

**A PROGRESSIVE GRAMMAR
OF THE ENGLISH TONGUE:
BASED ON THE RESULTS OF
MODERN PHILOLOGY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649217304

A progressive grammar of the English tongue: based on the results of modern philology by
William Swinton

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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HARPER'S LANGUAGE-SERIES.

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BASED ON THE RESULTS OF MODERN PHILOLOGY.

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NEW YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
FRANKLIN SQUARE.

1872.

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S979
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Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1872, by
HARPER & BROTHERS,
In the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

24896

P R E F A C E.

THE present course of English Grammar, forming a part of Harper's Language-Series, is embodied in two books:

1. The "First Lessons in English;"
2. The "Progressive English Grammar."

The two are not necessarily connected; either may be used by itself. The "First Lessons," however, is designed to meet the wants of the lower classes of graded schools, while this text-book will connect with the "First Lessons," and, at the same time, furnish by itself a complete grammatical course for ungraded and for private schools.

Learning our mother tongue ought to be the most interesting of school studies; and yet, for nearly a century, countless numbers of technical grammars, all modeled after Lindley Murray, have been, by turns, the object of aversion to successive generations of school children. This is not to be wondered at. The traditional rules of syntax, and the time-honored nomenclature of etymology, have come down to us a heritage from the elder grammarians, who, writing before philology became a science, put forth all their strength in a too successful endeavor to subject our simple and peculiar English speech to the vassalage of Latin forms.

The introduction, some thirty years ago, of the method

of Sentential ANALYSIS, devised by the German philologist Becker, and adapted to American school use in the meritorious works of Professor Greene and others, marks the only considerable innovation, in this country, on the Murray system. The new doctrine excited great interest, and soon ran into a wide currency. When we consider, however, that Analysis is the syntax of English to no greater a degree than it is the syntax of any other speech; that it is, in point of fact, general or universal syntax, it is not strange that it failed to realize the brilliant results claimed for it by its early champions, and that of late it is falling out of favor with judicious teachers, who find that Analysis, while a curious and interesting study, and not without its value as a means of mental discipline, fails to accomplish the professed design of English grammar, which design now is, and always has been, to teach "the art of speaking and writing the English language with propriety."

In the mean time, in the results of modern linguistic study and research, materials have been rapidly accumulating, from which methods of treatment ought to be developed very different from the complications of Anglo-Latin syntax on the one hand, and from the abstractions of Analysis on the other. If the present work shall be found to possess any merit, that merit will be due to the fact that modern philology has made *English grammar possible* by showing us *what the English speech really is*.

In this text-book, of the four mediæval "branches" of grammar, two have been lopped off—to wit, Orthography and Prosody. These do not properly belong to English grammar, and, indeed, they came into the grammatical horn-books at a period when the awful mysteries of "grammairie" were ranked with the black arts. This exclusion

leaves for treatment the two proper departments of grammar—Etymology and Syntax; to which have been added Analysis and Construction, and English Composition.

I.

In the treatment of ETYMOLOGY three prominent points will be noticed:

1. A graduated method of unfolding the parts of speech, which are shown upon three successive and ascending planes. The parts of speech are first taken up and *defined* merely. Then all the parts of speech are again taken up, and their *subdivisions* set forth. Lastly, all the parts of speech are taken up for the third time, and their *inflections* (if they possess any) are exhibited. The superiority of this plan of gradual approach over the old way of crowding every thing in a confused mass of bewildering nomenclature upon the child must be evident on even a cursory examination.

2. The brief, simple, and practical definitions of the parts of speech and of grammatical terms in general. Grammarians, it is true, have been in the habit of magnifying the importance of abstract logical definitions, constructed with all the subtlety of the schoolmen. But is it not manifest that in an art like grammar the sole end of definition is to teach *uses*? Now it is believed that the school-boy, by the aid of such simple (though, it is true, empirical) definitions as NOUNS NAME THINGS, VERBS MAKE STATEMENTS, will learn to *detect* nouns and verbs much sooner than he possibly could, were he ever so cunning in the repetition of wire-drawn definitions that may, indeed, be theoretically exhaustive, but that are practically unintelligible.

3. The historical treatment of English inflections. The

modern study of Anglo-Saxon has thrown a flood of light on the forms and idioms of the English tongue. We obtain a satisfactory knowledge of our few fragments of English inflection only by learning how those inflections arose. And here, again, grammarians are chargeable with having misapplied a great deal of ingenuity in trying to explain *à priori* (by pure reasoning and logic) facts that can be explained solely by the history of our speech. In the present text-book the aim has been to introduce the more illustrative points of English philology stripped of their scientific dress.

II.

The treatment of Syntax in this text-book is probably what will most challenge attention.

In this division of the subject a marked departure from the old methods was found absolutely indispensable. The time-honored twenty-six rules of Murray's Grammar are an incongruous assemblage of mixed definitions and abstractions, imitated from Latin syntax, and having as their chief end to teach grammatical *parsing*, which is simply grammar run to seed. How many a thoughtful teacher has been rudely disenchanted by discovering that a boy may glibly parse Young's Night Thoughts, or Pollock's Course of Time, strictly in accordance with the twenty-six rules, and yet be profoundly ignorant of practical English!

The author bases his treatment of English syntax on the theory that the object of the school study of grammar is to furnish school-boys and school-girls with such an available outfit of knowledge in applied syntax as shall give them a fair mastery of the use of English in speaking and in writing. Accordingly, he found it needful to go through

syntax, and carefully to separate the abstract maxims used in disposing of words from those principles that are of prime importance, because they may be violated in the actual *forms* of words. This separation is marked by dividing the syntax of each part of speech into—

1. How to dispose of the part of speech.
2. Its practical syntax.

Of the latter—**PRACTICAL SYNTAX**—the treatment has been made quite full, the author feeling that he could not conscientiously avoid fairly meeting the numerous difficulties that arise in writing modern English. At the same time, as the principles are developed inductively, from copious illustrations very fully explained, it is believed that they will find firm lodgment in the intelligence, and, by consequence, in the memory of the pupil.

III.

A clear system of Sentential Analysis, freed from needless complications and refinements, has been reduced to its appropriate place and space in the grammatical course. Moreover, side by side with the principles of Analysis will be found the application of those principles to Synthesis, or Construction. The method of sentence-building here given has stood the test of the class-room, and the exercises will be found both to make Analysis itself intelligible and to lay the foundation for Composition.

IV.

As one of the professed objects of English Grammar is to teach the art of writing good English, the last division of the book comprises practical exercises in Composition.