

## IMITATION.

**Definition.** — To imitate, as a literary exercise, is to model one's own composition upon that of another.

**Kinds of Imitation.** — There are two kinds of imitation. In one the *thoughts* as well as the *style* are reproduced; in the other the *style alone* is followed.

**Reproduction.** — The first kind is properly called reproduction and may be practised in three ways: (1) a passage is read from an author, and the student is asked to rewrite it from memory, as like the original as possible; (2) the incidents of a narrative poem or the details of a descriptive poem are required to be set forth in prose; (3) a sentence, paragraph, or essay is analyzed, and the student endeavors to reproduce the passage from the analysis he has made, comparing afterwards his version with the original and noting the differences. The first and third of these ways of reproduction may be used to advantage in the many passages cited in the exercises that follow.

**Imitation properly so called.** — The second kind of imitation consists in adopting the style of an author with a change of subject.

**Close Imitation.** — The imitation is said to be close when the very words and expressions of the author are applied to another subject. Irving speaks thus of a mother's love: —

Oh, there is an enduring tenderness in the love of a mother to a son that transcends all other affections of the heart! It is neither to be chilled by selfishness, nor daunted by danger, nor weakened by worthlessness, nor stifled by ingratitude. She will sacrifice every comfort to his convenience, she will surrender every pleasure to his enjoyment, she will glory in his fame and exult in his prosperity: and if misfortune overtake him, he will be the dearer to her from misfortune; and if disgrace settle upon his name, she will still love and cherish him in spite of his disgrace; and if all the world beside cast him off, she will be all the world to him. — *The Widow and Her Son.*

By applying these words to the love of a patriot for his country and making the necessary changes, we get the following close imitation:—

Oh, there is an enduring ardor in the love of a true patriot for his country that transcends all other affections of the heart! It is neither to be chilled by selfishness, nor daunted by dangers, nor weakened by adversity, nor stifled by ingratitude. He will sacrifice every good for that country's welfare, he will surrender every pleasure for its advancement, he will glory in its fame and exult in its prosperity: and if misfortune overtake it, it will be dearer to him from misfortune; and if defeat threaten its existence as a nation, he will still love and cherish it in spite of its defeat; and if all the world turn against it, he will face all the world for it.

The same passage could be adapted to the description of a martyr's constancy to his cause or of an enthusiast's ardor in his favorite pursuit.

**Free Imitation.** — The imitation is free when the words and expressions are changed wholly or in great part, while the method of handling the subject and developing the thought remains the same. Irving gives us the following description of a poor widow's sorrow over an only son:—

When I saw the mother slowly and painfully quitting the grave, leaving behind her the remains of all that was dear to her on earth, and returning to silence and destitution, my heart ached for her. What, thought I, are the distresses of the rich! They have friends to soothe — pleasures to beguile — a world to divert and dissipate their griefs. What are the sorrows of the young! Their growing minds soon close above the wound — their elastic spirits soon rise beneath the pressure — their green and ductile affections soon twine round new objects. But the sorrows of the poor, who have no outward appliances to soothe — the sorrows of the aged, with whom life at best is but a wintry day, and who can look for no after-growth of joy — the sorrows of a widow, aged, solitary, destitute, mourning over an only son, the last solace of her years; these are indeed sorrows which make us feel the impotency of consolation.

— *The Widow and Her Son.*

A free imitation of this paragraph, on the subject, "The Joys of Youth," will run as follows:—

When I see a lad rushing joyously from his home, playing with his comrades, and returning to his mother tired but contented after his sport, my heart is filled with envy of his happy lot. What, think I, are the pleasures of the rich! They have cares to disturb — ill-health to lessen — an anxious, perhaps remorseful conscience to diminish and dispel their happiness. What are the enjoyments of the wicked! Their ill-gotten gains are soon spent — their wild excesses soon come to an end — their weakened and wasted bodies soon succumb to the ravages of disease. But the joys of the young who have no troubles to worry them — the joys of the innocent, with whom life is one long summer day, and who have no bitter remorse to expect — the joys of a lad, free from care, glowing with health, inspired with hope; these are indeed joys which make us feel envious of their fortunate possessors.

In the exercises that follow, the second kind of imitation has been put in practice, and the aim has been to imitate freely rather

than closely. It has been deemed more profitable, also, to insist rather upon following out the same development of thought, than to strive after those higher graces of style in the original, which, because they are more delicate and elusive, are for that reason more difficult to reproduce.