ELEMENTS

OF

ENGLISH GRAMMAR.
THE ELEMENTS
OF
ENGLISH GRAMMAR
WITH A CHAPTER ON ESSAY-WRITING

BY

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Key to the Questions contained in West's Elements of English Grammar and English Grammar for Beginners, by Alfred S. West, M.A. Cambridge University Press. Second Impression. Price 3s. 6d. net.
THE book contains the Elements of English Grammar, but it does not profess to be a complete manual of the English Language. Boys and girls from thirteen to seventeen years of age are the readers whose wants it has been written to supply. For a treatise intended to meet the requirements of older students, a different choice of materials would often have been made, and the materials chosen would have been treated in a different fashion. Hence it will be found that in the following pages no mention is made of some of the questions which are discussed in larger works; that other questions are touched upon, but not probed to the bottom; that here and there a definition lacks completeness, logical accuracy being sacrificed to intelligibility; and that the details of early English accidence have been inserted only when modern forms would be inexplicable without them. There are elementary books which furnish information so copious that young readers cannot see the wood for the trees. One who undertakes to instruct boys and girls needs constantly to bear in mind ὅσον πλέον ἦμισυ πιστός—how much the half is greater than the whole, in order that
vi

PREFACE.

he may avoid ‘the human too much.’ The things which have been deliberately left out of this small volume would have made a big book.

When we reflect that of every hundred boys and girls now learning English Grammar probably not more than one will ever read a page of any English author who wrote before the age of Elizabeth, it seems needlessly cruel to the remaining ninety-and-nine to inflict upon them the exhaustive study of historical English accidence. The average pupil, for whom the English Grammar lesson means mastering lists of strong verbs in half-a-dozen conjugations,—or learning that the comparative of near has assumed such diverse forms as nyra, nearra, nerre, nere, nerrer, or that the word which has at different times been written hwilc, whulc, whulch, wuch, wich, and whilk,—deserves our sympathy when he complains that English Grammar is rather dull. Tell him that “English Grammar without a reference to the older forms must appear altogether anomalous, inconsistent, and unintelligible,” and he will say that, if it is necessary to encounter grim battalions of these older forms on every page, the subject had better be left severely alone, since it is hardly worth while going through so much to get so little.

Dull, no doubt, some parts of English Grammar, and of any other grammar, inevitably are, but the subject as a whole is far from being so dull as teachers and treatises frequently succeed in making it. A good teacher, who takes an interest in the matter himself, will secure the interest of a class of quite small boys,—not merely of the good boys at the top, but of the rank and file, of all, indeed, save the hopeless residuum who ‘have taken the whole of science’ for their aversion,—while he sketches for them the gradual growth of our language, or talks over
PREFACE.

with them the difference between Common and Proper nouns, or tells them the derivation of curious words like liquorice, or treacle, or rhubarb, or supplies them with faulty sentences which are to be pulled to pieces and put right. Yet even these topics may be so handled as to produce depressing results.

An hour a week is the time usually allotted to the study of English Grammar at those schools in which the conflict of studies allows it a place in the educational routine. A class reading every week seven pages of this book will work its way to the end in the course of the school year. No attempt has been made to divide the contents into ‘Lessons,’ since the number of pages suitable for senior students would be too many for juniors. As each chapter usually completes the treatment of some important and distinct branch of the subject, the chapters vary greatly in length, and the amount to be prepared for each lesson must be determined at the discretion of the master.

Of the Questions at the end of the Chapters, most have been chosen from the Cambridge Local Examination Papers of the last twenty years; the Oxford Local Examination Papers and the Papers of the Royal College of Preceptors have furnished others, and a few have been made for their present purpose. They are of very different degrees of difficulty. Occasionally they raise points which are interesting, but not important enough to deserve discussion in the text of the chapter to which they are attached. In such cases solutions or helps towards solution have been added. At the close of a protracted exposition of an abstract principle, the practical teacher often has cause to feel that he has been beating the air, when the use of a concrete example enables him to drive his point home at once. To meet his needs, a good supply of
vi		\textit{PREFACE.}

sentences for correction has been added to the concluding chapters on Syntax. There is reason to hope that the boys and girls who attack these problems will find the benefit, not merely in the confidence with which they will face the Examiner, whom most young seekers after Truth nowadays expect to meet round the other side of the Tree of Knowledge, but also in the formation of the habit of thinking for themselves. In this case the English Grammar lesson will prove to be a means of education and not simply an opportunity for instruction.

Private students can obtain from the \textit{Key} whatever assistance they require to enable them to answer correctly every Question in the book. Much of the information furnished in the \textit{Key}, though unsuitable for junior pupils, may be of some interest and service to their teachers.

The matter contained in these pages has but slight claims to originality. The writer of an elementary text-book, traversing ground well-trodden by many predecessors, would probably go astray, if he endeavoured at any cost to be original. Many of the following chapters owe something, and occasionally they owe much, to Mr Mason's \textit{English Grammar} and to Prof. Bain's \textit{Higher English Grammar}. Use has been made also of Dr Gow's suggestive \textit{Method of English}, of Dr Angus's \textit{Handbook of the English Tongue}, of Mr Low's \textit{English Language}, of Dr Abbott's \textit{How to Parse}, of Dr Morris's \textit{Historical Outlines of English Accidence}, and of Professor Skeat's \textit{Principles of English Etymology} and \textit{Etymological Dictionary}. Acknowledgment of indebtedness to these and to other writers has in some places been made, but much of the well-worn material, of which an elementary work on English Grammar must be composed, is the common property of all who choose to write upon the subject.
PREFACE. ix

My cordial thanks are due to several friends for suggestions which have enabled me to improve in many respects the original draft of this book. To Dr Keynes, late Fellow of Pembroke College, Mr R. T. Wright, late Fellow and Tutor of Christ’s College, and Mr J. H. Flather, of Emmanuel College, my obligations are great for help in the work of revision. With his customary kindness Professor Skeat has sent me many valuable criticisms. At the same time it must be clearly understood that, for the shortcomings of the following pages, the responsibility rests entirely with me.

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# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER | PAGE
--- | ---
I. Historical Survey | 1
II. Constituents of the English Vocabulary | 9
III. The Indo-European or Aryan Family of Languages | 22
IV. The Divisions of Grammar | 30
V. Elementary Sounds in English | 37
VI. Signs or Letters | 54
VII. Etymology | 62
VIII. Nouns | 69
IX. Inflexion of Nouns. I. Gender | 80
X. Inflexion of Nouns. II. Number | 86
XI. Inflexion of Nouns. III. Case | 94
XII. Adjectives | 103
XIII. Inflexion of Adjectives | 112
XIV. Pronouns | 118
XV. Verbs | 134
XVI. Inflexions of Verbs | 141
XVII. Auxiliary and Defective Verbs | 171
XVIII. Adverbs | 179
XIX. Prepositions | 186
XX. Conjunctions and Interjections | 192
XXI. Compounds and Derivatives | 199
XXII. Analysis of Sentences and Parsing | 209
XXIII. Syntax of Nouns | 230
XXIV. Syntax of Adjectives and Pronouns | 241
XXV. Syntax of Verbs | 253
XXVI. Syntax of Adverbs, Conjunctions, and Prepositions | 269
Appendix I. Definitions of Grammatical Terms | 285
Appendix II. Passages for Analysis | 291
Essay-Writing | 299
Subjects for Essays | 326
Index | 331