to increase now that, in consequence of certain changes in the regulations concerning degrees, the number of competitors is more than doubled, over fifty being entitled to write this year, as against twenty-three or twenty-four last year. The testimony of those who are in the habit of attending Harvard Commencements (that of Rev. Dr. Bellows, for instance, as expressed in his enthusiastic speech last June) supports the opinion that there is, from year to year, a gradual improvement, sufficient to indicate that the labors of those who have helped the cause of good English have not been thrown away, that the ambition of the young men has not been appealed to in vain, and that the newly-awakened interest of the community in its own language has penetrated the academic shades.

In addition to the prescribed work in English, an advanced elective course was established two years ago. To this course none but Seniors or Juniors who have proved their ability as writers are admitted. Every member of the class is required to write a composition once a fortnight, sometimes on a subject of his own, sometimes on an assigned subject or on one of several assigned subjects. Occasionally the instructor calls for a written criticism of an author whose works he deems worthy of study, or for a critical estimate of the relative merits of two authors of the same

general character. Three hours a week are spent in criticism of the themes in the presence of the class, criticism in which all take part and which now and then leads to animated discussion. Often the best themes present the most matter for comment; and some of the best as well as some of the worst writers make great improvement in recasting their essays after they have been criticised. Two examinations occur in the course of the year, at which the class write upon subjects announced at the time, subjects drawn from books that have been read in preparation, or from current questions or familiar topics.

Last year, a course in "Oral Discussion" was established. In order to give ample time for preparation, the class meets only once a fortnight; in order to give ample time for debate, each session lasts for three consecutive hours. A question—political, historical, or literary—which presents a fair field for argument, and demands both reading and thought, is announced a fortnight before the time fixed for its discussion; two members of the class are appointed to open the argument on each side, and one to close it, each of the opening speakers to have ten minutes and each of the closing ones fifteen minutes. Between the opening and the closing speeches nearly an hour is given to volunteers on either side, each being allowed five minutes only. The remaining hour is spent in comment by the instructor on the debate to which he has been listening, comment which extends to points of manner as well as of matter, to the way of putting things as much as to the things put, the general aim being to teach the young men how to make everything serve the main object—the object of convincing or persuading a hearer. Awkward attitudes, ungrammatical or obscure sentences, provincial or vulgar locutions, fanciful analogies, far-fetched illustrations, ingenious sophisms, pettifoggery and subtleties, ineffective arrangement—all come in for animadversion; and corresponding merits for praise. The debate is judged as an exercise in spoken English as well as in reasoning; and observation shows that, as might have been anticipated, a strong writer is usually a strong speaker also.

These two are the only elective courses which make the writing or the speaking of good English their principal aim; and since the efficiency of each requires that the class should be limited in number and that preference should be given to the most competent writers or speakers, it is not unlikely that some who become conscious, at the end of their Junior year, of deficiencies in their powers of expression, are unable to avail

themselves of these opportunities to supply their deficiencies, and that many more do not open their eyes to their needs till after they have left college. If, however, the demand for elective work in English should greatly exceed the supply, the College will doubtless provide new courses sufficient to meet the demand. In establishing a course in composition in 1877, and one in oral discussion in 1878, the Faculty anticipated, rather than gratified, the wishes of the students; but both courses, as the event has proved, supply real wants.

Though the courses described are the only ones which aim, first and foremost, at good English, there are others which exercise a marked influence in the same direction. Prominent among these are the courses conducted by Professor Child, one of the most accomplished living English scholars,—those in philology making the student familiar with the sources of the existing language, and those in Shakspeare, Bacon, Chaucer, Milton, and Dryden, bringing him into close contact with the greatest of our writers. There is also a course in the English literature of the last and the present century; there are readings and lectures in English, and literary courses in other languages, none of which can fail, in one way or another, in a greater or a less degree, to cultivate a faithful student's powers of expression. A similar influence may be traced to the courses in the fine arts, in mental and moral philosophy, in history, in political economy, and even to some of the scientific courses. Every instructor who himself speaks and writes good English, and who demands good English from his pupils, is of great service; and the number of those who keep this object in view is steadily increasing.

On the whole, it seems fair to conclude that Harvard College, if not doing as much for the English of her students as can reasonably be expected while the schools do so little, is yet doing more and more every year, and that the most serious shortcomings in this respect on the part of her recent graduates cannot justly be laid at her door. English composition is the only study that every student *must* pursue after the Freshman year, every other subject being now optional; in the elective courses in writing and speaking English, the best men have ample opportunities for practice; in other courses, the best influences are indirectly at work to cultivate the students' powers of expression; instruction in elocution is given to all who desire it; Commencement Parts and Bowdoin Prizes (for dissertations on stated subjects) offer rewards for excellence in writing; Lee and Boylston Prizes for excellence in reading aloud and in speaking;

and there is now no doubt that in all the governing bodies of the University the current of opinion sets strongly in favor of good English.

NOTE

"Requisition" in the article as originally published, that being the word then used in the University Catalogue. "Requirement" is the proper word.

Le Baron Russell Briggs

"The Harvard Admission Examination in English"
The Academy (1888)

☛ Briggs (1855-1934) was a student of Adams Sherman Hill's and would succeed him as Boylston Professor of Rhetoric. As instructor in English, Briggs grew up teaching in the Harvard system and never knew anything else, since he spent his whole career there. When Briggs became dean of Harvard College in 1891 it marked the entrenchment of the composition system, despite the growing emphasis on literature in the English department. Briggs also served as president of Radcliffe College, 1903-23.

This article, which first appeared in *The Academy*, a journal for secondary school teachers and administrators, was reprinted in *Twenty Years of School and College English*.

THE HARVARD ADMISSION EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH IS WIDELY discussed and little understood. It is worth while, therefore, to show what this examination is and what sort of work the candidates do in it.

Every candidate is expected to write off-hand a respectable little theme, and to correct specimens of bad English. Subjects for composition are drawn from a few English classics, which the association of New England colleges prescribes; specimens of bad English are taken from the examination books of earlier years, from students' themes, from newspapers, and from contemporary literature.

A scheme of examination must meet two tests: it must be rational on paper, and must be rationally administered. Whether the English examination at Harvard meets the first of these tests is still an open question. Substitutes for it and modifications of it are suggested on every hand. One teacher would try the candidate's knowledge of English by all his examination books, considered, whatever their subjects, as English Composition. This is an alluring plan, ideal in its excellence, and, alas, ideal