

to call this grammar, and what but muddle and confusion can come of learning such stuff? Do you wish to see how the thing works? Take the following, which I quote, not as exceptional blunders, but as typical specimens of answers that I have had by hundreds within these few months:—

"A verb is in the passive voice when the object of the verb is really the subject, and the subject of the verb is really the object."

"Active voice is the agent passing to the object, passive voice is the object passing to the agent."

"A transitive verb is one that passes over to an object."

"A verb is transitive when the subject passes to the object."

"An active verb is a verb which does something; a passive verb is a verb to which something is done."

"A verb is in the passive voice when it acts upon the subject."

"A direct object is that which acts immediately on the object from which the action proceeds."

"All intransitive verbs show that the subject does nothing."

"A verb in the active voice is one in which the subject makes the active verb act upon the object; a verb in the passive voice is one which makes the object act upon the subject."

Let me, in passing, call attention to another exceedingly common mistake. Learners are often incautiously told that a transitive verb must always have an object,—the very important condition of its being in the active voice being lost sight of. Of course, a transitive verb may be in the passive voice, and then there is no grammatical object of the verb, though of course the subject stands for the real object of the action. When I have given a list of verbs to be classed as transitive and intransitive respectively, I have usually found three candidates out of four put all the passives among the intransitives. In the last list that I gave, there happened to be only one transitive verb (*lay*) in the active voice. A candidate pounced upon this, and informed that *lay* was the only transitive verb in the list, because you can lay an egg."

I must give you one other illustration of the all-pervading confusion between words and things, which I have been trying to expose. In parsing the words, "full many a flower is born to blush unseen," a candidate recently wrote, "is a preposition, showing the relation between *flower* and *born*." Could anything be more preposterously wrong? Hold, however; perhaps he was only making a strictly logical application of the definition that he had learnt. Very likely he had used one of our commonest school grammars which says that "a preposition is a word which shows the relation of a noun or pronoun to some other word in the sentence." Well, does not *is* show (in a sort of way) the relation of *flower* to *born*? Then, according to the definition, it is a preposition. If not, why not? Why, because the ordinary definitions of a preposition are totally wrong. Everybody admits that prepositions show relations of some kind. Of what

kind? Here again, there is absolutely no dispute. Primarily, relations in space, rest in, motion to, motion from—*in, at, to, towards, from, &c.* Secondly, relations of time—*at, before, after, &c.* Thirdly, by a metaphorical use, the relations of *cause, effect, &c.* Now I put it to any one's common sense, do these relations subsist between the words of a sentence? If I talk of a bird in a cage, is the word *bird* in the word *cage*? Of course not. The preposition *in* shows the relation in space of one thing to another. Can any one point out any conceivable relation between the word *bird* and the word *cage*, which is expressed by *in*? Yet a grammar, which bears a very distinguished name on the little page, lays down broadly that "preposition is a word which shows the relation of one noun to another." But these writers cannot even be consistent with themselves. In the same book we read, a few lines further on, that, "when a preposition connects noun with noun, the relation is between one object and another." Both statements cannot be correct. Still, when a man has made a blunder, it is better to correct it than to stick to it; and nothing could be more accurate than the statement just quoted, and what the writer goes on to say, "When it (*i. e.*, the preposition) connects a noun with an adjective, the relation is between an object and the quality expressed by the adjective (as *red* with *weeping*); when it connects a noun with a verb, the relation is between an object and an action (as *broken* with *storms*)." But a paragraph like this is a veritable *rara avis* in those sections of English grammars which treat of prepositions. The definition which is given by three examinees out of four is the thoroughly erroneous one that I quoted before, namely that "the preposition is a word which shows the relation of a noun or pronoun to some other word in the sentence," to which the writer adds a paragraph, which for confusion of thought is perhaps unrivalled. He says, "Sometimes the preposition shows the relation of one substantive to another, as, 'the wisdom of Solomon is renowned'; sometimes it shows the relation of some person or thing to a given action, as 'he fell against the wall'; sometimes it shows the relation of a substantive to some quality, as 'bread is good for food.' These facts may be thus expressed: 'prepositions relate nouns or pronouns to other nouns or pronouns, to verbs, or to adjectives.'" I presume that "to relate one noun to another" is meant to express the same idea as "to show the relation of the one noun to the other." If not, the second definition contradicts the first. But look, I pray you, at that intervening expository paragraph. It contains three different and absolutely inconsistent accounts of the functions of the preposition. First, the preposition shows the relation of one substantive to another, *i. e.*, of a word to a word. This is the old story—the word *bird* inside the word *cage*. Next, the preposition shows the relation of a person or thing to an action,—no longer of one word to another. Here the writer has accidentally deviated into sense, but it is only for a moment. In the next sentence he goes more ingeniously wrong than ever,