

Does not the possessive inflection explain and speak for itself? Besides, it is too difficult; it can be made the subject of a dilemma. Either a boy will understand the abstruse statement, that the first noun denotes possession in relation to the second; or, which is more probable, he will not. If he does not, the rule is useless, and worse than useless; if he does, he is far too sharp to require it. The common and more simple way of expressing the rule is, I believe, "When two nouns come together meaning different things, the former put in the possessive case." The legitimate inference from this rule is such an answer as recently fell under my notice, that in the sentence, "The Duke of Bedford was appointed by the Government Protector of the kingdom," Government is or ought to be in the possessive case before Protector. Again, there is positive mischief in such a statement exemplified by such instances as the following, "A verb may be put in the infinitive by another verb, by an adjective, and by a noun; as 'I wish to go,' 'He is worthy to be elected,' 'His capacity to think is amazing.'" Such a rule explains nothing, helps nobody, has no tendency whatever to make a pupil either more thoughtful, or even more mechanically accurate, and it does a great deal of harm by giving him the notion that when he has quoted the rule he has done all that can be expected of him. It may or may not be useful in particular circumstances to explain that *to go*, in "I wish to go," is an instance of the use of the infinitive as a noun, while in the latter case *to* is not the sign of the infinitive, but has a prepositional force, "He is worthy *to*" being like "He is fit *for*" ("aptus *ad*" in Latin): but in any case it can be of no use, and is a cruelty to boys, to give them a rule that encourages error. Our rule for Syntax should be, as it seems to me, to have few rules except such as may be necessary to correct common errors made by English boys in speaking. Many of our present rules appear to me mere idle meaningless verbiage, strung together for the simple purpose of imitating Latin. As though, while we are treading the streets of London, where we and our fathers have lived and walked, we should fix our eyes upon a guide-book, and go through a solemn make-believe that we are enquiring the way, and that we know no more of Oxford-street and Newgate than of the Via Sacra and the Tullianum.

This leads me to the last point of difference between English and Latin, the inflections. In Latin, the inflections are numerous and noticeable, and by means of them any boy can easily distinguish the parts of speech. The stupidest boy in the bottom form would not be so stupid as to imagine that *musa, musæ*, was a verb or an adverb, or *monéo, monui*, a noun. The inflections settle the question for him without the slightest necessity of thinking. He may, as a form, repeat the definition, whether in Latin or in English, that "a noun is the name of a person, place, or thing," but he makes no practical use of it whatever. In English, the case is different. The boy is taught to depend upon the definition, and hence spring sore perplexities. He knows very well that a "ball," or a "desk," or a "room," is a noun; these are all "things," and he recognises the justice of calling them "things" and their names nouns. But when he turns to his English history book, he is at sea. His familiar "things" have vanished, and in their stead he finds such words as "absence," "rarity," "succession," "non-existence," "nothing." Is "absence" a thing, and what part of speech is "nothing"? Probably he is in the habit, unconsciously sometimes, of substituting some other boyish criterion in the place of the usual definition. Perhaps he says to himself that a word is a noun if it will take "the" before it, without requiring any other word after it. But then, according

to his test, "Thomas" is not a noun. Again, what part of speech is "learning"? It will take "the," and yet evidently there are cases where it is not the name of a thing or a noun at all. "Good," again, is not a noun, and yet we talk about "rewarding the good and punishing the bad." No doubt these perplexities are boyish, but then we are dealing with boys, and not with men. Why allow boys, if we can help it, at the outset of their education, to fall into the way of regarding grammar as a mysterious and inexplicable bore? I think some of our definitions, which are often extremely unsatisfactory, might at all events be deferred, and tests might be substituted in their place with great advantage. But care should be taken that these tests are natural, and as closely as possible connected with the essence and function of the word. The test for a noun or pronoun, for example, might be, that it is a single word (sometimes preceded by *a*), answering to the question who? or what? after a transitive verb; such as, "I like," or "he likes." A few pronouns would be the only exceptions to the test, *I, thou, he, we, and they*. And boys should be distinctly warned that tests will only mislead them, if they do not also pay attention to the context.

Some of these tests may be simply empirical; but they will do a boy no harm, coming after the appeal to his intelligence, made in the preliminary lesson on the uses of the Parts of Speech, and they will be sometimes of much use in removing difficulties. Thus, the usual distinction between a verb and a conjunction, that the latter cannot be moved from the beginning of the clause which it introduces, whereas an adverb can, though not perhaps invariably true, will be found practically useful.

It is very important that the uninflected nature of the English language should be prominently brought out. The tendency of the language has been for several centuries, and still is, to diminish even the scanty remnant of the old inflections which we still possess. The Latin leaven, as usual, has been doing its work here, operating against the natural English tendency. Grammarians mourn over their lost inflections, fondly recalling those that are not quite lost to them, and making the most of the few that still remain, merely because they assimilate English to Latin. Among these jealously preserved relics is what is called the Objective case. I think it is scarcely fair to say, as is commonly said, "There are three cases in English: the Nominative, the Possessive, and the Objective." The Objective case has no existence except in some half-dozen pronouns. It would seem far more natural, therefore, to say that "A noun in the singular has one inflection, which is called the Possessive;" and to add that an old Objective inflection still remains in *I, thou, he, she, we, they, who*. In the same spirit we ought first to lay down a general rule: "There are no inflections of gender in the English language;" and then to add that there are a few feminines of foreign origin, as *empress, heroine, executrix*, and that the foreign suffix *-ess*, has been in a few cases appended to English words, as *shepherdess*; but, as it is not allowable to coin a feminine with this termination, it cannot be called an English inflection. The plural inflections of foreign words, such as *index, appendix, formula*, should meet with the same treatment. They ought not to be allowed to pester any young pupils; and when pupils are old enough, they ought to be told that the only security for the correct usage of foreign plurals, from time to time imported into the language, is a knowledge of the several foreign inflections; and that unless the English termination is remarkably harsh, as in *phenomenons, effluvioms*, a studious preservation of the foreign suffix savours of pedantry.

This principle of extermination may also be applied