

But learning by rote the names and definitions which make up the so-called "grammars" will never enable the student to have a clear idea of the nature of that wonderful thing, an English sentence. Neither will the study of sentences in any other language serve the purpose, for no other language furnishes sentences like our own. It would be just as reasonable to try to learn the structure of the horse by studying that of the mule. I freely admit that one's insight into the nature of his own language may be improved by giving him another to compare it with; but the new language must be the complement of his own, not a substitute for it. The best of all ways to learn English is to study English, and this statement is as true and as significant from the scientific as it is from the practical standpoint.

Nor is the task of investigating the nature of the English sentence one of trifling magnitude or difficulty. As all the subtleties and idiosyncrasies of thought reproduce themselves with the utmost fidelity in the language which embodies it, the variety of sentences is practicably unlimited. The arrangement of this vast mass of apparently capricious expressions in an orderly way under formal categories is as difficult as the classification of plants and animals, or the reduction of matter under chemical laws. No subject lends itself more perfectly to inductive investigation than does the English sentence, and none affords either a better intellectual discipline, or a more useful practical training.

How words which of themselves make no statement can be so used as to make one; what different forms the sentence assumes at the will of its author; into what functional elements it resolves itself when it is analyzed; what the various duties are which words, phrases, and clauses perform in the making of assertions; and what the explanation is of each of those idiomatic expressions which peremptorily refuse to be classed under ordinary grammatical categories—these are some of the questions to which the scientific student of language on its grammatical side must find answers. Nor can he stop here, for he will soon find that the English sentence was not always in its nature what it now is, and the further back he goes in the history of the language the greater the unlikeness. In seeking an explanation of this phenomenon he enters the field of historical grammar, which is enor-