

**SMALL BOOKS ON GREAT
SUBJECTS, NO.
XII; GENERAL PRINCIPLES
OF GRAMMAR**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649480661

Small Books on Great Subjects, No. XII; General Principles of Grammar by Various

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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TO KNOWLEDGE.



N^o. XII



GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF
GRAMMAR



LONDON
WILLIAM PICKERING

1847



INTRODUCTION.

IT has been rather a favourite notion among learned writers, that the English language has no grammar peculiar to itself; and that it can only be written correctly by applying to it the rules of the Latin. The result has been a good deal of latinized English, but general opinion has not sanctioned the attempt: a latinized style is not a good style, and the writers who keep the closest to the idioms of their mother tongue, are by general consent placed among the masters whom the English student must take as his best instructors.*

There are indeed rules of grammar which may be applied to all languages, for all those

* Swift, Addison, Southey, have been held models of good prose writing—they are very different in style, but they all agree in one thing: they eschew as much as possible all latinized phrases, words, and arrangement of sentences.

who speak and act must name *things* and characterize *actions*: they must describe what has happened as having done so in the past or the present time, or as likely to occur in the future:—they must state whether the individual was the actor or the sufferer;—they must consider things in their different relations to each other. But all nations do not agree in the minor divisions of these broad grammatical distinctions; and thus arise the peculiar idioms, and consequently grammars, of different languages: few have more of these peculiarities than the English, as is evident from the acknowledged difficulty which foreigners find in acquiring it—few therefore can more need a distinct grammar, in which these peculiarities shall be clearly laid down.

It is almost impossible that a language should have its origin amid civilisation and refinement: it has generally been the rude and rough expression of the passions and feelings of a people no less rude and rough: and, without going into a discussion of the different theories respecting the origin of language, I think I may safely assume that the *first* speech was not likely to be either written, or very abundant. We invent

terms to meet the exigence of the moment;— what we have never seen or done, of course we have no terms for, and hence the scanty vocabulary of the poor, even in our own times: for, even if taught the use and meaning of more words, they generally forget them, because they have no need for them in their every-day life. The wants of man in his first state were simple; his social relations few; and his language must have been in some degree proportioned to his manner of life.

It has been often remarked that the barbarian is generally poetic in his language; but it has not been at the same time remarked that the very paucity of his language is the cause of this. When definition begins, poetry ends. The barbarian has no terms by which to designate new objects, or to express a new train of thought, and he is thus *forced* to use metaphor instead of precise description. The animal with which the speaker is familiar is the type in his mind of the quality which chiefly distinguishes it; and, by a natural transition, the man who evinces such a quality is called by its name: thus, in the language of some of the oldest writings we possess, Judah is a lion;