

called a theme. Consequently, we hear of themes as early as the second form; but these are not, of course, the formal theme, which came only in upper grammar school after considerable preparation. For the boys must first be taught to invent material. This means that they must know where the storehouses of materials are and must know how to sort them out for their purposes by the rules of *inventio*. Thus theoretically they would need *inventio* or the topics before beginning Aphthonius, but the editors of Aphthonius have almost obviated this. For polished writing, the boys would also need *elocutio*, or the figures of speech, but it would have been possible for them to learn structure from Aphthonius before they took up the final systematic study of figures in such a work as that of Susenbrotus, since from the beginning they had been learning the figures as they read. Apparently, however, the boys of Shakspeare's day were required to have *Ad Herennium*, *Topica*, Susenbrotus, usually *Copia*, and some work on epistles, usually *De Conscribendis Epistolis* by Erasmus, before they came to Aphthonius. If they had proceeded, as was usual, through epistles, with Erasmus, *De Conscribendis* as guide, this precedent background would necessarily have been mastered before they began that work. It will be remembered that Erasmus provided for considerable preliminary drill on certain fundamental types of theme, which he thought would be more profitable than some of those in the unexpanded Aphthonius. It would seem to one who has never tried actually to teach the system that it would have been easier to begin with the themes as laid down in the expanded Aphthonius and then take epistles. But the Elizabethan schoolmasters did not see it that way. The epistle was the next most familiar form after colloquial speech. It ought, therefore, to be the first literary form taught. The themes of Aphthonius were preliminary to the full-fledged oration, on the authority of Quintilian. Therefore they could not be torn from that highest type of literature. So the schoolmasters kept the epistle in position, and used various devices finally to simplify the teaching of it.

Naturally, also, the theorists exercised themselves in devising the proper preparatory steps to and through the formal theme. Because the later authors happen to be more definitely systematic, it will be well here to begin with Hoole, and work back through Brinsley to Erasmus. For the fifth form out of six Hoole says,

Now forasmuch as this form is to be employed weekly in making Theams and Verses, which they can never well do, except they be furnished with