

**INTRODUCTORY LANGUAGE WORK;
A SIMPLE, VARIED, AND PLEASING,
BUT METHODICAL, SERIES OF
EXERCISES IN ENGLISH TO PRECEDE
THE STUDY OF TECHNICAL GRAMMAR**

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Introductory Language Work; A Simple, Varied, and Pleasing, but Methodical, Series of Exercises in English to Precede the Study of Technical Grammar by Alonzo Reed

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BUT METHODICAL,
SERIES OF EXERCISES IN ENGLISH
TO PRECEDE THE STUDY OF TECHNICAL GRAMMAR.

BY

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LANGUAGE WORK IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES.

A Talk with Teachers.

Should Language be Taught Directly, or only Incidentally?—Careful and intelligent experiment has of late cleared away much of the fog of conflicting theory and method surrounding the subject of language teaching, so that it is now beginning to take definite form and to receive rational treatment.

The theory that language is best taught indirectly through a series of "information lessons" is giving place to the conviction that the chief business of the language teacher is with the adaptation of the expression to the thought. It is impossible to carry on a course of object lessons and a course of language lessons together and make both consecutive and progressive. One must be sacrificed to the other, and it is invariably the language work that gives way. It is comparatively easy to make a series of object lessons continuous or to fill up the time of recitation with general information, while it is extremely difficult to bring oral language lessons within any well-defined plan or purpose.

That there are forms and principles of language which may be presented at an early age and made to govern the

pupils' practice through life, and that such forms and principles should be taught directly, systematically, and persistently, are conclusions now quite generally accepted.

Is Oral Teaching Methodical and Permanent?—

The fact that teachers after years of experiment have become dissatisfied with the very uncertain results of oral instruction is evidenced by the growing demand from our best schools for a text-book suitable for the pupils' use and for class-room drill.

Without a drill book in the hands of the pupils there is necessarily a serious loss of time in getting written exercises before the class, and in repeating instruction to bridge over breaks caused by lack of attention or by irregular attendance. But with the best effort of both teacher and class, young pupils find it almost impossible so to hold their oral instruction in memory as to be able to look back over the successive steps and get a bird's-eye view of the different lessons in their proper relations.

A successful teacher will give much oral instruction, and will throw his own personality into his work. The importance of bringing the instructed mind of the teacher into direct contact with the uninstructed mind of the pupil should not be undervalued. But unless oral work is supplemented by a rational text-book, it must lack continuity and permanency. Besides, getting instruction from the printed page is an essential part of language training.

Matter and Method of the Language Book.—The more thoughtful teachers are beginning to question the wisdom of those courses of language study in which

spelling, pronunciation, technical grammar, pictures for imaginative stories, poetry for memorizing and paraphrasing, information lessons, and other miscellaneous matter are prescribed, with no line of connection, no beginning, no middle, no end.

Why should the study of our mother tongue be made the one exception to Burke's motto, "Good order is the foundation of all good things"? And is it true that language books must needs be filled with the odds and ends of various subjects because there is so little to be done in the study of language proper?

Spelling and Pronunciation.—Since "language lessons" are supposed to deal mainly with related ideas, why should a language book be interlarded with lessons in pronunciation and spelling, when these subjects are amply provided for in two other text-books of the same grade—the "reader" and the "speller"?

Technical Grammar.—All instruction that aims *chiefly* to lay a foundation for technical grammar is out of place in the primary grades. There are, however, certain grammatical forms that should be brought to the pupils' notice as early as possible, and worked into practice by constant repetition.

Pictures for Stories.—Pictures to aid in imaginative story-writing may, for occasional exercises, serve a useful purpose; but when they are introduced into the language book and kept constantly before the pupils as composition lessons, the story-writing loses the very important element of freshness and surprise. Such exercises are much more

interesting and successful if the picture is first presented by the teacher at the hour of recitation. There is danger of overdoing this feature of composition work.

Poetry.—The reproduction of stories found in poems is an exercise of extremely doubtful utility. When we remember that the story is one of the most remote of the poet's purposes, and that the noblest poems of our language drop into insignificance when reduced to "plot" or "argument," it will be seen how positively harmful it must be for the young student to get the impression that his feeble story reproduction is in any sense a measure of the beautiful thought of a great poet.

Concerning the use of poetry for written paraphrase, Laurie says: "A more detestable exercise I do not know. It is an impious and unholy use of pen and ink."* Bain, after quoting one of the best attempts at paraphrasing poetry, remarks: "It has stripped the passage of its poetical beauty, and has not made a good piece of prose. It is an operation without assignable result."†

The translating of poetry into prose by simply changing the order, supplying ellipses, and revoking poetic licenses, is a profitable exercise for grammar grades.

In the primary grades, all pupils able to write should occasionally copy from the blackboard and memorize short selections of poetry. The teacher's chief aim should be to help the pupils to see the beauty of the word-pictures.

* "Lectures on Language and Linguistic Method," delivered in the University of Cambridge, England.

† "On Teaching English."

to appreciate the rhythmic flow of the language, and to get into sympathy with the sentiment. Here the text-book can be of little aid. The teacher certainly does not need to be told when and where he can best find opportunity to introduce such general exercises.

Plan of this Book—Observation and Practice.—Extreme reaction from abstract and formal methods has popularized the theory that precision in language comes only from practice, and that the child should constantly be exercised in expressing his own thought in his own language. How progress is to be attained by confining him to the feeble, commonplace expression of his own feeble, commonplace thought does not appear.

Excellence in language is attained through *observation and practice*.

In his lecture, "On the Study of Literature," Morley says: "So far as my observation has gone, men will do better if they seek precision by studying carefully and with an open mind and a vigilant eye the models of writing, than by excessive practice of writing on their own account."

Pupils should occasionally write original compositions—frequently, if the teacher can give the individual attention that will make them helpful. It has truly been said that we cannot know that we possess language, or anything else, till we can *use* it. It is equally true that we must acquire language before we can use it.

Distinguished masters and students of style are agreed that good language is got chiefly by the careful study of