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Review of “A Dictionary of Modern English Usage,” By H. W. Fowler

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exact language of the code except where further explanation is deemed essential.

Restraints on Alienation, pp. 336-340, and The Rule against Perpetuities, pp. 341-345 are topics so adequately treated and cogently expressed that they will appeal to the practitioner as well as the student.

An accurate table of cases and a thorough index and table of contents enhance the value of the book—especially to those who desire to use it for reference.
THEODORE SHORT, '27.

A DICTIONARY OF MODERN ENGLISH USAGE. By *H. W. Fowler*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1926.

Whenever a student of language utters a protest against the decline of grammar, the decay of syntax, and the consequent loss of perspective in language, the complacent among us remind him of the thirteenth century Orm and his fears for our tongue, and then cheerfully point out that the English language still manages to survive. Their implied argument, specious at best, is fully answered by even the most casual examination of *A Dictionary of Modern Usage*. Here quotation after quotation reveals the ineptitudes and absurdities that have reduced our speech to jargon—jargon, the dialect not of the illiterate but of journalists, novelists, and teachers. This work has a large significance; it is a protest against the vulgarization of our language.

With all its wealth of teaching, the book is a spirited adventure in words. Its author plunges into the wilderness of modern speech, and shooting jargon as it flies, he brings down many a graceless bird, often a monster. For our diversion and instruction he classifies and exhibits the creatures. He discourses on them learnedly, humorously. In fine, he produces something quite different from the usual dictionary, which merely records and explains. This new dictionary is plainly critical and didactic. The author not only describes but also chooses. And we are willing to listen and mend our speech because the writer possesses scholarship, wit, and taste. Special study and scientific investigation have not deadened his sense of form. With high spirits, with gusto, he exposes the shams of pretentious ignorance, ostentatious learning, and cheap ornament. He not only holds the mirror to the face of ugliness, but would also wash that face.

The book will be of special value to those who have not become acquainted with the idioms of English. Here they will find information on the uses of "a," "which," "shall and will," "the," and "that." They will find thousands of articles dealing with words that are a source of trouble to many classes of English-speaking people. He who will have nothing to do with "the acid test" and is above misusing "slogan" or misunderstanding "hectic" and "the psychological moment" may stand in need of advice on the use of "meticulous" and "exception proves the rule." In these articles on individual words and phrases and in more than four hundred general articles, with cross-references, he will be taught to recognize and to shun such common faults as *Vogue-words*, *Elegant Variation*, *Superiority*, and *Genteelism*. To him who is burdened with popular superstitions about the English language are addressed articles on *Fetishes*, *Puns*, *Saxonism*, *Preposition at End*, and *False Quantity*. These myths, which usually owe their life to a little learning and a great desire to show it, fall before the author's wide learning and intelligence. Perhaps the book may be of use to the ignorant; certainly it will prove useful to the misinformed.

Whoever deplores the breakdown of serviceable distinctions in our language, whoever shrinks from jargon and the tawdry style, will find in *Modern Usage* instruction and pleasure. The book makes for a wider acquaintance with words, with "the aroma, substance, and precision of words." By precept and example it teaches the ethics of pure and vigorous English. It is an attempt to formulate the canon of modern English speech.
WENDELL J. PHILLIPS, '27.