

**PURE ENGLISH: A TREATISE
ON WORDS AND PHRASES,
OR PRACTICAL LESSONS
IN THE USE OF LANGUAGE**

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Pure English: a treatise on words and phrases, or practical lessons in the use of language by
Fred. H. Hackett & Ernest A. Girvin

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PURE ENGLISH;

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AND
ERNEST A. GIRVIN.



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Simplicity is beauty; simplicity is power.—*Halleck.*

The only impeccable authors are those that never wrote.—*Hazlitt.*

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.—*Solomon.*

Altogether the style of a writer is a faithful representative of his ideas.—*Goethe.*

It is with words as with sunbeams, the more they are condensed the deeper they burn.—*Southey.*

If a gentleman be to study any language, it ought to be that of his own country.—*Locke.*

The great source of a loose style is the injudicious use of synonymous terms.—*Blair.*

To acquire a few tongues is the labor of a few years; but to be eloquent in one is the labor of a life.—*Anon.*

It is an invariable maxim that words which add nothing to the sense or to the clearness must diminish the force of the expression.—*Campbell.*

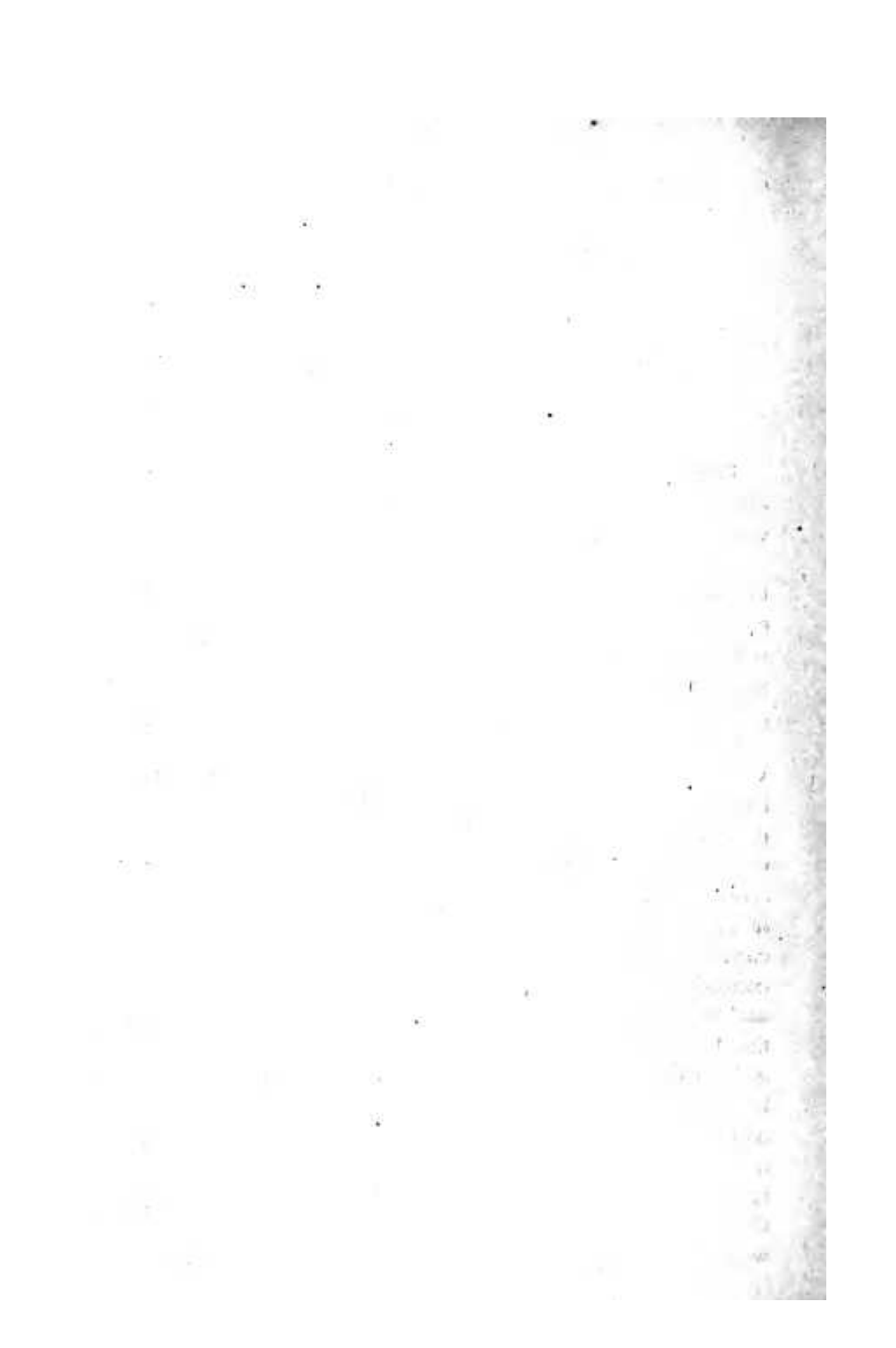
The history of literature abounds with examples of words used almost without meaning by whole classes of writers.—*William Mathews.*

The misuse of words in this literature of ungoverned or ungovernable sensibility has become so general as to threaten the validity of all definitions.—*E. P. Whipple.*

A tendency to slang, to colloquial inelegancies, and even vulgarities, is the besetting sin against which we, as Americans, have especially to guard and to struggle.—*W. D. Whitney.*

Propriety of thought and propriety of diction are commonly found together. Obscurity of expression generally springs from confusion of ideas.—*Macaulay.*

The curse and peril of language in our day, and particularly in this country, is that it is at the mercy of men who, instead of being content to use it well according to their honest ignorance, use it ill according to their affected knowledge.—*Richard Grant White.*



INTRODUCTION.

The abuse to which the English language is so generally subjected must be a source of sincere regret to all who appreciate its beauties. Ours is an age of progress and civilization, and it ought to be remembered that language, is also progressive, and entitled to serious consideration. Great changes in language are the result sometimes of historical convulsions. The very same word which to the Greeks meant an oak, to the Romans meant a beech, although an oak never yet changed into a beech.

Instruction is the leading purpose of "Pure English." While not a dictionary, a grammar, or a rhetoric, it aims to combine the essential elements of them all, and to present a simple and practical plan for the study and use of our language. It has been the motive of the authors to write *lessons*, not *essays*; to *teach* rather than to *entertain*. Special attention has been given to the cardinal elements of style, viz.: clearness, purity, and conciseness. The additional attributes of grace, color, and vividness, while not neglected, are subordinated to the laws of language more closely related to accuracy and strength. It is the violation of these laws that leads to many of the barbarisms, solecisms, etc., now so current among all classes. A careless or an ignorant use of the synonymous words, with which our language is well supplied, is also a prolific source of error. We do not think what we say, or else we do not say what we think.

"They are," says Professor Swinton, defining synonyms, "such as bearing general and generic resemblances, have yet specific differences, and a color and contour of their own." Like views were held also by the brilliant De Quincey, who writes: "All languages tend to clear themselves of synonyms as intellectual culture advances, the superfluous words being taken up and appropriated by new shades and combinations of thought evolved in the progress of society."

Synonymy has been treated in a manner consistent with its importance, and it is believed that "Pure English" may prove to be of especial value in our public schools. The text books, now in use, deal with the character and genius of our language in a very superficial and unsatisfactory way, and the study of English is too often neglected for that of Latin, Greek, French, German, etc.

Professor Reed, of the University of Pennsylvania, says, referring to our usual course of instruction: "But for the more essential acquirements in the language nothing is done; not a word is mentioned about the philosophy of construction; nothing on facility of expression, forms of idiom, formation of style, accuracy of expression, etc." "The maxims contained in works on composition and rhetoric," says Herbert Spencer, "are presented in an unorganized form. Standing as isolated dogmas—as empirical generalizations, they are neither so clearly apprehended, nor so much respected, as they would be were they deduced from some simple first principle. * * * * And we may be sure that a comprehension of the general principles, from which the rules of composition result, will not only bring them home to us with greater force, but will discover to us other rules of like origin."

Realizing the truth of these principles; remembering also the limited time which readers and students have at their disposal; and appreciating the value of intelligent condensation, the authors have striven to make a book that shall meet these requirements and be adapted to the practical needs of our people. The latest and best authorities have been freely consulted in the preparation of "Pure English," but, so far as the plan is concerned, it is original. Its authors do not suppose that the book is literally above criticism—and they may have violated some of the principles which it contains—but they submit it, such as it is, with a willingness that it be judged solely upon its merits. It may be added that a tendency to prolixity and bombasticism is what prevents many modern orators and authors from speaking and writing with propriety. A superfluity of words is offered in atonement for a paucity of ideas; but the style that is to please to-day must be free from all such faults, dense with ideas, full of color, clear, concise, powerful and pure

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