

Why Students Get Grey

K. M. '44

The difficulties of essay-writing are many and various, as I have found out from my own experience.

The first and greatest difficulty is choice of subject. "What am I going to write on"? That is the question that bothers a student who has received an essay assignment. If, as is seldom the case, the student receives sudden inspiration, his problem is solved; and the student who finds himself in such happy circumstances should consider himself lucky.

The topic must be one about which the writer knows something; and for the ordinary student this narrows the field down very considerably. Also, the topic must be one which can be finally discussed in about four or five pages, depending on the amount of time the writer has at his disposal. If all the student knows about his topic can be written on one page, he will be forced to "string a line", in order to have the essay a respectable length. If, on the other hand, he tries to discuss in three or four pages a topic that should be dealt with in ten pages, his essay will be but a list of facts or it will incompletely cover the subject.

Nearly everyone would prefer that the English teacher choose the topic rather than have the choice left to himself. In the first case the student has no choice; so he does his best and lets it go at that. In the latter case he starts an essay, writes a page or two, becomes disgusted with it, and starts in anew; thus he may try four or five topics, and so waste a great deal of time before he makes his final choice.

Having finally chosen his topic, the student has indeed overcome the greatest obstacle, but others lie ahead. If he is just writing his views on some aspect of life, he will not have to do any reading to increase his knowledge of his subject, but if he is writing on something that calls for some historical or technical knowledge he will have to do some research work. In the latter case, if he does not bother to find out whether or not his statements are facts, he is sure to find out later that some of them were false. I know this from personal experience, as I have made statements in my essays that I later found to be absurd.

The student is very often afraid to express his own opinions freely lest he be considered a pessimist, an optimist,

a heretic, a fanatic, a radical, or a revolutionist. So he is always confronted with the problem of what to write, and what not to write.

These difficulties, when coupled with the mysteries of punctuation and phraseology, account for the look of despair on the face of a Freshman who is sentenced to pass in an essay two weeks from today.



Yes, He is ris'n who is the First and Last;
Who was and is; who liveth and was dead;
Beyond the reach of death He now has pass'd,
Of the one glorious Church the glorious Head.

—*Horatius Bonar, D. D.*

We are all sure of two things, at least; we shall suffer
and we shall all die.

—*Goldsmith*

The greatest difficulties lie where we are not looking
for them.

—*Goethe*