

As forming, however, to a large extent, the elements of English, it becomes, for this reason, impossible to understand, correctly, our native tongue without having first mastered both the Latin and Greek roots; and this being the case it naturally follows that the proper way to learn English is to commence its study, simultaneously with Latin and Greek, when children first enter their reading lessons. The practicability and advantages of this will be shown when we come to explain the method by which it can be done. In the mean time it behooves us to examine minutely and weigh well the considerations which make the study of the ancient tongues an imperative requirement.

The proper meanings of the simple words of a language, the processes of compounding and analyzing, and the rules for modifications of form and signification, valuable as they unquestionably are, constitute, by no means, the chief recommendations why they should be taught at an early age. Our estimate of the study of language would be low indeed if we measured it by no other criterion than its fitness to make men say precisely what they think and express their thoughts according to correct rules. But there is a more dignified object to be gained. A purpose more worthy of the labors of the teacher, more attractive to the aspiring genius of children and more befitting the intelligence of manhood. The teaching of any language, if rightly understood, is essentially a logical and mathematical process; and, therefore at the very threshold of education, at almost the first lesson administered to a child, should commence a logical manner of speech and habit and thought. The formation of habit when the body and mind are maturing and gathering strength is the main point to be sought in every system of education; but to be effectual it must be commenced early, and must be carried on through its successive stages so that at every step the learner sees a rule and has a conviction that there is a reason for it, not dependent either on ignorance or caprice. Truth is an important ingredient in the satisfying of the reason; and with children and young persons nothing can be more fatal than to enforce precepts which are false, and lay down rules which, in practice, are contradictory. As one example of the little attention paid to these matters, let us take the division of the letters of the alphabet into vowels and consonants. The grammar published by direction of the Commissioners of Education for Ireland, and authorized by the Council of Public Instruction in Canada to be used in the Common Schools professes to be an improvement on both Murray and Lennie. Its definitions of those two classes of letters are as follows: "A Vowel is a letter which makes a distinct sound by itself. A Consonant is a letter which cannot be distinctly sounded without a vowel." Now the difference here stated between a vowel and consonant is in the distinctness of the sound; but if we take the right signification of the word "distinct," according to the Latin *dis* (asunder),

and *tingo* (dye, stain, paint or mark) we perceive that each consonant is marked by a sound as separative from every other letter of the alphabet as each vowel is assumed to be. Again, the second definition makes the sound of a consonant more marked when in conjunction with a vowel than when sounded alone. This however is not the case, as we find by the combinations *ac*, *ch*, *ol*, *ai*, *ra*, wherein the sounds of the consonants preserve exactly the same marks, the same volume and the same power, without augmentation or diminution, which they possess when expressed separately. The distinction intended, by the Latins, between a vowel and a consonant seems, evidently, to have been a sound expressed alone, and a sound expressed in conjunction with another sound. A vowel, from the Latin *VOCALIS* (one sound), and *CON* (together), with *SONANS* (sounding), equivalent to *sounding together*, bears out this interpretation; so that the Latin definitions contained in the signification and structure of the words "vowel" and "consonant" should have been preserved so long as the words themselves continued to be used. Following now the course indicated by the Latin significations, we discover that the vowels may be sounded by themselves, but that the consonants never should. For example, in the primary book of lessons, the child should be taught to express *a*, *e*, *o*, separately; but the combinations *ab*, *el*, *oe*, should each be expressed without any division of the letters, and in such a way as to give to each combination only one sound: The rule being that a consonant is not to be sounded alone. The practice, however, has been the reverse of this; and it is a melancholy fact that, at the very entrance of children to the school room, the first lesson they receive is to say the letters of the alphabet in a way exceedingly erroneous. However this is only one specimen of the treatment received by the juvenile mind at an age when it is most susceptible of being impressed and when impressions take the firmest hold, for good or for evil in after life. But it stands not alone; for, so far as the definitions and nomenclature are concerned, similar errors are visible in almost every lesson of our most approved grammars, in addition to the arbitrary character of their rules; illustrations of which will be given in a separate chapter.

With such a method of early mental discipline it need create no surprise that, among our best writers, incongruities of style and diction prevail to an extent hardly credible. There is now lying before us the report of a speech delivered, on a recent occasion, in England, by an illustrious personage of acknowledged scholastic reputation, in which occurs, among other errors, the expression "scientific knowledge." It is an expression often met with and, lately, appeared no less than three times in a prospectus of a proposed college to be established in our neighboring city Hamilton. It is adduced here as an example, along with others which follow, of the consequence of the present mode of teaching, and the necessity which exists for the adoption of an analytical