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978-1-316-50968-5 - Italian Prose Usage: A Supplement to Italian Grammars

Walter Shewring

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*A Supplement to Italian Grammars*

BY

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## PREFACE

THIS BOOK is addressed in the first place to those who are learning to write Italian and who feel the need for some assistance in passing from the merely correct translation of sentences to continuous composition of an advanced and serious kind. I assume these students to have already mastered some good small grammar (Grandgent's, I think, is the best I know), and to be accustomed to using the large edition of Hoare's 'Italian Dictionary'; and I try to provide such further information as experience has shown me to be most called for. Since most of those who learn Italian have previously learned French, I have thought it well to note some resemblances and differences between the two languages. And I have relied a good deal on the use of quotations—often extended ones—from modern Italian authors; these serve to exemplify not only the constructions considered but also the tone and the contexts in which such constructions are used.

I may well be reproached with incompleteness. The elasticity of Italian makes it specially hard to codify; doubtless there are accidental omissions, and in any case I have consciously passed over certain exceptions to my rules. But I hope that the work will bridge a gap and encourage the student to investigate further upon his own account and by means of his own reading. In such reading he will be well advised to pay special regard to Tuscan usage. For general technique, the structure of paragraphs, sentence-rhythm, there are many non-Tuscan writers—Albertini, for instance, and Ojetti and Pirandello—who are excellent models for the writing of modern Italian prose; but for some refinements of detail the standard lies with Tuscans alone, and in such matters a Collodi or Fucini is more to be respected than a more sophisticated author of wider reputation. And if one should honour Tuscan usage, much more should one shun journalistic usage—I mean such locutions as *rimarcare* for *osservare* and *arrangiare* for *mettere a posto*. An Englishman's Italian will in any case have weaknesses or stiffnesses enough; but at least he may

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choose his reading carefully, and he should be under no temptation to adopt such vulgarities as these.

Furthermore, I hope that the book may be of some service to those who do not write Italian but have occasion to read it or translate it. The common level of knowledge here is notably low. Scholars in other fields fall into strange pitfalls when they have to use Italian works; and respectable journals which have acquired some awareness of *faux amis* in French are content to write 'loyal' for *leale* or to take *contrast* as the simple equivalent of 'contrasts'. Such ignorance (and, by implication, such indifference) does not help to cement international goodwill.

Had I had the leisure and facilities, I should have liked to complete the book with some annotated passages for translation and corresponding fair copies. The scheme has been thwarted for the present, and I can only hope to return to it when time and circumstance are more favourable.

I am deeply indebted to the Mistress of Girton, Miss K. T. Butler, for her general encouragement of my work and her detailed help in revising and amplifying the manuscript.

W. S.