

take much too long to chase this really childish blunder out of all the grammatical nooks and corners in which it lurks. I shall content myself with giving you a few typical instances.

Did any of you, when very little boys and girls, ever learn some rhymes about the parts of speech, written with the view of aiding the budding intelligence of infant minds, and some of which run somehow thus—(I am not sure about one line) :

"First comes the little particle
Grammarians call an Article,
And then the mighty Noun.
A noun, it may be anything,
A tree, a castle, or a king.
A person or a town."

Here you see the absurdity above referred to in full force. The ghost of this innocent little effusion still haunts the examination room. I have a dreary presentiment that within the next six months I shall be told hundreds of times, as I have been told during the last, that a common noun is "some *thing* that belongs to a class," and that "an abstract noun is some *thing* that you can't see or hear or feel." This last wonderful absurdity has been rather a favourite of late. When it has been given *vivâ voce*, a little colloquy of the following kind has sometimes ensued between myself and the examinees. "Is *goodness* an abstract noun?"—"Yes." "Did you hear the word?"—"Yes." "But you told me just now that an abstract noun was something that you *couldn't* hear." Puzzled silence for a moment or two. Then, from some child a little sharper than the rest, and not impossibly a little sharper than the teacher,— "An abstract noun is the *name* of something that you can't see or hear." "Very well, let us try. Is *brightness* an abstract noun?"—"Yes." "Can you see the brightness of the sun?"—"Yes." "Then how can *brightness* be the name of something that you can't see? But now, did you ever hear of a quality?"—"Yes." "Tell me a quality of sugar."—"Sweetness." "What quality makes me call a man good?"—"Goodness." "Very well, *sweetness* and *goodness* are abstract nouns. What are they names of?"—"Qualities." "Now name to me some action."—"Jumping, motion, flight." "Those too are abstract nouns. What are they names of?"—"Actions." "Now tell me a noun that denotes a state in which a person or a thing may be."—"Sleep, life, death." "Good, those also are abstract nouns. Now put all that together, and tell me what an abstract noun may be the name of." The answer will come promptly from a dozen at once—"An abstract noun is the name of a quality, or an action, or a state." Is not all this within the comprehension of the youngest child who should be learning grammar at all? If so, is there any excuse for cheating the intelligence of a beginner, with the rubbish that I quoted before?

While on this point I cannot refrain from pointing out the worthlessness of a definition of abstract nouns which is more frequently given at examinations than any other; namely, that "an abstract noun is the name of anything which we only conceive of in our

minds as having a real independent existence." Now, as *only* is not a negative this definition involves the assumption that we do conceive of that for which the abstract noun is a name as having a real independent existence. But this is palpably absurd. You *cannot* conceive of *motion*, for example, as having a real *independent* existence apart from something that moves. You would contradict yourself in the attempt. That which has an independent existence of its own cannot be an *attribute* of something else. We may fix our attention upon the attribute without thinking about that in which it is inherent. But we cannot *abstract* an attribute in the complete manner in which a thief might *abstract* my watch. The definition is lame enough as it stands. But confusion gets worse confounded when examinees leave out the word *only*, or, reproducing that irrepressible blunder about words and things, tell us that an abstract noun is "*something* that we conceive of as having a real independent existence."

Of course this blunder is extended from nouns themselves to their accidents. I suppose most children might be made with a little pains to comprehend that sex (male and female) is a distinction between classes of animals, and that gender (masculine and feminine) is a distinction between classes of words. At present any question on the subject is sure to elicit in abundance such replies as the following, which I quote *verbatim* :—

"Sex is the difference between animals, gender is the difference between things."

"Gender is applied to one individual person, and sex to a collection of persons."

"Sex is applied to living beings, and in a singular sense; gender in a plural sense, and also to inanimate objects."

"Gender is the inflection of a noun as regards things, sex is the inflection of a noun as regards living beings."

"Sex is the distinction between male and female persons, gender between male and female animals."

"Gender is the distinction of sex," or, as I was recently told, "there is no difference between sex and gender, they both mean the same." There is a sort of courage about that answer which greatly commends it to my liking.

With how little reflection the usual lists of masculine and feminine nouns are often committed to memory and repeated, you may judge when I tell you that, along with the orthodox, *uncle, aunt; bachelor, spinster, &c.*, I have had masculine *hill* feminine *valley*; masculine *church*, feminine *chapel*,—a view of the relation between Churchmen and Nonconformists which might suggest some curious reflections, and is at any rate worthy of a boy in a well-known suburban college, who in interpreting a certain passage of poetry, explained "*music that the meeting soul doth pierce*," to mean, "music suitable for a dissenter."

As regards the case of nouns, I am afraid that many hundreds of unhappy children are still taught that the nominative does something, the possessive owns something, and the objective has something,