

If simple parsing is to afford constant practice in precise reasoning, the use or function of the words dealt with must be brought into the foreground, and be stated fully and clearly. To class a word as a noun without further explanation may or may not be an exercise in reasoning, according as the pupil has or has not in his mind a sound reason for his answer. But to class it as a noun because it is the name of a person or thing, which the pupil defines as well as he can, is an exercise of this kind. Obviously, at this stage, the pupil's reason for assigning a certain word to a certain part of speech is the chief point to be considered. If this is true it is sheer stupidity not to require him to state his reason. It is this alone that raises the exercise out of the sphere of guesswork. And the reasons given should afford evidence of thought and understanding, and not fall into a stereotyped formula, such as "Dog, a noun, because it is the name of something", "Yellow, a noun, because it is the name of something." The pupils can, and should, be trained to define with some precision what is named "Dog, a noun, because it is the name of an animal," and "Yellow, a noun, because it is the name of a colour." They can do this readily for the great majority of the nouns they meet with, and the exercise not only stimulates observation and thought, but lends much greater interest to the lesson. So handled, the grammar-lesson ceases to be a mechanical grind, and embodies intellectual elements of no mean value. Similarly clear and definite statements of the use of the words should be required for each part of speech. Thus, it is not enough to say of a pronoun that it stands for a noun. The very word or person it stands for should always be stated in the earlier stages of instruction, and wherever the sense of a sentence is understood this can be done without difficulty. Precise reference of this kind is all-important, for it is this that alone gives meaning and tangibility to the highly-generalised definitions which little children are often taught too soon, and which they are apt to repeat without thought or understanding. Once more, it is not enough to class a word as a verb because it says or states something, or means doing something (a remarkable definition favoured in some schools). The very person or thing it says something about must also be stated, if the answer is to show any apprehension of the meaning of the sentence. These are now deemed very minor matters but careful attention to them is indispensable if the teaching of the elements of grammar is to contribute anything of value to the mental discipline which our schools are established to promote. So far as I can judge, the grand aim in the handling of grammar in Standards III. and IV. has too long been to get the pupils to pass a formal and undiscerning examination, and not to turn its study to the best account in training and enlightening the mind.

Another important aspect of this subject is also undeservedly neglected. From the earliest lessons in grammar consideration of the structure of easy regular sentences, and of the linking of two or more statements into one sentence, should be kept prominently in view. This should be done for the mental discipline which the exercise yields, but chiefly for its evident utility as an aid to composition. In the latter subject the pupils of Standard IV., and even those of Standard V., show a marked uncertainty about the proper division of the matter of their exercises into sentences. The best means of surmounting this difficulty lies in the systematic study of the structure of the easy sentences that should alone be chosen for parsing in the lower classes. This study may well be begun at Standard III. stage, easy sentences being chosen for consideration. And Standard IV. pupils should be regularly trained to separate or distinguish the statements that compose each sentence, and to point out the words that link or join the statements together—the 'joining words,' as they may be collectively named, without at first distinguishing the classes into which a more refined analysis divides them. Regular practice in exercises of this kind not only helps parsing by making clear the function of conjunctions, of relative pronouns, and of relative adverbs, but it soon gives the pupils a fairly ready and sure knowledge of the limits of sentences. Without this knowledge blunders in the division of sentences can hardly be avoided. It is by the help of some instinctive grasp of it that pupils do as well as they do. How much better would they fare if the blind groping after guiding principles were replaced by a clear appreciation of them, derived from deliberate and consciously directed study.

Evidence of like purport to that already adduced might be drawn from the teaching of geography, history, and comprehension of English lessons, but there is no need to elaborate it. In this connection I shall mention only one other point—the historical dates taught in Standard III. class. These are often learned in the most mechanical way, without any knowledge of the events that make the dates notable, or even of what a date means. The date of the battle of Bannockburn, for example, is very commonly taught and nearly always known but as likely as not no one in the class knows in what country Bannockburn is situated, or what combatants took part in the battle. It is, however, chiefly in small schools that such work as this is met with but, grossly unintelligent though it is, we must not think too hardly of their teachers even for such failings, for they are not without reasonable excuse—the excuse that the burden of work prescribed for such schools is so heavy that it is practically impossible to find time to teach some of the minor subjects in an intelligent way. An educative study of any subject demands a certain minimum amount of time, and if this cannot be found teachers should not bear too much of the blame if they do resort to cram. At the recent Conference the Inspectors recommended that history should be taught only as reading-lessons are taught, without any special examination on dates and facts—an arrangement that would have greatly relieved the pressure of work incident to the present syllabus. Unfortunately the recommendation has not been accepted by the Minister.

A second impression left on my mind is that the progress of the preparatory classes is not so rapid as it might be, and that their teaching is wanting in breadth and thoroughness. The slow progress of these classes is no doubt due to various causes. In large schools it seems traceable to indifferent attention, caused by the unwieldy size of the classes in which the beginners are usually taught, and by their being spread over so large a space while the lessons are being taken. Beginners in reading are best taught in small groups of fifteen or at most twenty, and they should always be brought out to the floor for their lessons, as the children can in this way be trained to give close