

A Foreword by Professor March

In London, 1852, appeared a volume entitled, "Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases, Classified and Arranged so as to Facilitate the Expression of Ideas and Assist in Literary Composition, by Peter Mark Roget, M. D., F. R. S." It was intended to supply a collection of the words and idiomatic combinations of the English language, "arranged, not in alphabetical order as they are in a dictionary, but according to the ideas which they express," so that any one who has an idea may here find the word or words by which it may be most fitly and aptly expressed. This book has been for half a century a familiar part of the machinery used by authors, preachers, lecturers and the like. The number of such persons has lately increased rapidly. Writing also fills a larger place in our schemes of education. The students of our universities have little time for Socratic dialogue; they hand in essays day by day, and close their careers with original theses as heavy as articles in the quarterlies. Mr. J. W. Buel, who has proved himself to be an accurate observer of the needs of the book-buying public, and who has long used Roget, has thought that its material may be prepared and supplemented for a wider sphere, and has accordingly set on foot the preparation of the present volume.

The first shortcoming in Roget is that there are no definitions of the words or explanations of the phrases. The book is really an index of words to be looked up in dictionaries and cyclopedias, unless one comes to it with his mind thoroughly stored with words and meanings. Besides the single words there are collected phrases, kennings, and longer familiar quotations in English and foreign languages. These are all helpful to the literary worker. There has been a great accumulation of them in the latest dictionaries, in the Century, the Standard, and in the Oxford Dictionary. The Standard has gone farthest in the collection of groups of words, giving, for example, groups of names of apples, and coins, and structures, and animals. The Oxford prints the most numerous phrases, and adds quotations containing them which exhibit their biographies. The time seems ripe for a Thesaurus, bringing together groups of them, accompanied by concise definitions giving in each group the meaning of each word as used in the group.

Then there is difficulty with the machinery for finding any particular word or phrase. Early vocabularies often consist of groups arranged by their ideas. That of Ælfric, a