

**INTRODUCTORY LESSONS
IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR:
FOR USE IN LOWER
GRAMMAR CLASSES**

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Introductory Lessons in English Grammar: For Use in Lower Grammar Classes by Wm. H. Maxwell

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P R E F A C E .

WRITERS on the subject of grammar generally set out by deploring the unsatisfactory results of the study of English grammar "in the past." They tell us, and very truly, that it has not resulted in teaching children to speak and write their mother tongue "with propriety," to say nothing of ease and elegance. This view seemed, a few years ago, to be adopted quite extensively by the teaching profession. A demand arose for text-books that would enable the instructor to teach children to express themselves readily and accurately. To meet this demand, grammar, in hundreds of text-books, was diluted into the "language lesson"; and the "language lesson" became part of what has been called the "New Education."

Soon, however, came a reaction. It was found that the "language lesson," no more than grammar, taught children to speak and write "with propriety." Indeed, the results in the case of the former have been found even more meager than in the case of the latter; because the "language lesson" trains only, and in a very slipshod way, the power of expression; while grammar, when properly taught, trains children to think—that which is of the highest importance—as well as how to express their thoughts.

Those who have been dissatisfied with the results of teaching technical grammar seem to me, while I admit that their complaint is not without foundation, to have fallen into fundamental error as to the purpose of teaching grammar. Taking their cue from Lindley Murray, they seem to think the sole end and aim of this study is to teach children to "speak and write the English language with propriety." A more correct view I hold to be that the chief purpose of studying grammar is to

teach children how to comprehend thought when expressed in language; and, since there is little or no thinking without language, the development of the power to comprehend involves the development of the power to think and of the power to express thought. John Stuart Mill calls grammar "elementary logic." Mr. Fitch says: "Every grammatical rule is in another form a rule of logic"; and again: "Whatever gives precision and method to our use of words, gives precision to our thoughts." Now, while I can scarcely go the length of saying with Mr. Fitch that it is not as a set of rules for enabling English people to speak correctly that English grammar has the least value, yet I do believe that those who would make correct speaking the chief purpose of teaching grammar are foredoomed to disappointment; and, *per contra*, that those who are content to use grammar as a means of training the mind to appreciate the uses and relations of words in the expression of thought, and to understand something of the structure of language, will find their reward in minds rendered more acute, in strengthened memories, in enlarged vocabularies, and in greater correctness of speech. By this study children may be made to see that words do not merely represent things or ideas, but that they are pregnant with reality. In a word, the value of grammar as a study for children is first of all disciplinary, and only secondarily practical.

Is there, then, no place for the language lesson? Most certainly there is. It should both precede and follow grammar. It should precede, because, being on one side a highly abstract study, grammar should not be commenced too early in the child's school life; and the gap may profitably be filled with untechnical exercises, through which he may learn to avoid the grosser forms of linguistic error, and may acquire a stock of vocables and sentence forms, out of which will subsequently be developed the science of grammar.* It should follow the grammar lesson—each grammar lesson—by way of a practical application of the rule or principle taught. "Half the knowl-

* Exercises of this kind, graded for primary classes, will be found in "Maxwell's Primary Lessons in Language and Composition." A. S. Barnes & Co., New York and Chicago.

edge," says Marcel, "with twice the power of applying it, is better than twice the knowledge with half the power of application." The language lesson finds its proper place in the application of the principles and rules of grammatical science. To compel children to memorize rules and definitions, without at the same time applying them to some practical use, is not only irksome and disheartening to a degree, but is almost useless for any purpose whatever. On the other hand, to start children on a course of language lessons without the system and sequence laid down by the science of grammar, is to send them on a voyage over an unknown sea without chart or compass. When the chart and compass are present, however, in the form of rules and principles scientifically laid down, the sea is one that can be navigated with both pleasure and profit.

The design of the present volume is to present as much of the science of grammar, with its applications, as children between the ages of ten and twelve can understand and appreciate. As to the method of presentation, attention is invited to the following features, which, it is confidently believed, will recommend it as a working text-book:

1. The order of subjects is that now followed, with but slight variations, in all courses of study that require the use of two books—an introductory and an advanced. It is the order that a skillful teacher, beginning with the sentence, and classifying words according to their functions in the sentence, would naturally adopt. For more advanced students, there is much to be said in favor of taking up the subject according to a strictly logical division, as classification, inflection, syntax, analysis, and the like. But for the beginner, there can be no doubt that the simpler method of proceeding from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the complex, is not only easier, but more scientific.

2. Though this makes no pretensions to be a complete treatise upon grammar, yet it may justly be claimed for it that whatever topic is treated, is treated exhaustively. This method is based upon the sound pedagogical doctrine that whatever is worth teaching at all is worth teaching fully. If a child is unable to grasp the meaning of the terms *subject* and *predicate* of

a sentence, or the classification of nouns as *proper* and *common*, the study of grammar should be deferred until his powers are more mature. "It is the worst economy," says Dr. Bain, "to anticipate the mind's natural aptitude for any subject." While, however, this word of caution is deemed necessary, it may not be out of place to add that abundant experience has shown that children ten years of age may profitably take up the subject as it is here presented.

3. Each lesson has been so arranged as to require the least possible expenditure of energy to master the rule or principle to be taught. First comes a brief disquisition on the point in question, in which the rule or principle is evolved from illustrative examples. The teacher may have the pupils read this introduction, and may make it the subject of a series of questions; or she may use it as a model, according to which she will introduce the topic with exercises altogether oral. But even in this latter case it should be carefully read and questioned upon, as a *resume* of the oral exercises. Next comes the rule or definition, which should be committed to memory with the utmost accuracy. The objection to learning rules and definitions by heart applies only where they are learned without being understood. If they are formed after an adequate comparison of illustrative examples, and if their meaning is thoroughly understood, it then becomes of the utmost importance that this knowledge should be stored away in the memory in such a shape as to make its reproduction easy whenever occasion demands. There never was greater pedagogical nonsense than that which tells us that children should be required to frame their own definitions—a task the most profound philosophers find difficult of accomplishment. Says Butler:

"For all a rhetorician's rules
Teach nothing but to name his tools."

The third part of each lesson is a series of exercises, which serves two most important purposes: First, to fix in the mind, through repeated applications, the rule or principle already taught; second, to supply that constant practice in the manipulation of sentences so essential to the formation of a style