

**FIVE HUNDRED MISTAKE OF
DAILY OCCURRENCE IN
SPEAKING PRONOUNCING AND
WRITING THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE, CORRECTED.**

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Five Hundred Mistake of Daily Occurrence in Speaking Pronouncing and Writing the English Language, corrected. by Walton Burgess

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WALTON BURGESS

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LANGUAGE, CORRECTED.**

"NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN!"

FIVE HUNDRED MISTAKES

OF DAILY OCCURRENCE

IN SPEAKING, PRONOUNCING, AND WRITING

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE,

CORRECTED.

THIRTY-SECOND EDITION.

"Which, if you but open—
You will be unwilling,
For many a shilling,
To part with the profit
Which you shall have of it."

[*The Key to Unknown Knowledge*.—LONDON, 1599

"It is highly important, that whatever we learn or know, we should know
CORRECTLY; for unless our knowledge be correct, we lose half its value and use-
fulness."—*Conversations on Botany*.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE aim of this book, by correcting a multitude of common errors in the use of language, is mainly to offer assistance to such persons as need greater facilities for accurate expression *in ordinary conversation*. It is not designed to suggest topics of talk, nor to give rules or examples pointing out the proper modes of arranging them; but simply to insure persons who often have a good thing to say, from the confusion and mortification of improperly saying it. This chapter of introduction will not, therefore, be expected to present an essay on the general subject of conversation.

It may be remarked, however, by way of admonitory hint to some, that the most prominent error in the conversation of those who commit the most blunders, does not consist in saying too little that amounts to much, but too much that amounts to little; talkativeness is a characteristic more commonly of the ignorant, than of the wise. Shenstone says, "The common fluency of speech in many men, and most women, is owing to a scarcity of matter and a scarcity of words; for whoever is master of a language, and moreover

has a mind full of ideas, will be apt, in speaking, to hesitate upon the choice of both ; but common speakers have only one set of ideas and one set of words to clothe them in,—and these are always ready at the mouth. Just so, *people can come faster out of a church when it is almost empty, than when a crowd is at the door!*” But although, according to the old proverb, “a still tongue denotes a wise head,” the faculty of speech should not be neglected, merely because it may be misused.

Conversation is not a gift bestowed only upon those whom genius favors ; on the contrary, many men eminent for their fluency of style in writing, have been noted for habitual taciturnity in their intercourse with society. Hazlitt remarked, that “authors should be read, not heard!” Charles II. of England, not only the wittiest of monarchs, but one of the liveliest of men, is said to have been so charmed in reading the humor of Butler’s “Hudibras,” that he disguised himself as a private gentleman, and was introduced to the author, whom, to his astonishment, he found to be one of the *dullest* of companions. On the other hand, some of the humblest men with whom one falls into company, possessed of but little variety, and less extent of information, are highly entertaining talkers. The particular topic of remark does not form so essential a part of an interesting conversation, as the words and manner of those who engage in it. Robert Burns, sitting down on one occasion to write a poem, said :

“Which way the subject theme may gang,
Let time or chance determine;
Perhaps it may turn out a sang,—
Or probably a sermon.”

In the same manner, the subject of a conversation need not be made a matter of study, or special preparation. Men may talk of things momentous or trivial, and in either strain be alike attractive and agreeable.

But quitting the consideration of the thought, to refer to the mode of its expression, it must be remarked and insisted, that to “murder the king’s English” is hardly less a crime, than to design against one of the king’s subjects. If committed from ignorance, the fault is at least deplorable; but if from carelessness, it is inexcusable. The greatest of sciences is that of language; the greatest of human arts is that of using words. No “cunning hand” of the artificer can contrive a work of mechanism that is to be compared, for a moment, with those wonderful masterpieces of ingenuity, which may be wrought by him who can skilfully mould a beautiful thought into a form that shall preserve, yet radiate its beauty. A mosaic of words may be made more fair, than of inlaid precious stones. The scholar who comes forth from his study, a master of the English language, is a workman who has at his command hardly less than a hundred thousand finely-tempered instruments, with which he may fashion the most cunning device. This is a trade which all should learn, for it is one that every individual is called to practise. The

greatest support of virtue in a community is intelligence; intelligence is the outgrowth of knowledge; and the almoner of all knowledge is language. The possession, therefore, of the resources, and a command over the appliances of language, is of the utmost importance to every individual. Words are current coins of the realm, and they who do not have them in their treasury, suffer a more pitiable poverty than others who have not a penny of baser specie in their pocket; and the multitude of those who have an unfailing supply, but which is of the wrong stamp, are possessed only of counterfeit cash, that will not pass in circles of respectability. The present work therefore is, in some respects, not unlike the "Detector" issued for the merchants, to indicate the great amount of worthless money that is in general circulation with the good.

It is not to be supposed that all the mistakes of daily occurrence in the use of language, are to be numbered by "five hundred"—possibly not by five thousand; but it is evident that he who is instructed against five hundred of his habitual blunders, and enabled to steer clear of every one of them, has in no slight degree improved his conversation, and thereby increased his importance. As a prefix, or accompaniment, to this catalogue of corrected mistakes, the presentation of a few rules or principles of language, which, strictly observed, might guard against numerous general classes of errors, would not be thought misplaced, or undesirable. Some suggestions on

points most prominent are accordingly given among these introductory remarks—not in formal statements of grammatical rules, but in examples in which the spirit of such rules is revealed.

Not the least glaring among the many misuses of words and forms of expression in conversation, occur by incorrectly employing the pronouns—*who*, *which*, *what*, and *that*. It may be remarked, that *who* should be applied exclusively to persons. *Which* usually refers to animals and inanimate objects, except in such an expression as, "Tell me *which* of the two men was chosen?" *What*, means *that which*; thus, "This is the book *what* I wanted," should read, "This is the book *that* (or *which*) I wanted."

Among interrogatives, *who* ? inquires for the name; *which* ? for the individual; *what* ? for the character, or occupation. Thus, "*Who* built the bridge?" "Mr. Blake." "*Which* of the Blakes?" "*Charles* Blake." "*What* was he?" "A distinguished civil engineer."

The title of a small book for young people, recently published, was—"The Way *that* Little Children enter Heaven:" the word *that* is here incorrectly used as a substitute for *in which*, or *by which*.

When *this* and *that*, and their plurals, are used in the sense of *latter* and *former*, *this* and *these* signify the *latter*, and *that* and *those* the *former*. Thus, in the following couplet from Burns :