

The more perfect the language, the more perfect is the reasoning, and perfect language is ever dependent upon a clear and comprehensive knowledge of the life and origin and differences of words.

Another advantage of the study of words and their differences is the strengthening of the memory. Memory may be defined as that faculty of the mind by which it retains a knowledge of previous events and ideas. It should always be born in mind that it is a *mental*, not a physical power. Words should not be labelled and stowed away in archives of the mind as so much inert matter—a mere dead weight. There should be about each word the play of life, each should stand out in the beauty and significance of its own *aureole*. The precise meaning of each term is determined by a mental process, and when the word is employed, the process will be its luminous envelope. Examples may be taken as illustration: We may either *refute* or *confute* an argument. The difference between the two verbs can be seen only by deriving them. In each the physical image leading up to the mental notion is somewhat different. To *confute* is to cool down hot water by pouring cold water upon it, thus producing a tepid mixture; to *refute* is “to pour cold water upon hot cautiously, so as to prevent dissipation, but not boiling. The former means to *pour together*, the latter to *pour against*. To *confute* is, therefore, to neutralize an argument by opposing a reply, and to *refute* is to thwart continually without changing the character of the original statement.” Again: we are said to *forsake*, to *neglect*, to *desert*, to *abandon*. Let us get clearly into our minds the different ideas expressed by these verbs, according to origin. *Forsake* is either from *for* used in a privative sense and a Dutch verb collateral with the English verb, *seek*, or according to Skeat and others, from two words meaning originally to *contend against*. Taking the former derivation—which I prefer—*forsake* is primarily *not to seek*. To be *forsaken*, then, is to be sought no more. To *neglect* is from a privative and *legere*, to *pick*, to *cull*, to *choose*. These verbs closely approach each other in meaning, both involving *inattention*, but the one implies *contempt*, and the other only *indifference*. To *desert*—from *De* negative, and *serere*, to join, to link—was in the case of the Roman soldier, to leave his colors. There is in the word the idea of blame-worthiness and disgraceful separation. Pope says: “The mean deserter of thy brother’s blood.” To *abandon*—from the French at his own pleasure—involves the idea of giving up to *public blame*. Hence an *abandoned* character. In this