



The King's English

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JVA EDITORA

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First published: 1906

Public domain edition

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BY

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COMPILERS OF THE CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF CURRENT ENGLISH

No levell'd malice
Infects one comma in the course I hold.

Timon of Athens, I. i. 48.

SECOND EDITION

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW NEW YORK
TORONTO MELBOURNE CAPE TOWN BOMBAY
HUMPHREY MILFORD
1924

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PRINTED IN ENGLAND

PREFACE

The compilers of this book would be wanting in courtesy if they did not expressly say what might otherwise be safely left to the reader's discernment: the frequent appearance in it of any author's or newspaper's name does not mean that that author or newspaper offends more often than others against rules of grammar or style; it merely shows that they have been among the necessarily limited number chosen to collect instances from.

The plan of the book 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 tiro 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. The reader, however, who is thus led to suspect that the only method followed has been the rejection of method will find, it is hoped, a practical security against inconvenience in the very full Index.

Further, since the positive literary virtues are not to be taught by brief quotation, 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. To this it must be added that a considerable proportion of the newspaper extracts are, as is sometimes apparent, not from the editorial, but from the correspondence columns; the names attached are merely an assurance that the passages have actually appeared in print, and not been now invented to point a moral.

The especial thanks of the compilers are offered to Dr. Bradley, joint editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, who has been good enough to inspect the proof sheets, and whose many valuable suggestions have led to the removal of some too unqualified statements, some confused exposition, and some positive mistakes. It is due to him, however, to say that his warnings have now and then been disregarded, when it seemed that brevity or some other advantage could be secured without great risk of misunderstanding.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* itself has been of much service. On all questions of vocabulary, even if so slightly handled as in the first chapter of this book, that great work is now indispensable.

H. W. F.

F. G. F.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In this edition new examples have been added or substituted here and there.

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