

TEXT, TYPE AND STYLE

A COMPENDIUM OF ATLANTIC USAGE

BY

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THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS
BOSTON

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book is not intended as a general "hand-book," or "manual of style," or as a general guide to the study of English, or as anything more than its sub-title indicates: that is to say, an effort to put into words the principles and the rules — so far as those principles can be expressed in rules — that govern the preparation of copy and the handling of proofs of the "Atlantic Monthly." It would be more accurate to say that that was the purpose of the book when first projected; for it was so long ago, that the Atlantic Monthly Press was then in its earliest infancy, and little thought had been given to the matter of the "style" to be followed in such books as it might publish. As, however, its list of publications is rapidly growing, it has become necessary to decide upon the style to be adopted in respect to those matters that are within the province of the printer or publisher rather than of the author; and the scope of this book has accordingly been broadened so far as to indicate the points — comparatively few in number — wherein the usage of the magazine differs from that of Atlantic books.

Although many printing-offices and publishers issue their own handbooks or manuals, and although there is, in addition, a large number of volumes — textbooks and others — dealing with the general subjects of typography, punctuation, grammar, syntax, rhetoric, including all the matters here discussed, this book would seem to be justified, at least, by two or three facts.

1. No such manual has been issued by the printing-office at which the "Atlantic" and many Atlantic books are printed; indeed, the character of the work done there is so varied that it would be impossible to formulate rules which would apply to more than a small part of that work. The special force assigned to work on the "Atlantic" is supposed to follow Atlantic usage, under the direction of the experienced proof-reader in charge. Other Atlantic books are printed at different offices, whose typographical usages often vary, and never agree in all points with Atlantic usage.

2. The "Atlantic" is being used, to an ever-increasing extent, in connection with regular instruction in English, in schools all over the country.

3. The "Atlantic" is frequently honored by communications, from teachers and others, calling attention to matters of punctuation, or what not, which seem to them worthy of comment; sometimes in a critical vein, sometimes merely

seeking information as to the principles by which our practice is guided.

The main difference between the magazine and Atlantic books — and the one to which nine tenths of the communications refer — is the use in the former of single quotation marks, instead of double ones, which, in accordance with the general practice in this country, are used in the books.¹ This departure from the usual American custom is fully explained in the section on "Quotation Marks." The only other difference that needs to be specially mentioned here is in the matter of division of words, where much less latitude is allowed in the books than in the magazine, as is sufficiently explained in the section on "Spacing and Syllabification." Generally speaking, the wider the type page, the easier it is to secure even spacing of the lines; and in measures of 23 or 24 picas (about four inches),² or more, the somewhat unusual divisions that are allowed, at need, in the narrow 14-pica columns of the "Atlantic," are forbidden. Such other differences as may exist are mentioned under the appropriate headings.

The plan of the present work is shaped by the purpose that it is intended to serve: that is to say,

¹ It should, perhaps, be said that, in the very earliest publications of the Press, which were collections of articles that had appeared in the *Atlantic*, the type was set from the pages of the magazine as copy, and the single quotation marks were not changed.

² The type page of this book is 20 picas wide.

it discusses, almost exclusively, such matters of typography and style, and, to some extent, of syntax, as have been brought to the author's attention in his work on the copy and proofs of the "Atlantic" during nearly seventeen years, and of Atlantic books since such things have been. The result is, necessarily, that some points are omitted which are quite as important as some that are included. There has been no attempt to make an exhaustive list of words often inaccurately used, or of questionable constructions. The conditions under which the work has been done have been such that the preparation of such a list would have meant simply drawing without stint from one or more of the general textbooks on English, or from such a work as "The King's English."

There is a vast difference between "drawing without stint" from the last-mentioned work and using it freely, as the author has done. It is an inexhaustible mine of instruction combined with entertainment; only the surface of it has been scratched by extracting the passages quoted in the following pages; and if their perusal shall lead readers to resort to this volume of the Messrs. Fowler, — authors, also, of the compact and useful little "Concise English Dictionary," based upon the monumental "New English Dictionary," — the present book will have served at least one worthy purpose. The writer has turned to "The

King's English " again and again; not for suggestions as to the subjects to be discussed, because, as has just been said, these have in all cases been suggested by his daily work, but for assistance in giving a name to a problem, or in stating it — and almost never in vain. The section on "Common Parts," including "Correlatives," is an excellent instance: although all the various "cases" here mentioned under that heading — and some of them are not mentioned by the Messrs. Fowler — were in mind as needing attention, the possibility of grouping them all under one comprehensive title had not suggested itself.

In the Preface the authors say of the plan of their book, that it "was dictated by the following considerations. It is notorious that English writers seldom look into a grammar or composition book; the reading of grammars is repellent because, being bound to be exhaustive on a greater or less scale, they must give much space to the obvious or the unnecessary; and composition books are often useless because they enforce their warnings only by fabricated blunders against which every tyro feels himself quite safe. The principle adopted here has therefore been (1) to pass by all rules, of whatever absolute importance, that are shown by observation to be seldom or never broken; and (2) to illustrate by living examples, with the name of a reputable authority attached

to each, all blunders that observation shows to be common.

"Further, since the positive literary virtues are not to be taught by brief quotations, nor otherwise attained than by improving the gifts of nature with wide or careful reading, whereas something may really be done for the negative virtues by mere exhibition of what should be avoided, the examples collected have had to be examples of the bad and not of the good."

The entertaining quality of the book is due largely to these "examples of the bad," — especially in view of the eminent names often attached to the worst of them, — and to the authors' comments on them. An instance will be found on page 108 below, in connection with Emerson's foible of putting a comma between a noun and its verb. One can but wonder and take courage when one learns of the sins against good English committed by some of the greatest writers, and how curiously addicted some of them seem to be to special idiosyncrasies of syntax or punctuation.

The present writer has appropriated only one or two of the Messrs. Fowler's illustrative examples, but has taken his own as they have "happened" in the course of his reading — largely, of proofs, and, to some extent, of miscellaneous works. Only two books — "Sesame and Lilies" and "Diana of the Crossways" — did he reread

for the purpose of finding illustrations of the peculiar methods of punctuation of Ruskin and Meredith. He has not confined himself to "examples of the bad," because the reason alleged by the Messrs. Fowler does not exist in his case; but he has attempted to distinguish between good and bad by a word of explanation or by bracketed words or points, instead of adopting the too schoolbookish device of labeling them "right" or "wrong."

As to very many of the "examples of the bad," it should be said that they were found in "Atlantic" copy in the form in which they are here printed; but that they were corrected to conform to the usage of the office, before appearing in type.

Of the numerous handbooks and textbooks that the author has examined, only one or two seem to call for special mention: not that they are not all that they claim to be, but because, in most of them, the plan touches the plan of this book only at isolated points. He has explained elsewhere¹ the difficulty that he found in making profitable use of Professor Summey's elaborate and painstaking work on "Modern Punctuation,"² because its aim seems to be to show what modern punctuation is, rather than what it ought to be; but he bears

¹ See under "Punctuation," p. 53 *infra*.

² *Modern Punctuation*, by George Summey, Jr., Associate Professor of English in the North Carolina State College. Oxford University Press, 1919.

willing testimony to the fact that, when Professor Summey expresses a definite opinion upon any point, it almost invariably seems a sound one — as will appear more than once in these pages. Mr. Horace Hart's compact little book of "Rules for Compositors and Readers at the University Press, Oxford," which has been reprinted many times (the edition of 1914 was the ninth for publication), has been very useful, as has the late Wendell P. Garrison's entertaining paper, "A Dissolving View of Punctuation," printed in the "Atlantic" for August, 1906.

A new edition was published in 1906 of William Cobbett's "English Grammar" (which first appeared in 1817), with a biographical and critical introduction by Hon. H. L. Stephen of the High Court of Calcutta. The original title-page tells us that the book was "intended for the use of schools and of young persons in general; but more especially for the use of soldiers, sailors, apprentices, and plough-boys" — that is to say, as Judge Stephen suggests, "of persons who, like Cobbett himself, after they had once been taught to read, had to depend entirely on their own resources for anything else that they might wish to learn."

The famous Radical and "Reformer," whose hand was always raised against those in authority, enlisted in the army at the age of 21, and served in New Brunswick from 1785 to 1791, "during

which time he tells us that he learnt grammar. 'The edge of my berth, or that of the guard bed, was my seat to study in, my knapsack was my bookcase; a bit of board lying on my lap was my writing-table; and the task did not demand anything like a year of my life.' Having learnt grammar, he found himself prepared to take up the position which he characteristically describes in the same work: 'How many false pretenders to erudition have I exposed to shame merely by my knowledge of grammar! How many of the insolent and ignorant great and powerful have I pulled down and made little and despicable! And with what ease have I conveyed, upon numerous important subjects, information and instruction to millions now alive, and provided a store of both for millions yet unborn!'"

In the second edition of his book, published in 1822, Cobbett printed a dedication (dated November, 1820) to the hapless Caroline of Brunswick, Queen Consort of George IV, as "the only one amongst all the Royal Personages of the present age that appears to have justly estimated the value of The People." Whatever the merits may have been of the scandalous dissension between that unfortunate, if unwise, lady and the "First Gentleman of Europe," she was at that time the idol of the mob, one of whose spokesmen Cobbett was; and the significance of this dedica-

tion was further emphasized by the inclusion in this second edition of "Six Lessons, intended to prevent statesmen from using false grammar, and from writing in an awkward manner," in which the literary style of the Prince Regent, Speaker Sutton, Lord Castlereagh, the Duke of Wellington, and others, is held up to ridicule, perhaps a bit hypercritically, but with comments that sufficiently disclose the main purpose of the book — to belabor and poke bitter fun at his political enemies.

The "Lesson" on "Specimens of False Grammar, taken from the Writings of Doctor Johnson and from those of Dr. Watts" contains a passage which fully justifies Judge Stephen's remark that "It was thoroughly consistent with the whole of Cobbett's character [he knew absolutely nothing of Latin] that he should despise any knowledge he did not possess."

After referring satirically to the fact that the errors he proposes to point out were committed by the author of a grammar and a dictionary of the English Language and the author of a work on the subject of Logic, who were said to be "two of the most learned men that England ever produced," Cobbett proceeds: —

"Another object, in the producing of these specimens, is to convince you that a knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages does not prevent

men from writing bad English. Those languages are, by impostors, and their dupes, called 'the *learned* languages'; and those who have paid for having studied them, are said to have received 'a *liberal* education.' These appellations are false, and, of course, they lead to false conclusions. *Learning*, as a noun, means *knowledge*, and *learned* means knowing, or *possessed of knowledge*. . . . If the Reports drawn up by the House of Commons, and which are compositions discovering in every sentence ignorance the most profound, were written in Latin, should we then call them *learned*?

"The cause of the use of this false appellation, 'learned languages,' is this, that those who teach them in England have, in consequence of their teaching, *very large estates in house and land*,¹ which are public property, but which are now used for the sole benefit of those teachers, who are, in general, the relations and dependents of the Aristocracy."

In one of the "Lessons" added in the second edition, the author again discharges his spleen, in a different direction.

"I have before me 'A charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Winchester, at a primary visitation of that diocese, by George Tomline, D.D., F.R.S., Lord Bishop of Winchester, Prelate of the

¹ The italics, both here and below, are all in the original.

Most Noble Order of the Garter.' We will not stop here to inquire what a '*prelate's*' office may require of him relative to an *Order* which history tells us arose out of a *favourite lady* dropping her *garter* at a dance; but, I must observe, that, as the titles here stand, it would appear, that the *last* is deemed the most *honourable*, and of *most importance to the Clergy!* This Bishop, whose name was Prettyman, was the *tutor* of that *William Pitt* who was called the *heaven-born Minister*, and a history of whose life has been written by this Bishop. So that we have here, a *Doctor of Divinity*, a *Fellow of the Royal Society*, a *Prelate of the Most Noble Order of the Garter*, and a *Bishop of one of the richest sees in the whole world*, who, besides, is an *Historian*, and was *Tutor to a heaven-born Minister*. Let us then see what sort of *writing* comes from such a source."

All this is not to say that there is not much useful instruction and good sense to be found in this extraordinarily entertaining book; but, to quote once more from Judge Stephen's Introduction to the new edition, "the illustrations, drawn from current politics and from the most respectable authorities in contemporary literature, are, after all, the parts of the book which have secured for it whatever position it is that it holds in English literature."

The temptation to quote is so strong that it has

perhaps been yielded to over-much; but the present writer reckons as among the chief compensations of his labor the pleasure due to his having been led to read Cobbett and the Messrs. Fowler.

Something has been said of the use of the "Atlantic" in schools in different parts of the country. Will its use, we wonder, be discouraged by such deliverances as this, reported in the newspapers as this book is being prepared for press? Under the heading, "'It is Me' is all right," we read that the Superintendent of Schools of Cook County, Illinois, of which Chicago forms a very large part, said that "the correct form, 'It is I,' sounds stilted *and even egotistical*, and that it does no good to teach children forms of expression 'outlawed by common usage and *a sense of good form.*'"

If either "common usage" or "a sense of good form" demands "It is me," why does it not demand "Between you and I"? However, there is still a ray of hope for those teachers who prefer not to depart from grammatically correct usage: the Cook County Superintendent does not "instruct" them to teach their pupils to say, "It is me," but simply assures them that they will not be "reprimanded" if they do. And it has been rather encouraging to note the tone of journalistic comment, serious and otherwise, — especially the latter, — on this outbreak.

"The King's English" seems to err on the side