

me that they belong to the domain of logic; or, if to grammar, then to the grammar of style, or what is commonly called rhetoric. It seems to me that these writers, despondent at their having, seemingly, so little to teach in grammar, are in the habit of making poaching-raids upon the demesnes of logic and metaphysics, bringing away with them any field-stuff or worthless rubbish they may find lying about. If these distinctions had any influence on the formation of words, or on the form of subordinate sentences, it would be well to give them. But all kinds of sentences may be made and may be parsed without their aid; and why the feet of boys and girls should be clogged with festoons of this logical tangle it is difficult to see, except on the supposition above mentioned, that Teachers have very little to do, and that a few turns on the logic crank will strengthen their intellectual muscle. It appears to me that to put all the distinctions in this short Grammar of 132 pages into the head of a boy, and to drill him in them until they became his organs and intellectual tools, would require, on a moderate calculation, some five or six years of steady, hard work, at the rate of two to three hours a day. And the result, when gained, would be of no great value. What possible claim have these men, or any man, to say: "You shall not learn anything about the make or growth of the English language unless you indoctrinate yourself in several hundred of my fiddle-faddle distinctions; the English language and my book are one— and on no other plan has it been growing up for the last fourteen centuries."

The fact is, writers of Grammars for the young have gone astray for want of a distinct goal in view—they have been drawn hither and thither by the demands of the subject on the one hand, and by the needs of the pupil on the other—by a desire to present a logically-consistent theory of universal Grammar at one time, and by the necessity for explaining the individual laws and peculiarities of the English language at another. Perhaps the most deranging influence has been the influence of Latin. Dominated by the presence of Latin, our English Grammar, like the needle on board an iron ship, has guided everybody's steps in a wrong direction. This unhappy influence prevailed in literature down to the end of the seventeenth century, and even longer; it has prevailed in schools down to the present time. We have, for example, Dryden saying;—"How barbarously we yet write and speak, I am sufficiently sensible in my own English. For I am often put to a stand in considering whether what I write be the idiom of the tongue, or false Grammar and nonsense, couched beneath that specious name of Anglicism; and have no other way to clear my doubts but by translating my English into Latin." And in like manner, in schools we have all kinds of nonsense about adjectives *agreeing* with nouns—and, in general, every possible attempt made to compel the Grammar of English to conform to that of the Latin.

II. And what are we to say of the teaching of composition as evidenced by the books that are most generally used for teaching it?

It is difficult to conceive what purpose the writers of these books can have set before themselves in compiling them. Judging from the series of exercises they give, their purpose seems to have been to create penny-a-liners—to teach a style that no living breathing mortal ever used in speech or on paper, unless it were some fourth-rate Grub-street hack of the last century—to train their pupils to substitute long-winded phrases for knowledge and for ideas, and to write an English in which *Bottom* is translated beyond all possibility of recognition. I shall bring my proofs of these statements from three or four of the most widely-used and most modern books on the subject. All of them have been published within the last year or two. Here is one that calls itself a "*Practical Text-book of English Composition*," and which tells me that, if I value what it calls *purity of style*, I am not to use the phrases "*by dint of argument*," "*not a whit better*," or ever say that "*the tables were turned*."

Another, which has gone through eight editions, in a chapter on what it calls "*Propriety of Style*," tells me that, instead of

saying *heap up*, I must use the "elegant" term, *accumulate*; instead of *shut out*, *exclude*; instead of *broke his word*, the highly "elegant" phrase, *violated his promise*. The author of this book goes further, and says, "'I will have mercy and not sacrifice,' should be, 'I prefer mercy to sacrifice'!" [The italics are his own.] This gentleman, in his preface, says:—"Nor would it be difficult to point out numerous violations of grammar in the pages of Addison and Swift..... Yet these men had, in addition to their classical attainments, frequented the best company, and had attained, as far as the low state of grammatical knowledge would then allow, to correctness of expression." Shade of Scriblerus! where will this gentleman stop! What a pity it is that Addison, Swift, Locke, Barrow, and Tillotson, besides attending to correctness of expression, did not attend the "Collegiate and Commercial Academy," presided over with so much taste and elegance by the author of this remarkable work. Another "practical" manual for English Prose Composition gives, as a model for imitation, the following elegant English. "The polar bear is a tremendous and formidable beast. Its average length, when full grown, appears to vary from six feet to seven. There are instances on record of its attaining a much greater magnitude," and so on.

If, again, we consult these books to find out what kind of subjects they wish their readers to practise their powers of writing on, we do not discover any great change on the stupid moralities of the last generation. The first of the books I have mentioned above calmly meets the young writer—who is supposed to be between twelve and fourteen—with the questions, "Which do you prefer—a classical or commercial education? State your reasons." "What inferences are you entitled to draw from the extension of railways to all parts of the country?" "*Prove* a future state of rewards and punishments." The first request is an impossible one, the second is absurd and senseless; and the third is surely beyond the powers of most grown-up people. Our puristic friend offers for consideration and discussion such subjects as—"On the Importance of a Good Character;" "On Novels;" "On sympathy and Benevolence;" and "On Solitude." Or he puts such mildly broad, questions as—"Is Law or Physic more advantageous?" "Is Agriculture or Commerce preferable?" Now who among well-read and grown-up people have more than two or three notions to rub against each other on such subjects as *Sympathy, Solitude, Benevolence*? And, if we had, and cared to commit them to paper, who among us would think of wasting his time in reading them?

But there are three prime errors that haunt the teaching of composition. It is perhaps unfortunate that this word *composition* was ever applied to the writing of English. This term strikes the wrong key note for the pupil at first; it makes him imagine that he is to string stilted and imposing phrases together; that he is to make something "out of his own head," which, in general, contains nothing; and that he is to say that nothing in the most roundabout style he can possibly attain to. It is a pity that composition is not simply called *writing*—and that the term *handwriting* is not restricted to what sometimes figures under the queer term *calligraphy*. But this by the way. The three errors I mean, are:—

- (1) The use of the Analytic Method;
- (2) The practice of Amplification;
- (3) The custom of "Paraphrasing."

I. There is no doubt but that the practice of what is called *Analysis* is of immense benefit to those who are thoroughly drilled in it. The application of the categories of *noun, adjective, and adverb* to phrases and to subordinate sentences—for *Analysis* is this and nothing more—makes a boy quickly seize and understand the build of a sentence, however long, and enables him at once to detect any error, either in the grammar or in the construction of it. But the application of the Analytic method to the creation of sentences—to the writing of a story or of an English paper on some subject that the pupil can comprehend—is entirely reversing the order of nature. There is a rather clever book on