

**AN ELEMENTARY GRAMMAR OF
THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE:
PROGRESSIVELY ARRANGED FOR
THE USE OF SCHOOLS AND
COLLEGES; PP. 5-236**

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An Elementary Grammar of the Italian Language: Progressively Arranged for the Use of Schools and Colleges; pp. 5-236 by G. B. Fontana

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PREFACE.

THE study of languages offers to a discriminating observer not only a collection of words and idioms, but the knowledge of customs, tastes, and national peculiarities. It is true that there are general principles which may be applied in common to all languages,—the system of ideas having everywhere the same foundation,—but these are, in their application, subjected to conditions peculiar to each people. The formation of words, the construction of phrases, and the modulation of sounds, are but the results of the national character pervading the minutest details of a language.

The Italian language, like all others, has national characteristics. The strength of its metaphors, the conciseness of its phrases, its flexible adaptability to thought, its sonorous terminations, expressive articulation, and musical prosody, are the living monuments of a people eminently artistic, and endowed with a high organic sensibility. Their early opposition to foreign despotism, and triumph over barbarism during the political struggles of forty Italian

republics, created an elegant, energetic, and expressive language, possessing an innate nobleness and beauty.

A logical and philosophical method is therefore necessary to impart the Italian language, as well as intelligence, memory, and a musical ear, on the part of the learner. The latter attainments are often to be found, but there is no Italian grammar within my knowledge which combines all the requisites of a clear and concise treatise; some aiming to teach the classical tongue of the thirteenth century, others to give the mechanical translation of words and phrases, without rules and precepts.

The object of this work is to present the elements of the language as it is spoken to-day, in its simplest garb, both theoretically and practically.

The grammar is divided into two parts, embracing sixty lessons and sixty exercises. The first part is exclusively given to rules indispensable to a general idea of the language; the second is framed for those who are desirous of having an insight into its theory, and consists of synonyms, maxims, idioms, and figurative expressions. The student will thus be enabled to observe the distinctive features of the two languages: the strength and gravity of the English — *man, in his full vigor*; the softness and elegance of the Italian — *woman, in her perfect beauty*.

G. B. F.

INTRODUCTION.

To begin a course of lessons in Italian with the article, and, after having stated that *il* is used for the masculine gender, and *la* for the feminine, to call upon the pupil for an exercise, is not at all logical. The pupil must first know that *libro*, a book, is of the masculine gender, because ending in *o*, and *tavola*, a table, of the feminine gender, because ending in *a*; and then he can properly apply the article, and say *il libro, la tavola*.

The method adopted in this grammar consists in not introducing any part of speech, except a few connecting words, without having first given its appropriate rule.

The first lesson is therefore exclusively given to genders of nouns. As the pupil knows nothing but the genders, he can write no exercise; hence, no exercise is attached to the first lesson.

In the second lesson the pupil finds the article, the personal pronouns, and the auxiliary verb *to have*. These, together with his previous knowledge of the gender of nouns, give him material enough to write a sentence; consequently, he is furnished with an exercise.

The third lesson embraces the plural of nouns: not all the rules for the formation of the plural, but simply those necessary to one commencing the language. The remaining rules are introduced after things more important and useful to a beginner have been considered.

Progressing thus gradually and methodically, the pupil becomes familiar with the language in a short time, and without much effort.

The irregular verbs, which in other grammars occupy one third, and sometimes half of the book, have been simplified and reduced to rules, which are given in a single lesson.

The indefinite pronouns have been placed in three classes: those used for persons, those for things, and those for persons and things.

In Italian dictionaries some English words are found with two or more corresponding Italian words, which would naturally lead the pupil to use indiscriminately the one or the other; yet no two words have, in Italian, precisely the same import. The directions for the proper use of these synonyms have been given, in the course of the lessons, under the head bearing that caption.

No definitions have been given for the various parts of speech, as it is presumed that no one studies the grammar of a foreign language without first knowing that of his own.

Several rules common to both languages have not been noticed, to avoid complicating the work. In such cases the pupil can follow the precepts of his own language.

Particular pains has been taken to finish the lessons in pages, so that the vocabulary is always found on the same page as the exercise.

ACCENT.

ACCENT, in its common acceptation, is but a sign placed over syllables to show that they must be uttered more forcibly than the others. The Italians have but one accent, the grave (`), which is generally used to mark the distinction between words otherwise written alike: as, *amo*, I love; *amò*, he loved; and also in words which in their origin were written with an additional syllable; as, *bontà*, *virtù*, instead of *bontate*, *virtute*. This accent is limited to vowels at the end of a few words; yet every word has, in Italian, its unwritten accent, because every word has a vowel on which the voice must chiefly dwell. This inflection of the voice, this rhythmic accent, being the most marked and the most varied in Italian, is, of course, the most difficult to be acquired by foreigners who are not in immediate correspondence with natives, because harmony cannot be expressed by written words, and yet harmony is to a language what color is to a picture.

It is true that the vowels have, in Italian, an expressive significance: that the open sound of the *a* and *o* naturally expresses strength and gravity; the meagre sound of the *e* and *i*, meekness and feebleness; the obtuse sound of the *u*, something sad and disagreeable; and that these vowels, properly modified by the sounds of corresponding consonants, make the language eminently expressive,