

THE SUBJUNCTIVE MOOD.*

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THOSE of you who have studied "Mason's Grammar" will have found that he points out a number of difficulties encountered by students in the grammatical study of English. Perhaps the most prominent difficulty is that of the "Subjunctive Mood," and from the way in which Mason deals with it, it is evident that he has felt the difficulty himself. In saying this, I do not wish you to think that I consider that Mason lacks anything in clearness, or that he does violence to any of the principles of English. Of all the authors I have studied on this subject—Abbott, Mason, Angus, Fleming, and Bain—Mason is the only one, in my opinion, who has interpreted faithfully the teachings of our best grammarians.

The real source of difficulty, it seems to me, however, is the way in which we were taught to distinguish moods. The method was purely mechanical. Now, when Mason wishes us to free ourselves from a tyranny of names, and presents peculiarities, hitherto unnoticed, in a logical manner, we, as teachers, who possess more than ordinary intelligence and a little literary culture, but whose minds have become vitiated by the teachings we received from the old grammars and older teachers, at first do not perceive the distinctions in thought, to express which the English language is so admirably fitted.

It would be presumption on my part to enter into arguments in favour of the new conjugation, for any one who has examined Mason must have

found reasons sufficiently cogent to abandon the old method.

It may be well here to observe that in doing away with the Potential Mood there has been recognized that important principle in grammatical science, that all grammatical expedients are to be valued in so far as they explain fully the force and office of those words with which they deal.

The Potential Mood long occupied a conspicuous place in the conjugation of our verbs, but it has by many been discovered to be a useless invention—a deviation from the foregoing rule, not having a solitary circumstance to recommend its retention. It has accordingly been discarded for an arrangement that unfolds the true use of verbs.

It is a matter of surprise how such an arbitrary arrangement as the Potential Mood should be accepted by succeeding generations as the best that could be devised.

The only explanation of this is, that, in times past, teachers supposed themselves to be strictly confined to the authorized text-book, and did not investigate for themselves. The question was not "What does language teach," "What does use teach," but "What does the authorized text-book teach?" The doom of this system has been sealed, fortunately for the studies of our pupils. Research in all the departments of English grammar has been extended, and it may now with truth, and not with irony, be called a science and an art.

But we shall suppose that we are now beginning a school term, and that we have a class that have been

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