

**THE ESSENCE OF FRENCH
GRAMMAR; OR, THE MYSTERIES
OF FRENCH CONDENSED,
EXPLAINED, AND SIMPLIFIED**

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The essence of French grammar; or, The mysteries of French condensed, explained, and simplified by Raymond Oake

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RAYMOND OAKE

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THE
ESSENCE OF FRENCH GRAMMAR;

OR,

THE MYSTERIES OF FRENCH

CONDENSED, EXPLAINED, AND SIMPLIFIED :

WITH

AN ORIGINAL AND COMPLETE ANALYSIS OF THE VERBS,

AND A

PREFATORY RECEIPT FOR LEARNING FRENCH.

BY

RAYMOND OAKE,

PRIVATE TUTOR, AND AUTHOR OF MISCELLANEA.



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PREFACE.

A LANGUAGE is a vast study, and of all European languages French is probably the most profuse and difficult. Its profuseness, however, does not consist in words, but in idiom, or the disposition of those words. Yet we often hear French called an *easy* language; because, doubtless, few of the thousands who think they have "learnt it," have ever tried it practically, to any extent worth mentioning. For what is it to know French? To be all but French one's self. Translating it is certainly easy, but the reverse—putting English into French—is as certainly difficult, and to the mass of learners an impossibility; while the power of conversation, really such, as with a "native," appears to be a gift bestowed only on one here and there. But must this needs be the case? By no means. It is not the student or the teacher, but the system, which is in fault. We have been totally wrong in our ideas or practice of teaching languages. Milton and other great linguists declared that had they been taught as they themselves would teach (that is, naturally and systematically), they could have acquired all their Latin and Greek in as many months as took them years. The writer firmly

believes this ; and, having enjoyed twenty years' acquaintance with French and the other principal languages, and had twelve years' experience in teaching, he imagines he has discovered something of the *philosophy* of teaching, which he will endeavour to show in the following

RECEIPT FOR LEARNING FRENCH.

A language consists of words and principles. For a fair command of French four or five thousand words might suffice, but you require all, or nearly all, its principles. For instance, *What are you doing?* is expressed in three words, but they involve half-a-dozen principles. *What* has four senses, and in French as many words ; *are you doing* cannot be translated, the phrase being *What do you?* Then *we* say, I do, we do, you do, they do. The French *do* not : they have four different words, *fait, faisons, faites, font*. Here it is *faites*. *Que faites-vous?* But let us take a few lines from a work of medium difficulty, "Vertot's Revolutions of Sweden" (Sandhurst Military Examination Book): "Gustave ne fut pas longtemps dans ce château sans avoir la liberté d'en sortir pour se promener, et pour prendre le divertissement de la chasse. On lui proposait tous les jours des plaisirs nouveaux : tout le monde s'empresait pour le divertir, mais ces soins obligeants ne pouvaient lui faire oublier qu'il était prisonnier." The literal or exact English of this is: "Gustavus not was long-time in this castle without to-have the liberty of from-it to-go-out for himself to-promenade, and for to-take the divertissement of the chase. One to-him proposed all the days of-the pleasures new : all the world itself-impressed for

him to-divert, but these cares obliging not were-able to-him to-make-to-forget that he was prisoner." Now, this passage, taken by chance, is easy French; but how peculiar, and how difficult to put back into French from the following, which is the translated or proper English: "Gustavus had not been long in this castle before he obtained permission to go out for exercise, and enjoying the pleasure of hunting. Day after day fresh pleasures were offered him; every one strove to amuse him; but these kind attentions could not make him forget he was a prisoner." It is true many of the above words are similar in both languages, but what are words compared to principles?

The first principles are those of pronunciation, to which the opening lessons of the Grammar are devoted. Let them be completely mastered, learnt by heart every letter of them, and exercised *vis à vis* by the intelligent teacher. Then begin to stock the mind with words, so many a-day, according to time and memory. For this purpose a word-book is prepared, containing some thousands of the most useful, divided into classes, and with this advantage respecting space and economy—those alike or similar, as *orange, papier, &c.*, are without English, which is quite useless. The gender is attached to each word, *without* which the words themselves would be useless. Whilst learning these, go on gradually with the Grammar, which from beginning to end must be thoroughly and literally learnt. The author's bargain with his own pupils is, Learn this or a larger one, Levisac, Ollendorf, or the like, *for grammar must be learnt*. But we know those enormous and expensive volumes are not and cannot be learnt. They are neither tangible nor intelligible, very

clever and complete, but wholly out of place and purpose. It is to be regretted that usually those who know so much can explain so little. Question and answer are the only security for correct learning. The teacher has *his* part and the pupil *his*; and a much more animated part than rambling through a thousand pages of senseless repetition. Every page and line of this Grammar is arranged by design.* For instance, pronunciation is explained before exemplified, lest the example should take the attention from the principle. Its motto is, "Line upon line." The most prominent and intentional improvements are, the frequent comparison of the two languages and the treatment of the *verbs*, those inexorable plagues, of bitter notoriety. Perhaps they could not be more simply and yet theoretically dealt with. Their mystery, and the misery attending it, are here dispelled. Grammars in general seem to delight in amplification, or, more plainly, sprawl. Not satisfied with declining the verb *avoir*, to have, in its fullest extent, they go over it all again with the word *had* attached to each tense and word, as if any one knowing the French for *I have* and for *had* could not put the two together.

The author need not say his little work is original. If it become popular, native French masters (who have each published a grammar) must not be jealous, for it seems natural that Englishmen should write for the English, and it is quite certain that boys and girls, and even adults, have hitherto detested French for the very grammar's sake. It should be a maxim in teaching that mind is superior to memory, and

* Some of the categorical or long answers, as 20 and 36, may of course be kept up by a word from the teacher.

that to make the former a slave to the latter is degrading and destructive. Imagine the profit or pleasure of putting into French such phrases as the following, under the assumed name of exercises: *my father, your mother, the horse, a cow, the good are happy, soldiers fight*; and so on. In the present plan, exercises give way to living French. Any little French book is opened. A passage is read *perfectly*, that is, in pronunciation. It is translated *literally*, as before shown; then freely, which exercises the mind in *English* composition—a great accomplishment. The same passage is then copied on a slate, the literal English written under it, and under that the free English. The French is then rubbed out, and written again from the English, any word forgotten being copied and underlined. This is not all. Between the reading and writing process, the passage, or a part of it, is *parsed*, analysed, in every particular. Parsing, so common in Latin, is very seldom employed in French, but it is an essential of instruction as well as *construction*. The above forms a perfect and complete French lesson.

If, after mastering principles, going to France is so excellent a thing, what better alternative than French reading? Of course there cannot be too much conversation; but here we want one more printed help, third and last, a sufficiently complete vocabulary of French idioms in the usual form of dialogue. Its chief novelty will consist in every phrase being *literally* as well as freely translated, thus:—

Go to bed, it is ten o'clock.

Go yourself (to) couch, it is ten hours.

Allez vous coucher, il est dix heures.