

THE GRAMMAR QUESTION.

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THE address of Mr. Geo. H. Martin before the Massachusetts Teachers' Association on "What do our Pupils know in English Language when they leave the Grammar School?" is of the greatest interest to all teachers. The testimony it gives is full and explicit, both as to the attainments and deficiencies of the pupils in the Public Schools, and it will have exceptional weight with all who know the writer. Certainly, few teachers are better capable of judging, or have had so large opportunities for observation as he. In the latter part of his address, Mr. Martin raises a query in regard the value of the work done in technical grammar. After stating that "the pupils have little power to use their knowledge of grammar to determine whether sentences are correct or not, . . . except in case of very obvious errors," he continues: "Whether the training itself is worth what it would cost to get it, is another question. It is also a question whether it is best to teach grammar at all, unless it is carried far enough to obtain this practical end."

The *School Journal* (N. Y.) of Dec. 22, quotes these sentences for the benefit of "the old grammatical grinds who persist, in spite of all reason, in teaching parsing," as a support to its own position that "most, if not all, the time spent in studying grammar is wasted,"—an opinion for expressing which, it declares, it has "suffered persecution." "In other words, is the game worth the powder?" it asks, and thanks Mr. Martin for having (as it assumes) answered the question. The question itself is similar to some that are being asked all over the South to-day, in view of the large number of subjects taught (in the

coloured schools especially), that either cannot be directly utilized, or are not "carried" enough to obtain a practical end." Such questions will never cease to be asked, both because the defects of half-educated pupils are, from the nature of things, more conspicuous than their attainments, and because it is so easy to measure the worth of education by simply looking at its immediate and utilitarian results. The question, as applied to grammar, will not be finally answered, so long as, in addition to those teachers who think that "the design of English grammar now is, and always has been, to teach the art of speaking and writing the English language with propriety," there are also other influential teachers who believe that "the purposes of language study are various, that not the least of these is reflective power, that mere correctness is only one, and a subordinate one,"* and that "while grammar will be ready by and by to do its part in correcting and polishing our usages, it is only in its own time and way. We may turn it at once into an apparatus for discovering and eliminating errors of speech, . . . but only at the risk of sacrificing more legitimate objects."†

There are still some educated persons who do not regret that they spent some part of their schooldays in "parsing 'Paradise Lost.'" There are teachers who believe that the effort "to turn the light of intelligent reflection upon the instrumentality of thought," adds precision to the thought itself. They believe that the study of the logical relationships of

* See Welsh's "Essentials of English."

† Prof. W. D. Whitney, in *Journal of Education*, March 18, 1876.