A practical and complete German grammar

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A Practical and Complete German Grammar.

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PREFACE.

The Grammar here offered to the learners of German is intended to serve a double purpose. It is to be a thoroughly practical book, leading the beginner in German, according to the newest and best method of acquiring the practical use of foreign languages, from the very commencement on to the perfect use of German in conversation, translation, and writing, either with or without the aid of a teacher; and it is to be a complete system of German grammar, according to the latest discoveries and views in grammatical science,—complete at least as far as a correct and elegant use of German can be mastered by the aid of a grammar,—with a diligent regard to the German equivalents for English idioms.

There are a considerable number of German Grammars before the public; and among them are several that deserve no slight praise on account of the scholarship and practical utility they exhibit. We feel under obligation especially to mention the following:—

1. Heilner's (The Grammar of the German Language, philosophically developed, London, 1841, new issue, 1851), a work full of independent and philosophically digested learning. 2. K. F. Becker's (published by his son, Mr. Bernh. Becker, in Frankfort-on-the-Main and London, 1841, second edition, 1845),—a work whose merits no one that is conversant with grammatical matters will doubt for a moment. 3. Aue’s (Grammar of the German Language, London and Edinburgh, Chambers, 1853), a meritorious work, based entirely upon Becker's system, and more complete with regard to details and to Anglicisms and Germanisms even than Becker's. 4. Glaubensklee's (Synthetic Grammar of the German Language, New York, Ivison and
Phinney, 1857), a scientific abridgment of the principles of German grammar, devised to complete Woodbury's series of German textbooks. All these works, and many more of lesser note, follow the synthetic or scientific method of grammar, and are therefore, however great their merits in this respect may be, useful only to such pupils as already understand the elements of German, and those of grammar in general, from their previous acquaintance with and study of other foreign languages.

It is a merit of Woodbury in this country conclusively to have shown that the scientific or theoretical way of teaching a foreign language, when exclusively practised, is too tedious to attract the youthful mind, too slow of progress to reach its aim, and too much at variance with our improved modern system of instruction. The youth must learn foreign languages, more or less, in the same natural way in which he acquires his own mother tongue. He must begin with hearing it spoken in simple, then in more difficult and compound sentences; he must learn to understand them by analyzing and recomposing them into other sentences and periods. The pupil must learn at the same time to understand the foreign language when spoken, and to speak it himself, to read and translate the foreign tongue fluently into his mother tongue, and to write it like his own. This was the aim of Woodbury. But his system is carried too far. There are too many practical lessons, and consequently too long a preparatory period is required for the pupil to learn to translate and read German books, to converse in the language, and to master its grammatical construction. Besides, the examples chosen to illustrate the rules are often tedious and meaningless, and the thinking or analyzing faculty of the human mind is too little called into activity.

Among those who know Mager's merits in relation to the theory of the true method of learning foreign languages, there can be no doubt that there is but one system possible,—the practico-theoretical system, as hinted at by Ollendorf, Ahl, and Woodbury, and as perfected by Mager, and even further simplified in the present work. The beginning is made with an eminently practical course; the pupil hears the foreign language spoken and sees it written in a series of sentences that form a methodical gradation from the simplest and easiest to the more difficult and compounded. It is of importance that this course should not be prolonged beyond twenty-four lessons, at least not with able pupils; and that the latter should find themselves competent, at