

**MANUALS OF THE SCIENCE
AND ART OF TEACHING.
ON THE USE OF WORDS.
FIRST SERIES - NO. III**

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Various

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These Manuals, with the exception of the last of each series, have been written, at the request of the Literature Committee of the National Society, by men distinguished at their several Universities, and possessed of large experience either as teachers or examiners. The last of each series, that on Class Teaching and that on Apparatus, is the work in each case of a Lecturer on Method at one of the larger Training Colleges.

The writers have endeavoured in each case to connect the practice of teaching with the fundamental principles on which it should rest, and to bear in mind the capacities and needs of the particular class of readers for which these Manuals are specially intended. The chapters have been broken up into short paragraphs, with conspicuous headings, and simplicity of language has been uniformly aimed at.

In order to obtain greater clearness and precision, and to save cross-references from one Manual to another, each subject has been treated independently, and is complete in itself. This independence of authorship has necessarily caused some repetition of matter, but it will be seen that this slight addition to the bulk of the whole has largely contributed to the definiteness and completeness of the separate parts.

ON THE USE OF WORDS.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT WORDS ARE.

THE highest sign of a well-educated mind is the proper use of language, both in speaking and writing. If you have ever been in a foreign country and have not known the language of the people, or have spent a few days in a Welsh-speaking part of Wales, or have tried to communicate with a deaf and dumb person, you would recognise the necessity of words for the commonest purposes of life. Words, then, serve as spoken or written signs, agreed upon between a number of people for the interchange of thoughts.

Other signs besides words.—Beautiful pictures are by some writers recognised as a form of language, because they convey the painter's thoughts more truly than perhaps he could express them himself in words. On the other hand, descriptions written by eloquent masters of the English language are called word-painting. Most of our writers would find it difficult to embody their descriptions of scenery in pictures.

Importance of pure and simple language.—If it is most important for all of us to aim at the *highest, simplest, purest thoughts* that are accessible to us, it is next in importance, both for ourselves and others, that we should

form the habit of clothing them in the *highest, purest, and simplest language* that our education permits. It is of no use at all to employ *fine* words if our thoughts are not *fine* also ; on the other hand, we are of little use to others, if we cannot express our ideas in good language. Words should be signs for communicating our highest thoughts.

Perhaps the dullest books for children to turn over are dictionaries, which give us, in the shortest form, definitions of the words we use. But you would be astonished if you knew what pleasure a scholar can find in comparing and classifying words, in tracing out the first common-place meaning of a word ; for every one of them has been employed to express some impression on our organs of sense, before it was used to express our mental ideas. Good dictionary-makers are not simply dealing with combinations and collections of letters ; they are living in company with minds whose thoughts can be traced through the changed meanings of words. Turn to any page of a good dictionary and see what knowledge of the history of words is required. When Dr. Johnson compiled his book, very little was known of the history of words, and there was very little play for high literary faculties. Johnson called himself a 'harmless drudge ;' the arrangement and tabulation of the words was drudgery, but the wide reading of many authors and the keen logical power of definition required for his task are not the ordinary signs of a drudge.

The study of words is a study of men's thoughts.—Archbishop Trench, in his 'Study of Words,' quotes the expression 'fossil poetry,' as descriptive of words ; not in the first literal meaning, that the words are dead and have been dug up again, but in the sense of 'preserving and making safe for ever' the beautiful thoughts and feelings of men long dead and of some whose very names *have been lost*. It has been often disputed whether Homer *wrote all those beautiful poems that pass under his name ;*

in such cases, where History is dumb, the words and thoughts of the author are carefully scanned, because they are the only witnesses to the unity of the authorship.

The same author calls words 'fossil history.' The word 'England' is itself a piece of history; London is full of fossil history; such ugly names as Addle Street, Gutter Lane (two neighbouring narrow lanes leading into Cheapside) tell of times before the Norman Conquest, when one street was inhabited by Adel or Nobles, and the other contained the house of the leader Guthrum. See whether you can find out the meaning of the name of your own town or village, as a beginning to the study of 'fossil history' in names.

Exact use of words.—Words are useful for communication according to their exact signification at the present time. We have limited our definition of words to the articulate sounds we employ in speaking or to the written characters which we connect arbitrarily with the spoken words. But we should restrict our definition still further by the addition that words are useful in so far as they help others to comprehend our thoughts. A discovery would be useless unless some name were given to it by which its exact signification could be recalled to others. A short compound word is better for the purpose than two, and a native word is more quickly appreciated than a foreign one. In trades peculiar to a single country, words like 'spinning-jenny' are common; in sciences which belong to all mankind words from Greek or Latin are generally employed as a common scientific language. The names 'telegraph,' or distant-writer, 'microphone,' or minute-talker, express the powers of each instrument in a short form. 'Gravitation,' again, expresses in a short form, not only the force by which all objects on the earth are drawn towards the centre of the earth, but the heaviness which is the sensible result of that attraction.

We cannot invent words.—You may be astonished, and say, What! are the words 'telegraph,' 'microscope,' not words of modern invention? We answer they are not words of modern *invention*, but of modern *composition*. As any workman cannot create, but only bring things already created into union more or less close, so a word-maker can only bring together elements of words already existing, and combine them into a fresh word. The Roman Emperor Augustus said he could command almost anything to be done and be sure that he was obeyed, but he confessed that he could not make a new Latin word. He could not even introduce phonetic spelling, though he is said to have desired it.

We can trace the history of words to a certain point. We cannot find out their actual beginning, but we can trace them back to very simple elements of letters and to simple meanings expressing something seen, or felt, or heard,—some impression upon one of the senses. If you wish to make your words intelligible to a child, whose stock of mental ideas is very limited though he may have a comparatively large experience of objects and their impressions on his senses, you should give the first simple meaning of the word before you give the derivative meanings. For example, you wish to give a child a clear conception of the word 'shire.' He would be more likely to take interest in it and remember its meaning, if he were told it was a piece 'shorn off.' We might point out the moral truth that a 'naughty' child was a 'nothing' child or a worthless child, as the words 'naughty figs' are used in our English Bible. Will your scholars believe you if you tell them that 'scholar' once signified not the poor over-worked learner of modern times, but the student who had leisure to spare for pleasant voluntary study? 'Calculation' becomes pleasanter and more practical if it reminds you and your scholar to practise *arithmetic with real objects*, such as the 'pebbles' with *which Roman boys were taught arithmetic*, in order that

they might see and handle the results of calculation. 'Good-bye' and 'farewell' tell their own story more plainly, but it is a story that is not often read. You will have gone back far enough in the history of a word, if you come to some meaning that describes an impression made upon the senses; but do not think that you have grasped the full conception till you find some common point, in which all other meanings centre and from which they can be *derived*. The word 'de-ri-ved' is itself significant; all other meanings come from the primary meaning, as the waters of a 'river' flow 'down' from their source.

The meaning of words often changes for the worse, and every one who uses them carelessly contributes to their degradation. In many cases this amounts to a moral degradation; we allude especially to words connected with religious and Christian duties. Probably you know the common degradation of 'charity' or Christian love into giving alms to mendicants; 'religion' has almost lost the sense of that which binds us close to God; but the greatest evasion of truthfulness in words is to be found in the employment of euphemistic terms to express breaches of purity and chastity. We advise you, therefore, to be careful, especially in religious and moral subjects, to use such words in their purest and strictest sense.

Origin of words.—We have seen that when we require a new word, we cannot make one except by compounding words already existing, and that we can trace many words back to a certain point, but cannot answer the question—How did language begin? What faculty of man originated the first word? Some words are evidently taken from sounds, as the cries of animals, or the sounds of the powers of Nature. We hear the 'rustle' of leaves; we know that a bear does not 'mew' nor 'purr,' that a serpent does not 'roar,' nor a lion 'hiss.' Some combinations of letters, as *st* in 'stump,' 'strong,' 'strive,' 'steady,' express