

**A PLEA FOR THE QUEEN'S
ENGLISH:
STRAY NOTES ON
SPEAKING AND SPELLING**

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A Plea for the Queen's English: Stray Notes on Speaking and Spelling by Henry Alford

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HENRY ALFORD

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J. M. ...

A PLEA FOR

THE QUEEN'S ENGLISH

Boston Mass. - 20 Jan. 1866

Stray Notes on Speaking and Spelling

BY HENRY ALFORD, D.D.

DEAN OF CANTERBURY

TENTH THOUSAND



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“ Pædagoguli abite pestes,
Istinc ferte pedem invennsti inepti,
Invisi pueris bonis malisque,
Abite in miseram crucem execrati
Sæcli perniciosæque litterarum.”

NICCOLÒ, CONTE D'ARCO.
(See Preface).

PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE fact, that an edition consisting of an unusually large number of copies of this little work has been exhausted in a few months, shews that the Public are not indifferent to the interest of the subject. The course of the controversy which it has excited has at all events shewn one thing: that its publication was not un-needed. And though, in the course of this controversy, I have received some hard hits, I have no reason to complain, seeing that it has continually furnished me, as it has gone on, with fresh material for new remarks, and ampler justification for those which I had already made.

A charge has been brought against me, to which I feel bound to reply. One of my censors has alleged that the concluding sentence in paragraph 89 has been altered, so as to convey a

sense offensive to him, since its delivery in his hearing at Canterbury.

This allegation is incorrect. That sentence now stands *verbatim* as he heard it delivered here: and let me add, bears no such offensive sense as he supposes.

A mistake occurred in the title-page of the first edition, owing to my absence from England. The title ought to have stood, as will be seen by the first paragraph in that edition, "A Plea for the Queen's English," and now that title has been restored.

I mention this here, because that accidental circumstance has been supposed by one of my censors to conceal I know not what deep purpose, and has been dignified with the name of "the tactics of my opponent."

The motto at the back of the title-page has been borrowed from a little work by Signor Pagliardini, entitled "Essays on the Analogy of Languages." It expresses, in a jocular form, what every one who values our native tongue in its purity must feel: that most of the grammars, and rules, and applications of rules, now so commonly made for our language, are in reality not contributions towards its purity, but main instruments of its deterioration. These rules are often laid down by persons ignorant of the analogy of

languages, of the laws of thought, and of the practice of those writers whose works are the great fountain-heads of our English usage. *Difficile est . . . non scribere*, when we see men whose knowledge does not extend to the most ordinary facts of derivation, and requirements of speech, exalted into authorities whereby to judge of the correctness of Shakspeare, and Milton, and the English version of the Bible. We may not indeed say, *Malim cum Platone errare*: but we may say confidently, that the old writer had in his mind some reason for his mode of expression, which was far above the grasp of his modern critic.

I am happy to have been, in the course of my writing these "stray notes," made acquainted with some modern English Grammars which form exceptions to the description just given: Grammars based upon essential facts and principles which are utterly unknown to the "*pedagoguli*" of Count d'Arco's epigram.

I may mention among these, Dr. Latham's sensible English Grammar, and "An English Grammar specially intended for Classical Schools and Private Students," by Edward Higginson: Longmans, 1864.

It now only remains for me to express my thanks to my many Correspondents, for their

valuable contributions, inquiries, hints, and corrections: to my Censors, both gentle and ungentle, for their teaching by example and by precept: and to the Public in general, for the kind interest which they have shown in these stray notes on speaking and spelling.

CANTERBURY,

October 28, 1864.

A PLEA FOR
THE QUEEN'S ENGLISH.

1. I have called these "stray notes" "A Introductory.
PLEA FOR THE QUEEN'S ENGLISH."

2. I must begin by explaining what I mean by the term. It is one rather familiar and conventional, than strictly accurate. The Queen (God bless her!) is of course no more the proprietor of the English language than any one of us. Nor does she, nor do the Lords and Commons in Parliament assembled, possess one particle of right to make or unmake a word in the language. But we use the phrase, the Queen's English, in another sense; one not without example in some similar phrases. We speak of the *Queen's Highway*, not meaning that Her Majesty is *possessed* of that portion of road, but that it is a high road of the land, as distinguished from by-roads and private roads: open to all of