

THE
PRINCIPLES
OF
ENGLISH COMPOSITION:

ILLUSTRATED BY EXAMPLES,

WITH

CRITICAL REMARKS.

By DAVID BOOTH,

AUTHOR OF THE ANALYTICAL DICTIONARY.

A new and improved Edition.

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PREFACE.

THE Principles of English Composition first appeared in 1831, preceded by the following

ADVERTISEMENT.

"Of this work, the second, third and fourth chapters have been reprinted, with a few alterations, from the introductory portion of the Analytical Dictionary. The Author is not conscious of having appropriated a single line, from any other writer, without acknowledgment."

In this improved Edition, the Chapters above mentioned have been left out as, besides being printed in other of the Author's works, they contained nothing that did not belong to GRAMMAR, properly so called, rather than to COMPOSITION ; and the vacuity has been filled up with *new matter* more analogous to the subject of the present volume, the type of which has been chosen of a smaller size so as to lessen the selling price.

Charlotte Street, Bloomsbury.

May, 1840.

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PRINCIPLES

ENGLISH COMPOSITION.

CHAPTER I.

OF COMPOSITION, AND ITS DIVISIONS INTO GRAMMATICAL AND RHETORICAL.—DISTINCTION BETWEEN SYNTAX AND CONSTRUCTION.—OF ACCENT AND EMPHASIS.

THE objects of language, whether spoken or written, are threefold :

1. To communicate to others the impressions which the speaker has received ;
2. To recal to the memory of others what they once knew ; and,
3. To excite sensations in others through the medium of the imagination.

To produce either, or all, of these ends, by means of speech and gesture, is the business of the orator ; to gain the same purpose, by an arrangement of characters that represent words and sentences, is the province of

the writer. The speech is an ORATION, and the writing is a COMPOSITION; and both are eloquent if they please the ear and satisfy the judgment of those to whom they are addressed. The distinction, however, between an Oration and a Composition is only occasional,—not universal. An unpremeditated harangue has seldom any of the advantages of literary labour; but the Orations of those Masters, who, in successive ages, have rivetted the attention and penetrated the hearts of their hearers, have all smelt of the lamp ever since the days of Demosthenes.

Composition may, with propriety, be divided into two parts: Grammatical and Rhetorical. The former treats of the arrangement of the materials; the latter of the materials themselves. The one teaches the art of mounting the skeleton, with pins and with wires; the other chuses the fairest forms from the valley, binds them with sinews and covers them with flesh, and, animating them with the breath of Genius, bids the dry bones live.

The Grammatical division of our work has been much more generally investigated than the Rhetorical. Something on the subject may be seen in every Grammar; and, unless, when we hope to illustrate what has been left obscure, or to bring forward what has been neglected, we are not much inclined to tread anew the wearisome path of our childhood. For the present, therefore, with the exception of a few casual remarks, the declensions and conjugations shall be allowed to remain, unaltered, as they are found in the initiatory Schools. Before, however, entering upon the ground which we mean to occupy, we must beg leave to differ so far from the or-

dinary Grammars, as to distinguish between Syntax and Construction.

SYNTAX (from the Greek *syn*, with, and *taxis*, arrangement) treats of the Orthography that certain words should assume with regard to each other. It belongs to Grammar, strictly so-called, and is, in every particular language, that collection of Rules which fixes its grammatical inflexions. Thus:

'He came to see me, at my lodgings, yesterday morning; and I returned with him to his house, in the evening.'

Here the words *I*, *me* and *my* all refer to the speaker; and *he*, *him* and *his*, to the person spoken of: varying as either acts, is acted upon, or is a possessor, in the sentence. Again:

'She loves you, but you do not love her.'

'He loved her once, but he loves her no longer.'

In the former sentence, the verb, to *love*, changes with the person; and, in the latter, with the time of the action.

To preserve the customary uniformity, in such relations, is the proper province of Syntax.

CONSTRUCTION (from the Latin *construere*, to pile up, or build,) is the placing of the words and phrases of a sentence in a certain order; and, hence, we speak, metaphorically, of the *structure* of a sentence, pronouncing it to be bad, or good, according as it is perplexed or explicit,—rugged or harmonious. For example, the following are two Constructions of the same phrases, and which present the same thoughts though not with equal elegance and precision:

'Success and miscarriage are empty sounds, (for) I

have protracted my work till most of those have sunk into the grave, whom I wished to please; having little to fear or to hope from censure or from praise, with frigid tranquillity, I therefore dismiss it.

'I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty sounds; I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquillity, having little to fear or to hope from censure or from praise.'

Other arrangements of these phrases might be formed, or even the phrases themselves might be inverted; and he is the best Composer who is able to chuse the most luminous and most harmonious of the several Constructions. Strictly speaking, there is, probably, a shade of distinction in meaning, more or less obvious, between every two Constructions of the same sentence; but the investigation of this subject would here be premature: for we are now giving definitions—not examples.

HARMONY of Construction may be understood in two different senses: One is the accordance of the several members of the sentence and may be compared to symmetry in Architecture. The other is the pleasing succession of accents and emphases, and would, perhaps, be more accurately denominated by the term Melody: it forms the beauty and elegance of Prose; and, when the order of succession is preserved with measured regularity, it constitutes the essence of verse. POETRY is not, exclusively, allied to either. It consists in embodying the forms of things unknown, and in giving to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.

PROSE, (Latin *prosa*) is from *prorsus*, straight forward, in contradistinction to VERSE (Latin *versus*) from *vertere* to turn; because, in the one case, the reader goes on to the end of the paragraph, whereas, in the other, he must turn back at the end of every verse, whether the line be filled up, or not. It is on account of these turnings that the lesser divisions in the Bible are called Verses.

That part of Composition, which teaches the laws of Versification is named PROSODY, from the Greek *prosodia*, accent; and, although the English language does not possess the modulations which belonged to the accents of the Greeks, yet accentuation, such as we have it, is the sole foundation of our Verse. Those are supposed to have been of the nature of musical notes, and hence their name, from the Latin compound *accento*, I sing.

The accents of the English tongue (which are only to be found in Dictionaries) merely mark the stress of the voice, when resting upon certain syllables, in the same way that EMPHASIS (Greek *phao*, I speak) denotes a more forcible pronunciation of a particular word in a sentence. Seeing that, on our principles, every polysyllable is a combination of so many separate words, Accent and Emphasis are the same; and every compound, with its accentuated syllable, is, obviously, a minor sentence (or Phrase) with its emphatical word. "As emphasis," says Mr. Walker, "evidently points out the most significant word in a sentence, so, where other reasons do not forbid, the accent always dwells with greatest force on that part of the word which, from its importance, the hearer has always the

greatest occasion to observe; and this is necessarily the root, or body, of the word."

Accents, having been fixed by custom, are invariable; but Emphasis shifts with the meaning of the speaker. Although the example given by Mr. Sheridan has been often quoted, it is an illustration so plain, and yet so simple that it would be affectation to substitute another. It is a question of six words which may have five different interpretations:

"Shall you ride to town to-morrow?"
 "If the emphasis is on *shall*, as, 'Shall you ride to town to-morrow?' it implies, that the person spoken to had expressed before such an intention, but that there is some doubt, in the questioner, whether he be determined on it or not; and the answer may be 'certainly; or, I am not sure.' If it be on *you*, as, 'Shall you ride to town to-morrow?' the question implies that some one is to go, and 'Do you mean to go yourself, or send some one in your stead?' and the answer may be 'No, but my servant shall.' If on *ride*, as, 'Shall you ride, &c.?' the answer may be 'No, I shall walk, or go in a coach.' If on *town*, as, 'Shall you ride to town to-morrow?' the answer may be, 'No, but I shall ride to the forest.' If on *to-morrow*, as, 'Shall you ride to town to-morrow?' the answer may be, 'No, not to-morrow, but the next day.'"

The Accents and Emphases, in a sentence, may, therefore, be compared to the pulsations of a string; and it is easy to conceive that they may strike the ear, as dissonant or musical, according as their succession is abrupt or harmonious. But, separate from the Emphasis on in-

dividual words, there is a tone and cadence, belonging to each of the members of a period, which if not properly assorted, will destroy the harmony of the whole. The varied tones of narration, of interrogation, of entreaty and of command, are discriminative of these different feelings in the speaker. To these tones, the arrangement of the words is completely subordinated; and although they are not pronounced in the pharynx, an attentive writer always takes them silently into account in the construction of his sentences. It would seem that these vocal expressions of the passions are different in different countries; of what Copland says to be peculiar, we have some fine examples in Englishman's expressions which would, in Italy, be only a mark of surprise. But, this subject will come again under review when we treat of the laws of versification. If it be on *you*, as, 'Shall you ride to town to-morrow?' the question implies that some one is to go, and 'Do you mean to go yourself, or send some one in your stead?' and the answer may be 'No, but my servant shall.' If on *ride*, as, 'Shall you ride, &c.?' the answer may be 'No, I shall walk, or go in a coach.' If on *town*, as, 'Shall you ride to town to-morrow?' the answer may be, 'No, but I shall ride to the forest.' If on *to-morrow*, as, 'Shall you ride to town to-morrow?' the answer may be, 'No, not to-morrow, but the next day.'"

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