

***PERCIVAL  
LEIGH***

*Walk this way*

***THE COMIC  
ENGLISH  
GRAMMAR:  
A NEW AND  
FACETIOUS  
INTRODUCTION  
TO THE ENGLISH  
TONGUE***

**Percival Leigh**

# **The Comic English Grammar: A New and Facetious Introduction to the English Tongue**

EAN 8596547349990

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: [DigiCat@okpublishing.info](mailto:DigiCat@okpublishing.info)



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.

PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE.

PART I. ORTHOGRAPHY.

CHAPTER. I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

PART II. ETYMOLOGY.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI.

PART III. SYNTAX.

PART IV. PROSODY.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

ADDRESS TO YOUNG STUDENTS.

# PREFACE.

## Table of Contents

It may be considered a strange wish on the part of an Author, to have his preface compared to a donkey's gallop. We are nevertheless desirous that our own should be considered both short and sweet. For our part, indeed, we would have every preface as short as an orator's cough, to which, in purpose, it is so nearly like; but Fashion requires, and like the rest of her sex, requires *because* she requires, that before a writer begins the business of his book, he should give an account to the world of his reasons for producing it; and therefore, to avoid singularity, we shall proceed with the statement of our own, excepting only a few private ones, which are neither here nor there.

To advance the interests of mankind by promoting the cause of Education; to ameliorate the conversation of the masses; to cultivate Taste, and diffuse Refinement; these are the objects which we have in view in submitting a Comic English Grammar to the patronage of a discerning Public. Nor have we been actuated by philanthropic motives alone, but also by a regard to Patriotism, which, as it has been pronounced on high authority to be the last refuge of a scoundrel, must necessarily be the first concern of an aspiring and disinterested mind. We felt ourselves called upon to do as much, at least, for Modern England as we had before done for Ancient Rome; and having been considered by competent judges to have infused a little liveliness into a dead language, we were bold enough to hope that we might extract some amusement from a living one.

Few persons there are, whose ears are so extremely obtuse, as not to be frequently annoyed at the violations of Grammar by which they are so often assailed. It is really painful to be forced, in walking along the streets, to hear such phrases as, "That 'ere *honnibus*." "Where've you *bin*." "Vot's the *hodds*?" and the like. Very dreadful expressions are also used by draymen and others in addressing their horses. What can possibly induce a human being to say "Gee woot!" "Mather way!" or "Woa?" not to mention the atrocious "Kim aup!" of the ignorant and degraded costermonger. We once actually heard a fellow threaten to "pitch into" his dog! meaning, we believe, to beat the animal.

It is notorious that the above and greater enormities are perpetrated in spite of the number of Grammars already before the world. This fact sufficiently excuses the present addition to the stock; and as serious English Grammars have hitherto failed to effect the desired reformation, we are induced to attempt it by means of a Comic one.

With regard to the moral tendency of our labours, we may here be permitted to remark, that they will tend, if successful, to the suppression of *evil speaking*.

We shall only add, that as the Spartans used to exhibit a tipsy slave to their children with a view to disgust them with drunkenness, so we, by giving a few examples here and there, of incorrect phraseology, shall expose, in their naked deformity, the vices of speech to the ingenuous reader.



---

## PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE.

### [Table of Contents](#)

Our native country having been, from time immemorial, entitled *Merry England*, it is clear that, provided it has been called by a right name, a Comic Grammar will afford the most hopeful means of teaching its inhabitants their language.

That the epithet in question has been correctly applied, it will therefore be our business to show.

If we can only prove that things which foreigners regard in the most serious point of view, and which, perhaps, ought in reality to be so considered, afford the modern Minotaur

John Bull, merely matter of amusement, we shall go far towards the establishment of our position. We hope to do this and more also.

Births, marriages, and deaths, especially the latter, must be allowed to be matters of some consequence. Every one knows what jokes are made upon the two first subjects. Those which the remaining one affords, we shall proceed to consider.

Suicide, for instance, is looked upon by Mr. Bull with a very different eye from that with which his neighbours regard it. As to an abortive attempt thereat, it excites in his mind unmitigated ridicule, instead of interest and sympathy. In Paris a foolish fellow, discontented with the world, or, more probably, failing in some attempt to make himself conspicuous, ties a brickbat to his neck, and jumps, at twelve o'clock of the day, into the Seine. He thereby excites great admiration in the minds of the bystanders; but were he to play the same trick on London Bridge, as soon as he had been pulled out of the water he would only be laughed at for his pains.

There was a certain gentleman, an officer in the navy, one Lieutenant Luff; at least we have never heard the fact of his existence disputed; who used to spend all his time in drinking grog; and at last, when he could get no more, thought proper to shoot himself through the chest. In France he would have been buried in Père La Chaise, or some such place, and would have had an ode written to his memory. As his native country, however, was the scene of his exploit, he was interred, for the affair happened some years ago, in a

cross-road; and his fate has been made the subject of a comic song.

That our countrymen regard Death as a jest, no one who considers their bravery in war or their appetite in peace, can possibly doubt. And the expressions, "to hop the twig," "to kick the bucket," "to go off the hooks," "to turn up the toes," and so on, vernacularly used as synonymous with "to expire," sufficiently show the jocular light in which the last act of the farce of Life is viewed in Her Majesty's dominions.

An execution is looked upon abroad as a serious affair; but with us it is quite another matter. Capital punishments, whatever they may be to the sufferers, are to the spectators, if we may judge from their behaviour, little else than capital jokes. The terms which, in common discourse, are used by the humble classes to denote the pensile state, namely, "dancing on nothing," "having a drop too much," or "being troubled with a line," are quite playful, and the "Last Dying Speech" of the criminal is usually a species of composition which might well be called "An Entertaining Narrative illustrated with Humourous Designs."

The play of George Barnwell, in which a deluded linendraper's apprentice commits a horrid murder on the body of a pious uncle, excites, whenever it is represented, as much amusement as if it were a comedy; and there is also a ballad detailing the same circumstances, which, when sung at convivial meetings, is productive of much merriment. Billy Taylor, too, another ballad of the same sort, celebrates, in jocund strains, an act of unjustifiable homicide.



Even the terrors of the other world are converted, in Great Britain, into the drolleries of this. The awful apparitions of the unfortunate Miss Bailey, and the equally unfortunate Mr. Giles Scroggins, have each of them furnished the materials of a comical ditty; and the terrific appearance of the Ghost of a Sheep's Head to one William White,—a prodigy which would be considered in Germany as fearful in the extreme, has been applied, by some popular but anonymous writer, to the same purpose. The bodily ablation of an unprincipled exciseman by the Prince of Darkness, a circumstance in itself certainly of a serious nature, has been recorded by one of our greatest poets in strains by no means remarkable for gravity. The appellation, "Old Nick," applied by the vulgar to the Prince in question, is, in every sense of the words, a nickname; and the aliases by which, like many of his subjects, he is also called and known, such as "Old Scratch," "Old Harry," or "The Old Gentleman," are, to say the very least of them, terms that border on the familiar.

In the popular drama of Punch,<sup>[1]</sup> we observe a perfect climax of atrocities and horrors. Victim after victim falls prostrate beneath the cudgel of the deformed and barbarous monster; the very first who feels his tyranny being the wife of his bosom. He, meanwhile, behaves in the most heartless manner, actually singing and capering among the mangled carcasses. Benevolence is shocked, Justice is derided, Law is set at nought, and Constables are slain. The fate to which he had been consigned by a Jury of his Country is eluded; and the Avenger of Crime is circumvented by the wily assassin. Lastly, to crown the

whole, Retribution herself is mocked; and the very Arch Fiend is dismissed to his own dominions with a fractured skull. And at every stage of these frightful proceedings shouts of uproarious laughter attest the delight of the beholders, increasing in violence with every additional terror, and swelling at the concluding one to an almost inextinguishable peal.

Indeed there is scarcely any shocking thing out of which we can extract no amusement, except the loss of money, wherein, at least when it is our own, we cannot see anything to laugh at.

Some will say that we make it a principle to convert whatever frightens other people into a jest, in order that we may imbibe a contempt for danger; and that our superiority (universally admitted) over all nations in courage and prowess, is, in fact, owing to the way which we have acquired of laughing all terrors, natural and supernatural, utterly to scorn. With these, however, we do not agree. Our national laughter is, in our opinion, as little based on principle as our national actions have of late years been. We laugh from impulse, or, as we do everything else, because we choose. And we shall find, on examination, that we have contrived, amongst us, to render a great many things exceedingly droll and absurd, without having the slightest reason to assign for so doing.

For example, there is nothing in the office of a Parish Clerk that makes it desirable that he should be a ludicrous person. There is no reason why he should have a cracked voice; an inability to use, or a tendency to omit, the aspirate; a stupid countenance; or a pompous manner. Nor

do we clearly see why he should be unable to pronounce proper names; should say Snatchacrab for Sennacherib, or Leftenant for Leviathan. Such, nevertheless, are the peculiarities by which he is commonly distinguished.

We are likewise at a loss to divine why so studiously ridiculous a costume has been made to enhance the natural absurdity of a Beadle; for we can hardly believe that his singular style of dress was really intended to inspire small children with veneration and awe.

It can scarcely be supposed that a Lord Mayor's Show was instituted only to be laughed at; yet who would contend that it is of any other use? Nor could the office of the Chief Magistrate of a Corporation, nor that of an Alderman, have been created for the amusement of the Public: there is, however, no purpose which both of them so frequently serve.

If the wig and robes of a Judge were meant to excite the respect of the community in general, and the fear of the unconscientious part of it, we cannot but think that the design has been unsuccessful. That the ministers of justice are not, in fact, so reverently held, by any means, as from the nature of their functions they might be expected to be, is certain. A magistrate, to go no further, is universally known, if not designated, by the jocose appellation of "Beak."

Butchers, bakers, cobblers, tinkers, costermongers, and tailors; to say nothing of footmen, waiters, dancing-masters, and barbers have become the subjects of ridicule to an extent not warranted by their avocations, simply considered.

But the comical mind, like the jaundiced eye, views everything through a coloured medium. Such a mind is that of the generality of Britons. We distinguish even the nearest ties of relationship by facetious names. A father is called "Dad," or "The Governor;" an uncle, "Nunkey;" and a wife, "a rib," or more pleasantly still, as in the advertisements, an "encumbrance." Almost every being or thing, indeed, has in English two words to express it, an ordinary and an odd one; and so greatly has the number of expressions of the kind last mentioned increased of late, that, as it appears to us, a new edition of Johnson's Dictionary, enriched with modern additions, is imperatively called for. When we talk of odd words, we have no fear that our meaning will be misunderstood. It is true that there are some few individuals who complain that they do not see any wit in calling a sheep's-head a "jemmy," legs "bandies," or a hand a "mawley;" and it is also true that there was once a mathematician, who, after reading through Milton's Paradise Lost, wanted to know what it all proved?

And now that we are speaking of names, we may mention a few which are certainly of a curious nature, and which no foreigner could possibly have invented; unless, which would be likely enough, he meant to apply them seriously. The names we allude to are names of places—and pretty places they are too; as, "Mount Pleasant," "Paradise Row," "Golden Lane."

Then there are a great many whimsical things that we do:—

When a man cannot pay his debts, and has no prospect of being able to do so except by working, we shut him up in

gaol, and humorously describe his condition as that of being in Quod.

We will not allow a man to give an old woman a dose of rhubarb if he have not acquired at least half a dozen sciences; but we permit a quack to sell as much poison as he pleases, with no other diploma than what he gets from the "College of Health."

When a thief pleads "Guilty" to an indictment, he is advised by the Judge to recall his plea; as if a trial were a matter of sport, and the culprit, like a fox, gave no amusement unless regularly run down. This perhaps is the reason why allowing an animal to start some little time before the pursuit is commenced, is called giving him *law*.

When one man runs away with another's wife, and, being on that account challenged to fight a duel, shoots the aggrieved party through the head, the latter is said to receive *satisfaction*.

We never take a glass of wine at dinner without getting somebody else to do the same, as if we wanted encouragement; and then, before we venture to drink, we bow to each other across the table, preserving all the while a most wonderful gravity. This, however, it may be said, is the natural result of endeavouring to keep one another in countenance.

The way in which we imitate foreign manners and customs is very amusing. Savages stick fish-bones through their noses; our fair countrywomen have hoops of metal poked through their ears. The Caribs flatten the forehead; the Chinese compress the foot; and we possess similar

contrivances for reducing the figure of a young lady to a resemblance to an hour-glass or a devil-on-two-sticks.

There being no other assignable motive for these and the like proceedings, it is reasonable to suppose that they are adopted, as schoolboys say, "for fun."

We could go on, were it necessary, adducing facts to an almost unlimited extent; but we consider that enough has now been said in proof of the comic character of the national mind. And in conclusion, if any foreign author can be produced, equal in point of wit, humour, and drollery, to Swift, Sterne, or Butler, we hereby engage to eat him; albeit we have no pretensions to the character of a "helluo librorum."



## THE COMIC ENGLISH GRAMMAR.

“English Grammar,” according to Lindley Murray, “is the art of speaking and writing the English language with propriety.”

The English language, written and spoken with propriety, is commonly called the King’s English.

A monarch, who, three or four generations back, occupied the English throne, is reported to have said, “If beebles will be boets, they must sdarve.” This was a rather curious specimen of “King’s English.” It is, however, a maxim of our law, that “the King can do no wrong.” Whatever bad English, therefore, may proceed from the royal mouth, is not “King’s English,” but “Minister’s English,” for which they alone are responsible. For illustrations of this kind of “English” we beg to refer the reader to the celebrated English Grammar which was written by the late Mr. Cobbett.

King’s English (or, perhaps, under existing circumstances we should say, *Queen’s* English) is the current coin of conversation, to mutilate which, and unlawfully to *utter* the same, is called *clipping* the King’s English; a high crime and misdemeanour.

Clipped English, or bad English, is one variety of Comic English, of which we shall adduce instances hereafter.



He's only a little "prodigy" of mine, Doctor.

Slipslop, or the erroneous substitution of one word for another, as "prodigy" for "protégée," "derangement" for "arrangement," "exasperate" for "aspirate," and the like, is another.

Slang, which consists in cant words and phrases, as "dodge" for "sly trick," "no go" for "failure," and "carney" "to flatter," may be considered a third.

Latinised English, or Fine English, sometimes assumes the character of Comic English, especially when applied to the purposes of common discourse; as "Extinguish the luminary," "Agitate the communicator," "Are your corporeal



functions in a condition of salubrity?" "A sable visual orb," "A sanguinary nasal protuberance."

American English is Comic English in a "*pretty particular considerable tarnation*" degree.

Among the various kinds of Comic English it would be "*tout-à-fait*" inexcusable, were we to "*manquer*" to mention one which has, so to speak, quite "*bouleversé'd*" the old-fashioned style of conversation; French-English, that is what "*nous voulons dire*." "*Avec un poco*" of the "*Italiano*," this forms what is also called the Mosaic dialect.

English Grammar is divided into four parts—Orthography, Etymology, Syntax, and Prosody; and as these are points that a good grammarian always stands upon, he, particularly when a pedant, and consequently somewhat *flat*, may very properly be compared to a table.

---

# PART I. ORTHOGRAPHY.

Table of Contents

## CHAPTER. I.

Table of Contents

OF THE NATURE OF THE LETTERS, AND OF A COMIC ALPHABET.

Orthography is like a junior usher, or instructor of youth. It teaches us the nature and powers of letters and the right method of spelling words.

*Note.*—In a public school, the person corresponding to an usher is called a master. As it is sometimes his duty to flog, we propose that he should henceforth be called the “Usher of the Birch Rod.”

Comic Orthography teaches us the oddity and absurdities of *letters*, and the wrong method of spelling words. The following is an example of Comic Orthography:—

islinton foteenth of  
february 1840.

my Deer jemes

wen fust i sawed yu doun the middle and up agin att Vite  
condick ouse i maid Up my Mind to skure you for my hone  
for i Felt at once that my appiness was at Steak, and a  
sensashun in my Bussum I coudent no ways accompt For.  
And i said to mary at missis Igginses said i theres the Mann  
for my money o ses Shee i nose a Sweeter Yung Man than

that Air Do you sez i Agin then there we Agree To Differ, and we was sittin by the window and we was wery Neer fallin Out. my deer gemes Sins that Nite i Havent slept a Wink and Wot is moor to the Porpus i Have quit Lost my Happy tight and am gettin wus and wus witch i Think yu ort to pitty Mee. i am Tolloed every Day that ime Gettin Thinner and a Jipsy sed that nothin wood Cure me But a Ring.

i wos a Long time makin my Mind Up to right to You for of Coarse i Says jemes will think me too forrad but this bein Leep yere i thout ide Make a Plunge speshialy as her grashius madjesty as Set the Exampel of Popin the queshton, leastways to all Them as dont Want to Bee old Mades all their blessed lives. so my Deer Jemes if yow want a Pardoner for Better or for wus nows Your Time dont think i Behave despicable for tis my Luv for yu as makes Me take this Stepp.

please to Burn this Letter when Red and excuse the scrolls and Blotches witch is Caused by my Teers i remain

till deth Yure on Happy

Vallentine

*jane you No who.*

poscrip

nex Sunday Is my sunday out And i shall be Att the corner of Wite lion Street pentonvil at a quawter pas Sevn.

Wen This U. C.

remember Mee

j. g.



Now, to proceed with Orthography, we may remark, that  
A letter is the least part of a word.

Of a *comic letter* an instance has already been given.

Dr. Johnson's letter to Lord Chesterfield is a capital letter.

The letters of the Alphabet are the representatives of  
articulate sounds.

The Alphabet is a Republic of Letters.

There are many things in this world erroneously as well  
as vulgarly compared to "bricks." In the case of the letters  
of the Alphabet, however, the comparison is just; they  
constitute the fabric of a language, and grammar is the  
mortar. The wonder is that there should be so few of them.  
The English letters are twenty-six in number. There is  
nothing like beginning at the beginning; and we shall now