

days, a "couple" of dollars, etc. "Either," "neither," and "both" are often improperly used when reference is made to more than two objects. And here let us observe the superfine affectation that would introduce the pronunciations *ither* and *nither*. Good usage and euphony are both against them. There is nothing in their favour except novelty: that, however, with some persons is a strong recommendation. Dickens has perpetuated an egregious blunder in the expression, "Our Mutual Friend." Macaulay rightly calls this "a low vulgarism;" for mutual means reciprocal, or interchanged, and thus it is evident that friendship may be mutual, but friends never. But the height of absurdity is reached in the common expressions, "widow woman" and "widow lady." As well may we say "widower gentleman!" The phrase, "You are deceiving me," contains a contradiction. It cannot be deception that is practised on a person when he is conscious of it. The correct form is, "You are attempting to deceive me." This objection does not hold of course in the sentence, "You are deceiving him."

There is a snobbish vulgarism in the use of "drive" for "ride" in such sentences as, "The lady went for a *drive* in her coach." In these cases the coachman generally drives and the lady *rides*. Probably when she travels in a railway carriage or a steamboat she *drives* too! The common phrase, "I am mistaken," though it has been generally adopted, yet contains an absurdity. "To mistake" means to misapprehend, and if this expression means anything it means, "I am misapprehended," or, "I am misunderstood," which is something quite different to what we intend to convey by its use. Then there is the sentence, "I will do no more than I can help," that is, "I will do no more than that which I can help doing," that is, "I will do what I can help doing," which is absurd.

As it has been already remarked, the rules and definitions of grammar are not absolute but relative and conventional. They depend very much on the manner in which the usages of the language have been reflected in the mind of this or that gentleman, who, fancying himself a master of the whole subject of language, proceeds to manufacture a new grammar or reconstruct an old one. On this account it is to be hoped that it will not be considered treasonable against the Queen's English if we examine the principles advanced and the definitions given by those who profess to be expounders of the fundamental laws of our language. We do not presume to be expositors of language; we but raise a protest against the errors made by those who do. We advance only the facts of language; for the fancies of grammarians we care nothing. These errors spring principally from three sources. In the first place, most of our grammarians either are ignorant of, or neglect the fact that grammar deals primarily and essentially with *words*, that is, with the expression of ideas in speech or in writing, and not with the ideas themselves or with the actual objects, qualities and actions that give rise to ideas. Thus when we say, "John runs," we call in the aid of grammar to express in a manner accordant with good usage the ideas contained in the statement. Grammar assigns a technical name to the word "John," and to the word "runs," and treats of the connection these words have with each other in this sentence. Grammar has nothing whatever to do with the anatomy of the man named John, nor with the philosophy of the action of running. This fact, so plain that the very statement of it is a truism, has been frequently ignored by persons who are called grammarians. In conversation on this subject with a University graduate of good standing, the writer of