

COMMON ERRORS OF SPEECH AND THEIR CORRECTION.*

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HAVING consented, though not without considerable reluctance, to prepare a paper for this meeting of our Association, I thought that probably I could not do better than direct your attention for a little to the above-named subject.

In making this choice of a topic, I was influenced partly, I confess, by the fact that I had ready at hand a large number of illustrative examples, gathered from a variety of sources; but partly also, if not mainly, by the conviction, which every term's experience serves only to strengthen, that the subject has not received—and, indeed, cannot receive, under our present high pressure system of cramming for examinations—the attention which it deserves; and that the practical results of the teaching of grammar and composition in our schools, as tested by the ability of pupils to express themselves readily, clearly and correctly, are far from satisfactory.

That errors of speech, both written and spoken, are discreditably common, not only among those who have received merely an ordinary public school education, but even among those who have attended our High Schools and Collegiate Institutes—I am almost tempted to add Colleges and professional schools—will scarcely be denied by any one who has given even a moderate amount of critical attention to the English that he daily hears and reads.

To take the case alone of our own

profession, how few there are of us whose special attention is supposed to have been called to this matter, and whose imperative duty it certainly ought to be to act as vigilant and resolute guardians of the purity of our mother tongue, that have not to confess to frequent unfaithfulness to our trust, or that can be depended on to speak for five minutes or to write a page of foolscap without doing violence to the Queen's English.

The producing causes of the impropriety of speech to be heard in everyday life, I believe, are the following: 1. The bad English which scholars are almost constantly hearing spoken around them as they grow up, and which unfortunately is but too common in many of our school-books and local newspapers. 2. The fact that due importance has never been attached by our educational authorities to the value of correct speaking, and that of late years, owing to the excessive and unwise prominence given to mathematical subjects, under our system of inspection and examination tests, it has been and is impossible to give sufficient time and attention to the proper teaching of English. 3. The want of a suitable text-book in Grammar and Composition, coupled with the fact that the one in common use avowedly condemns the practice of giving pupils special drill in the correction of grammatical errors.

With reference to the last of these causes, whether Lennie was right in defining English Grammar as "the art of speaking and writing the Eng-

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