

Mulcaster on English

Quotations from *The first part of the elementarie which entreateth chiefe of the right writing of our English tung, set furth by Richard Mulcaster.*

I have expanded abbreviated forms of *n*, added word-spaces where words were joined, and made paragraphing clearer.

The quotation on p. 61 is from the *Peroration*, at the end of the book (p. 258):

But why not all in English, a tung of it self both depe in conceit, & frank in deliuerie? I do not think that anie language, be it whatsoeuer, is better able to vtter all arguments, either with more pith, or greater planesse, then our English tung is, if the English vtterer be as skilfull in the matter, which he is to vtter: as the foren vtterer is. Which methink I durst proue in anie most strange argument, euen mine own self, tho no great clark, but a great welwiller to my naturall cuntrie. And tho we vse & must vse manie foren terms, when we deal with such arguments, we do not anie more then the brauest tungs do.

CAP. XIII. That the English tung hath in it self sufficient matter to work her own artificiall direction, for the right writing thereof.

IT must nedes be that our English tung hath matter enough in hir own writing, which maie direct her own right, if it be reduced to certain precept, and rule of Art, tho it haue not as yet bene thoroughlie perceaued. The causes why it hath not as yet bene thoroughlie perceaued, ar, the hope & despare of such, as haue either thought vpon it, and not dealt in it, or that haue delt in it, but not rightlie thought vpon it.

For som considering the great difficultie, which theie found to be in the writing thereof, euerie letter almost being deputed to manie, and seuerall, naie to manie and well nigh contrarie sounds and vses, euerie word almost either wanting letters, for his necessarie sound, or hauing some more then necessitie requireth, began to despare in the midst of such a confusio, euer to find out anie sure direction, whereon to ground Art, and to set it certain. And what if either theie did not seke, or did not know how to seke, in right form of Art, and the composing method? But whether difficultie in the thing, or infirmitie in the searchers, gaue cause thereunto, the parties them selues gaue ouer the thing, as in a desperat case, and by not meddling thorough despare, theie helped not the right.

Again som others bearing a good affection to their naturall tung, and resolved to burst thorough the midst of all these difficulties, which offered such resistance, as theie misliked the confusion, wherewith the other were afraid, so theie deused a new mean, wherein theie laid their hope, to bring the thing about. Wherevpon som of them being of great place and good learning, set furth in print particular treatises of that argument, with these their new conceaued means, how we ought to write, and so to write right. But their good hope by reason of their strange mean, had the same euent, that the others despare had, by their either misconceauing the thing at first, or their diffidence

at the last. Wherein the parties them selues no dout deserue some praise, and thanks to, of vs and our cuntrie in both these extremities of hope and despare, tho theie helped not the thing, which theie went about, but in common apparence, did som what hinder it rather. For both he, that despared in the end, took great pains, before diffidence caused him giue ouer to despare: and he that did hope by his own deuise to supply the generall want, was not verie idle both in brain, to deuise, and in hand to deliuer the thing, which he deuised. Which their trauell in the thing, and desire to do good, deserue great thanks, tho that waie which theie took, did not take effect.

The causes why theie took not effect, and thereby in part did hinder the thing, by making of manie think the case more desperat then it was in dede, bycause such fellowes did so faill, were these. Their despare, which thought, that the tung was vncapable of anie direction, came of a wrong cause, the falt rising in dede not of the thing, which theie did condemn, as altogether rude and vnrule, but of the parties them selues, who mistook their waie. For the thing it self will soon be ordered (our custom is grown so orderable) tho it require som diligence, and good consideration, in him that must find it out. But when a writer taketh a wrong principle, quite contrarie to common practis, where triall must be tuch, and practis must confirm the mean, which he conceaueth, is it anie maruell if the vse of a tung ouerthwart such a mean, which is not conformable vnto it? Herevpon proceded the despare to hit right, bycause theie missed of their minde, whereas in dede theie should haue changed their minde, to haue hit vpon that right, which as it is in the thing, so will it soon be found out, if it be rightlie sought for.

Again the others hope deceiued them to as much. For theie considered not, that whereas common reason, and common custom haue bene long dealers in seking out of their own current, themselues will be councellers and will neuer yeild to anie priuat conceit, which shall seme euidentlie either to force them or to crosse them, as theie themselues do, neuer giuing anie precept, how to write right, till theie haue rated at custom, as a most pernicious enemie to truth and right, euen in that thing, where custom hath most right, if it haue right in anie. Wherefor when theie proceded on in a customarie argument, with the enemie of him, which is Lord of the soill, was it anie wonder if theie failed of their purpos, & hindered the finding out of our right writing, which must nedes be compased by customs consent, and reasons frindship? So in the mean time, while despare deceiues the one, and hope begiles the other, the one missing his waie, the other making a fo, and both going astraie, theie both lease their labor, and let the finding out of our right in writing, by their ill led, and worse laid labor, bycause the artificiall course, in finding out such a thing, hath another current, as I haue shewed before in the last title.

Yet notwithstanding all this, it is verie manifest, that the tung it self hath matter enough in it self, to furnish out an art, & that the same mean, which hath bene vsed in the reducing of other tungs to their right, will serue this of ours, both for generalitie of precept, and certaintie of ground, as maie be easile proued by these four arguments, the antiquitie of our tung, the peples wit, their learning, and their experience. For how can it be, but that a tung, which hath continewed manie hundred years, not onelie a tung, but one of

good account, both in speche, and pen, hath growen in all that time to som finesse, and assurance of it self, by so long and so generall an vse, tho it be not as yet sounded, the peple that haue vsed it, being none of the dullest, and traouelling continuallie in all exercises that concern learning, in all practises that procure experience, either in peace or war, either in publike, or priuat, either at home or abrode?

As for the antiquitie of our speche, whether it be measured by the ancient *Almane*, whence it cummeth originallie, or euen but by the latest terms which it boroweth daielie from foren tungs, either of pure necessitie in new matters, or of mere brauerie, to garnish it self withall, it cannot be young. Onelesse the *Germane* himself be young, which claimeth a prerogatiue for the age of his speche, of an infinit prescription: Onelesse the *Latin* and *Greke* be young, whose words we enfranchise to our own vse, tho not allwaie immediatlie from them selues, but most what thorough the *Italian*, *French*, and *Spanish*: Onelesse other tungs, which be neither *Greke* nor *Latin*, nor anie of the forenamed, from whom we haue somewhat, as theie haue from ours, will for companie sake be content to be young, that ours maie not be old. But I am well assured, that euerie one of these, will striue for antiquitie, and rather grant it to vs, then forgo it themselues. So that if the verie newest words, which we vse do sauor of great antiquitie, and the ground of our speche be most ancient, it must nedes then folow, that our hole tung was weined long ago, as hauing all her tethe.

For the account of our tung, both in pen and speche, no man will dout thereof, who is able to iudge what those thinges be, which make anie tung to be of account, which things I take to be thré, the autoritie of the peple which speak it, the matter & argument, wherein the speche dealeth, the manifold vse, for which the speche serueth. For all which thré, our tung nedeth not to giue place, to anie of her peres.

First to saie somewhat for the peple, that vse the tung, the *English* nation hath allwaie bene of good credit, and great estimation, euer since credit and estimation by historie came on this side the *Alps*, which appeareth to be trew, euen by foren cronicles (not to vse our own in a case of our own) which would neuer haue said so much of the peple, if it had bene obscure, and not for an historie, or not but well worthie of a perpetuall historie.

Next, for the argument, wherein it dealeth, whether priuat or publik, it maie compare with som other, that think verie well of their own selues. For not to tuch ordinarie affairs in comon life, will matters of learning in anie kind of argument, make a tung of account? Our nation then, I think, will hardlie be proued to haue bene vnlearned at anie time, in anie kinde of learning, not to vse anie bigger speche. Wherefor hauing learning by confession of all men, & vttering that learning in their own tung, for their own vse, of verie pure necessitie (bycause we learn to vse, and the vse is in our own) theie could not but enrich the tung, and purchase it account.

Will matters of war, whether ciuill or foren, make a tung of account? Our neighbor nations will not deny our peple to be verie wariious, and our own

cuntrie will confesse it, tho loth to fele it, both by remembring the smart, & comparing with som other, neither to vaunt our selues, nor to gall our frinds, with anie mo words.

Now in offring matter to speche, war is such a breder, as tho it be opposit to learning, bycause it is enemie to the Muses, yet it dare compare with anie point in learning, for multitude of discourses, tho not commonlie so certain, ne yet of so good vse, as learned arguments be. For war (besides all graue and sad considerations about it, which be manie and wise) as sometime it sendeth vs trew reports, either priuatelie in proiects and deuises, that be entended, or publikelie in euent, which be blased abrode, bycause theie be don, so mostwhat it giueth out infinit and extreme, I dare not saie lies, but verie incredible newes, bycause it maie hatch them at will, being in no danger of controllment, and comonlie in such practises and places, as haue not manie witnesses, while euerie man seketh as well to saue him self, as to harm his enemie, besides som curteous entertainment, which a deuising referendarie hath euen by telling that, which is not trew, to such as loue to hear, and either like or will like. All which occasions, and infinit mo, about stratagemes & engins, giue matter to speche, and cause of new words, and by making it so redie, do make it of renoun.

Will all kindes of trade, and all sorts of traffik, make a tung of account? If the spreading sea, and the spacious land could vse anie speche, theie would both shew you, where, and in how manie strange places, theie haue sene our peple, and also giue you to wit, that theie deall in as much, and as great varietie of matters, as anie other peple do, whether at home or abrode. Which is the reason why our tung doth serue to so manie vses bycause it is conuersant with so manie peple, and so well acquainted with so manie matters, in so sundrie kindes of dealing. Now all this varietie of matter, and diuersitie of trade, make both matter for our speche, & mean to enlarge it. For he that is so practised, will vtter that, which he practiseth in his naturall tung, and if the strangenesse of the matter do so require, he that is to vtter, rather then he will stik in his vtterance, will vse the foren term, by waie of premunition, that the cuntrie peple do call it so, and by that mean make a foren word, an English denison. All which reasons concerning but the tung, and the account thereof, being put together, as of themselues, theie proue the nations exercise in learning, and their practis in other dealings: so theie seme to infer no base witted peple, not to amplify it with more, bycause it is not for foulls to be so well learned, to be so warrious, to be so well practised. I shall not nede to proue anie of these my positions, either by foren or home historie: seing my reader stranger, will not striue with me for them, and mine own nation, will not gainsaie me in them, I think, which knoweth them to be trew, and maie vse them for their honor.

Wherefor I maie well conclude my first position: that if vse and *custom* hauing the help of so long time, and continuance, wherein to fine our tung: of so great learning and experience, which furnish matter for the fining: of so good wits and iudgements, which can tell how to fine, haue griped at nothing in all that time with all that cunning, by all those wits, which theie will not let go, but hold for most certaine, in the right of our writing: that then our tung hath no certaintie to trust to, but writeth all at randon. But the antecedent in

my opinion, is altogether vnpossible, wherefor the consequent, is a great deall more then probable, which is, that our tung hath in hir own possession, and writing verie good euidence to proue hir own right writing: Which tho no man as yet, by anie publik writing of his, semeth to haue sene, yet the tung it self is redie to shew them, to anie whosoouer, which is able to read them, and withall to iudge, what euidence is right in the right of writing. Wherefor seing I haue proued sufficientlie in mine own opinion, that there is great cause, why our tung should haue som good right, in her own writing, and take my self to haue had the sight of that euidence, whereby that same right appeareth most iustificable, and am not altogether ignorant, how to giue sentence thereof, I will do my best, according to that course, which I said was kept in the first, and generall fining of anie speche, which also hath bene translated to euerie secundarie, and particular tung, to set furth som certaintie for the English writing, by those notes, which I haue obserued in the tung it self, the pure best and finest therein, offering mean by comparison with them selues, both to correct, and to direct the worse and more grosse, without either innouating anie thing, as theie do, which set furth new deuises, or by mistaking my waie, as theie do, which despare, that our tung can be brought to anie certaintie, without som maruellous foren help.