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Editorials.

GRAMMAR AS A SCHOOL STUDY.

WE reprinted in last number, from an American contemporary, an article with the caption, "Grammar Is Not for Babes." As intimated in a brief note, we reproduced the article not because we agree with its position, but because the sentiments somewhat racily expressed in it are just now more or less popular in some pedagogical circles, and because the vexed question upon which opinions so dogmatic are affirmed is by no means settled.

The main contention of the writer of the article is that school children should not commence the study of grammar before they are fourteen years of age. To the objection that this would mean that the majority of our young people would go out into the world without the ability to distinguish a noun from a verb, Mr. Magnusson, the writer, replies that he would a thousand times rather have them do so than have the citizen ignorant of the very foundations of the Government he is supposed to support. "I would rather," he adds, "have the stonemason ignorant of the passive periphrastic con-

jugation than to have him handle granite and sandstone daily and never suspect that they have a history. Our pupils were much better off if they could trade off a few tons of sentence analysis and parsing for an appreciative knowledge of 'In Memoriam,' 'Faust,' and the 'Nibelungen Song.'"

Whatever logical force there may be in this reply depends, obviously, upon the correctness of the underlying assumption that the study of sentence analysis and parsing is incompatible with the most elementary knowledge—for nothing more can be hoped for in the Public School—of the foundations of constitutional government, of geology, or of some of the masterpieces of English and German literature. In his allusion to the German the writer seems to imply that, but for the obnoxious grammar, the pupil might find time, in the ordinary Public School course, to acquire a sufficient mastery of the German language to enable him to appreciate the German classics in the original. If so, one is curious to know whether he would have the pupil acquire this mastery of the German literature without wasting any time in the study of German grammar, *i.e.*, of the structure and idioms of the German language. Even that would be a scarcely less startling innovation than to have him acquire the ability to appreciate "In Memoriam" without any scientific knowledge of the language in which Tennyson's masterpiece was written.

This leads back, however, to the prior question: What is English grammar? All are agreed, we may presume, upon the time-honored definition. It is the science of language. In this, as in every other case, the science is derived from the actual things or facts—or, more strictly speaking, from the phenomena which are the subject of investigation. So, too, the science of language stands in the same relation to the practical use of language in which any other science stands to the practical application of the principles and rules which have been deduced from observation and experience. Is it not true that in this, as in every other case, the facts exist before the laws governing them are discovered? But none the less are the laws, which may be the discovery of a single mind—or, rather, which may first be defined and formulated by a single mind—of the greatest assistance, even to those who may have all their lives been accustomed to use many of them unwittingly. Many a mechanic makes skilful use of the pulley, the lever, and the inclined plane, who has no book knowledge of the science of

dynamics. Does he know nothing of that science? Many other illustrations will readily suggest themselves. But what should we think of the workman who refuses to abandon his own slower and more laborious methods in favor of the simpler ones discovered and applied by science?

But let us look at Mr. Magnusson's arguments very briefly, in their order. He sets out with the assertion, which he offers as first proof, that grammar is not a study for children, *viz.*, that "no normal child ever fell in love with grammar." This is a question of fact. Probably no other subject on the school programme has been, in the past, so badly taught as grammar. But we venture the assertion that there are many among our readers who will promptly refuse to accept this sweeping assertion, and testify that they have many children in their classes who enjoy the study of grammar as much as that of any other subject. No reason can be given why this should not be so, if only the subject be properly taught, *i.e.*, taught inductively and interestingly from the study of the language itself.

The second proof that grammar is not a study for children is that it is greatly over-valued. "Grammar," we are told, "is not the science by which we learn to speak and write correctly." The writer goes on to tell us that correct speech is learned by rote, that it is a matter of habit. Is that so? It is, of course, an inestimable boon to have around us in our youthful days, and to associate with, only those who are correct in speech. It is an advantage the loss of which nothing else can fully make good. But how small the percentage of our school children who have, or ever can have, this advantage. And what shall be done for all the rest, the great majority? How are they to correct their speech, even if they desire to do so, save by the knowledge and constant application of those principles and laws of language which it is the business of grammar to discover and store up in the shape of laws and rules? Is this not what every intelligent student who is ambitious to speak and write the language correctly is doing every day?

The best Greek, we are told, was written by men who would not have recognized a rule in grammar if they had seen one. Is that so? How did it happen that the best Greek writers uniformly used certain forms and terminations of verbs and adjectives, etc., with plural subjects, and certain other forms with singular subjects, if they followed no rules? They certainly observed a code of gram-