

**CONVERSATIONS ON ENGLISH  
GRAMMAR, EXPLAINING THE  
PRINCIPLES AND RULES OF THE  
LANGUAGE; ILLUSTRATED BY  
APPROPRIATE EXERCISES; ADAPTED TO  
THE USE OF SCHOOLS**

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Conversations on English grammar, explaining the principles and rules of the language;  
illustrated by appropriate exercises; adapted to the use of schools by Charles M. Ingersoll

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**CHARLES M. INGERSOLL**

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1830

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**BY CHARLES M. INGERSOLL.**



"There is no other method of teaching that of which any one is ignorant, than by means of something already known."—*St. Jerome.*

**Eighth Edition.**



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**1830.**

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## DIRECTIONS TO TEACHERS.

As one important object, proposed in this work, is, by the peculiar arrangement of the subject-matter, entirely to abolish, wherever it is used, the practice of *stutping* children by compelling them to recite, in endless repetition, 'words, words, words,' without *enriching* ideas; it may not be deemed either impertinent or improper to present, on the face of the book, some directions to those who may happen to use it. The Author believes it will be found most advantageous for learners in general to begin at the *third Conversation*, and return to the two preceding, on Orthography, after those on Etymology and Syntax are well understood.

Begin, then, at the *third Conversation*, and explain to the class, or individual, in a familiar lecture or conversation, the noun, with its two persons, its numbers, its genders, and the nominative case as an *actor*, illustrating the remarks by familiar examples, and requiring the pupils also to give examples, illustrative of what has been explained; then explain the *active verb*, and its agreement with the *actor*, or nominative, and give Rule I; 'A verb must agree,' &c. The learners may then be exercised, a few moments, in parsing such sentences as these; 'Boys play; Girls sing; Men labor; Men labors; Rain falls,' &c.; the teacher calling their attention to the distinctive form of the verb, as singular or plural. By spending twenty or thirty minutes in this manner with a class of learners, the teacher may prepare them to read the *Conversation*, which must be given for the *next day's lesson*, with intelligence and with pleasure; and they will find no difficulty in preparing themselves to parse accurately the *exercises* in the *Conversation*, and answer correctly the questions annexed. When the learners are called, the next day, their business will not be to recite a page, without acquiring *one idea*, but to *parse* the *exercises*, and *answer* the *questions*. The subject-matter of the *fourth Conversation* should be explained in a similar manner, before the pupils begin to read it; they will then proceed in this as in the other. After those two are well understood, the pupils will, doubtless, be able to proceed with the other *Conversations*, and understand them without previous verbal comment.

\*.\* If any should choose to begin at the *first Conversation*, there can be no great objection.

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

CONVERSATIONS  
ON  
**ENGLISH GRAMMAR.**

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**CONVERSATION I.**

OF LETTERS.

TUTOR,—GEORGE,—CAROLINE.

*Tutor.* I HAVE frequently told you, that as soon as you could read fluently, and understand what you read, I would instruct you in the principles of Grammar. I now find that you read your books for the purpose of understanding them, and that you do not, as many children do, merely pronounce the *words*, without any regard to the *sense*.

*Caroline.* You have so often cautioned us against the practice of reading without trying to comprehend the sense of every sentence, that I now find no pleasure in reading, unless I thoroughly understand the meaning of what I read.

*Tutor.* I believe so, Caroline, and I have no doubt that your brother George can say the same; and therefore I shall begin to instruct you in English Grammar this morning. And now, George, what do you think that Grammar is about.

*George.* I think it is about words, or language; and that it will teach us to speak and write what we mean, in such a



## 6. ORTHOGRAPHY.

manner, that others may clearly understand us; and that it will enable us to avoid putting words together so that a sentence will convey two or three different meanings, when it ought to convey but *one*.

*Tutor.* Very well. Grammar treats of language, and, if you understand it well, it will teach you to write and speak it correctly. Grammar may be divided into two sorts, *Universal* and *Particular*. Universal Grammar explains the principles which are common to all languages. Particular Grammar applies those general principles to a particular language, modifying them according to the genius of that language, and the established practice of the best speakers and writers by whom it is used. The practice of the best speakers and writers of any language, then, is the standard of the grammar of that language. But before I say more concerning *language*, I must know whether you can give the definition of an *idea*.

*George.* An *idea* is whatever a person has in his mind when he thinks.

*Tutor.* Very well. And now, Caroline, do you remember the definition of *language*?

*Caroline.* Language is the expression of our ideas and their relations, by certain articulate sounds, which are used as the signs of those ideas and relations.

*Tutor.* That is right. We must observe now what we have under consideration, viz. first, *things*; secondly, the images of those things in the mind, when we think of them, which are called *ideas*; and thirdly, *language*, or articulate sounds, used to express, or to convey, to other minds, those ideas which we have in our own. These articulate sounds we call *words*, which are used, by common consent, as the signs of our ideas and their relation. So you will perceive, that unless these words are used in such manner and order as will represent truly the order and relation of the ideas in our own minds,

another person will not be able to comprehend our meaning.

*George.* I perceive it very clearly. You say that words are used by common consent.

*Tutor.* That means, that all the people who speak the same language consent to call things by the same names, or to express the same ideas by the same signs.

*Caroline.* I understand it, and perceive the necessity of it; for, if the fact were otherwise, we could not comprehend each other; there would be as many different languages as there are persons. I wish you to say more, if you please, respecting those words that are the signs of the *relations* of ideas. I think I understand how a word is the sign of an idea, for when I think about this book which you gave me, the word *book* is the sign of what I think of; but I do not precisely comprehend how words are the signs of the *relations* of our ideas.

*Tutor.* When I say that you hold the book *in* your hand, what word expresses the relation between the book and your hand?

*Caroline.* It is *in*. I see now, that the word *in* is not the sign of a *thing* that I think of, but the sign of a *relation* existing between the book and the hand, which are two things that I can think of; so, then, a word that denotes a relation between things must be the sign of the relation between the *ideas* of those things.

*Tutor.* Yes; and you will, by a little reflection, perceive the different uses of words; that some are used to express ideas, or images of things; some to express ideas of motion; and others to express ideas of relations merely. As, in the phrase, "*The son of David studies,*" you may readily perceive, that *of* shows the relationship existing between the two persons; for if we were to leave it out of the sentence, and say, "*The son, David,*" &c., the phrase would indicate, that the two words referred to one

and the same person; so you may as readily perceive, that *of* is used to express the relation of the *ideas* in your mind, and the *signs* of those ideas, when put on paper, which are *son* and *David*.

*George.* I think we have a clear notion of what has been said; and that we perceive the importance of preserving the purity and uniformity of each particular language; and that, in each, there should be a common set of signs, which may be known, by *all* who speak that language, as the representatives of particular ideas, and definite relations.

*Caroline.* And this, I suppose, is accomplished by diffusing a knowledge of *Grammar*.

*Tutor.* Undoubtedly; for Grammar treats,

*First, of articulate sounds*, which are the sounds of the human voice, formed by the organs of speech, and of the form and sound of letters, which are the representatives of those articulate sounds; of the combination of letters into syllables, and of syllables into words;

*Secondly, of the different sorts of words*, their various modifications, and their derivations;

*Thirdly, of the just arrangement of words in the formation of a sentence*; and,

*Fourthly, of the proper pronunciation and poetical construction of sentences.* These four parts of Grammar are called,

- |                 |                |
|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. ORTHOGRAPHY, | 3. SYNTAX, and |
| 2. ETYMOLOGY,   | 4. PROSODY.    |

I will now proceed with these in their order.

## ORTHOGRAPHY.

### OF THE LETTERS.

ORTHOGRAPHY teaches the nature and powers of letters, and the just method of spelling words.