

**ENGLISH LESSONS
FOR
ENGLISH PEOPLE**

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English Lessons for English People by Edwin A. Abbott & J. R. Seeley

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BY

THE REV. EDWIN A. ABBOTT, M.A.,

HEAD MASTER OF THE CITY OF LONDON SCHOOL;

AND

J. R. SEELEY, M.A.,

PROFESSOR OF MODERN HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

"It is not so much a merit to know English as it is a shame not to know it; and I look upon this knowledge as essential for an Englishman, and not merely for a fine speaker." — ADAPTED FROM CICERO.

BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1901

TO THE

REV. G. F. W. MORTIMER, D.D.,

*Prebendary of St. Paul's Cathedral, late Head Master of the City of
London School.*

DEAR DOCTOR MORTIMER,

We have other motives, beside the respect and gratitude which must be felt for you by all those of your old pupils who are capable of appreciating the work you did at the City of London School, for asking you to let us dedicate to you a little book which we have entitled "English Lessons for English People."

Looking back upon our school life, we both feel that among the many educational advantages which we enjoyed under your care, there was none more important than the study of the works of Shakspeare, to which we and our school-fellows were stimulated by the special prizes of the Beaufoy Endowment.

We owe you a debt of gratitude not always owed by pupils to their teachers. Many who have passed into a life of engrossing activity without having been taught at school to use rightly, or to appreciate the right use of, their native

tongue, feeling themselves foreigners amid the language of their country, may turn with some point against their teachers the reproach of banished Bolingbroke:—

My tongue's use is to me no more
 Than an unstringed viol or a harp,
 Or like a cunning instrument cased up,
 Or, being open, put into his hands
 That knows no touch to tune the harmony;
 Within my mouth you have engaol'd my tongue,
 Doubly portcullis'd with my teeth and lips,
 And dull, unfeeling, barren ignorance
 Is made my gaoler to attend on me.
 I am too old to fawn upon a nurse,
 Too far in years to be a pupil now.

It is our pleasant duty, on the contrary, to thank you for encouraging us to study the "cunning instrument" of our native tongue.

Our sense of the benefits which we derived from this study, and our recollection that the study was at that time optional, and did not affect more than a small number of the pupils, lead us to anticipate that when once the English language and literature become recognized, not as an optional but as a regular part of our educational course, the advantages will be so great as to constitute nothing short of a national benefit.

The present seems to be a critical moment for English instruction. The subject has excited much attention of late years; many schools have already taken it up; others are

on the point of doing so; it forms an important part of most Government and other examinations. But there is a complaint from many teachers that they cannot teach English for want of text-books and manuals; and, as the study of English becomes year by year more general, this complaint makes itself more and more distinctly heard. To meet this want we have written the following pages. If we had had more time, we might perhaps have been tempted to aim at producing a more learned and exhaustive book on the subject; but, setting aside want of leisure, we feel that a practical text-book, and not a learned or exhaustive treatise, is what is wanted at the present crisis.

We feel sure that you will give a kindly welcome to our little book, as an attempt, however imperfect, to hand on the torch which you have handed to us; we beg you also to accept it as a token of our sincere gratitude for more than ordinary kindnesses, and to believe us

Your affectionate pupils,

J. R. SEELEY.

EDWIN A. ABBOTT.

PREFACE.

THIS book is not intended to supply the place of an English Grammar. It presupposes a knowledge of Grammar and of English idiom in its readers, and does not address itself to foreigners, but to those who, having already a familiar knowledge of English, need help to write it with taste and exactness. Some degree of knowledge is presumed in the reader; nevertheless we do not presume that he possesses so much as to render him incapable of profiting from *lessons*. Our object is, if possible, not merely to interest, but to *teach*; to write lessons, not essays,—lessons that may perhaps prove interesting to some who have passed beyond the routine of school life, but still lessons, in the strictest sense, adapted for school classes.

Aiming at practical utility, the book deals only with those difficulties which, in the course of teaching, we have found to be most common and most serious. For there are many difficulties, even when grammatical accuracy has been attained, in the way of English persons attempting to write and speak correctly. First, there is the cramping restriction of an insufficient vocabulary; not merely a loose and inexact

apprehension of many words that are commonly used, and a consequent difficulty in using them accurately, but also a total ignorance of many other words, and an inability to use them at all; and these last are, as a rule, the very words which are absolutely necessary for the comprehension and expression of any thought that deals with something more than the most ordinary concrete notions. There is also a very common inability to appreciate the differences between words that are at all similar. Lastly, where the pupil has studied Latin, and trusts too much for his knowledge of English words to his knowledge of their Latin roots, there is the possibility of misderiving and misunderstanding a word, owing to ignorance of the changes of letters introduced in the process of derivation; and, on the other hand, there is the danger of misunderstanding and pedantically misusing words correctly derived, from an ignorance of the changes of meaning which a word almost always experiences in passing from one language to another. The result of all this non-understanding or slovenly half-understanding of words is a habit of slovenly reading and slovenly writing, which when once acquired is very hard to shake off.

Then, following on the difficulties attending the use of words, there are others attending the choice and arrangement of words. There is the danger of falling into "poetic prose," of thinking it necessary to write "steed" or "charger" instead of "horse," "ire" instead of "anger," and the like; and every teacher, who has had much experience in looking