

Webster's
New
Dictionary of
Synonyms

A Merriam-Webster

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A DICTIONARY
OF
DISCRIMINATED SYNONYMS
WITH ANTONYMS AND
ANALOGOUS AND CONTRASTED WORDS



G. & C. MERRIAM COMPANY, *Publishers*
SPRINGFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS, U.S.A.

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Dictionary of
Synonyms
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PREFACE

WEBSTER'S NEW DICTIONARY OF SYNONYMS is newly edited and entirely reset but based upon *Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms*, which rapidly became a favorite book among readers and writers who wish to understand, appreciate, and make nice discriminations in English words that are similar in meaning. The earlier book filled a widespread need for a work devoted to synonymy with accessory material in the form of word lists of various kinds. The editors of this new and revised edition have rewritten and sharpened the discriminations, have increased the number of articles, and have more than doubled the number of authors quoted. Particular attention has been given to updating the quotations so that they accurately reflect today's English.

The core of this book is the discriminating articles. It is not its purpose to assemble mere word-finding lists for consultants with but a vague notion of the sort of word they seek, but rather to provide them with the means of making clear comparisons between words of a common denotation and to enable them to distinguish the differences in implications, connotations, and applications among such words and to choose for their purposes the precisely suitable words. (Compare the discussion of Roget's aims beginning on page 14a following.) In addition to the central core of discriminations this book provides auxiliary information of three types, in the form of analogous words, antonyms, and contrasted words. These three types are explained on pages 26a-31a.

Every word discussed in an article of synonymy is entered in its own alphabetical place and is followed by a list of its synonyms, with a reference (by means of an asterisk or a direction introduced by "see") to the entry where the discussion of these listed words is to be found. The words listed as analogous and those listed as contrasted are always displayed in groups, each group having a clear reference (asterisk or "see") to the term under which an article of synonymy is to be found.

The writing of the articles has been done chiefly by two associate editors of the Merriam-Webster editorial staff: Dr. Philip H. Goepp and Dr. Mairé Weir Kay. Their principal assistants were Miss Ervina E. Foss, in charge of cross-referencing, and Mr. E. Ward Gilman, in charge of proofreading, both assistant editors. Mrs. Betty Meltzer was the principal editorial assistant. Some of the articles on scientific terms were written by Mr. Hubert P. Kelsey, associate editor. All of these editors took part in the editing of *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*. The historical survey and the introductory analysis of the problems and issues in the field of English synonymy are largely the work of the late Rose F. Egan, sometime assistant editor, and have been taken over from the first edition with only minor changes. To her clear analysis and understanding this book still owes much of its quality although all of her discriminations have been revised in varying degrees.

PHILIP B. GOVE
Editor in Chief

INTRODUCTORY MATTER

SURVEY OF THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH SYNONYMY

Consultation of a work on synonyms is made easier if the consultant has a reasonable background of the theory and of the technique that have developed since the first English synonymy was published. The following essay [first published in 1942] is, so far as we know, the first attempt to survey broadly the course of that development from its beginnings to the present. It is not intended to be exhaustive. Some good books have been published which have not been specifically discussed because they have played no essential part in this development or have advanced no new ideas which, by challenging attention or debate, have led to further clarification of the problems involved. The purpose of this article has been primarily not to praise or to denounce but to lead up to the exposition of principles which have dominated the writing of this book. These principles, we believe, are founded upon the practice of those who have seen and known clearly what could be accomplished by a book of synonyms: there are others who disagree, but we have tried to present their case fairly.

It was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that the first book on synonyms appeared in English. The Rev. John Trusler (1735-1820) was its author, *The Difference between Words Esteemed Synonymous* its title, and 1766 its date. Its source is definitely established. In 1718, the Abbé Gabriel Girard (1677-1748) had published in France *La Justesse de la langue française ou les Différentes significations des mots qui passent pour être synonymes*, a work which had great vogue not only in France but also abroad, especially in England. That Trusler's book was based upon it is evidenced not only by the likeness of the titles but also (in the first edition) by an English version of Girard's preface and by the admission in the author's preface that he had translated as much of the articles as was in keeping with the peculiar genius of the English language. The second edition of 1783, however, increases the divergence between the two books: the prefaces are consolidated and the result is given as the work of the author, although many passages from Girard are included without being quoted. There are, too, many new articles dealing with peculiarly British terms, such as those which concern the church and daily life in England; but these, although they represent an enrichment of vocabulary, add little to the originality of the work, which still remains an imitation. A clear-cut distinction which sharply reveals the meanings of synonymous French terms often becomes a forced distinction when applied to English. In fact, Trusler never knew whether it was his aim to point out the "delicate differences between words reputed synonymous" or to give the particular idea of each word "which constitutes its proper and particular character." He claims both aims as one, not realizing that often they are divergent.

The next significant work was the *British Synonymy* of Hester Lynch Piozzi (1741-1821), better known as Mrs. Thrale, the close friend of Dr. Johnson. It first appeared in 1794 and was succeeded by at least two editions, the best known of which was published in Paris in 1804. That it was immediately popular is evident from the testimony of its 1804 editors, who asserted its merits on the ground of "the successive editions it has passed through being the best proof of the estimation in which it is held." That it was not written without a knowledge of Girard's work we know on the authority of these same editors.¹ "So great indeed was the estimation" in which the French work was held, "that in a few years after its publication, an imitation of it appeared in England": presumably the "imitation" was Trusler's.

The editors imply, however, that Mrs. Piozzi's work is something better than had yet been given to the public. "But it was only in the year 1794," they continue, in a tone that implies contempt for the "imitation," "that Mrs. PIOZZI (formerly Mrs. THRALE) so well known in the literary world for her different publications, and her intimacy with the learned Dr. Johnson, brought out the work we have now the pleasure of presenting to our Readers, and which is totally grounded on the structure of the English language." There is no reason to suppose, however, that she depended much on the influence of Dr. Johnson, who had died in 1784.

Mrs. Piozzi's book reveals an independence of spirit and a feminine disregard of advice. It is, in fact, never profound: it is full of errors or dubious assertions, and it is often absurdly naïve. More than this, it frequently takes issue with Dr. Johnson or, in a sprightly manner, casts doubt on his judgments. There

¹ Mrs. Piozzi in her own preface (p. vii) mentions Girard and says, "I should be too happy, could I imitate his delicacy of discrimination, and felicity of expression."

is the story of the milliner's apprentice who saved her chicken bones to feed a horse. Johnson contended that such an action showed that she was *ignorant*, but Mrs. Piozzi maintained that it proved her *senseless*. "I thought her an idiot [sic]" was, for her, the last word on the matter.

Great as was her respect for Dr. Johnson in his own field, she believed that she also had her field and that it was incumbent on her to remain within the limits she had set for herself. Her object is very clear. Like Girard and Trusler, she was distinguishing not synonyms (that is, words identical in meaning) but words so similar in meaning as to be "apparently synonymous." The subtitle of her book announces her aim and reveals a further limitation of purpose: "An attempt at regulating the choice of words in familiar conversation." Her preface to the 1794 edition develops these ideas:

If then to the selection of words in conversation and elegant colloquial language a book may give assistance, the Author . . . modestly offers her's; persuaded that, while men teach to write with propriety, a woman may at worst be qualified—through long practice—to direct the choice of phrases in familiar talk.

Her book, she modestly claimed, is "intended chiefly for a parlour window" and is "unworthy of a place upon a library shelf," but it may be of help to others "till a more complicated and valuable piece of workmanship be found to further their research." She wished in particular to help those who desired to converse elegantly and to save foreigners from ridiculous mistakes in speech. "If I can in the course of this little work dispel a doubt, or clear up a difficulty to foreigners . . . I shall have an honour to boast."

For this reason she could not see that her method of discrimination had much in common with that of the lexicographer and the logician. Theirs was to define: hers was to indicate propriety in the use of words. It was not her intent to establish differences in meaning but to indicate the fitness of words for use, often depending on "the place in which they should stand" but sometimes depending on their relative fineness, strength, force, or the like. She makes a distinction between the methods of the definer and the methods of the synonymist by giving, first, two definitions of the word *fondness*, one from "an eminent logician" and one from Dr. Johnson, and, secondly, by an ideal synonymy in which she reveals the same word's meaning by showing it in use along with similar words. This was not invariably her method, but it illustrates what in the main she was trying to achieve.

. . . I have before me the definition of *fondness*, given into my hands many years ago by a most eminent logician. . . .

"*Fondness*," says the Definer, "is the hasty and injudicious determination of the will towards promoting the present gratification of some particular object."

"*Fondness*," said Dr. Johnson, "is rather the hasty and injudicious attribution of excellence, somewhat beyond the power of attainment, to the object of our affection."

Both these definitions may possibly be included in *fondness*; my own idea of the whole may be found in the following example:

Amintor and Aspasia are models of true love: 'tis now seven years since their mutual *passion* was sanctified by marriage; and so little is the lady's *affection* diminished, that she sate up nine nights successively last winter by her husband's bed-side, when he had on him a malignant fever that frighted relations, friends, servants, all away. Nor can any one allege that her *tenderness* is ill repaid, while we see him gaze upon her features with that *fondness* which is capable of creating charms for itself to admire, and listen to her talk with a fervour of admiration scarce due to the most brilliant genius.

For the rest, 'tis my opinion that men love for the most part with warmer *passion* than women do—at least than English women, and with more transitory *fondness* mingled with that passion. . . .

It was in her simpler versions of this method that she developed a formula that has been followed by many of her successors in the discriminated synonymy—not always felicitously. We will have opportunity to return to this method later when it becomes an object of attack and will call it for the sake of convenience the Piozzi method. At present let examples of her usage suffice:

TO ABANDON, FORSAKE, RELINQUISH, GIVE UP, DESERT, QUIT, LEAVE . . . though at first sight apparently synonymous, conversing does certainly better shew the peculiar appropriation, than books, however learned: for . . . familiar talk tells us in half an hour—That a man *forsakes* his mistress, *abandons* all hope of regaining her lost esteem, *relinquishes* his pretensions in favour of another. . . .

we say a lad of an active and *diligent spirit*, or else of an *assiduous temper*, or *sedulous disposition*. . . .

we say that reports are *confirmed*, treaties *ratified*, and affairs *settled*.

a hard question *puzzles* a man, and a variety of choice *perplexes* him: one is *confounded* by a loud and sudden dissonance of sounds or voices in a still night; *embarrassed* by a weight of clothes or valuables, if making escape from fire, thieves, or pursuit. . . .

The gentleman who discharges a gaming debt in preference to that of a tradesman, apparently prefers *honour* to another virtue, *justice*. . . .

It seems a fair statement of her aim to say that she was attempting to indicate and establish idiomatic English. However, in determining such English, she had only two tests to apply: the drawing-room usage of her time and her own instinct. To literary use in general she was indifferent. Therefore her judgments are nearly always subjective and sometimes arbitrary. Moreover, she discounted the great help that discrimination of meanings is to the synonymist. "We must not meantime retard our own progress," she wrote in her preface, "with studied definitions of every quality coming under consideration. . . although the final cause of definition is to fix the true and adequate meaning of words or terms, without knowledge of which we stir not a step in logic; yet *here* we must not suffer ourselves to be so detained, as synonymy has more to do with elegance than truth. . . ."

Her judgments are often limited or partial, for they represent her personal feelings or the predilections of her age. Yet, within those limits, she frequently hit upon an exact meaning of a word in a particular sense and gave it life and color. What she seldom saw was that a word might have more meanings than the one which was illustrated (as *honor* in her example of the tradesman) or that a good but narrow instance of use might be taken as idiomatic by her readers (as when by implication *puzzle* suggests a question or problem needing determination and *perplex* a variety of choices). The danger of her work is not in the falsity of the example, for it is usually true or just, but in its inadequacy in suggesting other instances of good use.

Yet in her refusal to accept her age's theory of definition and in her approach to a concept of good usage we must recognize an independent spirit. The time was not ripe for a fully developed conception of the differences between logic and lexicography, yet she was somewhat nearer the present conception than some later and cleverer persons, and she had at least a feeling of rightness in the use of language that suggested, even if it did not consciously approach, the later theory of good usage as a test of such rightness. Besides, her book has an engaging quality, often lacking in books of this character, which is not necessarily a sign of the levity with which critics have charged this book, but rather of a spirited challenge to the ideals of a hidebound age.

Mrs. Piozzi's book was followed by William Perry's *Synonymous, Etymological, and Pronouncing English Dictionary*, published in 1805. On its title page and in its preface the editor explicitly offers his work as derived from *The Dictionary* of Samuel Johnson. Perry was the compiler of the better known *Royal Standard English Dictionary* brought out in England in 1775 and in America in 1788.

The *Synonymous Dictionary*, as we will call the 1805 book, evidently did not achieve the fame or popularity of the *Royal Standard*. Chauncey Goodrich, Noah Webster's son-in-law, referred to it in 1847 in his preface to the royal octavo volume of Webster as "entirely out of print." There is no evidence to show that it passed beyond the first edition. On its title page it is described as "an attempt to Synonymise his [Johnson's] Folio Dictionary of the English Language." In its preface Perry claims that it contains "the only synonymous vocabulary ever offered to the public" and that "To the philological, critical, and other interesting observations of the above learned author [Dr. Johnson], we have superadded two exclusive advantages to our publication; the one—as a *synonymous*, the other—as a *pronouncing* nomenclature. The *former* is new and unique. . . ."

The work, he informs us, was begun in 1797, three years, therefore, after the publication of the first edition of Mrs. Piozzi's *British Synonymy*. Yet there is no indication of knowledge of that work or of the work of Girard; in fact, Perry recognized no predecessor save Johnson. From Johnson, by explicit credit, he extracted his vocabulary and his explanations of meanings. Not so openly, however, did he extract the synonyms themselves: for example, his entry *good* is followed by Johnson's definition of sense 1, but the synonyms are taken from all of Johnson's succeeding twenty-nine senses. Nor does he provide many citations, and these are chiefly in entries at the end of the book; elsewhere, at the end of an entry or in parentheses, he cites the authors Johnson quoted but not the passages.

In addition he adopted an original method of presenting his material. There were two types of entries, one in lowercase and one in capitals. The latter, which he called "radicals," were followed by an exhaustive list; the former were succeeded by a much shorter list, but one word was printed in small capitals to indicate it was the radical. Thus "marches," a lowercase entry, has "borders, limits, confines, BOUNDARIES" as its synonyms; "BOUNDARY," an entry in capitals, has a much longer list which includes "limit, bound, bourn, term, mere, but, abuttal, border, barrier, marches, confines, precinct, line of demarcation, utmost reach or verge of a territory; a landmark, a mere-stone." If, then, one wished all the synonyms of a lowercase entry such as *marches* or *abbreviation*, one must turn to BOUNDARY OF ABRIDGMENT, the word entered as the radical.

There are two things to notice here that are important. Perry was not merely greatly extending the traditional definition of *synonym* (as one of two or more words of identical meaning or of apparently identical meaning) and broadening it to include a group of words which have resemblances in meaning, but was doing so in what seems to be a misunderstanding of Dr. Johnson's purposes in adding such words to his definitions and in ignorance of what he supplied as a corrective. The fact

of the matter is that Johnson was aware of the difficulties of his task; that he was conscious that the part of his work on which "malignity" would "most frequently fasten is the *Explanation* [i.e., the definition]."

I cannot hope to satisfy those, who are perhaps not inclined to be pleased, since I have not always been able to satisfy myself. To interpret a language by itself is very difficult; many words cannot be explained by synonymes, because the idea signified by them has not more than one appellation; nor by paraphrase, because simple ideas cannot be described.

That was the difficulty. Synonyms would not perfectly satisfy the need either when the word defined had many meanings or when the word defining had more significations than the one intended, for in either case one must be too broad and the other too narrow. Then, too, "simple ideas" (really those involved in simple words such as *be, do, act*) were beyond definition, as Johnson saw it.

The rigour of interpretative lexicography requires that *the explanation, and the word explained, should be always reciprocal*; this I have always endeavoured but could not always attain. Words are seldom exactly synonymous; a new term was not introduced, but because the former was thought inadequate: names, therefore, have often many ideas, but few ideas have many names. It was then necessary to use the proximate word, for the deficiency of single terms can very seldom be supplied by circumlocution. . . .

So Johnson wrote and so Perry quotes in his preface. But instead of continuing Johnson's statement to its end, Perry broke off with "circumlocution," thereby giving the reader some reason to infer that Johnson thought the method of definition by synonym preferable to that of definition by paraphrase. He had failed to notice or possibly had deliberately ignored that this was not in any sense Johnson's meaning, that both methods were faulty, but that there was a remedy for the imperfections of each. Johnson's addition to this last sentence, "nor is the inconvenience great of such mutilated interpretations, because the sense may easily be collected entire from the examples," makes that point clear. Perry may have been obtuse rather than disingenuous when, for the most part, he omits the examples (citations) of Johnson and enters synonyms, which are not, in Johnson's language, "exactly synonymous" but only "proximate words." But he may have known what Dr. Johnson meant, though his explanation is by no means clear:

. . . we by no means contend, that the whole of the explanations collected under such initial words as . . . we call RADICALS, are all strictly synonymous; neither, on the other hand, can we agree with those who roundly assert, that there are not two words in the whole English language of precisely the same signification; but this we take upon us to say, that we have no less than Dr. Johnson's authority for their selection and disposition as explanatory of their meaning. . . .

Dr. Johnson's example, great as was its authority and prestige at that time, was an unstable prop when his statements were misunderstood. Perry perhaps indirectly rendered a service by raising the issue as to whether the term "synonym" needed redefinition, since it was being broadened in its extension: he may also have done a service in showing to others the values implicit in word-finding lists. But he did not see that he had raised those issues, and what purports to be a dictionary succeeds chiefly in being a word finder.

Between 1805 and 1852 (the latter the date of publication of Roget's *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*) several works on synonyms appeared. Some were of the word-finding list type, and among these there was nothing of particular importance. On the other hand, there were as many as five works discriminating synonyms of which at least four stand out for one reason or another: *English Synonymes Discriminated* by William Taylor (1813), *English Synonymes Explained* by George Crabb (1816), *English Synonyms Classified and Explained* by George F. Graham (1846), and *A Selection of English Synonyms* by Miss Elizabeth Jane Whately (1851). Both Crabb's and Whately's books are still influential and have been reprinted in recent years.

William Taylor (1765-1836), the author of the first of these books, is better known as the translator of Burger's *Lenore*, Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, and Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris* and as one of the leading promoters of knowledge of contemporary German literature during the romantic era. His *English Synonymes Discriminated* is the result of his studies in German, French, Italian, and other languages and of his conviction that no English work the equal of certain foreign treatises on synonyms had as yet been written. The work is, as a whole, uneven, but a few articles in it are not only better than any others written up to that time but the equal of any that were to be written for over ninety years. A favorite theory of his was that if one is thoroughly grounded in the original meaning of a term, one "can never be at a loss how to employ it in metaphor." Consequently, etymologies became for him an important means of showing this original meaning. They formed not an invariable part of his discrimination but a very useful part when they were needed. Usually, also, he knew when his etymology was grounded on fact and when it was merely hypothetical. His method at its best is exemplified in the article covering *austere, severe, and rigid*, which we give here in abridged form:

Austerity (says Blair²) relates to the manner of living: severity, of thinking, rigour, of punishing. To austerity is opposed effeminacy; to severity, relaxation; to rigour, clemency. A hermit is austere in his life; a casuist, severe in his decision; a judge, rigorous in his sentence.

In this discrimination there is little exactness. Austerity is applied not only to habit, but to doctrine, and to infliction. Solitary confinement is a severe form of life, and a severe punishment. Rigid observances, rigid opinions, are oftener spoken of than rigid sentences.

A hermit is austere, who lives harshly; is severe who lives solitarily; is rigid who lives unswervingly. A casuist is austere who commands mortification, severe, who forbids conviviality, rigid, whose exactions are unqualified. A judge is austere, who punishes slight transgressions; severe, who punishes to the utmost; rigid, who punishes without respect of persons and circumstances.

Why this? Austerity is an idea of the palate; it means crabbedness. . . . These modes of life which are painful to the moral taste, are called austere. . . . Austerity is opposed to suavity.

Severity is not traced back to the sensible idea in which the word originates. *Se* and *vereor*, to bend down apart, are perhaps the component ideas. The *lying prostrate apart* is not only characteristic of the praying anchorite, and of public penance, but of cruel infliction: and to all these cases severity is accordingly applied. . . . To severity is opposed remissness.

Rigour is stiffness; rigid means frozen: stiff with cold. . . . To rigour is opposed pliancy.

Religious competition renders sects austere, priests severe, and establishments rigid.

With the exception of *severe* (the ultimate origin of which is still doubtful) the words, in the main, conform to their etymology. *Austere* does originally mean something like "bitter-tasting" and *rigid* means "stiff," though not necessarily "stiff with cold"; also, something that is *austere* is not sweet or suave, and something that is *rigid* is not pliant or flexible. He has caught the essential difference here, and the proper application follows. If Taylor had been able to maintain this method and the penetration it involved, he might have changed the course of synonymizing. But three years later *English Synonymes Explained*, by George Crabb (1778–1851), appeared and caught the public favor. For thirty-seven years Taylor's book remained unreprinted: then between 1850 and 1876 there were three new editions. For a few years it attracted some attention and then disappeared from favor.

Crabb's book, while still highly regarded by some, meets much adverse criticism from others. In his own day it was thought of generally as the best work available, although Crabb complicated matters somewhat by frequent revisions which changed its character. In his introduction to the first edition he complained of the lack of a work on English synonyms in which the subject is treated "in a scientific manner adequate to its importance." Englishmen though great in literature and philology had in this field fallen short of the French and Germans, who "have had several considerable works on the subject." He did not wish "to depreciate the labours of those who have preceded" him; rather he claimed to "have profited by every thing which has been written in any language upon the subject; and although I always pursued my own train of thought, yet whenever I met with any thing deserving of notice, I adopted it, and referred it to the author in a note."

Crabb's *English Synonymes Explained* is both the most laborious and the most ambitious work of its kind. In spirit and objective it is a far remove from Mrs. Piozzi's *British Synonymy*, few as are the years which intervened between their publication. For Mrs. Piozzi represented the old temper where sprightliness, elegance, and ease were paramount and Crabb the new temper in which the world had grown solemn and serious under the influence of many currents, such as the pressure of momentous events, the influence of Continental (especially German) thinkers, and the spread of all the new ideas spoken of collectively as romanticism. When the best philosophers and philosophic poets of the age were seeking to answer the questions what is beauty, what is poetry, what is art, what is genius and were discriminating the beautiful and the sublime, the naïve and the sentimental, imagination and fancy, the ugly and the grotesque, what synonymist could in conscience say that "synonymy has more to do with elegance than truth"?

Crabb was undoubtedly concerned with truth rather than elegance. He was stimulated by the thinking of his age and, like many persons of his time, responded with joy to the new philosophy that deepened and enriched the concepts of beauty, poetry, and truth. Although he was in no sense a philosopher, he had a smattering of philosophical knowledge, a small philosophical vocabulary, and a deep love of philosophical distinctions. He was also interested in philology as it was understood in his time. In the study of synonyms he found satisfaction of all these interests, all the more so since he had come to regard synonyms not as words of the same meaning but as "closely allied" words between which there are "nice shades of distinction." Discrimination not only gave him profound intellectual satisfaction: it also afforded him great opportunities. In his introduction he wrote:

My first object certainly has been to assist the philological inquirer in ascertaining the force and comprehension of the English language; yet I should have thought my work but half completed had I made it a

² Hugh Blair, rhetorician, 1718–1800.

mere register of verbal distinctions. While others seize every opportunity unblushingly to avow and zealously to propagate opinions destructive of good order, it would ill become any individual of contrary sentiments to shrink from stating his convictions, when called upon as he seems to be by an occasion like that which has now offered itself.

His justification for "the introduction of morality in a work of science" is very ingenious. In answer to anticipated objections he wrote, "a writer, whose business it was to mark the nice shades of distinction between words closely allied, could not do justice to his subject without entering into all the relations of society, and showing, from the acknowledged sense of many moral and religious terms, what has been the general sense of mankind on many of the most important questions which have agitated the world."

It is not easy to find in Crabb proofs that he was discriminating historical meanings (the interpretation that may be given to his "acknowledged sense"), but one can readily discover evidence that often he was supporting an older conception he favored rather than a new conception he heartily disliked. A good example of this is found in his discrimination of SOUL and MIND.

There are minute philosophers, who . . . deny that we possess any thing more than what this poor composition of flesh and blood can give us; and yet, methinks, sound philosophy would teach us that we ought to prove the truth of one position, before we assert the falsehood of its opposite; and consequently that if we deny that we have any thing but what is material in us, we ought first to prove that the material is sufficient to produce the reasoning faculty of man. . . . [He continued this line of argument through several sentences.]

But not to lose sight of the distinction drawn between the words *soul* and *mind*, I simply wish to show that the vulgar and the philosophical use of these terms altogether accord, and are both founded on the true nature of things.

Poets and philosophers speak of the *soul* in the same strain, as the active and living principle.³

Arguments of this character were mostly occasional with Crabb, but the method of discriminating things which the words named or to which they were applied was characteristically infixed. He could not, for instance, mark the distinctions between *finical* and *foppish* but between a *finical gentleman* and a *foppish gentleman*.

A *finical* gentleman clips his words and screws his body into as small a compass as possible to give himself the air of a delicate person. . . . a *foppish* gentleman seeks by extravagance in the cut of his clothes, and by the tawdriness in their ornaments, to render himself distinguished for finery.

He could not discriminate *beautiful*, *fine*, *handsome* without determining what is *the beautiful*, *the fine*, *the handsome*.

The *beautiful* is determined by fixed rules; it admits of no excess or defect; it comprehends regularity, proportion, and a due distribution of colour, and every particular which can engage the attention: the *fine* must be coupled with grandeur, majesty, and strength of figure; it is incompatible with that which is small; a little woman can never be *fine*: the *handsome* is a general assemblage of what is agreeable; it is marked by no particular characteristic, but the absence of all deformity. . . .

Even simple words were so discriminated; each one had an abstract reference which was the test of its right use no matter how little cultivated writers and speakers respected that test.

The *gift* is an act of generosity or condescension; it contributes to the benefit of the receiver: the *present* is an act of kindness, courtesy, or respect; it contributes to the pleasure of the receiver.

What we *abhor* is repugnant to our moral feelings; what we *detest* contradicts our moral principle; what we *abominate* does equal violence to our religious and moral sentiments. . . . Inhumanity and cruelty are objects of *abhorrence*; crimes and injustice of *detestation*; impiety and profanity of *abomination*. . . .

Crabb's habitual attitude to words as names of things, or for what he might have called "true concepts of things," vitiates his entire work. It has made it of negligible value in our time when lexicography has become an independent science with clearly defined objectives and functions, the chief of which is to respect the meanings men have agreed to give words rather than the notions individuals have concerning the things named or described by those words. His concepts, however interesting, are still subjective and have not been tested to any extent by actual written or spoken language. There are many citations in his work, but the sensitive reader often finds little relevancy between the word as used there and the sense defined. For example, in illustrating the meaning of the "soul" as "the active and living principle" he cites Thomson:

"In bashful coyness or in maiden pride,
The soft return conceal'd, save when it stole
In side-long glances from her downcast eyes,
Or from her swelling *soul* in stifled sighs"

³ This paragraph did not appear in the first edition.

But here *soul* as cited means simply and narrowly the rising emotions and not "the active and living principle."

His synonymies are, on the whole, hard reading because confused and inconsistent. As a rule they attempt too much yet do not fully apprehend the greatness of the task and leave the reader without any clear or definite impression or without any remembered distinctions. Also, they excite rebellion in a reader who can give any number of citations to show that Crabb's dogmatic assertions are not justified by usage. Despite these fundamental defects which, with the passage of time and changes in the basic conceptions, have come to be more and more striking, Crabb deserves recognition for some additions to the art of synonymizing. Even these, however, may not be entirely his contributions: a bit here and a bit there may have been done by others. Taylor, for example, gave etymologies when they served his purpose. Moreover, after Crabb the work of perfecting often remained to be done and many others are responsible for deeper insight into the possibilities of the method or the extent to which each possibility is serviceable. The chief contributions are three:

1. The addition of an etymology to the article. Much more, however, needed to be known before certain words could be correctly etymologized and before they could be related to the sense to be defined. In some cases Crabb's etymologies are "learned" additions to the article, in no way reflecting the words' semantic development.

2. The addition of a statement (usually introductory) as to how far the words are equivalent in meaning. There was an approach to this in the work of Mrs. Piozzi, but it was hardly of the same character. Crabb's method was not only clearer and firmer but was much less subject to idiosyncrasies. Since this was his most enduring contribution, a few examples may be given to illustrate his method.

INGENUITY, WIT. . . . Both these terms imply acuteness of understanding, and differ mostly in the mode of displaying themselves. . . .

TO DISPARAGE, DETRACT, TRADUCE, DEPRECIATE, DEGRADE, DECRY. . . . The idea of lowering the value of an object is common to all these words, which differ in the circumstances and object of the action. . . .

DISCERNMENT, PENETRATION, DISCRIMINATION, JUDGMENT. . . . The first three of these terms do not express different powers, but different modes of the same power; namely the power of seeing intellectually, or exerting the intellectual sight. . . .

In clearness of statement, in pointedness, in "hitting the nail on the head" nearly all of these introductions leave something to be desired. Nevertheless, they are historically important because they represent the first tentative formulation of what has proved to be an important and essential part of the discriminated synonymy at its best.

3. In the arrangement of his word lists Crabb claims to have moved from the most comprehensive to the less comprehensive. In such articles as those discussing **form, ceremony, rite, observance**; and **short, brief, concise, succinct, summary** the principle is clear, but in others, such as those for **apparel, attire, array**; and **belief, credit, trust, faith**; and **execute, fulfill, perform**, the procedure is not perfectly clear. In general, however, he seems to have had a plan and to have stuck to it when he could.

There are other devices used by Crabb which in later and defter hands proved valuable, but these three are the ones on which he has exerted his powers and with which he had greatest success. That the success was not complete is not entirely his fault. The English language is not a symmetrical language: it was never intended to be prodded into shape by the pen of the lexicographer or of the synonymist. No method is uniformly successful: every method must achieve a degree of fluidity before it can be turned to use. What was eminently true in Crabb's case is still eminently true, but some writers of today have learned to bow to necessity, a lesson which many early synonymists could not learn easily or gracefully.

His book continued to be held in high regard for many decades. In fact, a centennial edition in honor of the first (1816) was published in 1917 in the United States. Its editors' names are not given, but it contains an eloquent introduction by John H. Finley, then commissioner of education in New York state, which ends with the sentence: "Long life to Crabb and to that for which his name is as a synonym!"

By this time—that is, particularly between the first edition of Crabb's work and the first edition of Whately's book—keen interest was being displayed in the use of synonyms in education. Several texts suitable for use in the schools were prepared. Not necessarily the best of these but the most thoughtful and suggestive was *English Synonymes Classified and Explained with Practical Exercises Designed for School and Private Tuition* by George F. Graham. The emphasis in the book is entirely upon discrimination. Since there is no attempt to supply as many synonyms as possible and every effort to make differences clear, two words only are given in each article. Although this has the effect of making the book seem purely pedagogical, it admits employment of a method of classification which would break down if more words were to be added. It is, therefore, only by courtesy that Graham's book can be called a synonymy.

The study of synonyms ought, according to Graham, to begin in the elementary schools. In the hope of

making this possible, he divides all pairs of synonyms into five classes marking the relationships of these words. He calls his classes *General and Specific*, *Active and Passive*, *Intensity*, *Positive and Negative*, and *Miscellaneous*. The classification is obviously not clean-cut and the classes are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As illustrations of *General and Specific* relationships he compares *answer* and *reply*, *bravery* and *courage*; as instances of *Active and Passive* relationships he discriminates *burden* and *load*, and *actual* and *real*; and as examples of *Intensity* in relationships he considers *agony* and *anguish*, and *intention* and *purpose*. It is needless to say that a rigid classification begets a rigid method of discrimination. Sometimes, it serves to bring out a real distinction between the words, but more often it serves to confuse them by bending them to suit a set purpose. It is the best example we have had so far of the futility of applying a rigid method to the direct study of anything so nonrigid and living as a language.

Crabb's supremacy as a synonymist seems not to have been seriously threatened by a slight book which appeared in 1851, won general praise, and has been listed in practically every bibliography since that time. This book, usually called "Whately's book on synonyms," has never, so far as we know, been properly esteemed for its own values, nor has its true author ever been adequately recognized. Credit for its authorship is often given to the famous logician Richard Whately (1787-1863), Anglican archbishop of Dublin; rightly, it belongs to his daughter, Elizabeth Jane Whately. A modern but undated edition (before 1928) from the Boston house of Lothrop, Lee, and Shepard confuses both details of title and authorship by calling it on the title page "English Synonyms Discriminated, by Richard Whately, D.D." It has two prefaces, one the editor's preface signed, in the characteristic fashion of Anglican bishops, "Richard Dublin"; the other the preface by the author, which is unsigned.

The editor's preface is very short and abstruse but pregnant with meaning. The archbishop took occasion to say that "this little work has been carefully revised by me, throughout" and that though "far from presuming to call it perfect, it is, I am confident, very much the best that has appeared on the subject." Some of its readers will acknowledge its value in the "cultivation of correctness and precision in our expressions." There will be those, however [we are paraphrasing, amplifying, and interpreting his very cryptic statements], who are so blinded by their adoption of "the metaphysical theory of *ideas*" that they will regard words as of little importance in themselves, and the ideas named as of great significance. There are others, such as himself, who regard words as "an indispensable instrument of thought, in all cases, where a process of *reasoning* takes place." Words are the symbols which men use in discourse. For the most part they do not name real things, for abstractions, such as the one called "beauty," or the generalized notion, such as the one called "tree," exist nowhere except in the mind and have not reality. Only in particular things can beauty be found: only particular objects which are classed together under the name "tree" exist. Therefore, if words are to serve as convenient instruments of discourse, they must often be regarded as signs not of real things but of notions of things and must have a fixed and generally accepted content. Otherwise human minds could never come together in discourse. Moreover, actual discourse is often futile because words are loosely or incorrectly used.

The preface by the author, though it avoids all references to philosophy, is in general based on the same premises. The author, as has been said, is the archbishop's daughter, and the proper title of the book is *A Selection of Synonyms*. To her, as well as to her father, words are, for the most part, the names for human ideas or concepts of things. There may be words which name approximately the same thing but which, because of differences in human points of view, are distinguishable by slight differences in meaning. Synonyms, or as she preferred to call them "pseudo-synonyms," have "sufficient resemblance of meaning to make them liable to be confounded together. And it is in the number and variety of these that . . . the richness of a language consists. To have two or more words with exactly the same sense, is no proof of copiousness, but simply an inconvenience." A language, in her estimation, should have no more words than it needs, just as a house should have no more chairs or tables than required for convenience.

Differences in meaning she found even in words which denote exactly the same object, act, process, quality, emotion, and the like. Such words often have different connotations. "*Swine's flesh*," she says, is prohibited by the Mosaic Law, for "it is plain that it presents to the mind a gross idea, which *pork* does not." Some words may denote the same thing but their different origins or their varying historical associations give them a distinct character which better fits one than the other for use in certain contexts. In polite phrases such as "May I take the liberty?" the Latin derivative *liberty* is more suitable than the Saxon *freedom*. A heathen or an atheist may be called *just* but not *righteous* because Biblical use of the latter word has narrowed its application. Much more acute is her observation that two words may name the same thing but differ because they regard that thing from opposite points of view. She instances *inference* and *proof*.

Whoever justly infers, proves; and whoever proves, infers; but the word 'inference' leads the mind from the premises which have been assumed, to the conclusion which follows from them: while the word 'proof' follows a reverse process, and leads the mind from the conclusion to the premises.

In a footnote she refers to Aristotle's admirable parallel between *anger* and *hatred*, but after summing up

his distinctions, she adds significantly:

His [Aristotle's] example. . . has not been followed in this work. . . because, though the two *passions* may often be confounded together, and mistaken one for the other, the two *words* are not liable to be mistaken; and it is with words that we have now to do.

There, one is forced to comment, is the lexicographer speaking and not the would-be philosopher who would use definition or discrimination of words as an instrument for the expression of his own ideas.

Here and there in her preface and in her synonymies, without evident plan or intention, Miss Whately advanced ideas which when brought together indicate a conception of the synonymist's function and equipment far beyond any yet presented. Not only was she, in effect if not by design, distinguishing lexicography from philosophy but she was defining and enriching the concept of the ideal synonymy and the ideal synonymist. And she did so by flying in the face of all Crabb's admirers and imitators.

Although she realized the importance per se of the "history of the *derivation* of words," she omitted etymologies "which are generally appended to every group of synonyms as an almost essential part of it." She questioned the value of "this procedure" because it tends "to confuse the subject it was intended to clear," for "in inquiring into the *actual* and *present* meaning of a word, the consideration of what it *originally* meant may frequently tend to lead us astray." Nevertheless, she made good use of her knowledge of etymology when it helped in the discrimination of words.

'Contentment' may be classed among those words in the English language which adhere strictly to their etymology. Its root was undoubtedly the verb 'to contain,' and the substantive and its adjective have not departed from this meaning. A *contented* person does not indulge in fruitless wishes for what is beyond his reach; his desires are limited by what he possesses.

'Satisfaction' implies more: this word has likewise retained the signification of its root, and means that we have obtained all we want; not that our desires are *limited*, but that they have been *gratified*. A poor and needy man may be '*contented*,' but he cannot feel '*satisfaction*' with his condition.

Her illustrations are many and reveal wide reading, a broad linguistic background, and a deep interest in developments of meaning, in differences in meaning between words of the same origin in different languages (e.g., between the English *defend* and the French *défendre* which means not only to defend but also to forbid), and in English words which have "corresponding origins" yet are "widely different in their significations," such as *substance* (printed as *substantia* in her book), *understanding*, and *hypostasis*. She was interested also in the notions which gave names to things, as "'Heaven' . . . conveyed with it the idea of something *heaved* or *lifted up*. . . 'Coelum' . . . referred to something hollowed out or vaulted."

All these variations of meaning. . . are valuable and curious; but though they may occasionally help us, they must not be allowed to influence our decisions with respect to the significations of words. Our question is, not what *ought* to be, or formerly was, the meaning of a word, but what it *now* is; nor can we be completely guided by quotations from Shakespeare or Milton, or even from Addison or Johnson. Language has undergone such changes, even within the last sixty or seventy years, that many words at that time considered pure, are now obsolete; while others. . . formerly slang, are now used by our best writers. . . The standard we shall refer to in the present work, is the sense in which a word is used by the purest writers and most correct speakers of our own days.

Although Miss Whately cannot be said to be the first to discriminate meanings of synonyms, she was, so far as we know, the first in England to make that the avowed aim of a book of synonyms and to realize clearly the distinction between the meaning of a word and the thing or idea for which it stood.

Unfortunately, Miss Whately was not so successful in finding a method of synonymizing as she was in expounding its principles. She had, in theory, thrown off the yoke of Crabb, but in practice she occasionally submitted to it. Nor had she, any more than Crabb, been able to discard completely or to transform to her own use what has been called the Piozzi method of illustration. Some of the difficulty arises from her use of other writers and from the reviser (her father) who, though sympathetic in principle, did not always agree with the exposition in detail and made many heavy-handed changes. But these sources of difficulty are superficial: the real but unassignable reason probably has its roots in something that lies in temper and lack of experience. Yet, in spite of everything, she made several significant advances not only in the theory but in the art of synonymizing. Summed up, they are:

1. The principle that knowledge of meanings and all the background that such knowledge implies (derivations, historical development of senses, usage of purest writers and speakers, especially of one's own period, the associations that affect connotations, etc.) are indispensable elements of the synonymist's equipment, to be used or discarded as the occasion warrants.

2. The principle that the synonymist goes beyond the definer, in a difference of purpose. It is the function of the one who would define a word to estimate truly the meanings men have agreed should be given to it: it is the function of the synonymist to point out the differences between words with meanings so nearly alike

that he not only gives help in their correct use but promotes precision of expression so necessary to the thinker and writer.

3. A clearer conception of the ways in which synonyms differ:

(a) Because of differences in implications.

"Both *obstinacy* and *stubbornness* imply an excessive and vicious perseverance in pursuing our own judgment in opposition to that of others; but to be *obstinate* implies the doing what we ourselves chose. To be *stubborn* denotes rather, not to do what others advise or desire." (Quoted from Sir James Mackintosh.)

A *trifling* matter is one merely of small importance: a *trivial* matter is a small matter made too much of. The word 'trivial' implies contempt, which 'trifling' does not. By saying, 'He never neglects a *trifling* matter,' we are rather supposed to praise; but in blaming a person for frivolity, we often say, 'He is always engrossed with *trivial* concerns.'

(b) Because of differences in applications.

"*Obstinacy* is generally applied to the superior; *stubbornness* to the inferior. . . *Obstinacy* refers more to outward acts, and *stubbornness* to disposition." (Quoted from Sir James Mackintosh.)

Strictly speaking, '*expense*' should be applied to the purchaser, and '*cost*' to the thing purchased. . . . Many persons are tempted to buy articles. . . because they are not *costly*, forgetting that. . . these purchases may still be too *expensive*.

'*Delightful*' is applied both to the pleasures of the mind and those of the senses: '*delicious*' only to those of the senses. An excursion, a social circle, a place of abode, may be '*delightful*'; a perfume, or a fruit, '*delicious*.'

(c) Because of differences in extension, or range of meaning.

'*Timid*' is applied both to the state of mind. . . in which a person may happen to be at the moment, and to the habitual disposition; '*timorous*,' only to the disposition. '*Timid*' is therefore, the more extensive term, and comprehends the meanings of '*timorous*.' . . .

TO UNDERSTAND, TO COMPREHEND. The former of these verbs is used in a much more extended sense than the latter. Whatever we *comprehend*, we *understand*; but '*to understand*' is used on many occasions in which *to comprehend* would be inadmissible. . . . It would be quite correct to say, 'I did not *comprehend* his exposition, or his arguments, although I *understood* the language, and the grammatical import of each sentence.'

(d) Because of differences in association or origin and, therefore, in connotations.

FATHERLY, PATERNAL; MOTHERLY, MATERNAL. . . are formed from corresponding roots in Latin and Saxon. . . the Latin word being the more polite and cold, the Saxon the more hearty and cordial. . . . We speak of 'a *paternal* government'—'*maternal* duties'; but of 'a *fatherly* kindness of manner'—'*a motherly* tenderness.'

RIGHTEOUS, JUST. . . a Saxon and a Latin term, whose roots exactly correspond in meaning; but they have even more curiously diverged than many other pairs of words. '*Righteous*' is now exclusively applied to rectitude of conduct drawn from *religious* principle, while '*just*' is simply used for moral uprightness. A heathen or atheist may be called *just*, but not *righteous*.

(e) Because of the difference in the point of view from which the same thing is regarded.

'*Anger*' is more correctly applied to the inward feeling: '*wrath*' to the outward manifestation. . . . We should not speak of the 'anger,' but of the 'wrath' of the elements. We therefore speak of 'the *wrath* of God,' more correctly than of his *anger*. We cannot attribute to Him passions like those of men: we can only describe the external effects which in man would be produced by those passions.

In 1852, the year after Whately's *Selection of Synonyms* was published, appeared the first edition of the *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*, by Peter Mark Roget (1779–1869), a book that was to exert very great influence on the development of interest in synonyms and to provoke a new interest in opposite or contrasted terms. The modern consultant of the *Thesaurus*, accustomed to depend on the elaborate index (provided in 1879 by the compiler's son John L. Roget), has little knowledge of the original plan of the book, though it has in no way been disturbed by revisers of the Roget family. But this plan is obviously hard to use and few consultants of the *Thesaurus*, if any, now avail themselves of it. It depends upon a classification of all words into six main categories, those dealing with Abstract Relations, Space, Matter, Intellect, Volition, and Affections, each of which is divided into smaller and appropriate subdivisions until an appropriate heading, such as *Interpretation* or *Lending*, gives the clue for the left-hand column of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs gathered under it and an appropriate heading, such as *Misinterpretation* or *Borrowing*, gives the clue for the right-hand column of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that are theoretically opposed or in contrast. But Roget did not call these word lists *Synonyms* and *Antonyms* (the latter word indeed had not yet been coined): his usual name was "Analogous Words" for those in the left-hand column and "Correlative Words" for those in the right-hand column. Despite this, other revisers than those of the Roget family have consistently misinterpreted this volume as a book of synonyms and antonyms and have rearranged it or alphabetized it in the hope of making this clear.

It is, therefore, merely because of its historical connections with the treatment of synonyms and antonyms that this book is of immediate significance to us. Only when it is clear that the book purports to be a supplier of words—technically, a “word finder”—and nothing else, are we able to estimate correctly the heresy that has arisen out of its misunderstanding. To reach this end we must know very clearly just what Roget tried to accomplish by this book and just what he ruled out as extraneous to his purpose.

As early as 1805 Roget realized that what he needed for his own writing was a classified list of words in which he might find not only the right words to express his ideas but words that would help him in clarifying or formulating confused or vague ideas. He found the lists he made so useful to himself that he came to believe that they would prove, if amplified, of great value to others. For nearly fifty years he had this project in mind, but only at the age of seventy, after his retirement in 1849 from his position as secretary of the Royal Society of London for the Advancement of Science, was he able to realize it.

He held from the start that what was needed was not a dictionary of synonyms. Roget had in mind a consultant who not only did not know a near word but could not even recall a word somewhat similar in meaning to the word desired or only vaguely apprehended an idea because of the want of the right word or words to help him in formulating it. For example, a geologist who has found a rock, probably hitherto undiscovered, because it fitted into no known classification might be at a loss for the exact terms to describe its peculiar texture. Such a person could hope to find in the section headed “Matter” the concrete adjective he needed (such as *fissile*, *friable*, *splintery*). No word, no phrase, was too narrow in its meaning to serve Roget’s purpose, or too archaic, or too slangy, or too erudite. Whether one was writing a technical treatise or a witty essay, a historical novel or a definition for a dictionary, one might hope to discover in this *Thesaurus* the expressions “which are best suited to his purpose, and which might not have occurred to him without such assistance.” For words, “like ‘spirits from the vasty deep’ . . . come not when we call”; “appropriate terms, notwithstanding our utmost efforts, cannot be conjured up at will.”

More than this, Roget did not call the words he selected *synonyms*, when they were of the same part of speech and belonged in the same column. That he understood “synonyms” as denoting words of equivalent meaning is evident in his reference to the discrimination of “apparently synonymous” terms. There can be no question that he thought word-finding lists of synonyms and of “apparently synonymous” terms would be too meager to suit the purposes he had in mind.

As for the discrimination of synonyms, that was entirely foreign to the purpose of his book. He was very explicit about that:

The investigation of the distinctions to be drawn between words apparently synonymous, forms a separate branch of inquiry, which I have not presumed here to enter upon; for the subject has already occupied the attention of much abler critics than myself, and its complete exhaustion would require the devotion of a whole life. The purpose of this Work, it must be borne in mind, is not to explain the signification of words, but simply to classify and arrange them according to the sense in which they are now used, and which I presume to be already known to the reader. I enter into no inquiry into the changes of meaning they may have undergone in the course of time. I am content to accept them at the value of their present currency, and have no concern with their etymologies, or with the history of their transformations; far less do I venture to thrid [thread] the mazes of the vast labyrinth into which I should be led by any attempt at a general discrimination of synonyms.

It is also important to notice that Roget believed himself without a precursor “in any language.” He may have known Perry and many others who worked in the word-finding field before 1852: like other cultivated men he probably knew Crabb and others working on the discrimination of synonyms: but he always thought of himself as doing something quite distinct from both. In fact, he gave his successors many reasons for refusing to believe that his two series of word-supplying lists were synonyms or antonyms or were capable of discrimination as synonyms or of opposition as antonyms.

Despite that, his purpose was misunderstood and his book misinterpreted. In 1867 appeared a small book called *A Complete Collection of Synonyms and Antonyms*, by the Rev. Charles J. Smith, which gave evidence that here and there men were quietly substituting their judgment of Roget’s work for his own. It is true that there is only one sentence in the preface of Smith’s book to support this inference, and that concerns the reason why its author has chosen the dictionary method of presenting his material, “from finding that the abstract classifications of words, under certain broad ideas, according to the plan of Dr. Roget, seems invalidated by the necessity, in his well-known *Thesaurus*, of numberless cross-divisions, and is practically disregarded in favor of the Alphabetical Index.” Yet, brief as is that statement, it reveals that he thought his work and Roget’s had a common purpose—to give synonyms and their opposites or, to use the word which he now coined, their “antonyms”—and that the difference between the two books was merely a matter of method.

There is no evidence that Smith realized that he was changing the time-honored definition of *synonym*. His chief object in phrasing his definition of *synonym* was to set that term in opposition to *antonym*, which he regarded as its antithesis. Nevertheless, in so doing, he introduced a subtle and important change in the