

the frontiers are marked. My aim is to give my boys an acquaintance with the modes and habits of language in their more general aspects ; and I hold that, whether you call it grammar or not, the plan I am advocating will effect what I want. It is true that there is grave danger that boys who study language in this way may come to look upon grammar as a science, which states the facts of language, and not an art—the art of speaking and writing correctly. But this would not distress me much.

A word or two about definitions before we pass on. To provide our boys with ready-made definitions not only deprives them of much valuable exercise, but also is very likely indeed to give them false ideas of the nature of language. They are apt to look upon language as the invention of some primeval person or persons, springing full-grown from their brains as Athena did from the brain of Zeus, and provided with a complete set of laws and regulations as binding and unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians—instead of a slow natural growth, as slow and as natural as other human growths. When, as a proof of the rightness of the definition, the derivation is added, confusion becomes worse confounded. The derivation can only tell us what idea the original makers or adopters of the name had in their minds ; and that idea may have been right or may have been wrong, or, like most things human, partly the one and partly the other. Words have not fixed innate meanings of their own ; they mean just what those who use them agree from time to time that they shall mean—and that may in the long run have little or nothing to do with the original meaning. The growth and change in the meaning of words is familiar to us all ; and its history, which the great “ Oxford Dictionary ” is making possible for us in English, is valuable

and extremely interesting—more interesting to my mind than the history of the growth and change of form. Educationally also it is of great value ; but it does not belong to the stage we are discussing ; and the ill-timed dragging in of derivations will hinder and not help the study of it. There is, moreover, another drawback to the giving of ready-made definitions ; errors and mis-statements creep into them and are handed down unchanged from generation to generation ; which would not be the case were the work leading up to definition constantly redone. I suppose we may hope that before very long we shall not find, even in Latin grammars, adjectives defined as “ qualifying nouns ”—a dark saying at best, even if we substitute “ things ” for “ nouns.” Perhaps with it there may vanish the idea that verbs are of two classes, those which tell us “ what a thing does ” ; and, secondly (to use their own vile phrase), “ what a thing is done to.” The textbooks, it is true, do not often themselves adopt this classification, but somehow (I speak as an examiner) they allow the idea to get into the learners’ minds—some of whom gaily add the startling information that the latter class is called “ intransitive.” But there is one definition which age cannot wither nor can custom stale. I mean that which tells us that “ a pronoun is a word which stands instead of a noun.” Those who are learned in such matters inform us, as I understand, that pronoun-roots are as old as, or older than, noun-roots in language ; that there never was a period in language destitute of pronouns, or, in other words, that it was often found sufficient at first to indicate by reference or gesture what one was speaking about instead of giving it a name—in short, the pronoun was not invented to relieve the over-worked noun. However this may be, the definition is evidently thoroughly un-