

[From "How to Talk."]

## COMMON ERRORS CORRECTED.

We are about to note down and correct a large number of errors of frequent occurrence in our common talk. By reading them over a number of times you may impress upon your memory the correct form of expression, and thus avoid the false. But we might fill a large volume with "common errors," and still leave hundreds unmentioned; and unless you know something of the rules in accordance with which the language is constructed, the correcting of these errors will not guard you wholly against falling into others equally glaring.

## USING THE WRONG WORD.

'I expect the books were sent yesterday.' This is wrong, because we expect that only which is yet in the future. You may expect that the books will be sent to-morrow, or next week, or next year; but you *think, conclude, or suspect* that they were sent yesterday, or last week, or last year.

'Mr. Murray *learned* me grammar.' He may have *taught* you; but you have hardly *learned* grammar yet. The teacher *teaches*; and the pupil *learns, or should learn*.

Use the word *pupil* instead of *scholar* in speaking of one who receives instruction from a teacher. It is better to use the word *scholar* only in the sense of a 'man of letters' or a 'learned man.'

'I *propose* to offer a few hints on conversation,' Mr. Peabody says, in his Address. He might as well have said, 'I *offer* to offer a few hints.' He *should* have said, 'I *purpose*, etc.

'I *seldom or ever* see her.' Say *seldom or never, or seldom if ever*.

The word *veracity* is properly applied to the person who relates a story, but not to the story itself. We may doubt the *truth* of the latter.

Say, 'I *prefer* to walk, and not 'I *had rather* walk.'

'You have *sown* the seam badly.' Wheat is *sown* (or *sowed*); but a garment is *sewed*. To say that the banks of the river are frequently *overflowed*, instead of *overflowed*, is an error of a similar character.

We may *summon* a man by serving a *summons* upon him. Be careful not to use the noun (*summons*) in place of the verb (*summon*).

'Without you study, you will not learn.' *Unless* you study, etc.

He said that 'the *observation* of the Sabbath is a duty.' *Observance* is the word that he should have used.

To use an adjective in the place of an adverb; as, 'This letter is written *shocking*,' is a very common error; but the opposite fault of substituting an adverb for an adjective; as, 'Julia looks *beautifully*' (*beautiful*), is still more common. We employ adverbs to qualify verbs, it is true; but when we say 'Julia looks *beautiful*,' the word *beautiful*, by the help of the verb *looks*, with which it is joined in predicate or assertion, describes Julia. Julia does not perform the act of looking. We look at her, but by an idiomatic construction, which we believe is peculiar to our language, the act is *imputed* to her. Consider which you wish to express, the *quality of a thing*, or the *manner of an action*, and use an adjective or an adverb accordingly.

'I don't know but *what* I shall go to New York to-morrow.' Say, 'I don't know but *that*.'

'A' is now used instead of *an* before words beginning with long *u* or with *eu*. Say 'a university,' and 'a European.' It is also proper to say 'such a one,' and not 'such an one,' and to use *a* before *humble, humor, heroic, historical, and hypothesis*; but *an* must be used before *h* silent.

Whatever can not be conveniently numbered and is not reckoned numerically, or one by one, we speak of as a *quantity*; as, 'quantity of corn;' but we do not say 'a quantity of oxen,' or 'a quantity of men,' for these are usually reckoned numerically; as, 'ten oxen,' 'a hundred men.'

You may own *lots* of land in a city, town, or village, but that does not justify you in saying that you have 'lots of money,' 'lots of friends,' or 'lots of learning.' The word *loads* is subjected to the same improper usage.

'I intend to *stop* at home.' You mean *stay* or *remain*.

Corn *grew* in our garden last summer, but we did not 'grow our own corn,' as we heard a man say the other day. We *raised* it.

'No man has *less* enemies,' should be *fewer* enemies. *Less* refers to *quantity*.

For 'money is *plenty*,' say money is *plentiful*.

Our friend Dust-of-ages is an *antiquary*, not an *antiquarian*. *Antiquarian* is an adjective, and we may properly speak of our friend's 'antiquarian researches.'

*Couple* implies union, and a husband and a wife should form a *loving couple*; but you should not say 'a *couple* of men.' *Two* men, is the correct expression.

'James was in *eminent* danger.' You probably mean *imminent*. 'An *eminent* man was once in *imminent* peril.'

*In* should be used before the names of countries and large cities; as, 'I live in the United States;' 'He resides in New York;' but *at* should be used before villages and towns; as, 'at Clinton, at Burlington.'

You do not differ *with* another person, but *from* him.

*Neither* requires *nor*; as, 'Neither Andrew nor William can sing.'

'He was *indifferent* honest, but *exceeding* industrious.' Say *indifferently* honest, *exceedingly* industrious.

'A *remarkable* pretty girl;' 'Conformable to your desires;' 'Agreeable to my promise.' [See thirteenth paragraph.]

'Little grows there *beside* a coarse kind of grass.' The writer should have said *besides* or *except* a coarse kind of grass.

'This book is not as large as I expected.' You should say *so* large, etc. Using *as* in the place of *so* is a very common error.

We often hear such expressions as, 'I never

saw *such* a high tree,' in which *such* is used in the place of *so*. Say, 'I never saw a tree *so* high. *Such* denotes *quality*; *so*, *degree*. *Such* is properly used in the first sentence of this paragraph, in the phrase 'such expressions.'

Say, 'On *each* side of the river,' and not 'On either side.'

'I will think on thee, love.' Say of thee. 'Take hold on it;' 'I knew nothing on it;' 'He was made much on in Boston.' Substitute of 'No need for that.' Of that.

'Free of blame.' Free from blame.

'He is resolved of going to New Orleans.' You should say, resolved on going.

'We prevailed over him to come.' We prevail over our enemies, but prevail upon a friend.

In the winter it is said to be dangerous to walk of a rainy morning.' On a rainy morning.

'He ran again me,' should be, He ran against me.

A popular hymn commences:

'Mistaken souls, who dream of heaven'

It should be, *Mistaking* souls, etc.

We call on a friend, and not upon him.

'Received, New York, December 24th, of Fowler & Wells, twenty-five dollars.' We receive from a person or thing, and not of.

We accuse a man of neglecting his duty, and not for neglecting it.

'I am thinking he will soon arrive.' Say, I think, etc.

'She reads *slow*,' should be, She reads *slowly*.

'At *best*,' should be, At *the best*.

'From *now*,' should be, From *this time*, and, 'Since *when*,' Since *that time*.

'Every *now and then*,' should be, From time to time, or Occasionally.

'A few weeks *back*,' should be, A few weeks ago.

'He spoke *contemptibly* of him,' say *contemptuously*.

We go across a bridge, and not over it.

'Frederick belongs to the Odd Fellows.' In that case the Odd Fellows own him. Say, Frederick is a member of the Order of Odd Fellows.

'I am very *dry* to-day.' You probably mean *thirsty*.

'No less than ten persons,' should be, No fewer than ten persons.

'Bridget speaks bad *grammar*.' Say, speaks bad *English, or ungrammatically, or uses ungrammatical language*.

'His character is *undeniable*,' should be, His character is *unquestionable*.

Carefully discriminate between words of similar sound or form, and not use *for* in place of *fermentation*, *principle* for *principal*, *partition* for *petition*, etc.

Carefully observe the annexed column of words, together with their signification:

Ante, before.  
Accepted, received.  
Au-gust, the month.  
Capital, chief.  
Complement, that which completes.  
Currier, a dresser of leather.  
De-ert, merit.  
Errand, a message.  
Eruption, a breaking out.  
Ex-ecutor, one who executes.  
Eminent, exalted.  
Francis, a man's name.  
Genus, a class.  
In-val-id, of no weight.  
Ingenious, inventive.  
L'neament, a feature.  
Metal, a hard substance.  
Opposite, adverse.  
Ordinance, a law.  
Pillow, a cushion for the head.  
Prophecy, to predict.  
Radish, a plant.  
Relic, something remaining.  
Stationary, fixed.  
Statue, an image.  
Track, a path.

Discriminate between those and the words in the following column, each of which is pronounced nearly like one in the above, though the spelling, generally, and the signification, invariably, are different. The accented syllable, of words spelled alike, but differently pronounced, are printed in bold-face:

Anti, against.  
Excepted, not included.  
Au-gust, magnificent.  
Capitol, an edifice.  
Compliment, an expression of civility.  
Courier, a messenger.  
Des-ert, a waste.  
Errant, wandering.  
Interruption, an inroad.  
Ex-ecutor, one who performs the will of a testator.  
Imminent, threatening.  
Frances, a woman's name.  
Genius, intellectual power.  
In-val-id, one disabled.  
Ingenious, open, frank.  
L'neament, an ornament.  
Mettle, spirit.  
Opposite, suitable.  
Ordinance, cannon.  
Pillar, a column.  
Prophecy, a prediction.  
Reddish, slightly red.  
Relict, a widow.  
Stationery, the wares of a stationer.  
Statute, a law.  
Tract, a region or a small book.

'Emigrants are constantly arriving in this country.' Say *immigrants*. *Emigrants* are persons leaving a country, *immigrants* are persons coming into it.

## SUPERFLUOUS WORDS.

'She fell down upon her knees.' Omit the word *down*; and omit the *Italic* words in all the following examples:

'He will go from thence to-morrow.'  
'The fruit was gathered off of that tree.'  
'More than you think for.'

'Ellen rose up and left the room.'

'Who has got my inkstand?'

'What are you doing off?'

'We conversed together on the subject.' The prefix *on* is equivalent to *with*; so, to converse, means to talk *with*.

'Missing his way, he returned back.'

'They restored the money back to the owner.'

'You may enter in.'

'I shall go by the latter end of the week.'

'It is true I came at a late hour; but because why? I was detained.'

'I can not by no means allow it.'

'They combined together and covered it over.'

'I can do it equally as well as he.'

'Such conduct admits of no excuse.'

'The fellow again repeated the assertion.'

'Her conduct was approved of.'

'His mother finds him in money.'

'Nobody else.'

'As soon as ever.'

'Another one and the other one.'

'I have not had no dinner yet.'

'Please give me both of those books.'

'Our cat caught a great big rat.'

FALSE INFLECTIONS AND CONSTRUCTIONS.

'Take two spoonful of sugar,' etc., the recipe says. Transfer the *s* to the last syllable. Spoonfuls is the correct form.

'A disagreeable effluvia,' should be, A disagreeable effluvia. *Say also, A phenomenon and not a phenomena.* Effluvia and phenomena are plural.

'Please bring me them books.' Say *those* books.

'Him and me are going to the theater.' You would not say, 'Me is going to the theater.' He and I are going, is the correct expression.

'They are coming to see Charles and I.' Charles and I are the persons affected by the act of coming to see, and should therefore be in the objective case. Say, Charles and me. 'Between you and I,' should be corrected in the same way.

'The package was intended for Albert and I.' Intended for *him*.

'Who did you buy this of?' should be, Of whom did you buy this? The mistake consists in using the nominative case of the pronoun in the place of the objective case. To say, 'The man whom they intend shall execute the work,' is to fall into the opposite error. You should say, *who* they intend.

'Everybody has a right to their opinions;' but we have no right to use a plural pronoun in construction with a singular antecedent. Everybody [a singular noun] has a right to his opinions.

The error here indicated is a very common one. Even our best speakers and writers fall into it.

Saunders Smith, for instance, says: 'Who ever thinks of learning the grammar of their native language till they are very good grammarians?'

We hear such expressions as, 'These sort of entertainments,' 'Those kind of people,' etc. The adjective pronouns in these phrases belong to the nouns *sort* and *kind*, and should therefore be in the singular number; as, 'This sort of entertainments;' 'That kind of people.'

'I will lay on the sofa.' Well, you may lay [lay what?] on the sofa; but meanwhile you must listen to Parry Gwynne's exposition of what he calls 'The grand fault, the glaring impropriety committed by all ranks and conditions of men, the rich and the poor, the high and the low, the illiterate and the learned—except, perhaps, one in twenty—and from which not even the pulpit and the bar are totally free,' which is the substitution of the transitive verb *lay* for the intransitive verb *lie*.

'To lay,' he says, 'is a transitive verb, like *love*, demanding an objective case after it, without the intervention of a preposition. To lie is an intransitive verb, not admitting an objective case after it, except through the intervention of a preposition; yet this 'perverse generation' will go on substituting the former for the latter. Nothing can be more erroneous than to say, as people constantly do, 'I shall go and lay down.' The question which naturally arises in the mind of the discriminating hearer is, 'What are you going to lay down—money, carpets, plans, or—what? for, as a transitive verb is used, an object is wanted to complete the sense. The speaker means, in fact, to tell us that he (himself) is going to lie down, instead of which he gives us to understand that he is going to lay down or put down something which he has not named, but which it is necessary to name before we can understand the sentence; and this sentence, when completed according to the rules of grammar, will never convey the meaning he intends. One might as well use the verb *to put* in this situation, as the verb *to lay*, for each is a transitive verb, requiring an objective case immediately after it. If you were to enter a room, and, finding a person lying on the sofa, were to address him with such a question, as, 'What are you doing there?' you would think it ludicrous if he were to reply, 'I am putting down;' yet it would not be more absurd than to say, 'I am laying down;' but custom, while it fails to reconcile us to the error, has so familiarized us with it, that we hear it without surprise, and good breeding forbids our noticing it to the speaker. The same mistake is committed through all the tenses of the verb. How often are nice ears wounded by the following expressions: 'My brother lays ill of a fever;' 'The vessel lays in St. Katherine's Docks;' 'The books were laying on the floor;' 'He laid on a sofa three weeks;' 'After I had laid down, I remembered that I had left my pistols laying on the table.' You must perceive that in every one of these instances the wrong verb is used; correct it, therefore, according to the explanation given; thus, 'My brother lies ill of a fever;' 'The vessel lies in St. Katherine's Docks;' 'The books were lying on the floor;' 'He lay on a sofa three weeks;' 'After I had lain down, I remembered that I had left my pistols lying on the table.'

'It is probable that this error has originated in the circumstance of the present tense of the verb *to lay* being conjugated precisely like the imperfect tense of the verb *to lie*, for they are alike in orthography and sound, and differ only in meaning; and in order to remedy the evil which this resemblance seems to have created, I have conjugated at full length the simple tenses of the two verbs, hoping the exposition may be found useful; for it is an error which must be corrected by all who aspire to the merit of speaking their own language well.'

## THE TRANSITIVE VERB. THE INTRANSITIVE VERB.

To lay.	PRESENT TENSE.	To lie.	PRESENT TENSE.
I lay	money,	I lie	down,
Thou layest	carpets,	Thou liest	too long,
He lays	plans,	He lies	on a sofa,
We lay	any	We lie	any
You lay	thing.	You lie	where.
They lay		They lie	
IMPERFECT TENSE.		IMPERFECT TENSE.	
I laid	money,	I lay	down,
Thou laydest	carpets,	Thou layest	too long,
He laid	plans,	He lay	on a sofa,
We laid	any	We lay	any
You laid	thing.	You lay	where.
They laid		They lay	
PRES. PARTIC., Laying.		PRES. PARTIC., Lying.	
PERF. PARTIC., Laid.		PERF. PARTIC., Lain.	

'In such sentences as these, wherein the verb is used reflectively, 'If I lay myself down on the grass I shall catch cold,' 'He laid himself down on the green sward,' the verb *to lay* is with propriety substituted for the verb *to lie*; for the addition of the emphatic pronoun *myself*, or *himself*, constituting an objective case, and coming immediately after the verb, without the intervention of a preposition, renders it necessary that the verb employed should be transitive, not intransitive, because 'transitive verbs govern the objective case.' But this is the only construction in which *to lay* instead of *to lie* can be sanctioned by the rules of grammar.

'You may set on the bench till I return.' 'I thank you; but what shall I set? We often set traps for mice, and gardeners set cabbage plants, tomato plants, etc. I will sit, however, if you please.' Do not say, 'I set,' or 'I was setting by her bedside.' It should be, I sat or I was sitting. *Sit* is still worse, but we sometimes hear it.

## THE INTRANSITIVE VERB TO SIT.

SINGULAR.	PLURAL.
1. I sit,	1. We sit,
2. You sit,	2. You sit,
3. He sits,	3. They sit.
Past tense.	
SINGULAR.	PLURAL.
1. I sat,	1. We sat,
2. You sat,	2. You sat,
3. He sat,	3. They sat.
PRESENT PARTICIPLE, Sitting.	
COMPOUND PARTICIPLE, Having sat.	

'Margaret rose the basket from the floor.'

You must use, in this case, the transitive verb *raise*, the past form of which is *raised*. She raised the basket from the floor. *Rise* is an intransitive verb. The sun rises; it rose this morning.

Do not say, 'He was obliged to fly the country.' *Flee* is the proper word.

She said to the shop-keeper, 'If this cloth be good, I will purchase twenty yards of it.' She should have said, 'If the cloth is good, etc.' The subjunctive mode implies both contingency and futurity.

'I will be drowned, nobody shall help me,' is a form of expression attributed to a Frenchman struggling in the waters of the Thames. Englishmen and Americans frequently make an equally incorrect use of the auxiliaries *shall* and *will*. 'The Schoolmaster at Home' says:

'*Shall* and *will* are both used to express future time, and their proper application constitutes one of the difficulties of the language! When the future is to be expressed simply without emphasis, *shall* must be used after the first person and *will* after the second and third; but when the future is to be expressed with determination and authority, *will* should be used after the first person and *shall* after the second and third. If we wish to express will or determination with regard to the future, we must use *will* and not *shall*.'

If, on the other hand, we merely foretell a future event, without reference to will or determination, *shall* must be used.'

*Should* and *would* are subject to the same rules as *shall* and *will*. *Would* express volition; as, 'I would do it, were I in your place.' *Should* expresses duty; as, 'You should do it under any circumstances.'

'I should have went.' Say, *gone*.

Some persons—we might perhaps say a majority of those who professedly speak the English language—use the imperfect tense and the perfect tense together, in such sentences as the following: 'I intended to have called on him last night,' 'I meant to have purchased one yesterday,' or a perfect tense and a perfect tense together, as, 'You should have written to have told her.'

These expressions are illogical, because, as the intention to perform an act must be prior to the act contemplated, the act itself can not with propriety be expressed by a tense indicating a period of time previous to the intention. The three sentences should be corrected thus, placing the second verb in the infinitive mood, 'I intended to call on him last night, I meant to purchase one yesterday, You should have written to tell her.'

'If I had have known it, I should have acted differently.' Of what utility is *have* in the foregoing sentence? Say, 'If I had known, etc.'

'He got on to the stage-coach at Leedsville.' Why use two prepositions when one would be quite as explicit and far more elegant?

'He continued on, beyond the Phalanx.' Of course; how else could he continue? Omit *on*.

'To who was the order given?' and *who* do you accuse of neglect? To whom, and Whom do you accuse?

'It is I who is to perform the work,' should be, It is I who am, etc.

Scott wrote—

I will be HER whose foot the waves wet not.

He should have written, I will be she whose foot the waves wet not.

'They were frightened more than us,' should be, They were frightened more than we.

Beware of using *as* in the place of *that*; as, 'This is the man as I saw.'

*Either* refers to two things only, therefore you must not say, 'Either of the three.'

Each refers to a single object only; as, 'Each of the girls was rewarded,' and not *were* rewarded.

'They were the most beautiful of any other.'