

**KEY TO DALGLEISH'S
ENGLISH COMPOSITION
IN PROSE AND VERSE**

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Key to dalgleish's english composition in prose and verse by Walter Scott Dalgleish

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WALTER SCOTT DALGLEISH

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DALGLEISH'S ENGLISH COMPOSITION

IN PROSE AND VERSE.

WITH

AN INTRODUCTION ON THE TEACHING OF SYNTHESIS.

THIRD EDITION, REVISED.

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INTRODUCTION.

ON THE TEACHING OF SYNTHESIS.

THE process of grammatical Synthesis, on which the exercises in "English Composition" are chiefly based, is novel in many of its features. The author, however, is so thoroughly convinced of its utility, both as a mental discipline, and as a means of cultivating accuracy and flexibility of style, that he begs to offer the following illustrations of the mode of dealing with it, to those teachers who may not be familiar with its peculiarities. It should be premised, that the exercises pre-suppose some acquaintance, on the part of the pupils, with the general principles of Analysis.

We begin, as is natural, with *Simple* sentences. Certain elements are given as data, out of which a simple sentence has to be formed—a sentence with one predicate. These elements represent the numerous ideas which crowd upon the mind when engaged in composition, and which the unpractised find it so difficult to adjust and assort.

In synthesis, as in analysis, the first step is to fix upon the predicate, which, with its inseparable attendant, the subject,

forms the pivot on which the sentence turns. Around these two essential elements all the others cluster, either as attributes to the latter, or as enlargements of the former. Suppose, then, that we have such elements as the following placed before us:—

- (a) A certain *crime was facilitated* in England.
- (b) This was done in the end of the reign of Edward I.
- (c) The crime was that of clipping the coin.
- (d) It was facilitated by the custom of cutting the silver penny.
- (e) This custom was sanctioned by law.
- (f) The penny was cut into halves and quarters.

We are required to introduce all these circumstances into a simple sentence.

I. We take the words in italics as the subject and predicate, *crime was facilitated*.

II. Attached to *crime* we find only one attribute, viz., in (c) the crime of *clipping the coin*. Attached to *was facilitated*, we find three adverbials, viz., in (a) (place), *in England*; in (b) (time), *in the early part of the reign of Edward I.*; in (d) (manner), *by the custom of cutting the silver penny*. In (e) we find an attribute to *custom*, viz., *sanctioned by law*. In (f) we find an adverbial to *cutting*, viz., *into halves and quarters*.

III. Arranging these elements one after the other, bringing together the nouns and attributes, the verbs and adverbs, which are co-related, we get,—

"The crime (of clipping the coin) was facilitated in England, in the early part of the reign of Edward I., by the custom (sanctioned by law) of cutting the silver penny (into halves and quarters)."

IV. As the occurrence of so many as three adverbials at the close of the sentence makes it cumbrous, we bring one of them (preferring that of *time*)* to the beginning, and thus get the complete and well-balanced sentence:—

* See "English Composition," Part I., § 49.

"In the early part of the reign of Edward I., the crime of clipping the coin was facilitated in England by the custom, sanctioned by law, of cutting the silver penny into halves and quarters.

Let us next take *Complex* sentences, containing one principal predicate, and one or more subordinate predicates. As each clause in a complex sentence admits of analysis into the primary elements of a sentence, the data for each clause in synthesis might be stated with the same detail as in the case of the simple sentence given above. This, however, after sufficient practice has been given in the construction of simple sentences, is unnecessary, and would only complicate the exercise. It is better, therefore, to limit the attention, in the case of complex sentences, solely to the combining of clauses. Accordingly, in the data for the synthesis of complex sentences, the substance of each clause is stated as a simple sentence; and the pupil is required to combine these in accordance with certain prescribed relations of interdependence. In order to express these relations briefly, and to present them clearly to the eye, a system of analytic notation has been adopted.* The essential feature in that notation is, that each principal clause is indicated by a capital letter, and the subordinate clauses by corresponding small letters; the degree of subordination being further expressed by algebraic indices, while different clauses in the same degree are distinguished by co-efficients. Thus a^2 is dependent on a^1 , a^3 on a^1 , and a^1 on A; b^2 on b^1 , and b^1 on B; c^1 on C, &c.; while two or more clauses dependent on a^2 , for instance, are marked as $1a^2$, $2a^2$, $3a^2$, &c. Before proceeding to exemplify the application of this system to synthesis of complex sentences, we must premise—1st, that as in simple sentences we begin with the subject and predicate, so here we begin with the clause containing the principal subject and predicate; 2d, that we must be

* See "English Composition," Part I., §§ 16, 17.

careful to attach each subordinate clause as nearly as possible to the word which it explains, linking them together by the proper connectives,* to determine which is indeed the only point of real difficulty in the exercise.

In exemplification of this, let us now take a sentence at random from Goldsmith, and having broken it down into a series of simple propositions, endeavour from these elements to reconstruct it;—

1a¹ (*substantive*). It was proper to sell our colt at a neighbouring fair, and buy us a horse.

A. My wife proposed this.

1a² (*attributive*). The colt was grown old.

2a² (*attributive*). A horse would carry single or double upon an occasion.

3a² (*attributive*). And a horse would make a pretty appearance at church.

4a² (*attributive*). Or a horse would make a pretty appearance on a visit.

2a¹ (*adverbial: reason*). We were now to hold up our heads a little higher in the world.

I. We begin by writing down the principal clause (A); *My wife proposed*. In place of "this," we add the substantive clause (1a¹) as the object of "proposed,"—introducing it with its proper connective "that." *My wife proposed that it was proper to sell our colt at a neighbouring fair, and buy us a horse*. The next clause (1a²) is attributive to "colt;" we therefore introduce it immediately after that word: *our colt, which was grown old*. The next three clauses (2a², 3a², 4a²) are all attributive to "horse," and must therefore be connected with that word: *a horse, which would carry single or double upon an occasion, and would make a pretty appearance at church or on a visit*. The only remaining clause (2a¹) gives the reason of all this, and must be introduced by "since," or "as." We thus get the complete sentence—

* See "English Composition," Part I., § 30.

"My wife proposed that it was proper to sell our colt, which was grown old, at a neighbouring fair, and buy us a horse, which would carry single or double upon an occasion, and would make a pretty appearance at church or on a visit, as we were now to hold up our heads a little higher in the world."

II. This arrangement of the sentence, though the natural one, is open to the objection that the last clause ($2a'$) is too far separated from the clause (A) on which it is immediately dependent,—no fewer than four other clauses coming between them. To rectify this, we may bring that adverbial clause to the beginning of the sentence,* and then we have it as Goldsmith originally wrote it:

"As we were now to hold up our heads a little higher in the world, my wife proposed that it was proper to sell our colt, which was grown old, at a neighbouring fair, and buy us a horse, which would carry single or double upon an occasion, and would make a pretty appearance at church or on a visit."

As *Compound* sentences consist merely of simple and complex clauses in combination, it is unnecessary to give separate examples of their treatment. The illustrations we have given will suffice to shew that this kind of exercise compels the pupil to attend to the construction of sentences and the arrangement of their parts in a way which, under the old-fashioned system of composition, was almost, if not altogether, unattainable. We can commend the exercise to teachers on other grounds. It will not only save them and their pupils much time and fruitless labour, but will be found to excite the interest of the latter in the same way as the working out of a problem in mathematics, or as the executing of a constructive puzzle amuses children of a younger growth. The exercise, too, enables them to feel their power all the more, that the result, if correct, is an intelligible whole. There is great utility, also, in the constancy

* See "English Composition," Part I., §§ 46, 49.