PRINCIPLES

OF

ENGLISH COMPOSITION

THROUGH

ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

A TEXT-BOOK FOR
THE SENIOR CLASSES OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
AND FOR PUPIL-TEACHERS

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PREFACE

As a means of teaching composition and the principles that govern sentence structure, analysis of sentences has completely broken down and become, outside the teaching profession, entirely discredited. Pupils parse and parse, analyse and analyse, for years of their school life, and in the end are ignorant of what constitutes a good sentence and wholly without ability to write one. The cause of this unsatisfactory result is not, I think, difficult to discover.

The parsing of single words, however well done, can be made to bear only on the syntax of single words—quite a trifle in sentence structure. Analysis, however, includes single words, phrases, and clauses—the whole mechanism of the sentence however complex, and, of course, ought to bear on the syntax of the whole mechanism; but unfortunately it has been made by the books to concern itself only with breaking down and classifying. Its sole aim has been to dismember the sentence and to place the *disjecta membra* under their appropriate headings. This is all very well from the point of view that decomposition and classification are the sole end of grammar; but ought they to be so regarded? Is not synthesis as important as analysis? Is it not necessary that the young student should be trained not only to decompose and classify, but also to *compose*, that is, to arrange words, phrases, and clauses in their most effective setting? Analysis is purely destructive; it destroys beauty of thought and beauty of

form; synthesis restores both; it is the complement of analysis. This fact has been ignored by the text-books, and therefore analysis has become discredited. Analysis is useful chiefly for purposes of synthesis. From analysis the student learns to discern the parts and the function of the parts of the sentence; from synthesis and the rules of placement he learns to build up the sentence by placing the parts in their most effective setting.

In this little book analysis is treated only as a means to an end—the synthesis of sentences and the principles of sentence structure. No distinction is made between 'indirect object' and 'extension'; for whatever helps the predicate to express its meaning is an adjunct to the predicate, and it is not of the least consequence whether we call it an 'object' or an 'extension.' The important thing is to recognise its function and to know its place in the sentence.

It will be allowed by all competent judges that the foundation of composition lies in the sentence, that no one can compose well who cannot write a good sentence, and that no one can *consciously* write a good sentence who does not understand the principles that govern sentence structure. To the exposition and exemplification of these principles a large part of this book is devoted; accordingly a prominent place is assigned to synthesis, to the placement of qualifying adjuncts—a most difficult part of composition—and to the devices usually adopted to bring emphatic words into positions of emphasis and related words into proximity.

I have endeavoured so to present this part of the subject as to induce in the young student a critical attitude of mind—critical, that is, as to his choice of modes of expression and as to the merits or the defects of this or of that mode. In his excellent *Companion* to his *Higher English Grammar*, Professor Bain says: 'In teaching English the most effective course seems to me to be this: having selected an exemplary passage, first to assign its peculiar excellence and its deficiency, and next to point

out what things contribute to the one and what to the other, and what are indifferent to both. *The pupils are thus accustomed to weigh every expression that comes before them, and this I take to be the beginning of the art of composition.*' The spirit of this passage and of Bain's teaching is the governing spirit of this little manual, which, however, does not pretend to go beyond the elements of composition. It deals with the structure of sentences of many forms and of several degrees of complexity, but not with the paragraph and the connectives that give movement to the paragraph and the larger divisions of the paragraph. For a full and masterly treatment of the whole subject the teacher is referred to Bain's books on English.

In connection with the pronoun and the complex sentence of two clauses I have introduced the subject of equivalent modes of expression. This part of composition is of great interest and importance, and is deserving of much fuller treatment than it has received in this book. For a very full and able treatment of it the teacher is referred to Mr. A. F. Murison's *First Work in English*, published, like Professor Bain's books, by Messrs. Longmans and Co.

The exemplary passages, and the passages for analysis and synthesis, are, with a few unimportant exceptions, selected by myself from our most idiomatic prose writers. They are, with one or two exceptions, selected from prose writings, for the obvious reason that prose composition can be taught only from prose models. The language of the examples and exercises, though not more difficult than that of the reading-books of the classes for which this book is intended, is yet sufficiently difficult to make the pupils respect it. It is my experience that many of the prose examples in most text-books of analysis are so unlike the sentences of the reading-books, so simple (not to say childish) that boys and girls of average ability despise them. They do not see what good can come from a study of them.

The analysed sentences furnish the pupils with a large

amount of good material for putting into practice the principles of composition expounded in the text. The synthesising of these examples should prove one of the most profitable as well as one of the most interesting exercises in the book. For the assistance and convenience of teachers a key to the synthesis is published separately.

Another very useful exercise is the correction of errors in grammar and arrangement. Examples of such errors are inserted here and there in the book. Some of these are of my own selecting, but most of them are taken from the fine collection of the late Dr. Hodgson, whose book, *Errors in the Use of English*, should be in the library of every teacher.

On every page of his pupils' reading-books, the teacher will find passages exemplifying some of the principles explained and exemplified in this book. Such passages should be used as supplementary exercises. Besides word-parsing for concord and government, the teacher should give his pupils a considerable amount of phrase- and clause-parsing for position. For this exercise the reading-books furnish abundance of fine material. It is a good exercise to set the pupils to search their reading lessons for examples of this or of that construction.

The reading-books also furnish examples of paragraph structure, of the elements of style, including figures of speech, and of the phrases and connectives that are usually employed to mark transitions of thought and to give movement to paragraphs and the larger divisions of the paragraph (see Bain's *Rhetoric and Composition*, Pt. I.) In the same books is to be found plenty of good material for exemplifying the difference between the diction of prose and that of poetry. It is unquestionable that, in the hands of a competent teacher, the reading-books can be made a most powerful instrument for teaching the essentials of good form in prose composition. Even their errors can be turned to account in teaching what to avoid.

'In composition, as in grammar, we need two courses of instruction, running side by side. The first is, a

systematic course of principles, with appropriate examples; the second, a critical examination of texts, passages, or writings, as they occur in some of the good English authors. The two methods support and confirm each other, while either by itself is unsatisfactory. If there *are* principles of composition, they ought to be set forth in systematic array, and not left to irregular and random presentation. On the other hand, unless we grapple with some continuous text, we can neither find adequate exemplification, nor give any assurance of the completeness of our theories' (Bain, *On Teaching English*, p. 23).

In this little book I have attempted to supply 'a systematic course of principles, with appropriate examples'; the school reading-books supply the other essential—'passages for critical examination.'

Suggestions for the improvement of the book and corrections of misprints and other errors will be gratefully received by the publishers or by myself.

To Mr. J. Wetherell, M.A., Head-master of Towcester Grammar School, who has kindly performed for me the disagreeable task of seeing the book through the press, I gladly tender my sincere thanks.

P. GOYEN.

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PART I

THE SIMPLE SENTENCE

Logical Analysis

A simple sentence is a group of words by which:

I. A statement is made, as:

'Birds fly.' 'The fire burns.' 'The boy has learnt his lessons.'

II. A question is asked, as:

'Why do you run so fast?' 'Who bought these articles?'

III. A command or a wish is expressed, as:

'Go (thou).' 'Speak (you).' 'May you be happy.'

Every simple sentence contains at least two parts, the *subject* and the *predicate*. The *subject* is the word (or words) denoting the person about whom or the thing about which something is asserted. The *predicate* is the word (or words) by means of which something is asserted of the subject.

These parts, the subject and the predicate, are the essential parts of every sentence; all other parts of the sentence group themselves to the one or the other of these. Hence a sentence, however long, may be regarded as consisting only of subject and predicate.

A sentence broken up into these two parts is said to be analysed.