

**TEXT FLY WITHIN
THE BOOK ONLY**

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_154915

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

THE LANGUAGE LIBRARY



THE PATTERN OF ENGLISH

THE LANGUAGE LIBRARY

EDITED BY ERIC PARTRIDGE



By G. H. Vallins

GOOD ENGLISH: HOW TO WRITE IT

BETTER ENGLISH

SPELLING



THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

With a chapter on the history of American English by
Professor John W. Clark, of the University of Minnesota

Professor Ernest Weekley

THE LANGUAGE OF SCIENCE

T. H. Savory

THE WORDS WE USE

Dr. J. A. Sheard

CHAMBER OF HORRORS

A Glossary of British and American officialese, with an
Introduction by Eric Partridge

'Vigilans'

A DICTIONARY OF THEATRICAL TERMS

Wilfred Granville

EARLY ENGLISH

John W. Clark

MODERN LINGUISTICS

Simeon Potter

ETYMOLOGY

A. S. C. Ross

G. H. VALLINS

The Pattern of English



ANDRE DEUTSCH

First published 1956 by
ANDRE DEUTSCH LIMITED
12-14 Carlisle Street, Soho Square
London W1

Printed in Great Britain by
TONBRIDGE PRINTERS LIMITED
Tonbridge Kent

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>Page 7</i>
I The Inflected Language	15
II Basic Word Order	55
III The Verbal Phrase	66
IV Sentence Patterns	82
V Syntax	112
VI The Sentence on the Paper	149
VII A Praxis	163
<i>Appendix</i>	177
<i>Index</i>	185

PREFACE

THIS book is neither a Grammar nor a Manual of modern usage. It is rather an attempt to show, by illustration and example, the changing pattern of English from the time of King Alfred to the present day. In another way, it is a study in practice and precept; for after the first chapter, which deals in the main with the inflected language, it concerns itself with the old and still continuing conflict between custom and law, usage and grammar, what is and what ought to be.

'Custom,' said Ben Jonson, 'is the most certain mistress of language, as the public stamp makes the current money. But the eldest of the present, and newest of the past language, is the best. For what was the ancient language, which men so dote upon, but the ancient custom? Yet when I name custom, I understand not the vulgar custom; for that were a precept no less dangerous to language than life, if we should speak or live after the manners of the vulgar: but that I call custom of speech, which is the consent of the learned.' Yet the end of his discourse seems to forget the beginning; since the 'consent of the learned' is continually influenced by and may even depend on 'vulgar custom'. We have not, and never have had, an academy to settle our disputes, a final arbiter of right and wrong. From time to time the grammarians have made their pronouncements and promulgated their laws; but it has been the common man who in speech has shaped the colloquial, which itself has shaped, or helped to shape, the literary language. Nevertheless, the learned men have not been without power to guide and restrain; their mark is on the language also. Only, since custom itself changes, they in turn have never been able to come to one consent.

As a kind of running commentary, therefore, on the general theme of this book I have given quotations from the work of a few representative grammarians, both past and present.

They range from Ben Jonson to Eric Partridge; that is, between them they represent the language over a period of three and a half centuries. Reference is made to their works in the text; but it may be useful for the reader to have a briefly annotated list of the chief of them here:

1. *The English Grammar* 'made by Ben Jonson for the benefit of all strangers, out of his observation of the English Language, now spoken and in use'.

'The original manuscript of Ben Jonson's *English Grammar* perished by fire in 1623. Some years later Jonson re-wrote the *Grammar*, and three years after his death it was printed in the folio edition of his *Works* (London, 1640-1). The text, however, was marred by numerous misprints and blunders. In 1692, when a new edition of the *Works* was published, the *Grammar*, which had been based on Elizabethan authorities, was revised and made to conform to the linguistic usages of the end of the seventeenth century.'
— from the Preface by Strickland Gibson, M.A., to the 1928 reprint.

2. *A Grammar of the English Tongue*. By Doctor Johnson. This was prefixed to the *Dictionary* (1755).

3. *The Rudiments of English Grammar*; adapted to the Use of Schools. With Observations on Style. By Joseph Priestley (1761). Priestley is, of course, better known as a scientist; but this book testifies to his pre-eminence in other walks of life. 'Of all the grammarians of this period,' says Baugh (*History of the English Language*), 'only Priestley seems to have doubted the propriety of *ex cathedra* utterances and to have been truly humble before the facts of usage.'

4. *Short Introduction to English Grammar*. By Robert Lowth (1762). This book, with its details and dogmatism, became exceedingly popular. Lindley Murray (see below) closely followed it, and often quoted from it *verbatim*, without acknowledgment.

5. *Elements of the Grammar of the English Language*. Written in a familiar style: Preceded by an Introduction, tending to illustrate the fundamental Principles of Universal Grammar. By Charles Coote, A.M., of Pembroke College, Oxford (1788). Coote professed 'to adapt the rules to the capacities even of the junior classes of scholars', and gave notes which might serve 'to exercise the sagacity of the learner after he has gone through the body of the work'. In etymology, he 'adopted the deductions of the ingenious Mr Horne Tooke', whose fantastic *Diversions of Purley* had appeared in 1786. He also referred to the authority of Lowth and James Harris, who had published, twenty years before, *Hermes or A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Vniversal Grammar* (1745).

6. *An English Grammar*. By Lindley Murray (1795). *The Dictionary of National Biography* says that Murray (who was an American) 'introduced system into grammar'. But much of his work was derivative, especially from Lowth.

7. *A Grammar of the English Language*, in a Series of Letters. Intended for the use of Schools and of Young Persons in General; but more especially for the use of Soldiers, Sailors, Apprentices, and Plough-boys. By William Cobbett (1817). This, wrongheaded, mistaken, dogmatic, biased, is the most entertaining of the older grammars – and in some respects the best. It is odd that Baugh does not even mention it. There is a reprint in the Oxford Miscellany.

8. *An English Grammar*. By Alexander Bain (1863).

9. Modern Grammars:

(a) *A New English Grammar Logical and Historical*. By Henry Sweet. (Oxford, 1892–98.)

(b) *Advanced English Syntax*. By C. T. Onions. (Kegan Paul, 1904.)

(c) *The King's English*. By H. W. and F. G. Fowler. (Oxford, 1907.)

- (d) *A New English Grammar*. By E. A. Sonnenschein.
(Oxford, 1916.)
- (e) *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*. By H. W. Fowler. (Oxford, 1926.)
- (f) *Usage and Abusage*. By Eric Partridge. (Hamish Hamilton, 1947.)

There is a general note on these books on p. 116. Other Grammars, ancient and modern, are mentioned or referred to from time to time in the text.

These and the scores which are not mentioned testify to the great interest in language, both in the past and in the present. They are also a reminder that this interest itself springs from the very freedom from authority which allows the Englishman the privilege of argument about matters of syntax and idiom, and sets the grammarians at odds one with another. On this Joseph Priestley said a wise word two hundred years ago:

As to a publick Academy, invested with authority to ascertain the use of words, which is a project that some persons are very sanguine in expectations from, I think it not only unsuitable to the genius of a free nation, but in itself ill calculated to reform and fix a language. We need make no doubt but that the best forms of speech will, in time, establish themselves by their own superior excellence: and, in all controversies, it is better to wait the decisions of *Time*, which are slow and sure, than to take those of *Synods*, which are often hasty and injudicious. A *manufacture* for which there is a great demand, and a *language* that many persons have leisure to read and write, are both sure to be brought, in time, to all the perfection of which they are capable.

It is always well to remember that the greatest grammarian of all is Time, because he goes, of necessity, hand in hand with change.

I should like to thank the Editor of the Language series, Mr Eric Partridge, not only for his interest in this book but also for the help, inspiration, and occasional provocation of his own work; and my publishers, Messrs André Deutsch Ltd, for their encouragement and co-operation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the following for giving me permission to reprint copyright matter: Mr Leonard Woolf for a passage from *Between the Acts* and a passage from *The Common Reader* by Virginia Woolf; to Messrs George Allen & Unwin for a passage from *This and That* by the late John Hilton; to Messrs Chatto & Windus for a passage from C. E. Montague's *A Writer's Notes on His Trade*; to Messrs Faber & Faber for a passage from T. S. Eliot's *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*; to Messrs Michael Joseph for a passage from Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth*; to Messrs Longmans, Green for a passage from A. P. Rossiter's *Our Living Language*; and to the Clarendon Press for a passage from H. W. Fowler's *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*.

THE PATTERN OF ENGLISH

Chapter I



THE INFLECTED LANGUAGE

(I)

WE HAVE to remember, at the outset, that English was originally a highly inflected language, like Latin and Greek. Between the time of King Alfred and the end of the mediæval period most of these inflections disappeared. Not all, however. Some remain; but these, though historically interesting, have little significance in or influence on the pattern, or syntax of the language. We depend upon sense relationships and word groupings, the order and arrangement of phrases and clauses, and only in a minor way on the visible grammatical agreement of words through their endings for number, gender, and case. Nevertheless, our syntax, though generally free of accident – the ‘accidents’ which happen to the forms of words – does not entirely escape it. English cannot quite forget its past.

Old English, or Anglo-Saxon as it is sometimes called, is so far removed from Modern English that it is almost like a foreign tongue. This is due partly to sound changes in the mediæval period which are reflected in spelling, and partly to the disappearance of the inflections themselves. But since, at a far remove, we speak the language that Alfred spoke, it is convenient – and indeed necessary – to begin there, and see not only what inflections remain, but also what in our modern syntactical pattern has evolved from the older inflectional system, and, by implication, what changes have occurred owing to the loss of inflection.

To begin, then, with the noun. The modern noun has only two inflections, one for number, to indicate the plural, and one to indicate (in general) possession – a notable survival from the past, which will be dealt with later (p. 18). The

Old English noun had inflection not only for number and possession, but also to distinguish the noun as object from the noun as subject, and to show an indirect relationship which we express with the aid of such prepositions as *to*, *at*, *by*, *with*. In the technical language of grammar, it inflected for *case*;¹ and its forms are usually described, after the Latin style, as Nominative (subject), Accusative (object), Genitive or Possessive (indicating possession etc.), and Dative (indicating the indirect relationship). The fact that these terms are almost meaningless to us today, at least as far as nouns are concerned, is itself a reminder that inflection is no longer of any great importance.

Theoretically it should be possible to tell by merely looking at it whether an Old English noun is subject of a sentence or object of a verb. As a matter of fact, this is true of only a comparatively few nouns. Thus *stow*, 'a place' (as in many place-names today, like *Burstow*, *Instow*) is the subject form (nominative), and *stowe* is the object form (accusative). But most Old English nouns happened to have the same form for the subject and the object relationship. And this is significant. It means that the function of the noun, whether subject or object, was usually determined not from its form but from its position in the sentence in relation to other words, exactly as it is today. When we say 'The lion beat the unicorn' and 'The unicorn beat the lion', we have no doubt of the meaning of the two sentences, and therefore of the function of the nouns *unicorn* and *lion*; the word order tells us all we want to know, and since the nouns themselves do not betray their function in their form, we have no conscious sense of subject and object. The frequent lack of an inflected form for the object noun in Old English points forward to its final disappearance from all nouns. We do not miss it, because owing to our familiarity with fixed or conventional sentence patterns it is unnecessary.

¹ (a) 'One of the forms of a sb., adj., or pron., which express its relations to some other word, *e.g.* as subject, object, etc; (b) *loosely*, the relation itself' – SOED. In Modern English, except where inflection survives (as in pronouns), we use the term *loosely*.

But not only did nouns inflect for case in Old English; they were also arranged, as in Latin, in groups and declensions according to grammatical gender. Thus *stan* (stone) was a masculine noun, *giefu* (gift) feminine, and *scep* (sheep) neuter, and each had its own system of inflections. The older grammarians often went to great lengths to keep the division into genders, though they usually had little understanding of the Saxon system. Thus Ben Jonson in his *Grammar* says:

Of the genders there are sixe. First, the masculine, which comprehendeth all males, or what is understood under a masculine species: as angels, men, starres: and (by prosopœia) the moneth's, winds, almost all the planets. Second, the feminine, which compriseth women, and female species: i'lands, countries, cities. And some rivers with us; as Severne, Avon &c. Third, the neuter, or feined gender: whose notion conceives neither sexe; under which are compriz'd all inanimate things; a ship excepted: of whom we say, shee sayles well, though the name be *Hercules*, or *Henry*, or *Prince*. Fourth, the promiscuous, or epicene, which understands both kindes: especially when we cannot make the difference: as, when we call them *borses*, or *dogges*, in the masculine, though there be *bitches* and *mares* amongst them. So to fowles for the most part, we use the feminine, as of *eagles*, *hawkes*, we say, *shee flies well*: and call them *geese*, *ducks*, and *doves*, which they fly at. Fift, the common, or rather doubtful gender, wee use often, and with elegance: as in *cosin*, *gossip*, *friend*, *neighbour*, *enemie*, *servant*, *theefe*, &c., when they may be of either sexe. Sixt is the common of three genders: by which a nounce is divided into substantive and adjective. For a substantive is a noun of only one gender, or (at the most) of two. And an adjective is a nounce of three genders, being alwayes infinite.¹

Indeed, the idea of a grammatical gender in nouns has persisted, especially in school text-books, to this day (see p. 177).

But with the disappearance of these inflectional declensions, and also of inflection in adjectives (see p. 25), gender itself

¹ What this sixth classification means it is difficult to determine.

disappeared from English, except in the third personal pronouns. It is important to keep this clearly in mind. Such pairs as *man* – *woman*, *fox* – *vixen*, *master* – *mistress* do not exhibit grammatical gender. They are merely distinctive names that indicate differences of sex. Grammatically, they are separate words. Their relationship is one of meaning, not of grammar, since the inflectional patterns on which the division into masculine, feminine, and neuter depended have disappeared.

This division into declensions is reflected, though only in a minor way, in the modern noun inflections for the plural. All but a few of our nouns make their plural by the addition of *-s* to the singular form¹. In native words this *-s* derives from the Old English plural ending, *-as*, of the masculine declension, and in derivatives through the standard French plural in *-s*. Only a few native nouns refuse to come into line. There was, for example, a little group which, owing to the workings of a sound-law in the primitive language, made their plural not by an inflectional ending but by an internal change of vowel. Of these, *foot* – *feet*, *louse* – *lice*, *mouse* – *mice*,² *man* – *men*, *tooth* – *teeth*, *woman* – *women*, are the chief survivals. A few nouns, chiefly the names of animals, belonged to an original neuter declension, which had no plural inflection; *deer*, *sheep*, and *swine*, which are both singular and plural, are familiar examples. In *oxen* we have a survival of the Old English ‘weak’ declension, whose ending for the plural was *-an*. This inflection is seen also in *children*, which is, however, a double plural; the Old English *cild* was a neuter noun, with plural *cildru*, surviving in the Northern and Scottish *childer*. The modern *-ren* combines the old neuter and weak endings. Apart from these interesting oddities, only direct derivatives, like *termini* from Latin, *phenomena* from Greek, *bureaux* from French, do not have the standard inflection in *-s*.

The other surviving inflection in the noun is that for the possessive. In Old English the commonest, but not the only, possessive suffix in the singular noun was *-es*: ‘Sigebryhtes broþur’, ‘the brother of Sygebryht’, ‘cyninges þegnas’, ‘the

¹ With certain spelling modifications as in *churches*, *ladies*, *loaves*.

² the spelling in *-ce* is due to French influence.

thanes of the King'. This *-es* ending remained up to the time of Chaucer: 'his lordes werre', 'at his beddes heed'. But by Shakespeare's time the inflection had been reduced to the simple *s*, added direct to the noun, like the ordinary inflection for the plural. Thus Shakespeare has 'the mornings danger,' 'Helens beauty', 'natures truth', 'Hyperions curles'. Only the context pointed the difference of function between the two identical inflections. But by the end of the seventeenth century it became customary for an apostrophe to be inserted before the *s* of the possessive, indicating the omission of the original *e*; and thus we have the modern inflection (*'s*) for the possessive singular (*man's, lady's, wife's*). Although some Old English nouns had, according to their declension group, another singular possessive ending, the *'s* is, by analogy, the standard one today. The original inflection, for example, for feminine nouns was *-e*, which survives, although it is actually dropped from the spelling, in Chaucer's phrase 'his lady grace', and in our modern 'Lady Day'.

It is noteworthy that in the original edition of Ben Jonson's *Grammar* (1640) the simple *s* is given as the genitive inflection, in both singular and plural, so that 'the genitive plurall is all one with the plurall absolute'. But in the 1692 edition there is this note: 'To the genitive Cases of all Nouns denoting a Possessor is added *'s* with an Apostrophe, thereby to avoid the gross Syntax of the *Pronoun his* joining with a Noun; as, *The Emperor's Court, The General's Valour*; not *The Emperor his Court &c*'. The 'gross syntax' he refers to existed from Old English times to the nineteenth century as an independent idiom, not (as is sometimes supposed) a popular corruption of the inflectional *s*. J. W. H. Atkins in his chapter on The Language from Chaucer to Shakespeare (Cambridge *History of Literature*, V.) observes 'It was, doubtless, a form which had come down in colloquial speech, for its early use in literature was only occasional. Its more extended use in Elizabethan English points to the close connection which then existed between the spoken and literary languages.' Lowth has an interesting note on the subject: '“Christ His sake” in our Liturgy, is a mistake, either of the Printers, or of the

Compilers. – “My paper is the Ulysses his bow, in which every man of wit and learning may try his strength” (Addison, *Guardian* No. 98). This is a slip of Mr Addison’s pen: he gives us his opinion upon this point very explicitly in another place. “The same single letter [*s*] on many occasions does the office of a whole word, and represents the *bis* and *ber* of our forefathers” (Addison, *Spectator* No. 135). But both Lowth and Addison are wide of the mark.

The history of the inflection for the possessive plural is not quite so simple. In Old English it was commonly *-a* (*daga*, ‘of days’, *beafda*, ‘of heads’). But this ending, being unstressed, would, in the ordinary processes of language, first have been weakened to an indeterminate *-e*, and then lost altogether; the form for the possessive would, therefore, have become identical with the nominative form. In actual fact, after the loss of the Old English *-a* inflection, the *s*, which was the sign of the singular possessive, became also the sign of the plural. Thus Shakespeare has ‘for womens sake’, ‘these daughters hearts’, and Milton ‘as far as Angels kenn’, ‘parents tears’, ‘trumpets sound’. Then, illogically, but in imitation of the singular possessive, an apostrophe was added after the *s*, except in those nouns (see p. 18) which did not have an *-s* plural, in which it was placed before the *-s*. (*boys’*, *dogs’*, *men’s*, *sheep’s*).

We have already seen that only a comparatively few Old English nouns had an inflectional suffix in the object form. But all nouns had inflection for the indirect relationship (dative). It was normally *e* in the singular and *-um* in the plural. Of these endings there is no trace in Modern English, though their function survives in our modern indirect object (see p. 64).

That brings us to pronouns, in certain of which – the Interrogative (whose forms the Relative took over after the Old English period – see pp. 86–89) and the Personal – a fairly full inflection still exists. To begin with, they have an inflection for the object form, (*who* – *whom*, *I* – *me*, *he* – *him*, *she* – *her*, *we* – *us*, *they* – *them*), as well as, like some nouns, for the possessive (*whose*, *mine*, *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *its*, *theirs*). Furthermore, the third person pronoun (really in origin and function

a demonstrative) has in the singular separate forms, with corresponding inflections, for gender. On this Bishop Lowth (*Short Introduction to English Grammar*, 1762) has a naïve and amusing observation:

The persons speaking and spoken to being at the same time the subjects of the discourse, are supposed to be present; from whom, and other circumstances, their sex is commonly known, and needs not to be marked by a distinction of gender in their pronouns: but the third person or thing spoken of, being absent, and in many respects unknown, it is necessary that it should be marked by a distinction of gender; at least when some particular person or thing is spoken of, which ought to be more distinctly marked: accordingly the pronoun singular of the third person hath the three genders: *he, she, it*.

It must be emphasised that in the modern language their relationship to nouns is not now dependent upon grammatical gender, since, as has already been explained, that has disappeared from English. *He* and *she* relate to animate beings according to their sex, *it* to inanimate things. Even when we colloquially refer to a ship or a motor-car as *she*, we are giving those objects a personality, not bestowing upon the nouns *ship* and *motor-car* a grammatical gender.

Pronouns, like nouns, have no separate inflected forms in Modern English for the indirect or 'dative' relationship. Sometimes in Old English the two forms (accusative and dative) coincided, but where they did not, one or other has established itself and come to do duty for both. Thus the direct form of *be* (*bine*) has given way to the indirect form (*bim*). In French, whose inflectional system in pronouns roughly corresponds to ours, certain separate indirect forms have remained (*moi, toi, lui*). They are used also as caseless disjunctives, for the complement and for the emphatic nominative ('C'est moi', 'C'est lui', 'Moi, je suis Parisien'). In our use of *me, him*, and other object forms as complement (p. 133) we have an interesting parallel to this; and in fact our usage is sometimes

justified – if it requires justification – on analogy with the French.

The possessive forms of Old English personal pronouns, *min*, *þin*, *ure*, *eower*, *his*, *biere*, *biera*, were also used as possessive adjectives. *Min*, *þin* have weakened as adjectives, into *my*, *thy*; the others have developed, more or less regularly, into the modern forms *our*, *your*, *his*, *her*, *their*. Some of these possessives were declined in Old English like ordinary adjectives (see below); *ure*, for example, had a possessive form *ures*. It was partly on analogy with such forms that the modern possessive pronoun, as distinct from the adjective, forms developed, *ours*, *yours*, *theirs*.¹ We have today an inflectional differentiation between the pronoun-adjective ('That is *my/your* book') and the possessive of the pronoun, used absolutely ('That book is *mine/yours*'). Only *his* and *its* double the part. So also the Old English possessive of the Interrogative Pronoun (*hwæs*) has given us *whose*, as both adjective and pronoun.

Curiously enough, Old English had only one form (*bie*) for the subject and object of the third person pronoun, and one form (*him*) for the indirect, or dative, in the plural. Our

¹ These forms were often spelt with an apostrophe in old texts. The Authorised Version, for example, has 'for their's is the kingdom of heaven'. But there seems always to have been some doubt about the spelling. Priestley, for example, writes in the text of his *Grammar* (1761) 'when it is found without it's substantive', but he gives the forms without the apostrophe in his paradigms or examples. Lowth says: '*Thy, My, Her, Our, Your, Their*, are pronominal adjectives; but *His* (that is, *Hee's*) *Her's Our's Your's Their's*, have evidently the form of the Possessive Case'. Like Priestley, however, he gives no apostrophes in the paradigms. Baugh (*History of the English Language*) notes that *it's* was the spelling for the possessive of *it* down to about 1800. But Johnson gives and uses the forms without the apostrophe, and they are by no means uncommon in older texts. Even in modern English, however, an apostrophe sometimes slips in. Tennyson has 'Their's not to reason why'; and the following sentence appeared in a recent number of *The Times Educational Supplement*: 'This is the kind of thing that preserved the reputation of the oracle at Delphi; it is more likely to lose Miss Horsburgh her's'.

modern *they* and *them* developed later from Norse demonstrative forms. So, too, the 'neuter' singular possessive was the same as the masculine (*his*). It was not until Shakespeare's time that a separate inflection developed (*its*), partly, no doubt, in the interests of clarity, and partly, as Mr Hugh Sykes Davies suggests, because the vast number of nouns representing inanimate objects demanded their own possessive pronoun and adjective.

Old English has other undifferentiated forms, notably *bit* for the neuter subject and object and *hiere* ('her') for the feminine possessive and dative. It is clear, then, that to some extent, as with nouns, function and meaning depended upon syntax and word order. Certain other simplifications developed later; in particular, the loss from the standard language of the singular forms of the second person pronoun (*tbou, thee, thine*) and of the old second person plural nominative (*ye*). The 1640 edition of Jonson's *Grammar* has *yee* (nominative) where the 1692 edition has *you*.

Old English had two uninflected particles, *se* and *þe*, to do duty for the relative; but it also used demonstratives in all their inflected forms. With the loss of inflection during the mediæval period the single uninflected demonstrative *þat* ('that') established itself as a relative, and is still so used. Towards the end of this period the interrogative pronouns (*hwilc*, 'which' and afterwards *hwa*, 'who') also achieved relative function, and they are the most familiar forms today. The syntactical development of the relative pronoun is dealt with in Chapter IV.

Unlike nouns, the personal and interrogative pronouns have an inflected object form. This survives, perhaps, because since pronouns occur so frequently in their various functions, it is useful to have grammatical changes for the sake of euphony and the avoidance of tedious repetition. With our established word order, the loss of these forms would not lead to ambiguity. Logically, 'He hit I' or 'We hit she' is as clear and unambiguous as 'The man hit the boy' or 'The boy hit the man'. As it is, we say 'You hit it' and 'It hits you', where the subject and object forms happen to be identical.

The truth is that certain surviving pronoun inflections have never had any real security of tenure. In Shakespeare the interrogative and relative *who* stands as often as not for *whom* – ‘*Who* does the wolf love?’, ‘*Who* I myself struck down’. And certainly today most of us would say ‘*Who* (not *whom*) did you see?’, even if we lacked the courage to write it. There are signs that in time the object inflection *whom* will drop out altogether. So, too, our common use of the subject form for the object form in such phrases as ‘Let you and *I* go’, ‘between you and *I*’ is as old as Shakespeare. Abbott (*Shakespearian Grammar*) gives many other examples of case confusion in the plays. Here are two or three representative ones:

I would wish me only *be* (*Coriolanus*)

Is she as tall as *me*? (*Antony and Cleopatra*)

You know my father hath no child but *I* (*As You Like It*)

Yes, you have Cassio and *she* together (*Othello*)

It is perhaps not altogether fair to base a grammatical argument on Shakespeare; but most of the usages illustrated by Abbott may be paralleled in modern speech and writing. We are, in fact, only half conscious of pronoun inflection; so we often ignore it, because it does not seriously matter. Dialect, for example, is often scornful of standard case forms. The familiar Devonian ‘*’Er be going*’ and ‘*I saw ’e*’ are good examples of inflectional topsy-turviness; and it is noteworthy that the old second person plural subject form (OE *ge* = *ye*), now disused, but familiar in the English of the Authorised Version (‘*Ye are the salt of the earth*’), survives in dialect mainly as object (‘*I didn’t see ye*’), and is preserved in the contraction *goodbye*, for ‘*God be with ye*’.

Few traces of inflection remain in the other pronouns. The demonstratives, which have come by devious and winding ways from the two fully inflected Old English pronouns *se* – *seo* – *þæt* and *þes* – *þeos* – *þis*, have inflection for number only: *this* – *these* and *these* – *those*. Some singular indefinite pronouns (*one*, *anyone*, *no-one*, *other*) follow the pattern of nouns, with *’s* for the possessive; indefinite plurals, like *all*, have no inflection.

But, above all, we have had the good fortune to lose all our adjective inflections. The adjective was once inflected like the noun, and agreed with it in number, case, and gender. Thus, we have *for unrbytum dædum*, 'for unright (= evil) deeds', where the adjective and the noun both have the indirect plural inflection *-um*, and *fela godra manna*, 'many (of) good men', where *manna* is possessive plural and *godra* has the characteristic adjective possessive plural form (*-ra*) to agree with it. But during the mediæval period this highly inflected system almost disappeared. Only a final *-e* remains in Chaucer, for the adjective following the definite article – 'the gode man' instead of 'the god man' – and for the plural; and even in Chaucer this final *-e* is often lost in nouns of more than one syllable. Soon after, long before Shakespeare, it disappeared altogether, and adjectives were left uninflected as they are today. There is one solitary exception: the demonstrative adjective inflects for number (*this – these, that – those*) and agrees with its noun.

It was this loss of the inflected adjectives and articles that rid us of the bogey of gender. In French, where the noun has no inflection except for number, it has gender (masculine and feminine only), which is visible not in the form of the noun itself but in the adjective or article agreeing with it. A French noun, then, is either masculine or feminine, arbitrarily as it seems, but in reality mainly according to its origin in Latin or Greek. But adjectives, including the articles, have two forms, one masculine and one feminine. In themselves, the French nouns *table* and *banc* are as genderless as the equivalent English nouns *table* and *desk*. Qualify them with adjectives, however, and gender immediately appears. The French say '*la table brune*' but '*le banc brun*', where the noun *banc* is endowed with masculinity by the masculine forms of the article and the adjective, *le, brun*, and *table* by the feminine forms of the article and adjective, *la* and *brune*. In English we say 'the brown desk' and 'the brown table'; the article and adjective *the* and *brown* do not change, whatever noun they qualify. 'The struggle to remember these genders', says Mr Hugh Sykes Davies in *Grammar Without Tears*, 'is no

small part of the difficulty involved in learning French or German, or any other of the all-too-many modern languages that retain this absurdity.' Gender, to our eternal comfort, has completely disappeared.

One adjectival inflection has remained in modern English – that for degree. The endings *-er* for the comparative and *-est* for the superlative represent, in general, the endings in Old English; but a few irregulars like *less*, *least* from *little*, and *more*, *most* from *much*, and one or two alternatives like *older* – *elder*, give us a glimpse of an earlier waywardness. There are some odd survivals and developments; *near*, for example, which was the comparative of *neab*, has now become a positive and developed a new comparative, *nearer*, as well as a new superlative, *nearest*, beside the older *niebst* (next). But such things, though interesting enough, are no more than trifles. The most significant later development was the making of an analytic comparative and superlative by qualifying the simple positive with *more*, *most* ('more unreliable', 'most delightful'). Many native adjectives were short and could bear the addition of an inflectional syllable; it was the longer derivatives from French and Latin that preferred, and of course still prefer, the analytic device.

This brings us to adverbs. These were formed in Old English by the addition of *-e* to the adjective – *deope* 'deeply' from *deop* 'deep'. The modern characteristic ending *-ly* derives from the adverbial form (*lice*) of the adjectival suffix *-lic* (*glædlice*, 'gladly'; *leobtlice*, 'lightly'). A few adverbs of the simple *-e* type remain, though they long ago lost the *-e*; *bard*, *fast*, *long*, are familiar examples. These inflect, like adjectives, for degree – *barder*, *faster*, *longest*. But all the others have the analytic form of the comparative and superlative ('more gladly', 'most lightly'). Words in *-ly* which take inflection (*likelier*, *godliest*) are adjectives, not adverbs. Degree in its relation to usage and syntax is discussed later (p. 135).

Old English was blessed (or cursed) with an elaborate and complicated system of verb inflection. To begin with, it had a little group of verbs, rather cryptically labelled 'strong', whose past forms are distinguished from the present not

primarily by an added suffix but by a vowel change in the root. Of these *drink*, with past forms *drank*, *drunk(en)*, and *sing*, with past forms *sang*, *sung* are typical examples. Such verbs, however, are mere survivals, historically interesting, but outside the general pattern. Even in Old English, most verbs were 'weak' – that is, their past forms were made by the addition of a dental suffix (modern *-ed*, *-d*, *-t*) to the stem; and all verbs that have come into the language since the Old English period have the weak inflection. It is natural, then, that in the ordinary processes of language the 'strong' minority should tend to join the 'weak' majority. And this is precisely what has happened. Some have gone over, *lock*, *stock*, and *barrel*. Chaucer's line 'He sleep [slept] namore than dooth a nyghtyngale' and the form *bolpen* in the Authorised Version remind us that *sleep* and *help*, now weak, were once strong. Others have gone half-way, like *show* and *swell*, with the weak past tense *showed*, *swelled*, and the strong past participle *shown*, *swollen*. Others, though sticking to their guns and remaining strong, have shed some of their original changes under the influence of analogy. Only a few have retained their vowel system – with, of course, later modifications in sound and spelling – as it was in Old English; and from many of them the characteristic strong ending (*-en*) of the past participle has disappeared. This inflection, by the way, has had an interesting history. Often it was dropped in colloquial speech before it was dropped in the written language. Coote (1788) has the note: 'It may perhaps be said, that *got* is allowable as a contraction of *gotten*; but, though this argument may in some degree justify it's being used for *gotten* in common conversation, the latter ought not to be preferred in writing'. In Middle English it often weakened to *-e*; Chaucer, for example, has *spoke* beside *spoken*, *be* beside *been*, *unknowe* beside *knownen*. By Shakespeare's time the *-e* had also dropped; so we have in the plays such past participle forms as *writ*, *chid*, *forgot*. Sometimes, too, the participle had the form of the past tense: 'I have much *mistook* your passion', 'These errors are *arose*'. It was not, indeed, until the end of the eighteenth century, when our modern inflectional system

was stabilised, that the differentiation between past tense and past participle, at any rate in certain strong verbs, was finally made. Gray's original title for the *Elegy* was 'Elegy Wrote in a Country Churchyard', and John Wesley even went so far as to advocate, in his manual of Grammar, the use of the past tense form for the participle. Eighteenth century usage was so uncertain that Wesley's rule was not altogether surprising; at one time, the unification of the two forms seemed at least a possibility.

The Old English weak mutation verbs, too, have come down to us – *teach* – *taught*, *buy* – *bought*, *tell* – *told* and the like – in which a vowel change, caused by the fronting influence of an *i* or *j* in the original present forms, is combined with the characteristic dental ending. In addition, we have inherited, with some modifications, the inflections of a number of Old English anomalous and defective verbs, *be*, *have*, *go*, *may*, *shall*, *will* and one or two others. Though, therefore, the vast majority of our verbs are weak, and the ending for the past, both tense and participle, is simplicity itself (–[e]d, –t), we are still far from a single uniform system of basic present-past inflection. Old confusions and anomalies, the traffic between strong and weak, and certain modifications in spelling, have left Modern English with a considerable débris of inflectional forms, which now and then cause us difficulty, and certainly clutter up the grammar books. The truth is that English is apt to respect tradition rather than logic. It would, no doubt, be an easier language if all its verbs conformed to a single pattern. But the last-ditchers, the holders-out against change and uniformity, at least help to keep it interesting.

Most of the Old English tense inflections for number and person have gone.¹ The –*est* (present) and –*edst* (past) of the moribund second person singular remain, but they are mere fossils. There is only one living inflection, or deviation, from a standard present (*sing*, *walk*) or past (*sang*, *walked*) form. This is the –*s* (*sings*, *walks*) of the third person present singular, which has a special interest of its own. It derives not from the standard Old English ending –*eð*, but from the

¹ For the sake of simplicity the references are to the indicative tenses.

-es of the Northern dialect, and was not established in the colloquial or literary language until the late seventeenth century.¹ This *-eth* ending is familiar to us from the Authorised Version of the Bible:

Charity suffereth long, and is kind, charity envieth
not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up;

and it has survived, fitfully, in the formal language of the church – ‘Here beginneth the first lesson’. It remained, too, in poetic idiom up to quite recent times:

At eve the beetle boometh
Athwart the thicket lone;
At noon the wild bee hummeth
About the mossed headstone.

But even the parson and the poet have almost forsaken it nowadays.

The Old English present plural ending in *-aþ* was, even in Middle English, assimilated to the past in *-on*; it weakened first to *-en*, and afterwards to an indeterminate *-e*, which finally disappeared altogether. In the simple present and past tenses, therefore, inflection is reduced to a minimum. Only the *-(e)s* of the third person singular remains to make an outward and visible agreement of subject and verb.

The characteristic Old English subjunctive tense endings were *-e* (singular) and *-en* (plural). These, in the ordinary process of language, were weakened and lost. It follows, then, that the subjunctive differs from the indicative only in those forms where the indicative has inflection – that is, the moribund second person singular and plural, and the third person present singular. Of these the third person present singular is the only one that concerns us here: the subjunctive corresponding with the indicative ‘he sings’, ‘he walks’ is ‘(if) he sing’, ‘(if) he walk’. More important, for syntactical reasons discussed later (pp. 39–40), is the survival of separate subjunctive forms of the verb *be*: *be* for all persons, singular

¹ See my *Spelling* (André Deutsch), p. 116.

and plural, in the present tense, and *were* for all persons in the past singular.

The older grammarians had strange ideas concerning the nature of this subjunctive inflection. Ben Jonson, for example, evidently thinks of it as a plural. Some nouns, he says, though singular, 'require a verb plurall – especially when the verbe is joyned to an adverb, or conjunction: It is preposterous to execute a man, before he *have* been condemned'. Joseph Priestley (1761) has a curious note on it:

This form of the conjunctive subjunctive tenses is very little used by some writers of the present age; though our forefathers paid a very strict and scrupulous regard to it. It seems to be used with propriety only when there is implied some *doubt* or *hesitation*; since when an event is looked upon as absolutely certain, though in speaking of it we make use of the conjunctive particles, &c. the usual change of terminations is retained: to give a familiar example of this; we should say, in pursuing a person, *We shall overtake him though he run*; not knowing whether he did run or not; whereas upon seeing him run, we should say, *We shall overtake him though he runneth*, or *runs*.

Almost all the irregularities in the construction of any language arise from the ellipsis of some words which were originally inserted in the sentence, and made it regular: let us endeavour to explain this manner of speaking, by tracing out the original ellipsis: may we not suppose that the word *run* in this sentence is in the *radical form* (which answers to the *infinitive mood* in other languages) requiring regularly to be preceded by another verb expressing doubt or uncertainty, and the intire sentence to be, *We shall overtake him though he should run*?

Cobbett has the same idea. He seems to consider it 'the infinitive of the verb without any change at all', the sign (i.e. auxiliary) being understood.

There are no inflections left in the imperative; only the simple root verb remains ('go', 'stand'). Old English had *-e* in the singular and *-að* in the plural, but both have been

weakened out of existence. The *-að* ending, however, survives as *-eth* in Chaucer:

Lordynges, herkneth, if you leste.

The infinitive in Old English had a single characteristic ending, *-an* (*drincan, ridan, singan*), which weakened during the Middle English period to *-en* or *-e*, and was then finally lost altogether. Our modern infinitive is therefore the normal, uninflected verb (*drink, ride, sing*). The *to* which seems to be, but is not, an integral part of it, is in fact the ordinary preposition which happens to precede and govern the infinitive in a great many constructions (see p. 74). To this Old English had itself pointed the way. It had a kind of gerundial construction in which *to* was followed by the indirect or dative form of the infinitive, ending in *-anne*:

ond heo was fæger an to locianne
and it was fair to look upon

Here, the inflected *locianne* is obviously a word in its own right; and so, though less obviously, is the modern *look*. That is true of all those infinitives with which, owing to later syntactical changes, *to* struck up so intimate an acquaintance that the pair can hardly be separated. Thus, where Old English has ‘*þa ongan he sona singan*’ we say ‘Then began he immediately *to sing*’. The *to* compensates, as it were, for the loss of inflection. Yet our compound tenses (see below) and familiar expressions like ‘I saw him *go*’, ‘I heard him *sing*’, remind us that the association of *to* and verb form is an irregular union, rather than a true marriage. It is, however, a union that we cannot ignore. See also pp. 131–33.

The past participle forms have already been dealt with above; they are one of the chief pointers to the difference between weak and strong verbs, and we have retained, with modifications, the Saxon forms. But the Saxon present participle inflection *-(e)nde* (*drincende, ridende, singende*) has not survived. After the Old English period, the present participle was modelled on the pattern of abstract nouns derived

from verbs, like *leornung* ('learning') and *þegnung* ('serving' – cf. *þegn*); and this *-ung* ending was standardised in Middle English as *-ing*. It is for this reason that the present participle and the verbal noun (see p. 79) have the same ending (*-ing*) in Modern English.

We have only to glance at the verb paradigms in an Old English Grammar to realise how far modern English has progressed in this matter of verbal inflection towards simplicity. The seven gradation groups of strong verbs and the various classes of weak verbs, with their subtle differentiations, present a formidable and almost frightening complication of inflectional forms. Even when we allow for the survivals already mentioned, and for such irregularities as belong to spelling rather than to accidence, we cannot but be conscious of the gain which has resulted from inflectional loss.

(II)

Nevertheless, in one respect the Modern English is more complicated than the Old English verb, in that it has a highly developed analytic tense system. To this, however, Old English itself pointed the way. It had, for example, a tense form, or more properly a verbal phrase, made up of the verb *be* and the present participle, to express a kind of continuity in the present or the past:

... on þæm *is iernende* se ungefoglecesta stream.

... in which [a dike] *is running* a most turbulent stream.

... ond sibþan *wæs farende* þær þis cyninges modor mid þæm twæm dælum þæs folces *wuniende wæs*.

... and afterwards *was going* to where the king's mother with the two sections of the people *was dwelling*.

Here the present participle is in effect complement of *be*, like an ordinary adjective; but it is obviously only a step from this to our modern compound tense, where the auxiliary *be* and the present participle together make up a single verb

concept to express not only the time but also the manner and quality of the action. We have today a so-called *continuous* tense in the present and the past ('I am drinking', 'I was speaking') in addition to the old simple tense ('I drink', 'I spoke'). Syntactically there is a definite, though not easily definable, difference between them. In a main sentence or clause the modern present simple tense expresses habitual action, unrelated to definite time, as in 'I often go to London', 'I travel up with Mr Smith every day', or what may be called permanent action-state, as in 'I know Mr Smith well'. The modern compound 'continuous' tense expresses an action related to definite time, either present or future 'I am now writing a book', 'I am looking into the matter tomorrow'. In subordinate clauses (see p. 84) the simple tense occurs more frequently, because here the sense of habit or state of doing or being is often uppermost: 'When I go to London, I usually visit Westminster Abbey', 'We do not see him often, as he lives so far away'. But often a future significance is reflected, by implication, from the main clause: 'When you come, bring the book I lent you', 'As soon as the match is over, we shall go home'; and here there is a definite time relationship. Moreover, in formal style, the simple present, like the continuous, can have a future sense when it is used with an appropriate adverb: 'We go to Switzerland next week'.

The compound tense, on the other hand, tends to lose its time relationship in the subordinate clause, and approaches very near to the indefinite sense of the simple present. Between 'When I play golf, I wear plus-fours' and 'When I am playing golf, I wear plus-fours' there is not much to choose.

It is evident, then, that with the development of this compound tense form there also developed subtle idiomatic distinctions of use and meaning. They did not, in fact, establish themselves until quite late. Shakespeare often uses the simple present where we use the continuous; so does the Authorised Version, as in 'I go the way of all the earth'. Once established, however, they became part and parcel of the language. True,

the difference between the present simple and continuous tenses, though made easy, at least to the native reader and speaker, by long custom, is theoretically somewhat nebulous. Neither does our modern terminology help. No one, for example, knitting his brows over the previous paragraph, could avoid the thought that the term 'continuous', if it is to be used at all, is often more appropriate to the simple than to the compound tense. The first of the Old English examples rather paradoxically bears this out. We should say '*runs* a most turbulent stream'; the continuity expressed in '*is iernende*' requires in modern idiom the simple tense of habitual action or 'action-state'.

In the past, however, the distinction is clearer. The simple tense is related to definite time: '*I went* to see him yesterday', '*When I last saw* him, he *told* me he was leaving London'. And the compound tense is recognisably continuous: '*I was working* in the garden when he called to see me', '*While the chairman was making* his speech, a man at the back began to heckle'. The tense expresses the conception 'in the act of', a continuing action in the past. And this points to an important fact. While the Old English '*is iernende*', '*wæs farende*' anticipate our modern continuous form, and may be said to be its prototype, the origin of our continuous sense is, as Jespersen suggests, 'the old construction "*I am a-reading*", where *a-* (which afterwards disappeared) represents the preposition *on* and the form in *ing* is not the participle but the noun'. In effect, the underlying sense construction is *simple tense + preposition + noun*. We could use a similar, if not strictly parallel, construction in the example given above: '*I was at work* in the garden when he called to see me'; and, in fact, the continuous tense can always be resolved into the phrase pattern '*I am (or was) in the act of doing*'. Curiously enough, then, Old English gave us a form which established itself as a compound tense some centuries later with a certain subtle difference of sense. Basically, the verb *be* is followed in Old English by a complementary participle, and in Modern English by a form in *-ing* that is only a participle as it were by accident, representing a kind of complementary phrase.

The final fusion of auxiliary and participle has behind it, therefore, a somewhat complicated history, which is reflected to some extent in modern usage.

Old English also gave us the pattern for what are now called the 'Perfect' tenses. The verb *habban* ('have') stood with the past participle of a transitive verb, which was inflected to agree with the object:

oppe hie hine ofslægenne hæfdon

Here *hæfdon* is not an auxiliary, in our modern sense, but a verb of full meaning. The participle *ofslægenne* has the object inflection, agreeing with *hine*, and the literal sense is 'until they held (or possessed) him slain'. We have a somewhat similar construction in 'I have the books ready', or, with an actual past participle, 'I have the books properly arranged for you'. So, in the following Old English sentences:

þin agen geleafa ðe hæfþ *gebæledne*.

Thine own faith thee hath saved.

Ic mines þeodnes hafa *bylðo forworhte*.

I of my lord have the favour forfeited.

where *gebæledne* and *forworhte* agree with the objects *ðe* and *bylðo*. But equally often the participle was not inflected; and, the grammatical agreement of object and participle being lost, the original construction was obscured. The participle was in fact pulled away from its noun or pronoun into association with the verb, *habban* – an association which clearly points forward to our modern compound tense. For the most part this use of *have* with the past participle was restricted in Old English to transitive verbs; in other words, even when the participle was not inflected, its association with an object was assumed, and *habban* kept at least a shadow of full meaning. But there were exceptions. Alfred himself writes, for example, 'Nu hæbbe we scortlice gesæd ymbe Asia londgemæro', 'Now have we spoken briefly about the boundaries of Asia', where the participle *gesæd* is intransitive, and *hæbbe* seems to be a

pure auxiliary. More frequently with intransitive verbs *beon* ('be') was used, the past participle being a kind of complement:

þa wæs þæs folces fela on an fæsten oþflogen

Then was a great number of the people fled into a fastness, where 'wæs oþflogen' translates the Latin pluperfect *confugerant*. This use of *be* as an auxiliary with verbs of motion is common in the Authorised Version of the Bible: 'And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up?' It is, of course, idiomatic in Modern French, and has survived as an occasional poeticism in English, as well as in certain constructions where the participle is, in effect, a complementary adjective: 'The moon is risen', 'The season is far advanced'.¹ But the use of *have* as an auxiliary for the real perfect of both transitive and intransitive verbs gradually and finally prevailed.

Old English, as we have seen, had no special tense form to indicate future action. More often than not it used the simple present; but since the idea of futurity was often bound up with desire or compulsion, it also quite commonly has verb phrases made up of the verb *sculan* (shall), with the basic meaning 'must', 'ought', or *willan* (will), with the basic meaning of 'desire', 'intend', and the infinitive:

Donne sceolon beon gesamnode ealle ða menn ðe swyftoste hors habbað on þæm londe.

Then shall [must] be summoned all the men who have the swiftest horses in the land.

þonne þy ylcan dæge þe hi hine to þæm ade beran wyllað . . .

Then on the same day on which they desire to carry him to the funeral pile . . .

Similarly with the past tense – *be wolde fandian*, 'he desired to find', *hie burgan bealdan scolden*, 'they must [= were

¹ These two examples are taken from Jespersen's *Essentials of English Grammar*.

detailed to] hold the city'. Today both verbs often keep, though sometimes vaguely, their old sense of obligation or desire, but they are also used in the present as auxiliaries expressing simple futurity. Hence have arisen certain complications in the use of *shall* and *will*. To begin with, as a future auxiliary, *shall* has attached itself to the first person, and *will* to the other two persons; so 'I shall go', 'You will go', and 'He will go' are simple future tenses. The basic reason for this differentiation is that in the first person especially the idea of desire is frequently present, and this can be expressed by *will* when the meaning goes beyond the mere futurity implicit in the auxiliary *shall*. In other words, while 'I shall go' expresses an action regarded as future in time, 'I will go' expresses an action in which, with more or less emphasis, the idea of desire or determination is present. Obviously, this distinction between simple futurity and willingness or desire is not always a clear-cut one; so *will* is often used where *shall* would seem to be more 'correct', and always when the first person is linked with a second or third person pronoun in a double subject: 'He and I will go'. No difficulty arises with the other two persons; but it is worth noting that when *shall* is used with them it always has certain overtones, of, for example, compulsion or promise or threat. Thus it comes about that in expressing something more than mere futurity the verb-person relationship is reversed:

I *will* not cease from mental fight,
Nor *shall* my sword sleep in my hand.

Both verbs have here the latent sense, of desire and obligation respectively, which we have already noted in Old English.

The use of *should* and *would* is even more complicated. But one or two main principles are recognisable. In main clauses *should*, like *shall*, is used for the first person, and *would*, like *will*, for the second and third, when they are auxiliaries in what is rather oddly called, the Future-in-the-Past Tense:¹ 'I should be bored if I had no work to do', 'He would be bored if he had no work to do'. But in actual fact this sense of simple

¹ See p. 179.

'past' futurity is comparatively rare; so *would* tends to displace *should* even in the first person. We say in standard English 'I *should* like to see you' but 'He *would* like to see you'; nevertheless, the common change to *would* in the first person is natural, and, indeed, logical, unless we assume that the sense of volition is entirely concentrated in the verb *like*. We have here a hint of the older use of *would*, now poetic and archaic, as a verb of full meaning – 'I would I were where Helen lies', 'He would speak to you', 'Would that we were there!' Idiomatically, *would* for all persons is used to express habitual action, without reference to time:

He would sit, not speaking, on the sofa,
While you lay asleep on the floor –

a usage that is familiar in Chaucer:

Yet wolde he have a ferthyng, er he wente.

Should, on the other hand, expresses obligation, in the Old English manner: 'I should be more careful', 'You should look both ways before you cross the road'. We may note here also the indirect imperative forms, with *shall*, *should*, *will*, and *must*, as in 'Thou shalt not steal', 'Candidates should (or must) apply before 26th September', 'All recruits will parade at seven o'clock', or, in a kind of disguised question, 'Will you kindly come here?'.

The use of *should*, *may*, *might*, *would* in main clauses, and in subordinate clauses, especially after *if*, is bound up with the disappearance of the inflectional subjunctive. In Old English the inflected forms of the verb remained and were regularly used, as in Latin and Modern French, after certain conjunctions where a potential rather than a positive or indicative action was implied in the sense. But verb phrases, composed of *sceolde* (should) and *magan* (may), and the infinitive, were common, where these verbs were not true but quasi auxiliaries, keeping some vestiges of their full or original meaning. Thus:

... ond hu we hi nu sceoldon ute begietan gif we hie
habban sceoldon.

... and how we should now acquire them [wisdom and learning] elsewhere, if we should [= are to] have them.

for þæm hie þær sittan ne mehton.

because they might not [= were not able to] settle there.

... swa brad swa man mæg on twam wucum oferferan.

... so broad that a man may [can] cross it in two weeks.

Here we have the origin of those compound tenses, made up of the auxiliaries *should*, *may*, *might*, *would* with the infinitive, which now express, in both main and subordinate clauses, that indeterminate action usually expressed in Old English by the subjunctive forms. Any formal classification of such compounds is almost impossible, and indeed it is unnecessary for the native speaker or writer, who uses them without conscious thought for various shades and differences of meaning. The main point is that these verbs, together with *could* and *must*, when compounded with the infinitive, are important elements in the modern complex tense system, allowing us to express an action, in terms not so much of time and quality, as of mood and even imagination. Indeed, the differentiation of past, present, and future is absent from, or at any rate obscured in, many of them. They are, as it were, verbal blank cheques in the commerce between speaker and listener, writer and reader; their exact value, in any particular context, is understood and accepted by the two persons, or groups of persons concerned.

Nor is this all. In Modern English both the simple future and the indeterminate tenses also have perfect, continuous, and continuous perfect forms: 'I shall have gone', 'I should have been going', 'I might be going', 'He will have gone', and the rest.

In addition, the true inflected subjunctive (see p. 29) still survives, especially in main clauses of wish or desire, like 'God *save* the King!' But in subordinate clauses, partly owing

to the development of the compound 'indeterminate' tenses mentioned above, it has almost disappeared. Thus in the Old English sentence 'Ond þeah man *asette* twegen fætelas full ealað oððe wæteres, hy gedoð þæt ægþer bið oferfrozen, sam hit *sy* sumor sam winter', the verbs *asette* and *sy* are present subjunctives, but would normally be rendered as indicatives in Modern English: 'And though [= if] one *sets* up two vessels full of ale or water, they bring it about that either is frozen over, whether it *is* summer or winter'. True, modern idiom would allow in this context the subjunctives *set* and *be*, but they would have a faintly archaic air. It is, however, only in comparatively recent times that the inflected forms have become moribund. They were fully alive in Middle English, and common up to the eighteenth century. Swift has, for example, 'If a Prince *send* forces into a nation' and 'whether the said Cow *were* Red or Black'. But today such expressions as 'If he *go*', 'Though he *forget*', 'Even if I *be*', are consciously and aggressively literary. Only the form *were* holds its own, especially in the expression 'If I *were* you', where probably some attractive force of the complement (*you*) has helped to keep it alive. But even here *were* sometimes becomes *was* in the colloquial language; and in other expressions after *if* and *though* we tend to use either *was* or a compound tense: 'If it *was* true . . .', 'Even if he *should be* late . . .'.

On this matter Cobbett is worth quoting *in extenso*, partly because in his forthright way he relates sense to grammar, and partly because his own rulings represent an intermediate stage between older and modern usage:

The question, then, is this: What are the cases in which we ought to use the subjunctive form? Bishop Lowth, and on his authority Mr Lindley Murray, have said, that some conjunctions have a government of verbs; that is to say, make them or force them to be in the subjunctive mode. And then these gentlemen mention particularly the conjunctions, *if*, *though*, *unless*, and some others. But (and these gentlemen allow it) the verbs which follow these conjunctions are not always in the subjunctive mode; and

the using of that mode must depend, not upon the conjunction, but upon the sense of the whole sentence. How then can the conjunctions govern the verb? It is the sense, the meaning of the whole sentence which must govern: and of this you will presently see clear proof. 'If it be dark, do not come home'. 'If eating is necessary to man, he ought not to be a glutton'. In the first of these sentences, the matter expressed by the verb may be or may not be. There exists an uncertainty on the subject. And if the sentence were filled up, it would stand thus: 'If it should be dark, do not come home.' But in the second sentence, there exists no such uncertainty. We know, and all the world knows, that eating is necessary to man. We could not fill up the sentence with *should*; and, therefore, we make use of *is*. Thus, then, the conjunction *if*, which you see is employed in both cases, has nothing at all to do with the government of the verb. It is the sense which governs.¹

Lowth notes that 'the Nominative case following the Auxiliary, or the Verb itself, sometimes supplies the place of the Conjunctions *if* and *tho*': as, "Had he done this, he had escaped:" "Charm he never so wisely:" that is, "if he had done this;" "though he charm."² Cobbett is compelled to recognise this construction, at any rate with the verb *be* ('Were he rich, I should not like him the better'). But he thinks it *unaccountable*, and mentions it only because he 'never likes to slur things over'. He adds the characteristic remark: 'Those expressions, for the using of which we cannot give a reason, ought not to be used at all'. Neither Lowth nor Cobbett explains the use of *had* and *were* in the main clause after a subjunctive with or without the conjunction, as 'he had escaped' in Lowth's example above, or as in Cobbett's example '*It were* to violate every principle of morality to consider honesty as a virtue, when not to be honest is a crime which the law punishes'. Jespersen (*Essentials*) notes the construction 'in the main sentence of rejected condition (expressed

¹ See also Joseph Priestley's note quoted on p. 30.

² For this punctuation, see p. 159.

and implied)', and says, justly, that *would* and *should* (*be, have*)² are commoner nowadays. The use of the subjunctive form without the conjunction is, of course, still idiomatic, even if, as Cobbett says, it is unaccountable.

The Modern emphatic present and past tenses, compounded with *do* and the infinitive ('I do know', 'I did go') were not established until after the mediæval period. Up to that time *do* had a causal sense, as illustrated in the Old English quoted in the last paragraph. It could be used with the infinitive and a noun or pronoun as object; thus, 'doon him fecche' meant 'cause him to fetch'. In Old English, however, *onginnan* ('begin') was used as a quasi-auxiliary with much the same force as the modern *do*: *þa ongon he sona singan*, 'then began he immediately to sing'; and in Chaucer the contracted forms *gin* and *gan* were commonly ordinary emphatic auxiliaries: 'This Chaunticleer gan gronen in his throte'. Shakespeare has the corrupted form *can* as a present auxiliary:

Then can I drown an eye unused to flow
For precious friends, hid in death's dateless night;

and for the past emphatic Chaucer often uses *wolde* and *coude* in the same way.

In Old English the two simple tenses, Present and Past, were used in question sentences, and in sentences with the simple negative *ne* ('not'):

Ne *drincst* þu win?
Ic ne *geþristige* for modes mines nytenysse.

This usage was common throughout the mediæval period, and is familiar in the Authorised Version:

Knowest thou it, because thou wast then born?

The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting.

But already, even in Old English, *ne* had been used in question and negative sentences with the quasi auxiliaries *shall*, *will*, *may*, *can*. In Modern English this is the standard usage. We

² See p. 38.

ask a question, or make a negative statement or command, with the compound tenses, perfect, continuous, or emphatic: 'Have you seen?', 'Are you going?', 'I do not know', 'Do not speak'. The Old English sentences quoted above would be translated:

Do you not (or 'don't you') drink wine?

I do not venture because of the faintness of my heart.

There are exceptions, especially in poetic language, where the simple tense is often used for reasons of metre and rhythm. But in speech and the language of prose the simple tenses are never¹ used.

The pattern of the simple passive tense, *be* with the past participle, derives from Old English, which also used as an auxiliary the verb *weorþan*, 'become':

pær wearþ se syning Bagsecg ofslægen

There became [= was] King Bagsecg slain.

This construction survives in such expressions as 'I became quite interested in the book', and is paralleled by the modern use of the verb *get*, in 'They are getting married on Saturday'. Of course, the various resolved or compound tenses of the auxiliary *be*, Perfect, Continuous, Indeterminate, can be used with the past participle, making a complicated passive system that corresponds with the active. There is an Old English example in the sentence on p. 36, *sceolon beon gesamnode* 'shall be summoned'. The use of the continuous forms of the auxiliary, however, developed in three distinct stages. Originally, the continuous passive, as it may be called, was made up of a simple tense of *be* followed by *on* (*a-*) and a verbal noun, like the continuous active (see p. 34), as in the archaism 'The pie was a-cooking', where the particle *a-* represents

¹ This should, perhaps be modified. Sweet (*New English Grammar*) points out that we still keep the simple negative form 'in stereotyped adverbial or parenthetic phrases such as "I know not how", "I doubt not", "If I mistake not" '.

the original *on*. Up to the end of the eighteenth century this construction survived, but usually without the particle. Jespersen gives a number of examples, including one from Jane Austen, 'While the parcels were bringing down and displaying on the counter'; and says that the modern form, with the continuous tense of the verb *be* and the past participle ('were being brought down and displayed') was not established, in writing at any rate, until the early nineteenth century, and even then was objected to as 'an outrage upon English idiom, to be detested, abhorred, execrated'. The older form survives colloquially, and sometimes in writing, in Northern idiom.

It is clear from this that we have in Modern English a tense system which allows us to express all imaginable subtleties and differences of time, manner, and (in the widest sense) mood. The formal classifications, Simple, Definite, Perfect, Continuous, Subjunctive or Indeterminate, and even the time notation Present, Past, Future, have little real point or validity. For modern tense is not so much an element of grammar or syntax as a part of idiom. That is why to the native speaker and writer it rarely presents any difficulty, whereas to the foreigner, accustomed to a different tense system, it is a real bugbear. Jespersen's elaborate classification (*Essentials of English Grammar*, pp. 230-295) is a curious example of this fact. For the non-native reader this is, no doubt, valuable and informative. But the English reader tends only to be bewildered by what he may legitimately consider to be at worst much ado about nothing and at best a remarkable tribute to the amazing flexibility of our language. Cobbett (*Grammar*, 258) dismisses the matter once for all:

I need not dwell here on the uses of *will*, *shall*, *may*, *might*, *should*, *would*, *can*, *could* and *must*; which uses, various as they are, are as well known to us all as the uses of our teeth and our noses; and to misapply which words argues, not only a deficiency in the reasoning faculties, but almost a deficiency in instinctive discrimination. I will not, my dear James, in imitation of the learned doctors, pester you

with a philological examination into the origin and properties of words, with regard to the use of which, if you were to commit an error in conversation, your brother Richard, who is four years old, would instantly put you right.

It is not, in fact, as easy as that. But Cobbett's attack on 'the learned doctors' is not altogether unjustified. They often protest too much, and are apt to crystallise a natural idiom into a grammatical rule.¹

(III)

As a mainly analytic² language English tends to express in a phrase the function and meaning of an inflected form. This means that one of its characteristics is the prepositional phrase. Of course, this type of phrase belongs also to the inflectional, or synthetic, language when the preposition has what may be called an adverbial force going beyond the meanings which inflection can express. Indeed, Old English, like Latin, combines the two principles; that is, the preposition is followed by an inflected form of the noun or pronoun. Thus in the Old English sentence (from the *Chronicle*) 'prie Scottas com on anum bate butan ælcum gereprum' the nouns with their qualifying adjectives after the prepositions *on* ('in') and *butan* ('without') are in the indirect (or dative) case, as is shown by the endings *-e* and *-um*. We say 'came in a boat without any oars'. The disappearance of inflection in the noun and adjective has left the preposition to do its work alone. It is only in those pronouns where an inflected object form remains

¹ See, however, A. S. Hornby's *A Guide to Patterns and Usage in English* (Oxford, 1954) in which English 'verb patterns' are carefully analysed for foreign students; and (also for foreign students) *The Use of Tenses in English* by J. Millington-Ward (Longmans, 1954).

² An analytic language is one in which word relationships are indicated not by inflection but by analysis, that is, 'breaking down' a word form into a phrase; a synthetic language is one in which they are indicated by inflection. Latin is a synthetic language. English is mainly, but not wholly, analytic.

that preposition and inflection go together – ‘from him’, ‘against me’. Here the synthetic and the analytic types of language meet; a particular function and meaning is, in a sense, expressed twice over.

Old English has the inflected possessive¹ in various constructions where we now use the *of* phrase. Thus:

1. *syxa sum; biora oþer; micel dæl burgwara.*

The noun or pronoun (*sum, oþer, dæl*) representing part of the whole is followed by the possessive inflection (*syxa, biora, burgwara*). But in Modern English: ‘one *of six*’; ‘one (the other) *of them*’; ‘a great number [*lit. deal*] *of citizens*’ Similarly, after a superlative:

2. *Seo is mæst eallra ferscra wætera.*

The possessive plural *wætera* (‘of waters’), with its qualifying adjectives in agreement with it, follows directly on the superlative *mæst*. Modern English has ‘This is the greatest *of all fresh waters*’.

3. *Cynewulf benam Sigebryht his rices.*

The inflected possessive is dependent on the verb (*benam* = ‘deprived’); but in Modern English ‘Cynewulf deprived Sigebryht *of his kingdom*’.

4. *Song he [Cædmon] ærest be middangeardes gesceape ond bi fruman moncynnes.*

In Modern English: ‘Caedmon first sang about the shaping of the earth and the beginning of mankind’. The inflected possessive would be possible, but not idiomatic: ‘about the earth’s shaping and mankind’s beginning’.

On the whole, the modern inflection (‘*s, s’*’) is restricted to

¹ The Report on Grammatical Terminology (1911) advocates the use of the term *genitive*, since the inflected word often indicates something more than mere possession. But except in such technical phrases as ‘partitive genitive’, *possessive* is used in this book as being more easily intelligible.

nouns representing persons or animals, and the inflected noun (or pronoun) either has the function of an epithet adjective, as in 'Tom's bicycle', 'my book', or is used predicatively, as in 'The bicycle is *Tom's*', 'The book is *mine*'.

The *of* which, as early as the eleventh century, became incorporated in a prepositional phrase doing duty for an inflected noun or pronoun was the Old English preposition with the root meaning 'from': 'þrie Scottas cuomon *of* Hibernia', 'þa men *of* Lundenbyrig', '*of* hwæles hyde geworht'. Here Modern English would have 'came *from* Ireland', 'men *of* (or *from*) London', 'made *of* (or *from*) whale's hide'. The possessive *of* phrase follows the pattern of the French *de* + noun or pronoun, French having no inflected form of the noun.¹ Thus the Old English '*dæges ende*' would be in French 'la fin du [= *de* le] jour', and in Modern English not 'the *day's* end' but, on the French pattern, 'the end *of the day*'. In a comparatively modern construction, *of* can be followed by the inflected form in an emphatic phrase. Bishop Lowth notes it in his *Grammar* (1762) – 'the Sign [inflection] and the Preposition seem sometimes to be used: as, "a soldier of the King's" '.

In such expressions as 'a boy's school', 'the Electrician's Union', 'a dogs' home', where the idea of possession is at one remove, we have an anticipation of the use of the attributive noun. For it is, in fact, becoming customary nowadays to drop the apostrophe and write *boys*, *Electricians*, *dogs*, giving the nouns direct adjectival force. The idiom is established in such phrases as 'garden gate', 'the table leg', 'the kitchen sink', where an attributive-possessive, as we may call it, short-circuits the *of* phrase. Old English itself pointed the way, for it abounds in compounds in which two nouns are linked together, the first qualifying the second. To take but one example: *burgweall* is made up of the two nouns *burg*, 'city' and *weall*, 'wall'. We untie the compound and write 'city wall', where the separate noun *city* is attributive-

¹ It is noteworthy, however, that French uses an inflected form of the pronoun where we have the prepositional phrase: 'Avez-vous de ses nouvelles?', 'Have you news of him?', 'à sa vue', 'at the sight of him'.

possessive, 'the wall of the city'. Not that the compound is always untied in Modern English; far from it. Some nouns, like *mankind* (*man* + *kind*, that is, *kin*, 'the kin or family of man') and *housewife* are permanently joined; others, like *book-mark*, are linked precariously with a hyphen, and others, like *town clerk*, are kept apart. When to join, when to hyphen, and when to separate is a problem that modern writers on usage, especially Fowler and Eric Partridge, have tried to solve. But dictionaries differ, and in the absence of any firm, generally recognised principles, the writer is left largely to his own devices. It is curious, by the way, that in a few compounds like *townsman*, *townsfolk*, *batsman*, *cat'spaw*,¹ the possessive inflection, though without the apostrophe, still remains. On the general question Cobbett has something characteristically downright to say:

Sometimes the sign of the possessive case is left out, and a hyphen is used in its stead: as, 'Edwards, the government-spy.' That is to say, 'the government's spy'; or 'the spy of the government.' These two words, joined in this manner, are called a compound noun: and to this compounding of nouns our language is very prone. We say, '*chamber-floor*, *horse-shoe*, *dog-collar*;' that is to say, *chamber's floor*, *horse's shoe*, *dog's collar*.

This is an advantage peculiar to our language. It enables us to say much in few words, which always gives strength to language; and, after clearness, strength is the most valuable quality that writing or speaking can possess. 'The Yorkshire-men flew to arms.' If we could not compound our words, we must say, 'The men of the shire of York flew to arms.' When you come to learn French, you will soon see how much the English language is better than the French in this respect.

All which is abundantly true, and it justifies a digression on the use of the attributive noun in possessive and non-possessive senses, which is an outstanding characteristic of Modern English.

¹ With apostrophe in cod: *cat'spaw*

All types of nouns, compounded or uncompounded, may stand attributively for qualifying and modifying phrases introduced by such prepositions as *with*, *from*, *in*, *at*, *for* and *to*. Thus, among compounds, we have *book-stall*, *ink-pot*, *houseboat* and the like, and, with separate attributives, *town ball*, *Oxford Street*, *corner house*, *city clerk* and a host of others. Modern journalistic usage has greatly developed this idiom, especially in headlines, where much has to be packed into a little room. 'Running Gun Battle in River Tunnel', for example, has two attributive nouns (*gun* and *river*) which express briefly what otherwise would be resolved in phrases: 'Running Battle with guns in Tunnel under the River'. Other examples, all taken from a single page of the *Daily Telegraph*, are 'Ministry Action on Strike Wave', 'Talks with Conciliation Chief', 'Night Transfer Shortly', 'Mystery Yacht Identified', 'Cabinet hears Egypt Report', 'Trieste Discussion', and 'August Steel Output Record', where three attributive nouns pile up, as it were, to qualify the one official noun. It is worth remarking, by the way, that with a slight shift of emphasis in this conglomeration *Output* could become the real noun and *Record* the attributive: 'Record August Steel Output'.

Headlineese, no doubt, has its excesses, perhaps justifiable when we grant the necessity for a swift visual appeal; though it must be admitted that, even to the experienced reader, a jostling of nouns may, and often does, contain ambiguities. But the normal, less extreme, use of the attributive idiom in the ordinary structure of the sentence makes, as Cobbett says, for a welcome preciseness and economy. In effect, the uninflected noun takes on something of the syntactical force and quality of the inflected noun in a synthetic language; the resolved phrase, with its necessary multiplication of words, is itself in turn compressed into a single word.

Moreover, as a kind of by-product, the attributive noun enriches and gives elasticity to our vocabulary, since it often has a true adjective corresponding to it, and the difference between noun and adjective is reflected in subtle differences of meaning. Thus, to take by way of example one or two of the headlines already quoted, the true adjectives *ministerial*,

nocturnal, mysterious, Egyptian could not be substituted for the attributives *Ministry, night, mystery, Egypt* without a slight, but significant, shift of meaning and emphasis. Here we are, in fact, in the deep waters of idiom and the even deeper waters of synonymity. The difference between attributive and adjective in such pairs as *picture frame – pictorial qualities, farm worker – agricultural labourer, country walk – rural scene, money troubles – monetary speculations* belongs to the very genius of the language. It is beyond the bounds of syntax and grammar.

As we have already seen (p. 45), the indirect or 'dative' form of the noun and pronoun was frequently used after a preposition in Old English. It was also used in direct syntactical relationship with the verb. The following sentences, with the appended modern renderings, make this clear:

Ohthere said *to his lord* that he of all Northmen dwelt norþriest bude.

Ohthere said *to his lord* that he of all Northmen dwelt northernmost.

ond he hi [= hie] *him* eft ageaf.

and he gave them back *to him*.

ða þe niedbeðearfosta sien *eallum monnum* to witanne.

which are most necessary *for all men* to know.

þa was *him* on þæt bæcbord Denamearc.

Then was *to him* Denmark on the larboard.

Hi þa ealle pry togaedre *anre stefne* gretton þone cyninge.

They then all three together *with one voice* greeted the king.

Ælfred kyning hateð gretan¹ Bishop Wærferð *his wordum* luflice ond freondlice.

King Alfred sends his greetings to Bishop Waerferth *in* (or *with*) *these words* lovingly and friendlily.

¹ For this verbal construction, see p. 76.

Forþy *me* ðyncð betere, gif *iow* swa ðyncð . . .

Therefore *to me* it seems better, if *to you* it so seems . . .

In the modern version the Old English inflected word has been resolved into a phrase. Nevertheless, the first two sentences could be so rendered that the noun and pronoun stand alone, without a preposition: 'Othere told his lord—', 'He gave him them back'. True, the second construction would not be idiomatic, but it would be possible. The main point is that certain verbs (*give, tell, send, write* and one or two others) can have both a direct and an indirect object in Modern English – that is, an uninflected noun, or a pronoun in the object form,¹ representing the Old English inflected 'dative'. Here, as elsewhere, the ghost of inflection haunts us still.

For the sense of motion towards, Old English itself had the prepositional phrase: *opþe sciðu to Lundenbyrig brohton opþe to Hrofesceastre*,² 'brought the ships either to London or to Rochester'. It is this construction with *to* that now normally does duty for the old inflected dative form for the indirect object ('I said to him', 'He explained to me'), very much as the *of* phrase serves for the inflected possessive.

Here we may trace one or two curious ups and downs in the development of usage. Thus Chaucer sometimes has the indirect form without a preposition where we have the resolved phrase: 'Ther as I *yow* devyse', 'As I will explain *to you*'. On the other hand, Wyclif has the resolved phrase where we retain the true indirect object after the verb: 'And apostolis tolden *to bym* alle thingis, that thei hadden don, and tauzt'. He also uses the *to* phrase after a verb which was originally followed by the inflected dative: 'he thretenyde *to him*'.

Today some of the verbs mentioned above, which can have an indirect object without the *to*, may have the resolved

¹ French has a separate inflection for the indirect object in certain pronouns (see p. 21).

² an interesting example, by the way, of the possessive inflection in a proper name (*Hrofes ceaster*, Hrofe's camp or city). Cf. modern *Kingston*.

phrase as an alternative; that is, we can say 'I gave him the book' or 'I gave the book to him'. Nevertheless, the fact that two parallel expressions of this type do not mean precisely the same thing – there is an almost imperceptible shift of emphasis – reminds us that the casual and restricted survival of an inflectional idiom, in both the possessive and the dative, has given us the means of distinguishing subtle nuances of meaning. Again, as with the attributive noun and the true adjective, we are in the realms of idiom and synonymy. Between 'I told a different story to the policeman' and 'I told the policeman a different story', 'the king's soldiers' and 'the soldiers of the king', there is a very narrow gulf, but it is a gulf all the same.

There are one or two interesting points in the other sentences. The third has an inflected dative after an adjective, where we use the phrase with *to* or *for*, 'most necessary *to* (or *for*) all men'. In the fourth we have the inflected form with the impersonal verb, a construction which was common in mediæval English, and is familiar in Chaucer: 'Me thynketh it accordaunt to resoun'. Only the archaic *methinks*, *meseems* keep this idiom faintly alive; in the modern parallel impersonal construction we use the resolved phrase: 'It seems to me'. The fifth sentence is curious, with a dative after an adverb phrase 'on the larboard to him'. Here Modern English has evolved a neater construction, substituting for the pronoun a possessive adjective – 'on his larbord'. So Wyclif has 'A legioun is name to me' for 'My name is legion'.

In the other three sentences, the inflected noun (with its qualifying adjective) has a more pronounced adverb force, represented by our modern phrases introduced by such prepositions as *with*, *by*, *in*. As a matter of fact, the single noun or pronoun, with either the possessive or the dative inflection, was often used as an adverb in Old English. Of this there are a few interesting survivals – *once*, *since*, *thence*, *whence*, where the modern *-ce* spelling, influenced by French nouns in *-ce*, represents the Old English possessive ending in *-es*; *backwards*, *forwards*, *always*, *needs*, in such an expression as 'I *needs* must go'; and *seldom*, which keeps, with a slight change in spelling,

the plural inflection *-um* in the Old English *seldum*, the dative plural of *seld*, 'time'.

Two opposite tendencies, then, are observable in the modern language – the resolution of an inflected form into a prepositional phrase, and the compression of a prepositional phrase into an attributive noun. The result is that Modern English has evolved an idiomatic conciseness of expression which compensates for the loss of inflection. Moreover, as has already been explained, the restricted survival of certain inflections and their use, together with that of attributives, side by side with the resolved phrase has given it a peculiar, if embarrassing, flexibility of usage.

To sum up, the modern language, like so much else that is English, is a compromise. It retains some inflections, like that for the plural in nouns, which are necessary and syntactically significant; some, like the possessive in 's, s', which are strictly unnecessary in a language mainly analytic, and some, like the vowel changes in strong verbs, which perpetuate a primitive tradition. It is difficult and dangerous to forecast the future; but it is reasonable to suppose that those inflections that do not contribute to the clarity of expression and meaning will gradually – very gradually – disappear, just as the inflected adjective has disappeared and taken with it the bugbear of gender. Against this, we have to remember that an analytic language is bound to use more words than a synthetic language; that is, it sacrifices something in conciseness. The synthetic language will have, in the nature of things, somewhat longer words, but it will have fewer of them.

It is important to remember that all our surviving inflections derive from the native language. Educationists and others often complain that English grammar, or at any rate the systematic presentation, has been unduly influenced by Latin; and their complaint is not unjustified. The old grammarians, to whom Latin was the language *par excellence*, set an example that has been too zealously followed since. Even as late as 1915 Sonnenschein (*New English Grammar*) wrote: 'The English subjunctive, properly understood, is an admirable

clue to the uses of the mood in other languages. For example, the pupil who has mastered conditional sentences in English need only be told, when he comes to Latin and German, that these languages employ the same moods (and for the most part the same tenses also) as are employed in English. Similarly in regard to cases: the pupil who has mastered the uses of the English cases will have little new to learn when he comes to Latin, except that Latin has an extra case – the ablative.’ And this nonsense – engendered by the Report on Grammatical Terminology – has not completely vanished from the academic groves even now.

But the language itself owes to Latin only a rich, diversified vocabulary and a few syntactical constructions. Its accident and main syntactical structure are not Latin, but English. That they are often explained in the terminology of Latin is a misfortune, since in this way the true pattern of English has been misrepresented and obscured. No doubt the formal grammarians with a bias towards Latin have done us much evil; but the language has flourished in spite of them.

Chapter II



BASIC WORD ORDER

HERE are a half a dozen representative sentences from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. They occur in passages which King Alfred may have written himself, and certainly inspired; so that they represent what may be called 'classical' Old English. The literal translation is given in the second, and the modern rendering in the third, column.

<i>Original</i>	<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Modern Form</i>
Her hæþne men ærest on Sceapige ofer winter sætun.	Here (= in this year) heathen men first in Sheppey during the winter settled.	In this year for the first time heathen men settled in Sheppey during (= for) the winter.
ond þa Deniscan ahton wælstowe gewald.	and the Danes gained the battlefield's mastery.	and the Danes gained control of the battlefield.
þa gemette hie Æþel- wulf aldorman on Engla- felda, ond him þær wiþ gefeahrt ond sige nam.	Then met them Aethel- wulf alderman in Engle- field, and them there against fought and vic- tory won.	Then Aethelwulf the alderman met them in Englefield, and fought against them there and won the victory.
ond þæs ymb xiiii niht gefeahrt Æþered cyning ond Ælfred his broþur wiþ þone here æt Basen- gum, ond þær þa Denis- can sige namon.	and from that time (þæs) about fourteen nights fought Aethered king and Alfred his brother against the in- vading army (bere) at Basing, and there the Danes victory gained.	And about a fortnight from that time King Aethered and Alfred his brother fought against the invading army at Basing, and there the Danes won the victory.

<i>Original</i>	<i>Literal Translation</i>	<i>Modern Form</i>
þa foron hie to ond geffiendon þone here, ond þæt geweorc abra- con, ond genamon eal þæt þarbinna was, ge on feo, ge on wifum, ge eac on bearnum, ond brohtoneall into Lunden- byrig.	Then went they to and put to flight the invading army, and the fort (<i>geweorc</i> = 'work') broke down, and seized every- thing that therein was, both in (= of) cattle, and in women, and also in children, and brought all into London.	Then they set to, and put to flight the invading army, and broke down the fort, and took all that was in it – cattle, women, and children – and brought them all (lit. 'everything', singu- lar) to London.
Ond Hæstenes wif ond his sona twegen mon brohte to þam cýninge; ond he hi him eft ageaf, forþamþe hiora was oþer his godsunu, oþer Æðeredes caldormonnes.	And Hæsten's wife and his sons two man (indef. = 'one') brought to the King; and he them (to) him back gave, because of them one was his god- son, the other Aethered (the) alderman's.	And Hæsten's wife and his two sons were brought to the King; and he gave them back to him because one of them was his own god- son, and the other the godson of Aethered the alderman.

It is obvious from these sentences that the subject, verb, and object could take up different positions relative to one another. In the first two the order is roughly that which has established itself in Modern English. The subject ('hæpne men' 'Deniscan') stands before the verb, and the verb is followed by the object, if any, and any modifying adverbs or adverb phrases. Two main patterns are illustrated in the remaining sentences. Sometimes the verb stands first, being followed by the object and the subject in that order – *pagemette bie Æþelwulf aldorman*, 'Then met them Aethelwulf (the) alderman'. Similarly, without the object – *gefeabt Æþered ond Ælfred wiþ þone here*, 'fought Aethered and Alfred against the raiding army', *was oþer his godsunu*, 'was one his godson'. Or both subject and object may stand before the verb – *ond þær þa Deniscan sige nam*, 'and there the Danes victory gained', *ond he hi him eft ageaf*, 'and he them him back gave'.

These then are the three standard patterns of the Old

English simple sentence. In his book *Syntax and Style in Old English* Mr S. O. Andrew has classified them according to their occurrence. But there are so many variations and exceptions that this classification, although interesting and informative, has little relevance in any generalised study of the subject, such as this. The main fact which emerges is that during the Middle English period, partly no doubt owing to the influence of French syntax, the modern pattern, illustrated in the first two Old English sentences, became standardised. Here, for example, is a short passage from John Wyclif's translation of the Bible (1380):

And thei camen ouer the wawe of the see into the cuntree of Genazareth. And anon a man in vnclene spirit ran out of a biryel . . . The whiche man hadde an hous in graues, or biriels, and nether with chaynis now miȝte eny man bynde hym. For oft tymes he . . . hadde broken the chaynes, and hadde brokun the stockis to smale gobetis, and no man miȝte daunte, or make tame, hym.¹

Only once, and then for emphasis, does the word order change from the normal, in the clause 'nether with cheynis now miȝte eny man bynde him', where the subject follows the finite verb. In the Authorised Version (1611) the normal word order is kept, and the emphasis is made in another way: 'and no man could bind him, no, not with chains'. But Wyclif's order is quite possible in Modern English, when some particular significance is given to the meaning. Indeed, after the word *neither*, stressing a previous negative as in Wyclif's expression, the modern construction is precisely the same – 'neither could any man bind him'. The Authorised Version rendering reverts to the normal order only because it expresses its emphatic negative ('no man . . . no') without the use of *neither*. Our commonest variation for emphasis is the placing of the object before the subject, and therefore before the verb:

¹ Here Wyclif is giving a synonym for *daunt* (= 'make tame'), and this accounts for the position of *him*, which is in its normal position as object of *daunt*. We should say, of course, 'make him tame'.

'Two men I honour', 'This one thing I do'. There is a hint of it in the last Old English sentence quoted on p. 56. 'Hæstenes wif ond his sona twegen mon brohte',¹ which does not conform to any of the three Old English sentence patterns already mentioned, partly no doubt because the object is emphasised in contrast to the indefinite subject (*mon*).

Nevertheless, in Modern English there are certain well-defined constructions where the normal word order of verb, subject, object is broken. The verb *be*, when it is not an auxiliary but a verb of full meaning, is a law unto itself, in that it never, or rarely,² stands at the end of a sentence or clause. So unless it is followed in the normal way by a noun or adjective as complement, or by, for example, an adverb phrase, its subject usually comes after it. Old English has 'þæt Estland is swyðe micel', and that is the modern pattern 'The land of the Este is very large'. But where there is no complement, and the adverb phrase is brought (as commonly) to the beginning of the sentence, the subject comes at the end: 'ond ymbutan þone weall is se mæsta dic'. Modern English follows suit: 'and around the wall is the biggest dyke'. Old English often had the same order even when the adverb phrase came at the end: 'ond him wæs a widsæ on ðæt bacbord'. But we should say 'and the open sea was on his larboard' or (see next paragraph) 'and there was open sea—'. After an initial adverb phrase this inversion is common with verbs other than the verb *be*: 'At the end of the procession came the coach of the Prime Minister'.

It is interesting to note that already in Old English the adverb *þær* had developed as a kind of initial supporting word: 'ond þær bið swyðe manig burh, ond on ælcere byrig bið cyning, ond þær bið swyðe mycel hunig ond fiscnað', which can be translated into Modern English without any disturbance of the word order: 'and there are very many cities, and in each city is a king, and there is much honey and fishing'. True,

¹ We should, of course, make it passive: 'Haesten's wife and his two sons were brought'. See p. 56.

² As in such expressions as 'As you were', 'As it was', where the verb is emphasised.

in Old English sentences *þær* still has something of its real adverbial force, 'at that place', but it clearly anticipates the modern use of the purely introductory *there*. Used (more rarely) with verbs other than *be* it is more plainly unemphatic and introductory: 'þa færinga þar (= *þær*) eode in þæs cyninges dohtor', where again the modern word order is the same: 'then suddenly there went in the king's daughter'. The construction is very common in Modern English not only with the verb *be* but also with all verbs of motion ('There go the ships'), where the adverbial force of *there* is faintly retained.

The construction with the anticipatory *it* is not strictly parallel. Here the word order is normal, the grammatical subject *it* being followed by the verb; but the real subject, usually a phrase or clause, stands at the end: *Hit gelamp þæt bie gelærdon Apollonium ðæt he ferde on scipe*, 'It happened that they advised Apollonius that he should go in a ship'. In Modern English this is common with the infinitive phrase as subject: 'It is neither good to eat flesh nor to drink wine'. The normal order, without *it*, is possible but not idiomatic 'To eat flesh and to drink wine is not good'.

The other standardised inversion (or semi-inversion) of word order occurs in direct questions. In Older English, where the verb was simple, the inversion was complete: *Hwæt sægst þu?*, 'What sayest thou?' Modern English normally has a compound tense of the verb, the subject standing between the auxiliary and the infinite part: 'What do you say?' If the object is an interrogative pronoun or a noun qualified by the interrogative adjective *what*, it is placed at the beginning of the sentence: 'What are you doing?', 'What books have you read lately?' Otherwise, it follows the verb in the usual way: 'Did you see the Test Match?'.

So much for the main pattern of subject and predicate. There are, however, one or two other interesting examples of word order in the sentences quoted:

(a) In the phrases 'Æþered cyning', 'Æþelwulf ealdorman', the title directly follows the name. Here, modern usage has

one or two separate idioms. In Middle English the order with titles like *king* and *duke* was reversed. John of Trevisa (1382), for example, writes 'Kynge Harold' and 'Duke William'; and that is the idiom today, though the simple apposition with a Christian name is, on the whole, restricted to royal titles – Queen Elizabeth, Princess Margaret. We use words indicating formal military, ecclesiastical, and civic titles with the full Christian name and surname or the surname only, as in Colonel Robert Smith, Archbishop Laud, Alderman Jones. The Old English order survives only in the pattern of personal names – John King, Thomas Baker, Mary Smith.

In Modern English, when a name and a professional or trade designation are placed in apposition, the two are separated by commas, and the designation is preceded by an article. Thus we say 'The Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill', 'Sir Anthony Eden, the Foreign Minister', 'Fred Johnson, the umpire', the order being determined by the context and the requirements of emphasis. Recently, however, owing to American influence, there has been a tendency to place the designation immediately in front of the name, like a formal title: Prime Minister Churchill, Foreign Secretary Eden, umpire Fred Johnson. But this is a usage that has not yet passed beyond the bounds of popular journalism.¹

There is one other example of an appositional phrase in the sentences quoted, 'ond Ælfred his broþur'. Here the word order is precisely the same as in Modern English; though we can say equally 'and his brother Alfred', with perhaps, some slight change of emphasis or nuance of meaning. It is noteworthy that in 'Æþeredes ealdormonnes' the two nouns in apposition agree in case. In Modern English only one of them, the second, inflects for the possessive – 'Aethered the alderman's godson'; that is, the two nouns are regarded as a single phrase unit, 'Aethered-the-alderman'. So also with the modern phrasal indirect object. Old English has 'Ælfræde cyninge apas gesealde', where both *Ælfræde* and *cyninge* are

¹ Such terms as *President* and *Governor*, when they are used as titles rather than designations, follow the ordinary rule for titles. We say 'President Eisenhower', but 'Mr Jones, the president of the Association'.

dative. We say 'made their oaths to King Alfred' (or 'Alfred the King'), not 'to Alfred, to the King'. A syntactical problem arising when a word or phrase is in apposition to the subject is dealt with on p. 135.

(b) One of the Old English constructions is a little surprising, 'ond him þær wiþ gefeaht'. Here the preposition *wiþ* follows its object *him*; 'and them there against fought'. This construction was quite common, especially with the preposition *to*:

ond þa gatu him to belocen hæfdon.
and the gates him against locked they had.

oþ him mara fultum to com.
until them more help to came.

Later, with the decline of inflection, the preposition found its normal place in front of the word it governs, and there, at any rate in simple straightforward phrases, it remains; if it strays, it is only for idiomatic and syntactical reasons. It is comforting to be reminded that the preposition following its object is sanctioned by a long tradition. The burning question of 'preposition-at-end' is discussed later in the chapter on Syntax.

(c) Most of the adjectives in the sentences quoted precede the nouns they qualify – '*prie* Scottas', '*anum* bate', '*pone* here'; but the order is reversed in 'ond his sona *twegen*'. In general, pronominal and numerical adjectives stood before the noun in Old English, but descriptive adjectives came after: *ond þær sint micle meras fersce geond þa moras*, 'and there are great lakes fresh beyond the moors'. But in spite of the influence of French, in which the epithet adjective usually follows the noun, the modern standard order became established during the Middle English period, except in a few set phrases like 'the time being', 'the body politic', 'Thursday last'. So also certain adjectives of quantity follow a pronoun – 'we both', 'them all', approximating to nouns in apposition. 'In that contre', says Mandeville, 'ben longe apples, of gode savour;

and thei han grete long leues and large'. Only his reluctance to huddle three adjectives together in front of the noun causes him to place the third one (*large*) after it. We may similarly, for idiomatic reasons, reverse the order in Modern English.

(d) The adverb (*ærest*) and two adverb phrases ('on Sceapige' and 'ofer winter') stand in the first sentence between the subject and the verb. In Modern English the prepositional adverb phrase is normally placed either at the end of the sentence, after the verb, or at the beginning, before the subject. Its position depends upon its exact connotation in the context, on the emphasis intended, or sometimes on the rhythm of the sentence. In the modern rendering of this particular sentence the two phrases follow the verb because the second phrase 'ofer winter' is in fact dependent upon or has some relation to, the first: 'It was in this year that the heathens first settled in Sheppey during the winter' – that is, by implication, not during the summer. 'During the winter the heathens first settled in Sheppey' would have a different meaning. Similarly we say 'The house stood on top of the hill' or, with a different emphasis and rhythm, 'On top of the hill stood a house', where there is also the idiomatic inversion of subject and verb, as explained on p. 58. It would not be idiomatic to say 'The house on the top of the hill stood'; but where the phrase is parenthetical rather than directly modifying, the middle position is possible. Such a sentence as 'The boys, after the second lesson, went out to play', is passable though not natural English. But this construction is idiomatic when the phrase is made up of a preposition governing a verbal noun. The three sentences

On seeing the master, the boys stood up
 The boys, on seeing the master, stood up
 The boys stood up on seeing the master

all express the same thing with certain nuances of meaning and emphasis.

Simple adverbs, or combinations of adverbs, have more freedom of movement. We may say, again with subtle variations of meaning and emphasis, 'Suddenly the wind dropped'

or 'The wind suddenly dropped' or 'The wind dropped suddenly'. This freedom extends idiomatically to the adverb *only*, as when we say 'I only saw him once'. Here, by its position, the adverb modifies the verb (*saw*); but to express the meaning intended it should modify, and therefore, stand next to, the adverb *once*. 'I saw him only once' is correct English; but the pull of the verb is so strong that 'I only saw him once' is so common as to cause nothing worse than an occasional pedantic frown.¹

Certain adverbs, however, have their appointed positions, notably the negative *not*. The Old English negative (*ne*) always preceded the verb: *þæt þa Deniscan him ne mehton þæs ripes forwierman*, 'that the Danes might not refuse him the harvest'. When, however, the older *ne* was replaced by *not*, derived from the noun and adverb *nawibt*, *not* followed the simple verb: 'They departed not from the sins of the house of Jeroboam'. In compound tenses the *not* was placed between the auxiliary and the verb form; and that is where it always stands in Modern English, since (see p. 43) we do not use *not* with the simple verb. We have a hint of our modern construction – as well as, by the way, an illustration of the double negative – in Caedmon's answer to the visitant of his dream 'Ne con I noht singan'.²

Like *not*, *never* is usually boxed up in a compound tense, but, like the older *ne*, it also precedes a simple verb: 'I never hear from him nowadays'. Both words may take up an unusual position, at the beginning of a sentence, for the sake of emphasis, *not* always in conjunction with an adverb or adverb phrase, and *never* sometimes by itself:

Not for worlds would I go through that again.

Never did I see such a sight.

Neither and *nor* have the same emphatic position when they are used alone after an ordinary (*not*) negative: 'He did not

¹ But see p. 138.

² Note that the subject follows the auxiliary, also for emphasis.

come; neither (or nor) did he write'. When they are correlative, on the pattern of the Old English *ne . . . ne*, they stand before a simple verb ('I neither heard nor saw him'), or between the auxiliary and the verb form in compound tenses ('I have neither heard nor seen him').

(e) In Old English the inflected possessive in the partitive construction (see p. 46) stands before the noun or pronoun with which it is associated: '*wealstowe gewæld*', '*biora oþer*'. We place the *of* phrase afterwards: '*control of the battlefield*', '*one of them*'.

(f) The expression 'he hi him ageaf' may be rendered literally, though not idiomatically, 'he gave them him'. It is a curious thing that we do not commonly use the direct dative of a pronoun alongside a pronoun as direct object; but if we do, we say 'He gave them it' rather than 'He gave it them' – reversing, that is, the Old English order. When two nouns are concerned, the dative is always followed by the accusative 'He gave the man the book'; but when the dative phrase with *to* is used it always comes in the second place 'He gave the book to the man/to him'. See also p. 61.

(g) The expression in sentence (v) '*þa foron hie to*' is interesting. Here *to* is not a preposition but an adverb, and '*foron to*' is an example of those phrasal verbs¹ which are characteristic of English – 'get up', 'lie down', 'give in', 'set to', and hundreds of others. The adverb particle normally stands in close conjunction with the verb, almost as if compounded with it. Sometimes, however, an object or an adverb may split the phrasal verb. We can say 'I laid the book down' and 'I laid down the book' with no perceptible difference of emphasis or meaning. In Old English the subject often came between verb and adverb, '*þa ridon ii eorlas up*', as indeed it may still do in an idiomatically inverted sentence: 'Then rode two earls up'.

(h) In the phrase '*þæs ymb xiiii niht*', *þæs* is itself an adverb (see p. 52), and is modified by '*ymb xiiii niht*'. The order is reversed in Modern English: 'about fourteen nights after (or from) this'. In general, the position of inter-related

¹ See p. 147.

adverb phrases is dependent on the meaning or emphasis intended. The two sentences

We were standing near platform 9, under the clock
and

We were standing under the clock, near platform 9

say much the same thing; but in each the phrase near the verb bears the emphasis, and the other is a parenthetical addition; so in fact the sentences have not quite the same sense. There is, by the way, another possibility. If we omit the comma after *clock* from the second sentence, the final phrase is adjectival, not adverbial; 'under the clock near platform 9' – not, for example, 'the clock near platform 10'.

(i) The particle *ge* in the fifth sentence introduces each of the three prepositional phrases related to the verb *genamon*: that is, *ge . . . ge . . . ge* are correlatives corresponding with modern *both . . . and*. In Modern English, however, the linking of more than two words or word groups with correlatives is not strictly idiomatic; we cannot say *both . . . and . . . and*, *neither . . . nor . . . nor*, but depend on a separating comma after each item up to the last, which is introduced by the appropriate conjunction. Correlative conjunctions in Old English were normally identical, as *oþer . . . oþer* in the last sentence ('the one . . . the other'); so also *ne . . . ne*, for *neither . . . nor*, and *or . . . or*, for *either . . . or*, which is familiar in Shakespeare.

It is clear from these fairly representative examples that the word-order of the simple sentence or clause – that is, of the subject-predicate unit – in Old English was influenced by the existence of inflected forms. As in Latin and other inflected languages, these reveal their own function, and visible agreement reveals the syntactical and sense relationship of words. But with the loss of inflection, the position of words and word groups became all important. A conventional sentence pattern developed, therefore, in which the order and not the form of words was the main factor. Even so, in Modern English that order is itself variable within certain limits; and that variability contributes in a notable way to the general flexibility of the language.

Chapter III



THE VERBAL PHRASE

A PART from word order (see pp. 56–65), the simple sentence is constructed in Modern English precisely as it was in the English of King Alfred's time – that is, it consists of a subject and a predicate. The subject is the person or thing spoken about, and is represented by some form of a noun; the predicate is what is said about it and has as its key-word a finite part, or tense, of a verb. If the verb is transitive, it will have an object, which is also some form of a noun; and if it is intransitive, it may have a complement, which is a noun or an adjective in some form or other. The basic parts of a simple sentence are therefore the noun and the verb, with the adjective sometimes as complement. Any noun in the sentence (or, more rarely, pronoun) may be directly qualified by an adjective, and the verb may be modified by an adverb; indeed, going one step further, any such adjective or adverb may itself be modified by another adverb. In addition, the noun, the adjective, and the adverb may be, and often are, represented not by a single word but by a group of words, or a phrase. The simplest shape of the phrase standing for adjective or adverb is *preposition + noun*, as explained and illustrated on p. 45.

But the phrase is not always of the simple pattern, *preposition + noun*. It often contains an infinite part of a verb – the infinitive, the present participle, the past participle, and the verbal noun. Most verbal phrases, as they may conveniently be called, have an interesting history in the syntax of language. To begin, then, with the present participle. In classical Old English texts, that is, those belonging to the period of King Alfred, both the present and the past participles were normally used, as we have already seen (p. 35), as

adjectival complements of the verb. A little later, especially in translations from the Latin, which naturally came under the influence of Latin syntax, they began to have an independent function of their own in a phrase that qualified or modified some other word or expression in the sentence. Thus in the eleventh century translation *Apollonius of Tyre* we have

ond sealde Apollonige þone healfan dæl, þus *cwepende*
And he gave Apollonius the half share, *saying* thus

ond ðarin eode Gode *þancigende*

and he went therein [i.e., into his dwelling], *thanking* God.

In these sentences we have what is now usually called a participle phrase, qualifying the subject (*he*). It is, in fact, a new syntactical construction by which the use of a separate co-ordinate clause is avoided; the phrases take the place of the expressions 'and said thus', 'and thanked God', with the obvious advantage that the sentence is more closely knit into a single whole. There is a more striking example in the same text:

ond Apollonius hinc gemængde on ðæs cyninges plegan
ond *yrnende* þone ðoðor gelæhte ond, mid swiftre rædnesse
geslegene, ongear gesænde to ðam *plegendan* cynge.

and Apollonius joined in the King's game and, *running*,
caught the ball and sent [it], *struck* with even swifter
quickness, back to the *playing* King.

Here *yrnende* ('running') has adjectival force, qualifying Apollonius, and verbal force standing for the co-ordinate clause 'and ran'; *plegendan* ('playing') is an ordinary epithet adjective qualifying *cyng*e, and having the indirect or dative inflection *-an*, agreeing with *cyng*e in case; *geslegene* (for *geslegenne*, the object form) agrees with the noun *ðoðor*, or rather with an unexpressed pronoun (*b*)*it*, standing for it, and is itself the key-word of a qualifying phrase.

This adjectival-verbal use of the participles in a phrase, short-circuiting, as it were, a co-ordinate or subordinate clause (see p. 84), quickly established itself in the language. Here are a few representative examples from texts up to the seventeenth century:

Mandeville (1356):

For o griffoun there wil bere, *fleynge to his nest*, a gret hors.

The holy lond, *passing alle othere londes*, is the most worthi lond, and lady and sovereign of alle othere londes.

Wyclif (1380):

And he, *cryinge with a greet voice*, seide . . .

And he seith to the man *bauynge a drye bonde* . . .

Malory (1470):

They fond the fayrest corps *lyenge in a ryche bedde*, and a poure man *sittyng at the bargets ende*.

and ever they had an C torches *bernnyng aboute hym*.

The Book of the Common Prayer (1549, 1552):

as by thy special grace, *preuenting us*, thou dost put into our mindes good desires.

that we *louyng thee in al things*, maye obtain thy promise¹

The Priest *beeyng in the quier*, shall begynne with a loude voyce the Lordes prayer.¹

Sidney: Apologie for Poetry (1582):

The historian, *wanting the precept*, is so tyed, not to what shoulde bee, but to what is.

For the Philosopher, *setting downe with thorny argument the bare rule*, is so hard of utterance . . .

¹ The archaic punctuation obscures the construction; we should put a comma after *we* and *Priest*. Curiously enough, the construction of the first passage quoted is obscured in the modern text by the omission of the commas before and after 'preventing us'. See p. 157.

It is noteworthy that in all these quotations the participle phrase stands either at the end, or in the body of the sentence; and that its syntactical function is clear and unambiguous. All the constructions illustrated are still current in modern usage. But in these early texts it was only rarely (if ever) that the participle phrase was brought, where possible, to the beginning of the sentence, leading in to the main clause, as it often is now. The Authorised Version (1611), harking back to an earlier idiom, has 'He, willing to justify himself . . .' and 'Ye, being rooted and grounded in love . . .', where Modern English would normally place the pronouns (*he, ye*) after the phrase. True, the phrase sometimes precedes, or appears to precede, its related noun or pronoun, as in 'This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark . . .'. But even here the phrase is still in the body of the sentence, introducing or leading in a clause. The 'lead-in' construction with the phrase standing actually at the beginning of the whole sentence, was not yet common.

We still, however, have to reckon with Shakespeare. In *Hamlet*, there are two sentences, almost jostling each other, which point a moral for future usage:

'Tis given out that, sleeping in mine orchard,
A serpent stung me

Sleeping within mine orchard,
Upon my secure hour thine uncle stole.

Now if we assume that the participle phrase always has an adjectival function, and by its position in the sentence qualifies the appropriate noun or pronoun, we immediately realise that there is something wrong here. In the first sentence, apparently the serpent was sleeping, and in the second Hamlet's uncle. It is arguable, however, in fact, that the construction is adverbial – that the phrase does not take its function from the participle but is elliptical for 'as I was sleeping'. The argument is linguistically dangerous and unsound, since any syntactical construction must stand or fall without reference

to alternatives. Yet usage has always left the matter tacitly in doubt. When the participle phrase follows its related word, as in the early examples quoted, it usually finds its correct position in the sentence – correct in the sense that it is so placed as to convey the intended meaning. But when it precedes a sentence or clause, the strict adjectival relationship is not always regarded, or, to put it another way, the phrase is endowed with a semi-adverbial function unrelated to any particular word. Writers differ. Addison, as I have pointed out in *Good English* (p. 41) frequently has the loose participle phrase. Goldsmith has it now and then:

Being prepossessed against such falsehoods, his story had not the least influence upon me.

If this sentence is to be justified, the phrase can only be taken as the equivalent of the adverbial ‘as I was prepossessed against . . .’; in its adjectival function, it logically, but wrongly, qualifies *story*. But this syntactical irregularity seems not to have been recognised until comparatively recent times. Cobbett, for example, says nothing about it, and is not above exemplifying it in the text of his *Grammar*:

Having been taught by the rules of *Etymology*, what are the relationships of words, *Syntax* will teach you how to give to all your words their proper situations.

The arch-critic of the English of Kings, ministers, and established writers would hardly have written such a sentence if he had suspected that there was anything wrong with it. Bain, however, in his *English Grammar* (1863) has the note: ‘There is a very common error with reference to this construction: thus, “having failed in his attempt, no farther trial was made”. Here the participle “having” is without a subject, the finite clause supplying a different subject.’ He adds that the mistake arises from ‘confounding the participial adjunct with the absolute construction’.

Even now, when it has come under the law, the loosely related participle phrase occurs pretty frequently in modern usage. Though grammar, insisting on the pure adjectival

relationship, is against it, tradition is on its side; and, provided the result is not patently incongruous, it is not too lightly to be condemned. Onions, Fowler and Partridge, however, will have none of this argument. 'The duty of so arranging one's sentences that they will stand grammatical analysis', says Fowler, 'is much more generally recognised than it formerly was, & it is now not a sufficient defence for looseness of this kind to produce parallels, as can very easily be done, even from great writers of past generations'.¹ But he does allow in mitigation the modern process by which many participles acquire a prepositional or adverbial force, and no longer need 'the prop of a noun to cling to'. Familiar examples are 'considering', 'talking of', 'granting', 'touching', 'failing', 'allowing for', 'owing to', 'concerning'.² Any one of these, as well as several others, may introduce a phrase that is syntactically independent of a noun or pronoun in the main sentence, on the pattern of the absolute phrase (see below). It follows that there are borderline cases; and since this is so, there would seem to be some justification for any loosely related participle whose phrase is more adverbial than adjectival in function. So older usage and a modern syntactical development conspire to excuse, if not quite to justify, the speaker or the writer who without obvious ambiguity defies the law.

The emphasis in the preceding paragraphs and illustrations has been on the present participle phrase, mainly because it is commoner than the phrase introduced by the past participle, whether introductory or in the body of the sentence. It is subject, though not to the same degree, to the same irregularities as the phrase containing the present participle. On that point no more need be said here. But one interesting modern development must be briefly recorded. This is the reporter's or interviewer's past participle phrase standing like a sentry posted in advance (to adopt a phrase of Fowler) at

¹ In so weighty a pronouncement this construction and the punctuation seem oddly loose.

² The older use with an introductory *as* is interesting: 'As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes'.

the beginning of a sentence, as illustrated in the following quotations from a daily newspaper:

Told that the number of weapons found in their possession led the superintendent to believe they had been stolen, Mr X said . . .

Questioned about the shares, he agreed . . .

Syntactically the construction is quite normal; and its very succinctness is a recommendation. The only trouble is that the journalists so run it to death that it tends to become a piece of stylistic jargon. But Fowler's petulant condemnation of it is justifiable only on that ground. When it is used discreetly, in appropriate contexts, it is to be welcomed rather than frowned upon.

The participles also occur in what is generally known as the absolute phrase. In this construction they qualify a noun or pronoun inside the phrase itself; that is, the construction of the phrase is 'untied'¹ from the rest of the sentence. It is an imitation of the Latin construction in which both the noun (or pronoun) and the participle were put in the ablative case, forming an adverb phrase modifying the main verb:

cristam adverso curru quatit aura volentem.

His chariot being turned towards it, the breeze tosses his flying crest.

But it did not come into English as a patent Latinism during the Renaissance period, when the classical influence was at its height. Its history goes back to Old English times; for King Alfred and other translators from the Latin naturally followed, to some extent, the pattern of their original. Having an indirect or dative case form they used that, where Latin had the ablative:

pealh wæpre ic mynegie þe, gif þu, fultumiendum Gode, becmst to ðinum ærran wurðmynte, þæt þu ne forgite minne þearfendlican gegirlan.

¹ Lat. *absolvo*, *absolutus*, 'untie', 'loose'

Nevertheless I admonish thee [that] if thou, *God helping*, comest back to thy former honour, thou wilt not forget my poor garment.

Later, the participle and the noun lost their inflection, and even an inflected pronoun reverted to its subject form, so that in modern English we have not a dative but a nominative absolute phrase. Wyclif has it frequently, as a literal translation of the ablative absolute in the Latin of the Vulgate:

And anoon, *the nettis forsaken*, thei sueden [followed] him.

The which thing herd, his disciples camen . . .

And he reride hir vp, *the bond of hir taken*.

It is common in the *Book of the Common Prayer* (1549):

that, *thou being our ruler and guyde*, we may so passe through thinges temporall, that we fynally lose not the thinges eternall.

Then shalbe said daiely through the yere the praiers folowing, *all devoutely kneelyng*.

Shakespeare used it frequently, sometimes in an elliptical construction without the participle:

with this she fell distract,

And, *her attendants absent*, swallowed fire.

And, indeed, the absolute phrase has always had, and still has, a place in English, as a variant of the adverb clause of time and circumstance. Onions calls it a 'distinctly alien' construction, but says that 'Restoration times saw [it] naturalised and made a part of the syntax of the language'. That it belonged to the colloquial language is shown by the following quotation from the evidence in a court case (1715) of one Mary Lee: 'But as for this Jenny Johnson the prisoner, she coming sometimes for a quartern to the same shop that I made use of, we now and then had a dish of tea together'.¹ Curiously enough, it survives in modern speech, chiefly in a

¹ Quoted from the *Oxford Book of English Talk*.

tag or end phrase, with the object form of the pronoun – that is, as an accusative absolute: ‘I gave up the job, him being such a hard master’, ‘It was hard to pay my way, me being out of work’. All the same in Modern English it has a somewhat conscious literary air. We may say ‘The match being over early, we decided to go to the theatre’; but it would be more natural, and therefore more idiomatic, to say ‘As the match was over early, we decided to go to the theatre’. In other words, the construction, except in the corrupt usage mentioned above, does not belong to colloquial English. Yet, oddly enough, it has fashioned a number of standard idiomatic phrases: ‘weather permitting’, ‘other things being equal’, ‘all told [i.e. counted]’, ‘all things considered’, ‘granted a fine day’, ‘provided everything is ready’ and some others.

Jespersen (*Essentials*) notes an extension of the construction in which (as already noted in Shakespeare) the participle itself is not expressed, and gives as an example ‘She stood silent, her head slightly on one side’.¹ He also points out the interesting fact that the quasi-prepositional force of certain participles (*during*, *pending*, *notwithstanding*) derives from the absolute construction. ‘Notwithstanding his educational drawbacks, he is doing the job well’ may be re-expressed, and indeed sometimes is in legal jargon, ‘His educational drawbacks notwithstanding’ where *notwithstanding* is a participle qualifying *drawbacks* in the absolute phrase. The construction, therefore, though characteristic in the main of deliberate literary style, has had association with and an interesting impact on the idiomatic and colloquial language.

The Old English use of the infinitive in a prepositional phrase gave rise to the modern association of the uninflected infinitive form with the preposition *to*, as already explained on p. 31. Out of it arose what is termed today the adjectival infinitive, the *to* losing its prepositional force and being incorporated, as it were, in the verb phrase.² Thus in the

¹ In modern colloquial English such a phrase is more usually introduced by *with*.

² An example, by the way, of a natural use of the absolute phrase. See p. 72.

modern 'It was fair to look upon', literally translating the Old English 'heo wæs fæger an to locianne', the phrase 'to look upon' is regarded as the infinitive qualifying *it*. So also in such expressions as 'There is much *to do*', 'We have a long way *to go*', 'a house *to let*', and, with the rather more common passive infinitive, 'There are some interesting sights to be seen', 'There is much to be done'.

The adverbial infinitive of purpose came later, and has a somewhat different history. At first, in Middle English, the *to* phrase followed the preposition *for*. Wyclif (1380) has 'and thei wenten out, for to see what was don', and the Authorised Version 'What went ye out for to see?' Here we have clearly the integration of the *to* in the verb form (*to see*, OE *seon*), and the phrasal infinitive is object of a preposition (*for*). But the *for* came to be dropped at will. Thus the Authorised Version also has 'What went ye out into the wilderness to see?'; and this is the normal construction in Modern English, where the *to*, though it is, or seems to be, part of the verb, retains something of its old prepositional force. There was, however, another later development. The old *for* has been replaced by the prepositional phrase 'in order to', and the uninflected verb form following it appears to exist as an infinitive in its own right: 'I came in order to settle the business', not 'in order to *to settle*'. There is a parallel in the French 'Il faut manger pour vivre', where the preposition *pour* governs the verb form with the characteristic infinitive ending. Here English has either 'We must eat in order to *live*' or 'We must eat *to live*'. In the first sentence *live* is the infinitive governed by the compound preposition *in order to*; in the second the preposition *to* has been swallowed up in the verb form (*to live*). Again, French provides a parallel in the normal construction after verbs of motion 'Je suis venu voir mon frère', where the infinitive (*voir*) stands alone, without a preposition, and is represented in English by the phrasal infinitive (*to see*), 'I have come to see my brother'. Bishop Lowth (*Short Introduction to English Grammar*) notes a special idiomatic use of a kind of infinitive of purpose. 'The Infinitive Mode', he says, 'is often made Absolute, or used

independently of the rest of the Sentence; supplying the place of the Conjunction *that* with the Subjunctive Mode: as "to confess the truth, I was in fault" '. Presumably the alternative construction he suggests would be 'That I may confess—'.

The noun force of the infinitive as object is implicit in the compound tenses (p. 38), and was apparent in certain Old English constructions which have since disappeared, like *Ælfred bateð gretan Wærferð*, 'Alfred commands to greet Wærferth' and *He bine feallan let*, 'He hindered him to fall'. Ben Jonson (*The English Grammar*) says 'When two verbes meet together, whereof one is governed by the other, the latter is put in the infinite, and that with this signe *to*, cumming betweene: as, *Good men ought to joyne together in good things*. But, *will, doe, may, can, shall, dare* (when it is in-Transitive), *must*, and *lett*, when it signifieth a sufferance, receive not the signe. This signe set before an infinite, not govern'd of a verb, changeth it into the nature of a nounce'. This use of the infinitive as noun, chiefly subject or object, is common enough: 'To err is human', 'I forgot to bring the book', 'We asked him to attend the meeting'. Wyclif has an intermediate construction in which the infinitive is governed by *for*, 'And thei bygunnen for to preie him', but he also uses the phrasal infinitive directly after the verb, 'Thei bigunnen to bere aboute in beddis hem that hadden hem yuele'. The *for* construction survives, partly owing to the example of Wyclif, in the Authorised Version.

A late mediæval development was the use of the phrasal infinitive *to be* with a noun after verbs like *think*, *consider*, on the pattern of the Latin accusative and infinitive: 'I consider him to be a good man'. Here noun and infinitive together make a phrasal object after *consider*; but in normal Modern English the infinitive is omitted, and the noun becomes a simple object with an objective complement: 'I consider him a good man'.

Even as a noun, however, the infinitive occurs in its simple form without the *to* (as in the compound tenses) after certain verbs, prepositions, and conjunctions, though in such constructions its noun force is usually obscured. We have, for

example, 'I heard him *go*', 'I dared not *do* it', 'I made him *come* with me', 'I could not but *sympathise* with him', 'I would die rather than *yield*'. *Help* is an interesting example of a verb that may have both constructions – 'I helped him to mend his bicycle', 'I helped him mend his bicycle'. Some modern purists have objected to the omission of the *to* after *help*; but at least one of the older grammarians gives it as a verb that is followed directly by the infinitive form, without *to*. SOED quotes an example from Matthew Arnold: 'I would fain stay and help thee tend him'.

As we have already seen (p. 31), our modern verbal noun in *-ing* takes its form from the Old English abstract noun in *-ung*. Such pure nouns still, of course, exist in the language – *bunting*, *spelling*, *reading*, *writing*, and the like. But it is easy to see how, being closely related to a verb form, they themselves came to have a verbal function. It is implicit even in the simple Old English phrasal construction 'on smeauge [searching] and on leornunge', which gave us the model for our continuous tenses, and survives in such archaisms as 'a-hunting' (= on hunting). But the verbal function becomes real in 'and he ȝaue to hem power of heelynge siknessis' (Wyclif), where *beelynge* is a noun governed by a preposition and also a verb having its own object (*siknessis*). So, in 'Reading maketh a full man', *reading* is the pure noun, but in 'He wasted his time in reading comics' it is both noun and verb. There was, however, and still is, an intermediate stage, in which the *-ing* form, originally an unqualified abstract noun, is qualified by the definite article and followed by *of* – 'of the making of books there is no end'. Here the word *making* has no syntactical verbal force at all. But it would be possible and indeed idiomatic in Modern English to re-express that sentence in this way 'There is no end of making books', where *making* has slipped over, as it were, into its verbal use. Today both constructions exist. We can say 'The learning of Latin is to be recommended' and 'Learning Latin is a difficult business'; between them there is that slight and subtle difference of function which is a matter of idiom rather than of syntax and grammar.

In earlier English there was a construction in which the *of* after the verbal noun was omitted. Swift has, for example, 'I confess I owe the preserving my eyes to my own rashness', where Modern English would have 'the preserving of'. Shakespeare's 'You need not fear the having any of these lords' represents an interesting step to the modern construction with the pure (transitive) noun-verb: 'You need not fear having any of these lords'. Lindley Murray (1795) has an interesting note on this: 'Participles¹ are sometimes governed by the article; for the present participle, with the definite article *the* before it, becomes a substantive, and must have the preposition *of* after it: as, "These are the rules of grammar, by the observing of which, you may avoid mistakes." It would not be proper to say "by the observing which;"² nor, "by observing of which;" but the phrase without either article or preposition, would be right: as, "by observing which"'. Ellipsis has taken us one step further. The obsolescent, almost obsolete, 'The cake was a long time in the baking' became 'the cake was a long time in (or a-) baking' and finally 'The cake was a long time baking', where the force of the verb-noun (*baking*) is obscured by the loss of the preposition.

This obscuring of the noun element in the *-ing* form has led to a construction on which much pedantic ink has been spilt. In the sentence

But by the noise increasing, I knew their numbers were greater (Swift)

it is clear that if *increasing* is syntactically a noun governed by the preposition *by*, noise should be possessive (*noise's*), qualifying it, or the *the . . . of* construction ('by the increasing of the noise') should be used. And, in fact, this construction with the logical possessive was, and is, common in English. Bunyan has, for example, 'The name of the Mayor, that was of Diabolus's making,² was the Lord Lustings'. Jane Austen is on the whole a stickler for the usage:

¹ See note on p. 79.

² Note the punctuation: see p. 155.

Mr Robinson's asking him how he liked our Meryton assemblies and his answering immediately to the last question

On Miss Lucas's persevering . . .

Our modern practice is a characteristic compromise. If, as in the Swift quotation, the possessive form would be awkward, we avoid it, as Swift himself does; if it is natural and easily manageable, as when the qualifying word is a pronoun, we tend to keep it: 'I had not heard of his going'. Nevertheless, 'I had not heard of him going' is common, especially in speech; indeed, it is so well established that it is useless to argue against it. What happens syntactically when we drop the possessive is a matter for speculation; in general, we may say that the *-ing* form loses most of its noun force and gravitates towards a present participle, with the function of an adjective.¹

Since the infinitive and the verbal noun² are both noun forms, there is a close relationship between them. Both, for example, may be used as subject of the sentence or object of the verb:

To see is to believe
Seeing is believing

¹ Fowler coined for it the name 'fused participle', and was so proud of his invention that he wrote a singularly obtuse article on it in *Modern English Usage*. This article, together with Jespersen's answer to it (S.P.E. Tract 25) and Partridge's comments in *Usage and Abuse*, is dealt with on p. 129 ff.

² I have used this general term throughout this section for the form in *-ing* which has both noun and verb force. In formal grammar books the following terms are commonly used, following the recommendations of the Report on Grammatical Terminology:

Gerund when the verb force is syntactically recognisable ('I enjoy watching cricket', 'I spent my time in reading a thriller').

Verbal Noun when the verb force is not syntactically recognisable, as in the 'the . . . -ing of' construction.

Gerundial Adjective when the gerund is attributive ('running track', 'swimming bath').

I love *to watch* the trains go by
 I love *watching* the trains go by.

As always, however, the difference in syntactical construction implies a subtle, almost imperceptible, difference in meaning. The two sentences in each of the pairs given are almost, but not quite, synonymous; the use of one or the other would depend upon certain indefinable factors of time and emphasis in the mind of the speaker or writer.

It is interesting to note that in the second pair the non-phrasal infinitive *go* could be replaced – again with a slight change of meaning – by the *-ing* form (*going*). And here arises a point that has some bearing on the so-called fused participle, discussed above. Fowler himself would scarcely argue that in this construction, or in the parallel ‘I heard him singing’, the noun or pronoun should be possessive (*trains’*, *his*). It is not easy to determine the actual function of the *-ing* form here. The corresponding infinitive (*go*, *sing*) is associated with the noun or pronoun very much in the manner of the accusative and infinitive (p. 76); and the noun + the verbal part may be considered a single phrase unit (‘trains go’, ‘trains going’) as object of the verb; or *going*, *singing* may be elliptical for the older ‘on going’, ‘on singing’ later weakened as ‘a-going’, ‘a-singing’; or the *-ing* forms may be regarded as simple participles qualifying the noun or pronoun. As far as Modern English is concerned, the question is an academic one; but the usages reflect the complicated historical development of the infinitive, participle, and noun-verb forms. Abbott, for example (*Shakespearian Grammar* 93), points out that in mediæval texts the inflected infinitive after *to* (see p. 31), as in *to singenne*, gave rise to similar constructions with the present participle (*to singende*) and the noun in *-ing* (*to singinge*).

Since by its very nature the phrasal infinitive cannot normally follow a preposition (but see p. 75), in that construction the verbal noun does duty for it, as an ordinary noun in a prepositional phrase – ‘I was interested in finding the true facts’. Here, however, by ellipsis the infinitive is also

used, though again with a slightly different meaning – ‘I was interested to find out’ for ‘in to find’. We have an example of this kind of development in the modern use of the verb *aim*. Just as *interest* is idiomatically followed by *in*, so is *aim* followed by *at*, as in ‘I aimed at getting through the examination’. But largely owing to American influence, the elliptical construction with the infinitive, ‘I aimed to pass the examination’, has now become a recognised alternative. American dictionaries give it as the only construction.

We have seen (p. 74) that the infinitive may have adjectival force. But it cannot be attributive in the ordinary sense – that is, as a simple epithet adjective. The verbal noun, however, like any other noun, is often used attributively, as in ‘eating apple’, ‘running track’, that is, ‘an apple *for eating*’, ‘a track *for running*’.¹ This construction is comparatively modern, but it goes back to those compound forms in Old English which have already been noted (p. 47) in connection with the attributive use of the noun, as, for example, *leornungcniht*, a scholar, a man (‘knight’) of or devoted to learning.

In this survey of the various infinite parts of the verb and their use we have recognised the fact that these verbals, to use a convenient all-embracing term, may be themselves simple nouns, adjectives, adverbs, or even prepositions, and that they may also occur in word-groups of phrases having the function of noun, adjective, or adverb. That is no more than to say that they are an important element in sentence building, taking their place with the ordinary parts of speech and the simple prepositional phrase in the fundamental pattern of subject and predicate.

¹ But note that in ‘a running stream’ *running* is an ordinary participle.

Chapter IV

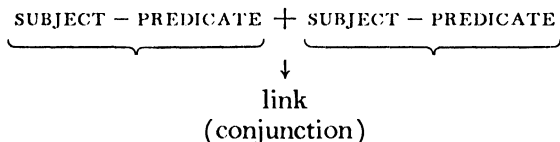


SENTENCE PATTERNS

(I)

*The little dog laughed to see such fun,
And the cow jumped over the moon.*

THERE we have the second step in sentence building – the linking together of two subject-predicate units, with their qualifying and modifying words and phrases, in a single sentence. The pattern is



Both units – or clauses, as it is convenient and customary to call them – are of equal weight or value. One statement (or question or command, as the case may be) is added to another by means of the plus sign, *and*. The sentence of linked clauses is characteristic of Old English narrative prose like that of the *Chronicle*:

871. Her cuom se here to Readingum on Westseaxe, ond þæs ymb iii niht ridon ii eorlas up. þa gemette hie Æpelwulf aldorman on Englafelda, ond him þær wip gefeaht ond sigc nam. þæs ymb ii niht Æpered cyning ond Ælfred his broþur þær micle fierd to Readingum gelæddon, ond wip þone here gefuhton; ond þær wæs micel wæl geslægen on gehwæpre hond, ond Æpelwulf aldorman wearþ ofslægen;

ond þa Deniscan ahton wælstowe gewald. Ond þæs ymb
 iiii niht gefeaht Æþered cyning ond Ælfred his broþur-wip
 alne þone here on Æscesdune; ond hie wærun on twæm
 gefylcum; on oþrum wæs¹ Bachsecg ond Halfdene þa
 hæþnan cyninges, ond on oþrum wæron þa eorlas.

871. In this year the raiding army came to Reading in
 Wessex, and about three nights afterwards two earls rode
 up. Then Aethelwulf the alderman met them in Englefield,
 and fought against them, and gained the victory. About
 four nights afterwards King Aethered and Alfred his brother
 led a great army to Reading, and fought against the raiders;
 and there was great slaughter on each side, and Aethelwulf
 the alderman was slain; and the Danes had mastery of the
 battlefield. And about four nights afterwards King Aethered
 and Alfred his brother fought against the whole raiding
 army at Ashdown; and they were in two detachments: in
 one was (were) Bachsecg and Halfdene the heathen kings,
 and in the other were the earls.

It forms the basic pattern of mediæval prose, and is most
 familiar to us in the Authorised Version of the Bible (1611),
 which in its general style harks back to older models, from
 Wyclif onwards:

And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came
 and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran
 toward the army to meet the Philistine. And David put his
 hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and
 smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk
 into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. So
 David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a
 stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there
 was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran,
 and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and
 drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off
 his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their
 champion was dead, they fled.

¹ For the number of this verb see p. 121.

But *and* and, more rarely *but* and *or*, were not, even in Old English, the only links. In other words, the clauses that made up a sentence were not always of equal value; like the word or the phrase, they could act as qualifiers or modifiers – that is, as adjectives or adverbs – and also as noun equivalents. Here, for example, is a sentence from Alfred's Preface to his translation of Pope Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*:

Da ic þa gemunde hu sio lar Lædengeðeodes ær ðysum oðfeallen wæs geond Angelcynn ond ðeah monege cuðon Englisc gewrit arædan, þa ongan ic, ongemang oðrum mislicum ond monigfaldum bisgum ðisses kynerices, þa boc wendan in Englisc þa is genemned in Læden Pastoralis ond on Englisc Hirdeboc, hwilum word by worde, hwilum andgit of andgite, swæswæ ic hie geleornode æt Plegmunde minum ærcebiscepe ond æt Assere minum biscepe ond æt Grimbolde minum mæssepreoste ond æt Johanne minum mæssepreoste.

When I remembered how the learning of Latin had declined throughout England and yet many men could read English writing, I began, among the various and manifold duties of this realm, to render into English the book which is called in Latin *Pastoralis* and in English (*Shep*)*herd-book*, sometimes word for word, sometimes sense for sense, just as I learnt it from Plegmund my archbishop and from Assere my bishop and from Grimbold my mass-priest and from John my mass-priest.

Now in construction that is surprisingly modern. It contains two adverb clauses, a double noun clause as object of the verb *remembered*, and an adjective clause qualifying the noun *book*. And these clauses are not merely linked together, but placed in a proper relationship to one another as well as to the basic or main clause ('I began to render—') with its modifying phrases. The general shape of the complex (or 'inter-folded') sentence is already there.

Some of the Old English subordinating conjunctions are

simple, like *gif* ('if'), *þeab* ('though') and *þæt* introducing a noun clause of indirect statement. But many of them are compounded of demonstrative forms, recognisable by the characteristic initial *þ*. Indeed the introductory *þæt* of the noun clause is itself in origin demonstrative; the actual clause stands in a kind of appositional relationship to it.¹ And this is significant, for it betokens in the earlier language a co-ordinate rather than a subordinate relationship between the clauses concerned. There is a good example in the sentence of King Alfred quoted above 'þa ic þa gemunde, þa ongan ic', where the reiterated *þa* ('then') of the first clause achieves a conjunctive force with the *þa* of the second clause: *then – then – then* equals *when – then*, or more simply *when*. We can see the construction more clearly in a sentence where there is no duplication of the *þa*: 'þa hie on Eastseaxe comon to hiora weorc, þa gegaderade sio laf micelne here onforan winter', 'When those in Essex came to their fort, then the remnant gathered together a big force before winter'. Though the modern rendering is *When – then*, the basic construction is a parallel one: *Then – then*.

Similarly *þær* ('there') is used not only as an adverb, as in Modern English, but also as a pure conjunction (= 'where'): 'ond þone æþeling on þære byrig metton *þær* se cyning ofslægen læg', 'and they met the atheling in the city where the king lay slain'. Sometimes a demonstrative adverb was combined with the conjunctive particle *þe*, also demonstrative in origin, to make a conjunction. Thus *þæs* is an adverbial possessive meaning 'after this' or 'afterwards', but *þæsþe* is conjunctive: 'Ond ymb ii gear *þæsþe* he of Francum com he gefor', 'And about two years after he came from France he died'. It is easy to trace in this use of the demonstrative adverb-conjunction the progress from the construction with two syntactically independent sentences to that in which they are placed in syntactical relationship, one subordinate to the other:

¹ The conjunction *that* is only the pronoun *that* used in a particular way. 'I believe that he is guilty' is a modification of 'I believe that; he is guilty'. Sonnenschein – *New English Grammar*

They met the atheling in the city. There the king lay slain.

They met the atheling in the city WHERE the king lay slain.

Already in Old English the forms *bwær*, *bwon*, *bwæþer* had been used as conjunctions introducing indirect questions. But the characteristic *bw-* (Modern English *wb-*) forms of the interrogative did not replace the demonstrative (*p-*, *tb-*) forms as conjunctions introducing adverb or adjective clauses until the early mediæval period. In the modern language the distinction is outward and visible: speaking generally, *tb-* is a sign of the demonstrative and the adverb, *wb-* of the relative and the conjunction.

The reference in the previous paragraph to adjective clauses and the relative jumps ahead a little. We have already seen (p. 23) that Old English had the fully declined demonstrative (*se*, *seo*, *þæt*) and the indeclinable demonstrative particle *þe* as conjunctions – that is, in a relative function:

he wolde adræfan anne æpeling *se* was Cyneheard haten.

he would drive back an atheling *who* was called Cyneheard.

þonne todælað hi his feoh *þæt* þær to lafe bið.

Then they share out his property *which* is left.

þæs cyninges þegnas *þe* him bæftan wærun.

the King's thanes *who* were behind him.

Again, the demonstrative construction, with consecutive simple sentences, is implicit:

He would drive back an atheling: he was called Cyneheard.

He would drive back an atheling WHO was called Cyneheard.

Soon after the Old English period, however, the interrogative pronoun *bwilc*, ('which') was adopted as a relative, and the old interrogative adverbs *bwær*, *bwon*, corresponding to the old demonstrative forms in *p-* (*þær*, *þa*, *þonne*) became

the normal conjunctions. Meanwhile, the particle *þe* disappeared, and the indeclinable demonstrative *þæt* retained the function of the relative, as it does today. In mediæval English, then, the two normal forms of the relative are *that* and *which(e)*:

Ther was a child of Rome *that* on a time went with his fader *whiche* was a senatour into the chambre where as they helde their counceyll. (Caxton)

Now speke we of the fayre mayden of Astolat, *that* made suche sorowe daye and nyght that she never slepte. (Malory)

The other form of the interrogative, in its four cases, *hwā*, *hwone*, *hwæs*, *hwæm*, was adopted as a relative somewhat later. It keeps a modified inflection in Modern English – *who* (subject), *whom* (object), *whose* (possessive) – and is restricted to a personal (or, more rarely, personified) antecedent. The use of *which* with a personal antecedent in the Authorised Version (as, for example, at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer) is a reminder of the comparatively late adoption of the *who* form – though we must remember, as has already been pointed out, that the Authorised Version itself (1611) turns back to one earlier idiom.¹

The result of all this is a somewhat tangled syntax of the relative pronoun in modern usage. We have three forms – the indeclinable *that*, *which* (subject and object), and *who*, declined as above. *That* is an all-purpose pronoun; it may have a personal or an impersonal antecedent. We may say 'The man that lives next door', and 'The book that I left on the table'. It cannot be immediately preceded by a preposition,

¹ Addison has a curious note on the subject (*Guardian*, 160): 'In our management of the relatives, *who*, *which*, *that*, it may be a good general rule, to apply *who* to persons; *which*, to things; and *that*, to things chiefly. But, when the antecedent is the *second* person, not only *that*, but *which*, is used for *who*, by our best writers'. He says of the *which* at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer that it is used 'to avoid the ill effect, which the open vowels – who art – would have on the ear',

but may have a preposition following it, usually at the end of a sentence: 'The room that I slept in' (see also p. 114). But here the pronoun is, in fact, usually omitted, according to the principles outlined later in this chapter.

Up to Elizabethan times *that* was the common relative with a personal antecedent in the nominative case; but for the oblique cases *whom* and *whose* were commonly used. About that time, however, the *wh-* forms established themselves, to the exclusion of *that*, only to be ousted again by *that* in the later seventeenth century. But once more there was a swift reaction. It is noteworthy that in his famous revision of the *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (see p. 114) Dryden in the edition of 1684 several times substituted *who* for the *that* of 1668. Early in the next century Steele devoted part of a *Spectator* paper to the subject:

To Mr Spectator

The humble petition of **WHO** and **WHICH**
Sheweth

That your Petitioners being in a forlorn and destitute Condition, know not to whom we should apply ourselves for Relief, because there is hardly any Man alive who hath not injured us. . . . We are descended of ancient Families, and kept up our Dignity and Honour many Years, till the Jack-sprat **THAT** supplanted us. . . . Senates themselves, the Guardians of *British* liberty, have degraded us, and preferred **THAT** to us; and yet no Decree was ever given against us. In the very Acts of Parliament, in which the utmost Right should be done to every *Body*, *word*, and *Thing*, we find ourselves often either not used, or used one instead of another. In the first and best Prayer Children are taught, they learn to misuse us: *Our Father* **WHICH** *art in Heaven*, should be *Our Father* **WHO** *art in Heaven*. . . .

Today we prefer the *who* forms with a personal, and hover between *which* and *that* with an impersonal, antecedent. But between *that* and *which* the choice is still open. Fowler (*Modern English Usage*) observes, with some truth, that 'the propor-

tion of *thats* to *whichs* is far higher in speech than in writing'; and in an elaborate article tries to establish a rule by which *that* is reserved for the defining and *which* for the non-defining relative clause. This distinction, which was not recognised in writing until comparatively recent times (see p. 155), requires a word of explanation. In the sentence 'The man who lives next door to me is an engine driver', the *who* clause is defining; it 'identifies the person or thing meant by limiting the denotation of the antecedent' (Fowler). But in the sentence 'Mr Smith, who lives next door to me, is an engine driver', the *who* clause is non-defining or parenthetical. Syntactically, it is a co-ordinate, not a true subordinate clause: 'Mr Smith lives next door to me; (and, by the way) he is an engine driver'. Fowler's argument is that, where the antecedents are appropriate, *that* should be used in the first type, and *which*, following a comma, in the second.

But, as he admits, there are certain difficulties owing in the main to a peculiarity of *that* already mentioned – its refusal to be directly preceded by a preposition. He might have added that in a sentence already overloaded with *th-* words, *the*, *this*, *those*, and *that* itself in its other functions, an additional relative *that* will only emphasise the cacophony, and that here therefore *which* is to be preferred even when the clause is defining. Some writers do, in fact, consciously or unconsciously, follow Fowler's rule as far as possible; others use *that* or *which* as the spirit moves them. It cannot be said that there is any real consistency in modern usage. After all, since the personal *who* is both defining and non-defining, the distinction between *that* and *which* as impersonal relatives is apt to be artificial; though it must be admitted that as both forms exist it would seem convenient to allot to each its appointed task. But unfortunately – or fortunately – the genius of language is not a tidy one; and here, as elsewhere, the intuition of the speaker or writer, prompted by certain broad, but not detailed, principles is the final arbiter. Even Cobbett allowed, for once, the exercise of discretion. '*Which*, as a relative pronoun,' he says, 'is applied to irrational beings only, and, as to those beings, it may be employed indifferently

with *that*, except in the cases where the relative comes directly after a *verb* or a preposition in the manner just spoken of'. His examples are 'the man to *whom*' not 'to *that*' and 'having defeated *whom*', not *that*. And there is sound sense in what he says, though his conclusion is not altogether sound for really modern usage. Eric Partridge (*Usage and Abusage*), following Onions (*Advanced English Syntax*) seems to go even farther than Fowler himself, making some not readily understandable distinction between *that* (personal) and *who* in their defining function. In this Onions and Partridge had been anticipated by Alexander Bain, who in his *English Grammar* (1863) has the following note: 'The following sentences are ambiguous under the modern system of using *who* for both [i.e. defining and non-defining] purposes: "I met the boatman who took me across the ferry". If *who* is the proper relative here, the meaning is "I met the boatman, and he took me across", it being supposed that the boatman is known. But if there be several boatmen, and I wish to indicate one in particular by the circumstance that he had taken me across the ferry, I should use *that*'. Fowler (MEU) is cautious about *that* for *who* in defining clauses, though he appears to think it would be desirable. Hugh Sykes Davies (*Grammar Without Tears*), in his anxiety to get rid of surviving inflections, goes so far as to say that '*that* and *which* should always be used in preference to any other relative pronoun, if their use does not sound outright wrong to the user'. But any ambiguity in this matter of defining or non-defining is, in fact, avoided (as it was not formerly – see p. 155) by our modern system of punctuation. Abbott (*Shakespearian Grammar*) classifies, as far as possible, the Elizabethan uses, which conform in some respects, but by no means all, to those of today.

In Modern English the relative pronoun is frequently omitted, but only when it is defining, and is neither subject of its own clause nor in the inflected possessive form (*whose*). We can say, that is, 'The man I saw yesterday', 'The book I was reading', 'The train I usually travel in (or on)'. Shakespeare and other early writers sometimes omitted it even as a nominative, as in 'I have a mind presages me such thrift'.

But this omission always occurred rather in verse than in prose. Today in standard English the relative as subject is always expressed, except by certain modern poets, who, having so much to say and so little time or space to say it in, are impatient of such trifles as connectives. Bridges, for example, notes as an important factor in the obscurity of G. M. Hopkins's poems 'his habitual omission of the relative pronoun as when he writes "O Hero savest" for "O Hero that savest"'. Omission of the relative, whether poetic and abnormal or according to modern idiom, dates back to mediæval times;¹ it is an important element in elliptical construction, which is dealt with in Chapter IV. Bishop Lowth, however, in his Grammar justly notes how the omission of the relative may lead to the erroneous omission of the preposition which should govern it. He gives as examples 'in the temper of mind he was then' (*Spectator* 549) and 'in the posture I lay' (*Gulliver's Travels*), and remarks: 'In these and the like Phrases, there is an Ellipsis both of the Relative and the Preposition; which were much better supplied'. This, however, betrays him into a far more doubtful pronouncement: 'In general, the omission of the Relative seems to be too much indulged² in the familiar style; it is ungraceful, in the serious; and of whatever kind the style be, it is apt to be attended with obscurity and ambiguity'.

The use of the inflected possessive *whose*³ with an impersonal antecedent has had a curious history. Johnson says '*Whose* is rather the poetical than regular genitive of *which*', giving a quotation from *Paradise Lost*, 'that forbidden fruit whose

¹ See the passage from Mandeville, p. 96.

² It is curious here that Lowth himself omits the adverb particle of the phrasal verb 'indulge in'. But he is probably using *indulge* in this sense as an ordinary simple transitive verb, as occasionally in Modern English.

³ Always adjectival. Where the function of the pronoun is not possessive we always use the phrase 'of whom/which', where *of* is equivalent to the French *de*: 'The man of whom I was speaking', or, more idiomatically (see p. 114), with omission of *whom*: 'The man I was speaking of'.

mortal taste'; and this is borne out by Abbott's examples from Shakespeare. Lindley Murray, writing some thirty years later, is guarded: 'The word *whose* begins likewise to be restricted to persons; yet it is not done so generally, but that good writers, even in prose, use it when speaking of things. The construction is not, however, generally pleasing'. Cobbett, a trifle later, is more definite: '*Who*, *whose*, and *whom* cannot be used correctly as relatives to any nouns, or pronouns, which do not represent *men*, *women* or *children*'.¹ It is not correct to say, the horse, or the dog, or the tree . . . *whose* colour was such and such'. Murray's note seems to imply a contemporary pedantic reaction against what was already becoming established usage. It is certain, however, that the inanimate *whose* has had to fight for its footing. Nesfield, a century after Murray and Cobbett, is as uncompromising as Cobbett himself; and as late as 1933 the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, following the *OED*, says, with a magnificent disregard for common usage, '*whose* . . . in ref. to things now usu. replaced by *of which*, exc. where this would produce an intolerably clumsy form'. Luckily, Fowler himself came to the rescue: 'Let us, in the name of common sense, prohibit the prohibition of *whose* inanimate; good writing is surely difficult enough without the forbidding of things that have historical grammar, & present intelligibility, & obvious convenience, on their side, & lack only – starch'. And all the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer.

Some earlier uses of the relative and relative conjunctions now lost to English are interesting:

- (i) *which* was often (a) qualified by the definite article and (b) followed by a redundant *that*:

the which to do we require you to desyre him

¹ On this point Murray, writing before Cobbett, has an odd observation: 'We hardly consider little children as persons, because that term gives us the idea of reason or reflection: therefore the application of the personal relative *who* seems to be harsh: "A child *who*". A little later Lowth has the note: '*whose* is by some authors made the Possessive Case of *which*, and applied to things as well as persons; I think improperly'. He gives examples from Dryden and Addison.

the whiche (rel. adj.) wordes dyuerse other lordes that
were there present sustayned and maynteyned

Lord Berners' Translation of Froissart's *Chronicles*

Paraurenture in thilke large book

Which that men clepe the heuen

Chaucer: *Man of Lawes Tale*

Similarly, with the relative adverbial conjunctions and others,
like *if* and *though*:

Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote

Chaucer: *Prologue*

So also the demonstrative adverb, especially *there*, was made
conjunctive by the addition of *as*:

And eek as loude as dooth the chapel-belle

Ther as this lord was keper of the celle.¹

Chaucer: *Prologue*

This *as* was also frequently added to relative conjunctions –
'when as' (= *when*) and 'where as' (= *where*). *Whereas*
(one word) is still current, but with a different connotation
(= *but*, 'on the other hand'), introducing a contrasting state-
ment, or, in formal, especially legal, English standing for
'seeing that'.

(ii) *which* was frequently used as a relative adjective, some-
times preceded by *the*, as in the second example under (i)
above:

I have . . . emprysed to enprynte a book . . . after a cotype
unto me delyverd, whiche cotype Syr Thomas Malorye dyd
take oute of certeyn bookes of Frensshe – Caxton.

In this construction the *which* clause was commonly detached
– that is, it occurred as a separate sentence, related in sense
but not syntactically to what had gone before – so that the
which had the force of a demonstrative pronoun:

¹ Robinson places a full stop after *chapel-belle*, making the *ther as*
clause introductory to the next sentence. But this does not invalidate
the example.

But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory – *Authorised Version*

Modern English would probably omit the noun (*copye*) in the Caxton sentence, making *which* a pure relative pronoun, or use a demonstrative (*this*) following a semi-colon. The *which* of the detached sentence in the quotation from the Authorised Version¹ it would replace by the demonstrative adjective *these*, ('These things are an allegory'), or, as in Moffatt, by a singular demonstrative pronoun – 'This is an allegory'.

(iii) *which* was sometimes used in an absolute phrase, a construction lost to Modern English:

The mother of those two young men was to bee drawne to the temple by a yoke of bullocks, which when the howre came being strayed and gone out of the way, the two young youtnes yoked themselves – xvi c. Translation of Herodotus.

We should use *and* + the demonstrative:

and, when the hour came, these being strayed and out of the way, the two young youtnes . . .

It occurs, however, as late as Goldsmith: 'I answered the stranger's caresses at first with reserve; which my friend perceiving, instantly let me into my visitant's trade and character'.²

(iv) *which* or *whom* as object often stood at the beginning of an adverb clause of time, or before the participle in a participle phrase:

which after they had done in the sight and view of the whole multitude in a lucky howre they dyed – from a xvi c. Translation of *Herodotus*

¹ It is interesting to note that the Revised Version (1883) retains the *which*: 'Which things contain an allegory'.

² The construction has led Goldsmith into the error of omitting the subject of the clause: 'which my friend perceiving, he instantly . . .'.

We had much work to come by the boat, which when we had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship –
Authorised Version

We should bring the relative away from its antecedent, and place it after the verb; or, more idiomatically, resolve *which* into *and it* as in the Revised Version rendering of the second sentence:

We were able, with difficulty, to secure the boat: and when they had hoisted it up, they used helps, undergirding the ship.

(v) In Old and Middle English the demonstrative *þæt*, *that(te)* was used as a demonstrative-relative:

He forseah to donne *þæt* heo hine bæd

He refused to do *what* she bade him

But wend haf funden *þat* þai soght

But thought they had found *what* they sought

This usage is familiar in Shakespeare:

All the conspirators, save only he,
 Did *that* they did in envy of great Caesar.

But *what*, originally an interrogative like the other *wh-* forms (see p. 86), replaced it in the later mediæval period, and is, of course, standard in Modern English. Addison has a curious and interesting note. He quotes the sentence, 'Should we continue in possession of what we have already made ourselves masters?', and comments: '*What* is properly, *that which*, but is here used for, *that of which*, to prevent the repetition of *of*'.

(vi) It is remarkable, and on the whole a pity, that demonstrative and relative adverb or adverb-conjunction forms compounded with a following preposition (*bereof*, *bereto*, *thereof*, *thereto*, *thereby*, *whereof*, *whereto*, *whereby*, and the rest) have dropped out of ordinary use, being relegated to the legal, formal, and poetic language. The Authorised Version retains

them, and for that reason they have a precarious survival in ecclesiastical jargon. In Modern English we resolve them into preposition demonstrative or relative ('of this', 'to it', 'by that', 'of which', etc.), with some loss of conciseness and frequently some damage to the rhythm of the sentence. *Therefore*, with a somewhat confused history and a specialised meaning, remains; so does *thereupon* and, less commonly, *wherefore*, and *whereupon*. But the others, unfortunately, belong to the lumber of legal – and, at times, facetious – language.

(II)

It is clear, then, that the basic mechanism of both the simple sentence and the complex sentence, with its system of phrases and dependent clauses, goes back to the earliest times. But since then new constructions have developed, and others fallen into disuse. Within a certain recognisable structural framework, there has been a gradual evolution of sentence patterns – an evolution that, since the language is living, is still going on. An illustration has already been given (p. 84) from classical Old English prose – King Alfred's own – where the construction, partly owing to the existence of inflection, is comparatively tight. But the mediæval sentence was usually loose, built upon the cumulative *and* model, with its phrases and clauses in haphazard relationship to one another. Here, by way of example, are three representative passages. The first is from Mandeville's *Travels* (1356), the second from Caxton's Epilogue to one of the first books ever printed in England, *The Recuyell of Troy* (1474), and the third from Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (1485).

And therfore alle the Iewes that dwellen in alle londes, lernen alle weys to speken Ebrew, in hope that whan the other Iewes schulle gon out, that thei may understonden hire speche, and to leden hem in-to Cristendom, for to destroye the cristene peple. For the Iewes seyn, that thei knowen wel, be hire prophecyes, that thei of Caspye schulle gon out and spreden thorgh-out alle the world; and that

the Cristene men schulle ben under hire subieccion, als longe as thei han ben in subieccion of hem. And if that zee wil wyte how that thei schulle fynden hire weye, after that I have herd seye, I schalle telle zou.

Thus ende I this book, whyche I haue translated after myn Auctor as nyghe as god hath syuen me connyng, to whom be gyuen the laude and preysyng. And for as moche as in the wrytyng of the same my penne is worn, myn hande wery and not stedfast, myn eyen dimmed with ouermuche lokyng on the whit paper, and my corage not so prone and redy to laboure as hit hath ben, and that age crepeth on me dayly and febleth all the bodye, and also because I haue promysid to dyuerce gentilmen and to my frendes to adresse to hem as hastily as I myght this sayd book, therfore I haue practysed and lerned at my grete charge and dispense to ordeyne this said book, in prynte after the maner and forme as ye may here see, and is not wretton with penne and ynke as other bokes ben, to thende that euey man may haue them attones: for all the bookes of this storye named the Recule of the Historyes of Troyes thus enpryntid as ye here see were begonne in oon day, and also fynysshid in oon day, whiche book I haue presented to my sayd redoubtid lady as afore is sayd. And she hath well acceptid hit, and largely rewarded me: wherfore I beseche almyghty God to rewarde her euerlastyng blisse after this lyf. Prayng her said grace and all them that shall rede this book not to desdaigne the symple and rude werke, nether to repleye agaynst the sayyng of the maters towchyd in this book.

And soo thenne the kyng took the quene by the hand & went thydder. Thenne the kynge made the barget to be holden fast; & thenne the kyng & and quene entred, with certayn knyghtes with them. And there he sawe the fayrest woman lye in a ryche bedde coverd unto her myddel with many ryche clothes, and alle was of clothe of gold, and she lay as though she had smyled. Thenne the quene aspyed a letter in her ryght hand, and told it to the kynge. Thenne

the kynge took it, and sayd, Now am I sure this letter wille telle what she was, and why she is come hydder. Soo thenne the kynge and the quene wente oute of the barget, and soo commaunded a certayne wayte upon the barget. And soo whan the kynge was come within his chamber he called many knyghtes aboute hym, & saide that he wold wete openly what was wryten within that letter. Thenne the kynge brake it, & made a clerke to rede hit.

Between them, these passages give a fair idea of the structure of the sentence in mediæval prose. In both Mandeville and Malory, a century afterwards, *and* is a dominant word, especially at the beginning of the sentence. One sentence follows on another in simple succession, with a conjunction as head-word representing a link in a chain, or (to jump to another metaphor) a single step in the chronological development of the narrative. The pattern, as has already been pointed out, is familiar to us in the Authorised Version. It is characteristic of unsophisticated child-like prose, in which one thing comes after another heralded by *and*, *then*, and an occasional *but*. Third-form exercise books are full of it.

Nevertheless, the complex sentence is also here. Sometimes it achieves a modern shape, especially with the noun clause in the predicate. The sentences beginning 'For the Iewes seyn' (Mandeville) and 'And soo whan the kynge was come' (Malory) are good examples. The relative clause, too, with *that* as the normal relative pronoun, performs its ordinary function. Mandeville, in 'after that I have herd seye' uses *that* as the demonstrative-relative (= *what* – see p. 95), but by Malory's time *what*, sometimes used also by Mandeville, had finally established itself – 'this letter wille telle what she was'. Other complications with the relative, outlined on pp. 114–16, were to come later.

In longer complex sentences the grammatical relationship of the various parts was apt to be loose. Mandeville's first sentence, for example, loses itself in the middle. He repeats *that* after the conjunctive phrase 'in hope that', and suddenly slips into what seems to be an infinitive phrase but may be

construed as an infinitive with *to*, parallel to *understonde* in a compound tense with the auxiliary *may*. Similarly, he thrée times introduces what promises to be a consecutive clause with *so* and ends it with an adverb clause of time: 'so longe he stalle mynen . . . til that', 'pursuen him so streyte . . . tille that', 'mynen so strongly tille that'.

The Caxton passage is in a somewhat different class, or at any rate on a different level. To begin with, it is not pure narrative, and is not therefore after the chronological link (*and . . . then . . . and*) pattern. The first sentence is normal, the only point worthy of note being that the second relative clause is somewhat removed from its antecedent. But the second is of a cumulative-complex (not to say complicated) type which is characteristic of mediæval prose when the writer ventures beyond ordinary links and simple subordinations. He never quite knows where to stop. The sentence unwinds itself like a ball of wool, getting every now and then into a tangle. Its various units or word-groups have only a loose and casual grammatical relationship, and yet – again to forget a previous metaphor – they make an easily recognisable and often beautiful pattern of sense. Here, for example, Caxton three times changes his construction in the involved series of adverb clauses that lead up to the main clause. He begins with *for as moche as*, passes on to *that*, and on again to *because*. In the second half of the sentence he has two clauses which have no clear grammatical connection – 'and is not wreton with penne and ynke', where a subject has to be supplied, and 'whiche book I have presented', where the adjectival use of the relative (see p. 93) does not compensate for a loose relationship. The detached participle phrase ('Prayng her said grace . . .') at the end of the passage is also notable; though this may betoken nothing more than a fashion of punctuation. In Modern English we should break up the long second sentence; and attach the participle phrase to the sentence which follows it, by the simple expedient of placing a comma after *lyf*.

These are of course isolated examples. But it is safe to generalise to this extent, that in early prose the sentence of

linked co-ordinate (*and*) clauses is common, especially in narrative writing; and that (as in the Caxton passage) the trailing co-ordinate clause is the basis of, or clearly influences, the complex pattern. In other words, thought tends to be chronological rather than logical, and this is reflected in the grammatical structure. G. D. Bone in his chapter on language in S. L. Greenslade's *The Work of William Tindale* (1938) makes the interesting and revealing comment: 'In old writers each sentence looks backward, as it were – adds something fitting to what has gone before. In our new prose each sentence leans forward; seems to be getting more and more into the argument, to be leading to something really interesting. You read the new prose pressing on to the end of the sentence, hoping to meet something interesting as you get further into it; in the old prose you took in each part, section or sentence, piece after piece, fully understanding and consuming one part before moving on to consider the next'.

The history of the sentence after mediæval times is a matter of style rather than of grammar. Already the main elements of what may be called, rather loosely, a standard pattern were there. Within this pattern, which is based upon formal, though not rigid, grammatical relationships, there are of course endless variations; and different linguistic influences have had an important share in the general shaping. In particular, there has been a healthy struggle between the learned or literary language, looking mainly to the classics for its example, and the language of ordinary speech. Now one has been uppermost, and now the other; but between them they have determined the grammatical mechanism of the written sentence.

In the sixteenth century the balanced or antithetical structure, often with a marked metrical rhythm, superseded the loose amorphous pattern of mediæval times. Its extreme manifestation is seen in the prose of Lyly's *Euphues*, which Shakespeare parodied in a famous passage in *I Henry IV*:

For though the Camomile, the more it is troden, the
faster it growes; yet Youth, the more it is wasted, the

sooner it weares . . . There is a thing, *Harry*, which thou hast often heard of, and it is knowne to many in our Land, by the Name of Pitch: this Pitch (as ancient Writers doe report) doth defile; so doth the companie thou keepest; for *Harry*, now I doe not speake to thee in Drinke, but in Teares; not in Pleasure, but in Passion; not in Words onely, but in Woes also.

Lyly's own addiction to conceits and metaphorical figures has made euphuism something of a byword, and obscured the beneficent influence of his style in giving shape to the sentence. Here is a characteristic passage from *Euphues*:

The foule Toad hath a faire stone in his head: the fine golde is found in the filthy earth: the sweet kernell lyeth in the hard shell: vertue is harboured in the heart of him that most men esteeme mishapen. Contrariwise, if we respect more the outward shape, than the inward habite, good God into howe many mischifes doe we fall? into what blindnesse are we led? Doe we not commonly see that in painted pots is hidden the deadlyest poyson? that in the greenest grasse is the greatest Serpent? in the cleerest water, the uglyest Toad? Doth not experience teach us, that in the most curious Sepulcher are inclosed rotten bones? That the Cypres tree beareth a fayre leafe, but no fruite? That the Estridge caryeth fayre feathers, but ranke flesh?

The style is familiar to us in the collects of the *Book of Common Prayer*, which was first published in 1549. It is noteworthy that they are all written in single, usually complex sentence units:

Almightye God, whiche doest see that we haue no power of oureselues to help oureselues; kepe thou us both outwardly in oure bodies, and inwardly in oure soules, that we maye be defended from all aduersities whiche may happen to the body, and from all euell thoughtes whiche maye assault and hurte the soule.

The balance here is obvious in both phrase and structure; and the general effect is one of economic compactness. In this

way the Prayer Book is in strange contrast to the Authorised Version, which, as we have already noted, looks backward to the trailing sentence of linked or parallel co-ordinate clauses.

The artificialised antithetical style is apparent in much Elizabethan writing, not so much in the basic structure of individual sentences, as in balanced words or word-groups occurring within a larger, and often looser, pattern. Shakespeare often has it in his mannered prose of wit and repartee, and sometimes in simpler contexts – 'I beseech you, let his lack of years be no impediment to let him lack a reverend estimation, for I never knew so young a body with so old a head. I leave him to your gracious acceptance, whose trial shall better publish his commendation'. It is common in Sidney:

The Philosopher therefore and the Historian are they which would win the gole: the one by precept, the other by example. But both not having both, doe both halte. For the Philosopher, setting downe with thorny argument the bare rule, is so hard of utterance, and so mistie to bee conceived, that one that hath no other guide but him shall wade in him till hee be olde, before he shall finde sufficient cause to bee honest: for his knowledge standeth so upon the abstract and generall, that happie is that man who may understande him, and more happie that can applye what hee dooth understand. On the other side, the Historian, wanting the precept, is so tyed, not to what shoulde bee, but to what is; to the particular truth of things, and not to the general reason of things; that hys example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a lesse fruitfull doctrine.

And Bacon, a few years afterwards, in sentences that often seem structurally loose owing to a peculiar system of punctuation,¹ often fortifies his aphoristic prose with words or phrases carefully and effectively opposed:

The loyes of *Parents* are Secret; And so are their Griefes, and Feares: They cannot vtter the one; Nor they will not

¹ See p. 150.

vttter the other. *Children* sweeten Labours; But they make Misfortunes more bitter: They increase the Cares of Life; but they mitigate the Remembrance of Death. The Perpetuity by Generation is common to Beasts; But Memory, Merit, and Noble workes, are proper to Men: And surely a Man shall see, the Noblest workes, and Foundations, haue proceeded from *Childlesse Men*; which haue sought to expresse the Images of their Minds; where those of their Bodies haue failed: So the care of Posterity, is most in them, that haue no Posterity. They that are the first Raisers of their Houses, are most Indulgent towards their *Children*; Beholding them, as the Continuance, not only of their kinde, but of their Worke; And so both *Children*, and *Creatures*.

Later writers have often used this antithetical kind of writing. Coleridge¹ notes it in the Letters of Junius, 'whose style,' he says, 'is a sort of metre, the law of which is a balance of thesis and antithesis.' He adds, however, 'the antithesis of Junius is a real antithesis of images or thought; but the antithesis of Johnson is rarely more than verbal'. Whether this is true of Johnson or not, it is a reminder that the outstanding characteristic of his prose is this very element of verbal and grammatical balance in the structure of the sentence. Cobbett, having given his own correction of a sentence from the *Rambler*, says:

This was what the Doctor meant; but this would have marred a little the *antithesis*: it would have unsettled a little the balance of that *see-saw*, in which Doctor Johnson so much delighted, and which, falling into the hands of novel-writers and of Members of Parliament, has, by moving unencumbered with any of the Doctor's reason or sense, lulled so many thousands asleep! Doctor Johnson created a race of writers and speakers. 'Mr Speaker, that the state of the nation is very critical, all men must allow; but, that it is wholly desperate, few men will believe.' When you hear, or see a sentence like this, be sure that the person

¹ *Table Talk*, July 3, 1833.

who speaks, or writes it, has been reading Doctor Johnson, or some of his imitators.

And we do not need to search very far in *The Rambler* itself to see the justice of his remarks:

The ostentatious and haughty display of themselves has been the usual refuge of diurnal writers; in indication of whose practice it may be said that what it wants in prudence is supplied by sincerity; and who at least may plead that if their boasts deceive any into the perusal of their performances, they defraud them of but little time.

Cobbett is right in his strictures on the construction as an excess or trick of style. Nevertheless it is true to say that anti-thesis, however artificial, has played a considerable part in developing the grammatical cohesion of the sentence generally.

Of the long, involved sentence that belongs to the rhetorical prose of the seventeenth century it is unnecessary to say very much. Its structure reflects in a largely analytic language the closely knit pattern of the sentence characteristic of Latin and Greek. But because of the lack of inflection, the English sentence of this type, painfully built up of a multitude of loosely related phrases and clauses, is grammatically loose and cumbersome, though its general effect is impressive. One example from Milton will suffice:

First, when a City shall be as it were besieg'd and blockt about, her navigable river infested, inrodes and incursions round, defiance and battell oft rumor'd to be marching up ev'n to her walls and suburb trenches, that then the people, or the greater part, more than at other times, wholly tak'n up with the study of highest and most important matters to be reform'd, should be disputing, reasoning, reading, inventing, discoursing, ev'n to a rarity, and admiration, things not before discours'd or writt'n of, argues first a singular good will, contentednesse and confidence in your prudent foresight and safe government, Lords and Commons; and from thence derives it self to a gallant bravery and well grounded contempt of their enemies, as if there

were no small number of as great spirits among us, as his was, who when Rome was nigh besieg'd by *Hanibal*, being in the City, bought that peece of ground at no cheap rate, whereon *Hanibal* himself encampt his own regiment. —
Areopagitica

Meanwhile, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a new kind of written prose was developing that took its idiom, its vocabulary, and its mode of expression from colloquial speech. Miss C. V. Wedgwood (*Seventeenth Century English Literature*), has a chapter called significantly 'Practical Prose', in which she comments on the 'crisp and pithy manner of the time', and illustrates it from letters, 'characters', and the beginnings of journalism. But all this was a matter of style, not of syntax or the pattern of the sentence, which was neither mannered in the antithetical, nor complicated in the literary-rhetorical, fashion, but had a looseness corresponding to the ordinary flow of conversation. Professor Simeon Potter gives as an example the opening sentence of *Robinson Crusoe*:

I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, though not of that country, my father being a foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull. He got a good estate by merchandise, and, leaving off his trade, lived afterwards at York; from whence he had married my mother, whose relations were named *Robinson*, a very good family in that country, and from whom I was called *Robinson Kreutznaer*; but, by the usual corruption of words in England, we are now called, nay, we call ourselves, and write our name, *Crusoe*; and so my companions always called me.

In this, he says, 'there is no ambiguity, no obscurity, and no tautology. The reader receives no mental check. All is easy and natural.' This may be true, but the fact remains that syntactically Defoe's prose is formless. Though he is, in another way, a literary pioneer, he is, as far as sentence pattern is concerned, at the end of period rather than at the beginning. For in the closing years of the seventeenth century the sentence, influenced on the one hand by a consciously

literary and on the other by a conversational style, found a distinctive form which is characteristic of what may be termed normal modern English prose. Coleridge said that Dryden began the second great period of the English Language; and, as far as prose style is concerned, most subsequent critics have agreed with him. Professor Saintsbury (*The Peace of the Augustans*) speaks of Dryden's 'discovery of the secret of adjusting the style of prose-writing to that of well-bred and modern conversation'. The subject is a vast one, and is far outside the scope of this book. But it is safe to say that the modern shape of the sentence dates approximately from the end of the seventeenth century. And here another remark of Coleridge may be conveniently quoted, though it actually occurs in a passage where he is denouncing a looseness in the prose of his contemporaries. 'A close reasoner', he says, 'and a good writer in general may be known by his pertinent use of connectives'. In other words, he stresses the proper relationship of phrases and clauses in the structure of the sentence.

Addison's prose, says Doctor Johnson, 'is the model of the middle style. . . . His sentences have neither studied amplitude, nor affected brevity; his periods, though not diligently rounded, are voluble and easy. Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison'. In the narrow syntactical sense that famous pronouncement is sound and true. Addison's usage or 'grammar' differs, as we have already seen in Chapter III, somewhat from our own. But we have only to open a volume of *The Spectator* at random to realise that here is what may be called the norm – the 'middle style' – of the English prose sentence:

I have only considered our language as it shows the genius and natural temper of the English, which is modest, thoughtful, and sincere, and which, perhaps, may recommend the people, though it has spoiled the tongue. We might, perhaps, carry the same thought into other languages, and deduce a great part of what is peculiar to them from the

genius of the people who speak them. It is certain, the light talkative humour of the French has not a little infected their tongue, which might be shown by many instances; as the genius of the Italians, which is so much addicted to music and ceremony, has moulded all their words and phrases to those particular uses. The stateliness and gravity of the Spaniards shows itself to perfection in the solemnity of their language; and the blunt honest humour of the German sounds better in the roughness of the High-Dutch, than it would in a politer tongue.

That is well over two centuries old; but its basic sentence pattern, modified somewhat by changes of idiom, belongs equally to *The Spectator* of today.

There are, it is true, certain signs in modern writing of a change in the structure of the sentence. They are most clearly observable in the work of the poets, who (as has already been explained on p. 91) are impatient of connectives. But also in prose the psychological novel has developed a syntactical idiom of its own. Here the sentences themselves, following the disconnected vagaries of thought, have themselves a disconnected inconsequential pattern; often, as in the second extract, scorning the finite verb:

Across the hall a door opened. One voice, another voice, a third voice came wimpling and warbling: gruff – Bart's voice; quavering – Lucy's voice; middle-toned – Isa's voice. Their voices impetuously, impatiently, protestingly came across the hall saying: 'The train's late'; saying: 'Keep it hot'; saying: 'We won't, no Candish, we won't wait.'

Coming out from the library the voices stopped in the hall. They encountered an obstacle evidently; a rock. Utterly impossible was it, even in the heart of the country, to be alone? That was the shock. After that, the rock was raced round, embraced. If it was painful, it was essential. There must be society. Coming out of the library it was painful, but pleasant, to run slap into Mrs Manresa and an unknown young man with tow-coloured hair and a twisted face. No escape was possible; meeting was inevitable. Uninvited,

unexpected, droppers-in, lured off the high road by the very same instinct that caused the sheep and the cows to desire propinquity, they had come. But they had brought a lunch basket. Here it was. – Virginia Woolf: *Between the Acts*

It was half-past six, too dark to paint, turning very cold. Clouds all streaming away like ghost fish under the ice. Evening sun turning reddish. Trees along the hard like old copper. Old willow leaves shaking up and down in the breeze, making shadows on the ones below, reflections on the ones above. Need a tricky brush to give the effect and what would be the good. Pissarro's job, not mine. Not nowadays. Lyric, not epic.

Stopped at the corner and put on Coker's socks. Silk and wool; must have cost seven and six. But the trouble was, I had holes in my bootsoles and the pavement stuck through. Went to a rubbish basket and got some evening newspapers. Shoved 'em in my boots. Shoved 'em up my trousers, stuffed 'em down my waistcoat. As good as leather against an east wind. Thank God for the Press, the friend of the poor. – Joyce Cary: *The Horse's Mouth*

This kind of sentence, however, is on the whole restricted to fiction, and is used for particular effects. The 'pertinent use of connectives' is still characteristic of the sentence in normal writing.

It is possible that the spoken word, as represented especially in the wireless talk, will have a greater influence on sentence structure than this 'stream-of-consciousness' fictional idiom. Quite recently Mr A. P. Rossiter has devoted the greater part of a book (*Our Living Language*) to a discussion and exemplification of this new and familiar mode of expression. 'The Spoken Word,' he says, 'does not always mean "exactly what we (all) speak" or "speak like"'. It is a term used by the B.B.C.; and within that range of meanings, it indicates language which is a simulacrum, a semblance of what we speak . . . A naturalistic convention rules broadcast "talk-ing"; and he who writes within it must take thought to the *subtraction*

of cubits from his usual literary stature'. This seems to imply a dichotomy – which he himself appears to deny, but which nevertheless exists – between Literature and the colloquial Language. But the real point is that the wireless Talk is, in fact, written; it demands, therefore, in writing an idiom and a sentence pattern which belongs, or purports to belong, to ordinary speech. So Mr Rossiter's scripts are printed in the book from the copies of the originals. Here is a short extract from one of them:

Generous admiration for skill – that is one thing. Another that marks 'finding language interesting' is an open-minded, inquiring attitude towards what is said, and How. I don't mean 'unbiased' – hardly a man in a million is 'unbiased' about language: it is too human and intimate a thing for that. But an inquiring mind is curious about its own biases. Inquiring minds, interested in language, aren't satisfied with being told that such and such an expression or noise is 'wrong': they want to see the How of things. In short, to make their English more theirs: not simply swallowing others' opinions, merely because they are written down (or broadcast, for that matter!).

Some years before, a notable 'natural broadcaster', the late John Hilton, had something to say on the same subject. His argument runs on very much the same lines as Mr Rossiter's, and his script has much the same flavour:

There've been bits in the paper sometimes about my broadcasts. The bits I've always liked best are those that refer to John Hilton 'who just comes to the microphone and *talks*. So different from listening to something being *read*.' Oh yes, I like that. For, of course, I read every word of every talk. If only I could pull it off every time – but you have to be at the top of your form. Yes, of course, every word's on paper even now – this – what I'm saying to you now – it's all here. Talking! Just as it comes to him! Right out of his head! I hope it sounds so, it's meant to. If it does – well – this is one of my good days.

'Tricks of the trade.' Must I really tell you those? All right. The first trick of the trade is that there aren't any tricks. I mean tricks don't come off. That's my experience, anyway. I've tried, in my time, this way and that. I like experiments. I'll try anything once. But the little stunts and tryons – no good! For me, I mean, of course. I think what listeners can spot more surely than anything else is any trace of falseness. I think you've got to find yourself – the radio rendering of yourself, and then be true to it. Truth, not tricks. For my sort of stuff, I mean, of course.

'But to read as if you were talking! Isn't that a trick?' Oh no, that's an art – or a craft, whichever you like. And in every art or craft there's a technique, a method, a way. What is it here? Well, I suppose each has to find his own; but my notion is that to read as if you were talking you must first write as if you were talking. What you have on the paper in front of you must be talk-stuff, not book-stuff.

But this pseudo-language, with its syntactical conventions, remains apart from any recognised literary style – apart even from the deliberately cultivated conversational style of a writer like Lamb. Mr Rossiter quotes the observation of a BBC official that his Talks were 'too much the spoken word for *The Listener*'. And that in itself is significant. It means that in the medium of print, the long established syntax of the sentence with its complex relationships still holds its own. But what will happen in the future it is too early, as yet, to prophesy. Hazlitt, writing long before the advent of wireless, discusses the whole subject of the relationship of the spoken to the written word in his two essays *On Familiar Style* and *On the Prose Style of the Poets*. 'To write,' he says, 'a genuine familiar or truly English style, is to write as anyone would speak in common conversation who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and rhetorical flourishes.' And again, 'I certainly agree with the above theory

of Horne Tooke as to conceive that no style is worth a farthing that is not calculated to be read out, or that is not allied to spirited conversation'. But Hazlitt did not visualise a new idiom in writing of the 'spoken word'.

Chapter V



SYNTAX

THE PREVIOUS chapters have been concerned, in the main, with the accidence of English, and with the development of the formal pattern of the sentence. It is noteworthy that until the latter part of the eighteenth century grammarians and writers did not concern themselves with points of syntax or what we should call usage. The older *Grammars* were usually divided into four parts, Orthography, Etymology (i.e. Accidence), Syntax, and Prosody; and among these Syntax was apt to take a subordinate place. There is a good example in the *Grammar* which Johnson prefixed to the *Dictionary* (1755). Johnson blandly dismisses Syntax in the following brief notes:

SYNTAX.

The established practice of grammarians requires that I should here treat of the Syntax; but our language has so little inflection or variety of terminations, that its construction neither requires nor admits many rules. *Wallis*, therefore, has totally neglected it; and *Jonson*, whose desire of following the writers upon the learned languages, made him think a syntax indispensably necessary, has published such petty observations as were better omitted.

The verb, as in other languages, agrees with the nominative in number and person; as, *Tbou fliest from good; He runs to death.*

Our adjectives and pronouns¹ are invariable.

Of two substantives the noun possessive is in the genitive; as, *His father's glory; The sun's heat.*

¹ It is difficult to know what Johnson means by saying pronouns are invariable.

Verbs transitive require an oblique case; as, *He loves me; You fear him.*

All prepositions require an oblique case; as, *He gave this to me; He took this from me; He says this of me; He came with me.*

Six years afterwards (1761) Joseph Priestley in his *Rudiments* devotes no more than two pages to the subject, with the naïve note: 'As but few of the relations of words and sentences in construction are expressed by a change of termination in English, but generally by conjunctive particles, the art of English Syntax must consist chiefly, in the proper application of the conjunctive particles; and the accurate use of these can only be learned from *observation* and a *dictionary*'. He added that 'for this simplicity in the grammar of our language (arising chiefly from the paucity of our inflections of words) we are indebted to the long continued barbarism of the people from whom we received it; the severity of whose climate, and difficulty of subsistence, left them little leisure for polishing, or indeed using, their language: Whereas the inhabitants of the more benign southern climates were, from the earliest antiquity, led by nature into luxury and refinement in everything'. In all this the implication is plain: that since English is mainly an analytic, not a synthetic, language, what Cobbett calls the 'principles and rules which teach us how to put words together so as to form *sentences*' may be left to look after themselves.

Nevertheless, as we have already seen (p. 88) a consciousness of the propriety (or impropriety) of certain forms of expression had revealed itself at the end of the seventeenth century in the corrections that Dryden made in the second edition (1684) of his *Essay of Dramatick Poesie*. Dryden himself recognises this consciousness. Comparing the language of his own day with that of the 'last age', he says, 'I may safely conclude in the general, that our improprieties are less frequent, and less gross than theirs. One testimony of this is undeniable; that we are the first who have observed them; and, certainly, to observe errors is a great step to the

correcting of them'. Malone tells us that in the interval which elapsed between the first edition (1668) and the second, Dryden 'appears to have revised and corrected it with great care, various changes being made, chiefly in the language, in almost every page'. Dryden is concerned with two points – the form of the relative pronoun, and the preposition after the noun or pronoun it governs. The first has already been dealt with. The second, which (thanks, perhaps, to Dryden) has remained a curious grammatical superstition, deserves a brief note here. Two of Dryden's own corrections will serve as sufficient illustration:

'I cannot think so contemptibly of the age in which I live' (1684) for 'the age I live in' (1668).

'... of which none boast in this our age' (1684) for 'which none boast of' (1668).

But writers and grammarians have never followed Dryden in his fastidiousness and insensitiveness to a neat and useful idiom. True, Bishop Lowth has his reservations. He gives an example of it, and remarks: 'This is an idiom which our language is strongly inclined to; it prevails in common conversation, and suits very well with the familiar style in writing; but the placing of the Preposition before the Relative is more graceful as well as more perspicuous; and agrees much better with a solemn and elevated style.' Cobbett, however, accepted it, at any rate as far as it concerned relative pronouns, without question; and Fowler becomes almost lyrical in its defence. That it has to be defended at all is remarkable in view of usage, both colloquial and literary, for some centuries. Perhaps behind all the objections to it is the etymology of the word *preposition* itself (*pre* + *positum*, 'placed in front of'), which, as Macaulay would say, every schoolboy knows.¹

It is convenient here to treat of another relative construction which did not trouble Dryden, and was not called in question until quite recent times. This is the use of a co-ordinating

¹ See also the note on Old English usage (p. 61).

conjunction (*and, or, but*) before a relative when its clause is linked or related not to another relative clause immediately preceding it but to a simple adjective or an adjective phrase. There are plenty of examples of this construction in good writers up to the nineteenth century. Six will suffice:

The preposition in the end of the sentence; a common fault with him [Ben Jonson], and which I have but lately observed in my own writings. – Dryden: *Essay on the Dramatick Poetry of the Last Age*

But among all our methods of moving pity or terror, there is none so absurd and barbarous, and which more exposes us to the contempt and ridicule of our neighbours, than that dreadful butchering of one another, which is so very frequent upon the English stage. – Addison: *Spectator*

If, for instance, the Reports drawn up by the House of Commons, and which are compositions discovering, in every sentence, ignorance the most profound, were written in Latin, should we then call them *learned*? – Cobbett: *Grammar* (text)

The reading of this play is like going a journey with some uncertain object at the end of it, and in which the suspense is kept up and heightened by the long intervals between each action. – Hazlitt: *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*

The sexton and the verger had led in between them, among the graves beneath the cloisters, a blind man, very old, with a wondrous stoop, but who must have owned a grand stature before extreme old age had bent him. – Trollope: *The Last Chronicle of Barset*

Such, then, was Gray – a typical eighteenth-century scholar-artist with a peculiarly intense response to the imaginative appeals of the past and whose pervading temper was a sober melancholy. – Lord David Cecil.

When this construction began to be questioned it is difficult to say. Nesfield (1905) is dogmatic about it; so is

Sonnenschein (*New English Grammar*, 1913), who says 'it is' an error to connect an adjective clause with a preceding adjective by a co-ordinating conjunction, as in "Any man possessing intelligence and who will take trouble can make a fortune"'. Partridge (V & A, 1947) declares that such a sentence as 'The house, situated on the hill and which was empty, was destroyed by fire' is inadmissible in English. But Fowler (MEU) is not so sure; indeed, of 'the rule that *and* *which* or *but* *which* should be used only if another *which* has preceded' he says bluntly that 'it is not true'. He allows the linking of the relative clause with 'an expression of the same grammatical value as the coming *which*-clause' – that is, either a clause itself (which has never been in question) or an adjective equivalent, always provided that clause and equivalent are both defining or non-defining but not a mixture of the two. His article then proceeds to such subtleties as only serve to drive the reader and unfortunate writer back to the simple rule, however far removed it may seem from a usage established in the past. But the grammatical argument against 'and-whichery' is certainly difficult to define. It rests probably on the desire for symmetry in the sentence; a simple adjective or an adjective phrase does not balance with a co-ordinate clause.¹ In other words, the co-ordinated units must be the same not only in function but also in actual pattern. Fowler himself half implies this when he says: 'If the writer had foreseen that a relative clause was to come (& not to foresee is carelessness), he could usually have paved the way for it by throwing his first expression into the same form'.

The consciousness of syntax, with all its doubts and difficulties, developed in the grammarians of the nineteenth century. Cobbett, with grim satisfaction, affixed to his *Grammar* 'Six Lessons, intended to prevent statesmen from using false grammar, and from writing in an awkward manner', in which he subjected to a pitiless (and sometimes naïve) criticism the faults and failings in certain documents

¹ It is significant that in the highly antithetical prose of Dr Johnson the construction *and* + relative, following an adjective equivalent is rarely, if ever, used.

or speeches written by eminent politicians and ecclesiastics of his time. Forty years later Alexander Bain's *An English Grammar* (1863) foreshadowed, however faintly, the treatment of accident and syntax on historical and formal principles by Sweet, Onions, Sonnenschein and others. But it was H. W. and F. H. Fowler who first essayed the more difficult task of equating, or at any rate relating, formalised grammar to usage and idiom. Their book, *The King's English*, appeared in 1906; and it was followed twenty years after by H. W. Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (1926), a major work in linguistic analysis and criticism, which (it is not too much to say) has stimulated the many writers who since, in book, pamphlet, and newspaper, have peeped over the shoulder of the writer, pronounced upon the doubtful points, and tried to chart the shadowy no-man's land between right and wrong. In all this the Society for Pure English played a big part, with pamphlets by such linguists and scholars as Robert Bridges, Sir William Craigie, Henry Bradley, H. W. Fowler, and Otto Jespersen, whose monumental *Grammar* stands a little apart as the dispassionate survey of a foreigner surveying the language as it were from the outside. Since Fowler's time many books have been written on the subject of usage in general, the most notable being *Usage and Abusage* by Eric Partridge and *The Reader over Your Shoulder* by Robert Graves and Alan Hodge. In many others the criticism has been directed on to certain corruptions of the language, especially officialese or 'gobbledygook', to give it its expressive American nickname, and what is sometimes rather unfairly called journalese. Sir Ernest Gowers, writing specifically for the Civil Service, Sir Alan Herbert, who often slips into an exaggeration that defeats its own ends, Mr Ivor Brown, and Professor B. Ifor Evans have played an important part in combating such dangerous (but, it must be confessed, often entertaining) evils. To the work of these and many lesser writers on the subject may be attributed the widespread interest existing today in the *minutiae* of the language and in the proper relationship of the colloquial and the literary, the idiomatic, and the theoretically correct.

Two factors play an important part in all such analysis and argument. One is the survival, mainly owing to the teaching of English in grammar schools bound by a rigid examination system, of a traditional conception of formal grammar;¹ the other, in conflict with it, the consciousness of continually changing idiom in the living language. It is not the purpose of this book to discuss this subject in any detail; that has indeed already been done, indirectly, in the books on usage already referred to. But it is interesting and instructive to take certain representative 'disputed points in English Grammar', as Jespersen has it (SPE TRACT 25), other than those touched upon in the previous pages, and see how grammarians have dealt with them, reflecting the linguistic principles, and in part the usage, of their own age.

To begin, then, with the one outstanding agreement that exists, in a modified form, in Modern English – that between the subject and the finite verb. Dr Johnson, as we have already seen, deals with this agreement simply and succinctly – 'The verb, as in other languages, agrees with the nominative in number and person'. And that is, of course, the basic law. But quite early the grammarians were beset with doubts and difficulties in what seems to be, on the face of it, a clear and unambiguous relationship. Ben Jonson, with a characteristic Latin outlook, hankered after the old fuller inflections. 'The persons plurall,' he says, 'keepe the termination of the first person singular. In former times, till about the reigne of King Henry the eighth, they were wont to be formed by adding *-en*: thus, *loven*, *sayen*, *complainen*. But now (whatsoever is the cause) it hath quite growne out of use, and that other so generally prevailed, that I dare not presume to set this a-foot againe. Albeit (to tell you my opinion), I am perswaded that the lack hereof well considered will be found a great blemish to our tongue. For seeing tyme and person be, as it were, the right, and left-hand of a verbe; what can the mayning bring else, but a lamenesse of the whole body?' However, he has to accept the dismal situation, and postulates the agreement in such forms as remain. But even he has to

¹ See Appendix, p. 177.

single out for special mention 'nouns signifying a multitude', which, he says, 'though they be of singular number, require a verb plurall'. Eighteenth-century grammarians solved the problem of these doubtful nouns in various ways. A little later, Cobbett had a characteristically short way with them:

The nominative is frequently a noun of *multitude*; as *mob*, *parliament*, *gang*. Now, where this is the case, the verb is used in the singular or in the plural, upon precisely the same principles that the pronouns are so used. I will just observe that *consistency*, in the use of the verb, in such cases, is the main thing to keep in view. We may say, 'The gang of borough-tyrants *is* cruel;' or, that 'the gang of borough-tyrants *are* cruel;' but if we go on to speak of their notoriously brutal ignorance, we must not say, 'The gang of borough-tyrants *is* cruel, and *are* also notoriously as ignorant as brutes.' We must use *is* in both places, or *are* in both places.

On the whole, modern grammarians have followed him, though with refinements. Both Fowler (MEU) and Partridge (U & A) point out the difference between the true collective which signifies a group considered as a unit (singular) and the true 'noun of multitude', which is properly distributive (plural). Thus Partridge gives as examples 'Parliament rises at the beginning of August' (collective), and 'Parliament differ over the question of war' (distributive). Fowler himself says, however, that this 'is a delicate distinction, & few will be at pains to make it', and 'that while there is a better & a worse in the matter, there is seldom a right & a wrong'. Jespersen (*Essentials*) records 'the double-sidedness of collectives' as revealed 'by the number of the verb and by the pronoun referring to it' (*sic*); and says, without further comment, that 'even good writers treat a collective in the same sentence as a singular and as a plural', giving an example from George Eliot:

The Garth family, which was rather a large one, for

Mary had four brothers and one sister, were very fond of their old house.¹

But on this matter of inconsistency Fowler is even more decided and dogmatic than Cobbett himself: 'Failure to abide by the choice of singular or plural when made & plunging about between *it* & *they*, *have* & *has*, *his* & *their*, & the like, can only be called insults to the reader'. However, the usage has a long history. In the Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle* we have:

893. Her on þysum geare for se micla here, þe we gefyrn
ymbe spræcon, eft of þæm eastrice westweard to Bunnan;
ond þær wurdon gescipode, swa þæt hie asettan him on
æne sif ofer mid horsum mid calle.

The subject is the collective *here*; in the first clause the verb is singular (*for*), but in the rest of the sentence both verbs and pronouns (*wurdon*, *hie*, *asettan*, *him*) are plural:

893. In this year the great raiding army, which we spoke of before, went (*for*, singular) out of the eastern kingdom westward to Boulogne; and there *they were* embarked (*wurdon*, plural), so that *they* crossed over at one time, horses and all.

Agreement with the double or multiple subject, when its constituents are singular nouns or pronouns, has always been a little doubtful. The rule is simple; since the subject is plural ($a + b + c$) the verb should be plural. But two factors tend to conspire against it: the first is the force of attraction, by which the singular noun standing near the verb attracts the verb into its own number, and the other is meaning, when each item of the double or multiple subject is thought of separately and is related to the verb by a kind of ellipsis of the auxiliary, or when the two (or more) nouns suggest a unified idea. Attraction often occurs when the word order is

¹ One of his other examples, from Kipling, is curious: 'The note that catches a public who think with their boots and read with their elbows'. Unless he goes so far as to imply that a collective qualified by the indefinite article is automatically singular (which, judging from other examples, he does not), the agreement of verb and pronoun (plural) here is quite consistent.

inverted; that is, when the verb precedes the subject. Again, we may go back to the Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle*:

Ond þæs ymb xiiii niht *gefeabt* Æþered cyning ond
 Ælfred his broþur wi þone here æt Basengum

And about a fortnight after this King Aethered and
 Alfred his brother fought against the raiding army at Basing.

In Modern English the problem of agreement does not, of course, arise, since inflection had disappeared in the past tense; but in the Old English sentence *gefeabt* is singular for the plural *gefeabton*. So also in Shakespeare – ‘*Is Decius Brutus and Trebonius here?*’ Today there is a certain recognised latitude which belongs rather to idiom than grammar – a latitude which extends to the verb after an introductory *there* even when the subject is unambiguously plural: ‘*There’s¹ two men in the room*’. Fowler recognises the construction as colloquial, since the speaker may have started the sentence ‘before fixing the precise form of the subject’. In his view the writer, with the leisure to think out the sentence from beginning to end, has no excuse for leaving a singular verb when the subject turns out to be grammatically plural. But this is to argue too dogmatically against a familiar usage, both past and present.

Lowth and Murray both give an example from the Authorised Version (Apocrypha) of the sentence in which the items of a multiple subject are considered separately: ‘*Sand, and salt, and a mass of iron, is easier to bear, than a man without understanding*’. Here the separation of the items is obvious; the subject cannot be considered cumulative or compound. But more often than not the sense intended by the writer determines the number of the verb. We may say ‘*His bearing, his general conduct, his keen intelligence tells greatly in his favour*’, where we consider the qualities in turn, and mentally supply the phrase ‘each of these’. But we may equally say ‘*His bearing, his general conduct, and his keen intelligence tell greatly in his favour*’, where we actually express the plus

¹ but rarely, ‘*There is—*’

sign (*and*), and supply mentally an appositional *all*. Bain says: 'Such sentences are always contracted co-ordinate sentences, and their construction is singular. So in the example "my poverty, and not my will, consents" there is a contraction: ("my poverty consents, but my will does not consent"). The omission of the connective makes no difference if the meaning is the same.'

Similarly, the writer may use his discretion with what may be described as the unified double subject. This is usually made up of two abstract nouns that are closely associated: 'His meaning and intention is clear', where the two nouns are in fact held together with the one possessive adjective *his* and express the single idea 'his intended meaning'. It is, however, possible to make the verb plural, and expedient to advertise the fact by repeating the possessive. The usage is common, and on the whole modern formal grammarians have given it their blessing. Onions (AES) says: 'If the words composing the Subject are so closely connected as to compose one *idea*, the Verb may be Singular'.

Grammarians are not so happy about *with* as a pseudo-connective. Murray gives the example 'The King, with the lords and commons, form an excellent frame of government', but adds a note of disapproval: 'As the preposition *with* governs the objective case, in English, it is manifest that the clauses following *with* in the preceding sentence cannot form any part of the nominative case'. Cobbett has a characteristic note on it: '"A leg of mutton, with turnips and carrots, *is* very good." If we mean to say, that a leg of mutton, when cooked with these vegetables, is good, we must use *is*; but if we be speaking of the goodness of a leg of mutton *and* these vegetables taken all together, we must use *are*. When *with* means *along with*, *together with*, *in company with*, and the like, it is nearly the same as *and*; and then the plural verb must be used'. Onions says vaguely that the preposition *with* may serve as the equivalent of *and*, and gives the two examples:

Old Sir John with many more are at the door.

The side A with the sides B and C compose the triangle.

It is characteristic of English usage that even when two constructions exist which conveniently distinguish two shades of meaning it often refuses to take advantage of them. *With* is a preposition and disjunctive in effect, and the phrase it introduces is properly parenthetic; *and* is properly conjunctive. There seems to be every reason, then, to use *and* for *with* when *with* 'is nearly the same as *and*'; and to reserve *with* for the parenthetic phrase. In other words, the careful writer will recognise and make the distinction between 'The King, with the two Princes, has left London for the country' (parenthetic) and 'The King and the two Princes have left London for the country' (properly conjunctive). This would mean that a singular subject followed by a *with* phrase would determine the number of the verb; that is, the verb would always be singular.

A more serious difficulty, still remaining with us, arises with the number and person of the verb with what the older grammarians called a disjunctive and we call an alternative (*either . . . or*) subject. It is instructive to note a few representative pronouncements upon it:

1. Lowth seems to ignore this difficulty, contenting himself with the simple rule that 'two Nouns in the Singular Number, joined together by a Conjunction Copulative, have Verbs, Nouns and Pronouns, agreeing with them in the Plural Number'.

Short Introduction to English Grammar (1762)

2. When the pronouns thus disjoined are of different numbers and persons, the verb cannot properly be made to agree with each; for, if we say, 'you or I was present' adapting the verb to the pronoun *I* as being the most worthy person, the verb, being then singular, will not suit the second person plural, *you*: in which case, that part of the verb in question which would suit *you*, is understood.

Charles Coote: *Elements of the Grammar of the English Language* (1788)

3. The conjunction disjunctive hath an effect contrary to that of the conjunction copulative; for as the verb, noun, or

pronoun, is referred to the preceding terms taken separately, it must be in the singular number; as, 'Ignorance or negligence has caused this mistake;' 'John, or James, or Joseph, intends to accompany me;' 'There is, in many minds, neither knowledge nor understanding.'

When singular pronouns of different persons are disjunctively connected, the verb must agree with that person which is nearest to it; as, 'I or thou art to blame;' 'Thou or I am in fault;' 'I, or thou, or he, is very changeable.'

When a disjunctive occurs between a singular noun, or pronoun, and a plural one, the verb is made to agree with the plural noun and pronoun; as, 'Neither poverty nor riches were injurious to him;' 'I or they were affected by it.' But in this case it is best to place the plural noun or pronoun nearest to the verb.

Lindley Murray: *An English Grammar* (1795)

4. It sometimes happens that there are, in the nominative, two or more nouns, or pronouns, and that they are in *different numbers*, or in *different persons*: as, '*The minister or the borough-tyrants.*' These nouns cannot have the verb to *agree* with them *both*. Therefore if it be the conspiring of these wretches against the liberties of the people, of which we have to speak, we cannot say, 'The minister or the borough-tyrants *conspire*;' because the verb would then not *agree* in number with the noun, *minister*: nor can we say, *conspires*; because the verb would not agree with the noun, *borough-tyrants*. Therefore, we must not write such sentences: we must say, 'The minister *conspires*, or the borough-tyrants *conspire*, against the liberties of the people.'

Cobbett: *Grammar* (1817)

So also with person: 'We cannot say, "They or I *am* in fault," "I, or they, or he *is* the author of it," "George or I *am* the person."' Cobbett goes on, characteristically, to attack Lindley Murray for his vacillation.¹

5. When two or more pronouns of different persons, and of

¹ See also the quotation on p. 40.

the Singular Number, are connected by the Alternative Conjunctions, the following rules are observed:

I. When the words 'either' or 'neither' precede the Pronouns, the Verb is in the third person: 'either he or I is in the wrong', 'neither he nor I is in the wrong'.

II. When the Pronouns are not preceded by 'either' or 'neither', the Verb agrees with the first: 'I or he am in the wrong', 'He or I is in the wrong', 'You or he are in the wrong', 'He or you is in the wrong'.

Alexander Bain: *An English Grammar*

6. When the subjects are of different persons the Verb is made to agree with the Subject nearest to it:

Either my brother or I am going.

Neither you nor he is in fault.

C. T. Onions: *Advanced English Syntax* (1898)

7. Sentences like the following are not good English:

Either he or I am at fault.

Either he or I is at fault.

E. T. Sonnenschein: *New English Grammar* (1915)

Sonnenschein therefore advocates either

(i) resolution into separate predicates ('Either he is or I am at fault') or

(ii) making the verb plural in defiance of (i), especially with *neither . . . nor*.

8. Complications occur when, owing to a difference in number or person between the subject of the *neither* member & that of the *nor* member, the same verb-form or pronoun or possessive adjective does not fit both. The wise man, in writing, evades these problems by rejecting all the alternatives – any of which may set up friction between him & his reader – & putting the thing in some other shape; & in speaking, which does not allow time for paraphrase, he takes risks with equanimity & says what instinct dictates.

H. W. Fowler: *Modern English Usage* (1926)

9. If both of the subjects are in the singular, the verb is singular. Pronouns in different persons increase the difficulty; that is, when both subjects are in the singular. The rule that the nearer subject governs the verb in both person and number applies here as elsewhere.

Eric Partridge: *Usage and Abusage* (1948)

10. When two words in the singular are connected by means of *or* (*nor*) grammarians prefer the verb in the singular:

Neither Coleridge nor Southey *is* a good reader of verse
(De Quincey)

But as the idea is often addition rather than separation, there is good excuse for those writers who use the plural, e.g.

Snuff or the fan *supply* each pause of chat (Pope)

Without that labour, neither reason, art, nor¹ peace, *are*
possible to man (Ruskin)

Jespersen: *Essentials of English Grammar*

Here Fowler and Cobbett are unexpected bedfellows, both arguing for resolution, at any rate in writing, and advocating grammatical safety at the expense of idiomatic neatness. Onions (followed by Partridge) is of the Lindley Murray school; so also, rather surprisingly, is Nesfield. Coote with his odd preference for *I*, 'as being the most worthy person', stands somewhat apart, as does Bain with a remarkable double-barrelled rule that reflects nothing more than an eccentric individual preference or a passing fashion. Only Sonnenschein and Jespersen argue, more or less boldly, for the plural verb. Yet that would seem to be the natural solution on two counts: first, as Jespersen says, because 'the idea is often addition rather than separation', and second, because the plural verb, being uninflected for person, can always maintain a benevolent neutrality. If the idea of separation is uppermost, resolution is idiomatically possible with a change of sentence structure – 'Either he is likely to get the post, or I am'. Onions, by the way, in spite of his ruling for

¹ It is noticeable that Jespersen does not comment on this use of *neither – nor* with three subject nouns.

English, notes the plural usage in other languages: 'In Greek, Latin, French, German, Spanish, when two Personal Pronouns connected by *neither . . . nor* are the subject, the Verb is plural, *neither . . . nor* being treated as equivalent to *both . . . and . . . not*'.

Two other points of subject-verb agreement are worth noticing. Most grammarians treat the pronouns *each*, *neither*, *either*, *anyone*, *nobody* and one or two others as singulars demanding a singular verb and a singular related pronoun or possessive adjective in the third person – 'Each of us is in danger of losing *his* money'. But colloquial usage, at any rate, is against them. Most of us would say, in natural speech, *are* and *our* in the example given. And the argument against this usage even in writing is, after all, not a very strong one. The same grammarians argue that *none* (= *no* + *one*) followed by *of* + plural noun or pronoun may be, and usually is, plural, and may take the person of the plural following the *of*: that is, we may legitimately write 'None of us *were* sure of *our* facts'.¹ There seems no reason, then, why in writing we should not accept the colloquial usage with *each*, *neither*, and the rest of them. In such subjects the number and person of the word in the *of* phrase tend to overrule the number and person (third singular) of the distributive. There is an interesting parallel in the construction 'We each *have our* own duties', where *each* affects neither the verb nor the related possessive pronoun: though it must be admitted that most grammarians (for example, Fowler) advocate a strict pronoun relationship when the distributive is placed for emphasis after the verb: 'We have each *his* own duty'. It is, however, unfortunate that this kind of finickiness in the general treatment of distributives should linger on, especially as it often involves an ambiguity in the gender of the related possessive: in 'Each of us must bear *his* own burden' the *his* has also to do duty for *her* if persons of both sexes are comprised in the *us*. But here, as elsewhere in English, a

¹ Partridge, however, will not yield: 'When *none* = *not one*, use the singular, as in 'None of the newspapers has appeared this week' (U & A).

firm grammatical superstition militates against natural and convenient usage.

The other point is the number of the verb (*be*) when subject and complement conflict in number. On the whole, writers and grammarians have looked upon this as an awkwardness of construction that cannot always be avoided. Cobbett is very conscious of it. 'The verb *to be*', he says, 'sometimes comes between two nouns of different numbers', and gives the example 'The great evil is the taxes'. He advocates the avoidance of the verb *be* in all such cases, and the substitution of some such phrase as 'arises from' or 'is produced by'. Fowler allows the verb *be*, merely pointing out the danger of its being attracted into the number of the complement – 'Our only guide were the stars'.

1. *The gerund and related matters*

The early history of the *-ing* forms of the verb has already been outlined (p. 31); but something further must be said about the treatment of them in modern times especially by Fowler, Jespersen, and Partridge. On the whole, the older grammarians were not conscious of the difficulty illustrated in the two expressions 'I had not heard of his going', 'I had not heard of him going'. As has been pointed out, some eighteenth-century writers were sticklers for the noun function of the *-ing* form here, and therefore qualified it with the possessive of the noun or pronoun. But Coote has the following curious note, which is based on his interpretation of the *-ing* form as a participle:

It is not uncommon to place a noun in the possessive case, or a possessive pronoun before an auxiliary active participle and a passive one; as, 'upon that person's being sent thither, the disturbances ceased'; 'from his having obtained his majesty's pardon, it is probable that there were some favorable circumstances in his case'; 'this proceeds from their having been too much indulged'. Here the nouns and the pronouns are annexed to the former participle as if it were a noun; and this depending on the latter participle,

both united seem to be used as one noun; a form of speech not altogether worthy of approbation'.

That he does not confine his disapprobation to the use with the auxiliary participle is clear from the fact that he condemns Addison's 'There will be no danger of *their spoiling* their faces, or of *their gaining* converts' as a confusion of 'two modes of expression'.

Cobbett is peculiarly hazy, and evidently does not recognise the implications of his rather obscure ruling:

Sometimes not only two or more nouns, or pronouns, may be the nominative of a sentence; but *many other words* along with them may assist in making a nominative: as, 'Pitt, Rose, Steel, and their associates giving to Walter a sum of the public money, as a reward for libelling the sons of the king, *was* extremely profligate and base.' That is to say, this *act* of Pitt and his associates *was* extremely profligate and base. It is, when you come to inquire, the *act* which is the nominative, and all the other words only go to describe the origin and end of the act.

It was not until 1906 that grammarians became conscious of a problem that had hitherto been solved, on the whole, by common sense and expediency, and had therefore not, in fact, existed as a problem at all. Then, in an evil hour, the brothers Fowler in *The King's English* coined the expression 'fused participle' for the *-ing* form attached to a non-possessive noun or pronoun. Twenty years later in *Modern English Usage* H. W. Fowler, with a magnificent disregard of older usage, declared that a dozen years ago (that is, before 1926) it was possible, 'without offending reputable writers', to describe the elementary form of the fused participle as an 'ignorant vulgarism', and that it was not very easy to collect instances of it. Onions pointed out the absurdity of this statement; so did Jespersen in his *SPE TRACT Some Disputed Points in English* (1926), where he says:

In my view the *-ing* here is not the present participle, but the verbal substantive, and the rise of the construction

in question is only the latest step in a long and most interesting development, in which the *-ing* adopts more and more of the specific verbal qualities, and is more and more freed from the restrictions which at first were inherent in it as in other substantives.

Take Thackeray's 'I have not the least objection in life to a rogue being hung': the object of the preposition *to* is not *a rogue* by itself; neither is it *being*, but the combination of both, the nexus as I call it, in which a *rogue* is the subject-part and *being* the predicate-part, exactly as in a clause 'that a rogue is hung'.

That, in effect, takes us back to the happy pre-Fowlerian days. But it must be confessed that Fowler and others of his persuasion set up an uneasiness among writers who lay emphasis on grammatical 'correctness', and the ghost of the fused participle is by no means laid. However, Partridge (U & A) is uncompromising and convincing in his support of Jespersen against Fowler. What is more, he admits the difference between 'I saw him crossing the road' and 'I saw his crossing the road'; and justly remarks that 'the criterion is not a mere grammatical one, but a criterion of *sense* . . .', that is, 'the fused participle conveys one nuance, the genitive and gerund another'.

Sweet, writing in 1898, says simply that 'in the combination possessive gerund, as in *I do not like his coming here so often*, the oblique case (i.e. the uninflected noun or object form of the pronoun) may be substituted for the possessive, so that the gerund becomes a present participle'. He adds – strangely, in view of Fowler's remarks already quoted¹ – that 'there seems a tendency to give up the latter non-possessive construction altogether', and says that in the phrase 'without their being afraid of their breaking', *their*² could be omitted, but not changed into *them*. Six years afterwards Onions (AES) recognised the two constructions but did not distinguish

¹ See p. 129.

² Which *their*? The statement, in any case, is oddly academic, and the example stilted.

between them; at the same time he noticed the objection which the Fowlers raised later in *The King's English*. He says:

Notice the following alternative constructions, the first involving the use of the Gerund, the second of the Verb Adjective in *-ing* (Active Participle):

What is the use of *his coming*? – of *him coming*?

He spoke of *its being* cold. – *it being* cold.

We hear every day of the *Emperor's dying*. – the *Emperor dying*.

Forts were erected to prevent *their landing*. – to prevent *them landing*.

Some people insist that the first of these constructions should always be used. But the second is the older use, and, moreover, involves nothing illogical or inconsistent with other uses of the Participle, which may be generally paraphrased by 'in the act of *-ing*'.

His final comment is difficult to understand. It seems to mean that 'He spoke of it being cold' = 'He spoke of it in the act of being cold'.

The fused participle problem is the classic example of a grammatical superstition enunciated by modern academic pedantry in the name of, but in the teeth of, usage both ancient and modern. There is an interesting parallel in the treatment of the split infinitive; but what may be called the great split-infinitive scare has had a different history. This construction – the placing of a modifying adverb between the *to* and the verb form of an infinitive phrase ('to carefully consider') – had existed, though it was not common, in English from late mediæval times. But it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that it was called in question. One of the first references to it is in the American Gould Brown's vast book *The Grammar of English Grammars* (1851):

Of the infinitive verb and its preposition *to*, some grammarians say, that they must never be separated by an

adverb. It is true, that the adverb is, in general, more elegantly placed before the preposition than after it; but, possibly, the latter position of it may sometimes contribute to perspicuity, which is more essential than elegance: as, 'If any man refuse so *to implore*, and to *so receive pardon*, let him die the death' – *Fuller*, on *the Gospel*. The latter word *so*, if placed like the former, might possibly be understood in a different sense from what it now bears. But perhaps it would be better to say, 'If any man refuse so to implore, and *in such terms* to receive pardon, let him die the death'. 'Honour teaches us properly to respect ourselves' – *Murray's Key* ii, 252. Here it is not quite clear, to which verb the adverb '*properly*' relates. Some change of expression is therefore needful. The right to place an adverb sometimes between *to* and its verb, should, I think, be conceded to the poets, as

'Who dared *to nobly stem* tyrannic pride'.

Burns: *The Cottar's Saturday Night*

It is noteworthy that Brown, though he raises his eyebrows a little at the usage, by no means condemns it outright. Such condemnation did not come until the end of the century with the school grammarians. Nesfield (1905) has a dogmatic, but historically unsound, note on it: 'An adverb should not be placed between the "to" and the Infinitive. The custom is springing up, but it is not sanctioned by the usage of any good writers'. To the generation who were educated in the early years of this century the split infinitive is still suspect; and indeed it still arouses the displeasure of the schoolmaster and the examiner. Onions, however, has a good (but guarded) word to say for it; and Fowler, in a long article (MEU), argues so eloquently against the pedants that he leaves the reader with the general impression that it is almost a crime not to split an infinitive. In very recent times Hugh Sykes Davies (*Grammar Without Tears*) has taken the argument one step further by advancing the rather fanciful and irrelevant theory that the simple verb form is itself the infinitive (without the *to*), and that therefore the infinitive is unsplittable.

The fact is that the position of the adverb in relation to the *to* and the verb is only one aspect of, and follows the principle governing, the position of the adverb generally (see p. 62 ff.). It is to be noted that the splitting of the infinitive by anything more than a single adverb ('To at all times and in all circumstances be ready') is regarded as a solecism.

2. Case

Pronouns have enough inflection left to set us an occasional problem in case.

(a) Such expressions as 'It is me', 'That was him' still trouble speakers, writers, and grammarians. Lindley Murray, in a somewhat cryptic note, is doubtful: 'The verb *to be* has a nominative case after it; as "It was *I*, and not *be*, that did it": unless it be in the infinitive mode; as, "Though you thought it to be *him*." Perhaps the objective case may also follow the verb *be*; as, "If it be *me*;" "Should it be *him*."' But Cobbett, characteristically, is more positive: "'Who broke that glass? It was *me*.'" It ought to be *I*; that is to say, "It was *I who broke it*.'" ' Later writers have (usually half-heartedly) excused rather than justified the usage on one ground or another. Bain has an interesting observation: 'Notwithstanding that most grammarians have laid down this rule [i.e. for the nominative after *be*], we hear in the speech of all classes of society such expressions as "it was me", "it was him", "it was her", perhaps more frequently than the prescribed form. Probably the best way of reconciling grammar and usage¹ on this point is to consider that there are two forms of the nominative case: one to be used when the verb immediately follows, and another when the pronoun has to stand alone'. He mentions the analogy of the French disjunctive pronoun ('C'est *moi*', 'C'est *lui*'), as do Onions, Sonnenschein, and other later writers. Onion condones 'It is me', but for some strange reason condemns the corresponding 'It's him', 'It was us' as careless vulgarisms. In fact, he goes so far as to hazard

¹ This correlation of the two effective principles, *grammar* and *usage* (see p. 117), is significant.

the guess that 'the sound analogy of *be*, *she*, and *we* has no doubt furthered the use of *me* as a regular and natural form of expression in such cases'. Sonnenschein's argument is substantially the same, without, however, any reference to the rather fanciful and unsound analogy of Onions. It is odd that Fowler, the professed apostle of usage, recognises the construction as a fact, but dubs it 'technically wrong'. Partridge, quoting Onions, allows the usage for all pronouns only when 'the statement is exclamatory', adding (with rather doubtful justification) that 'those educated speakers who say "it's me" or "it is me" would not say "It is me who wrote that essay"'. Jespersen (*Essentials*) has no qualms: 'It is and has long been natural to use the objective in the predicative. The reason is that a predicative is felt as a kind of object'.¹ This is, after all, only another version of Bain's wise and realistic remark already quoted. The usage is firmly established. If the argument of Bain and Jespersen is accepted, or alternatively if the pronoun is regarded as a caseless disjunctive on the pattern of the French, grammar has no more to say.

(b) It is an ironical fact that the opposite practice of saying and writing a nominative where an objective form of the pronoun is grammatically correct is equally common in English. 'Between you and I' is as old as Shakespeare (*Merchant of Venice* iii), and probably older. So too in the expression 'Let you and I go'. Here both the pronouns are objects respectively of the preposition and the verb; but the second is obviously, and the first may be, nominative. On this the older grammarians have little to say; the more modern ones grumble vaguely. Fowler says incomprehensibly that '*between you and I* is a piece of false grammar not sanctioned, like the contrary lapse *It is me*, even by colloquial usage', and notes with *let* a wrong subjective now and then. But, again, the usage is

¹ At any rate it is Queen's English:

"It's Princess Margaret," said one, apparently unable to believe that a Queen could be so young.

The Queen heard her.

"No," she said, leaning over with a smile, "it's me." - *Daily Telegraph*

established; and the reason is not difficult to see. The second (inflected) pronoun gets out of the orbit, as it were, of its governing verb or preposition. Put it first – that is, bring it within the orbit – and it has the normal objective form. We say and write naturally ‘Between *me* and you’, ‘Let *me* and you go’. Sometimes an ungrammatical nominative creeps in to other constructions. Among his examples Fowler gives ‘The bell will be always rung by *he* who has the longest purse’, ‘... which enables the spectator, *he* who is most repelled ...’. Here the explanation is not easy, unless we assume that the nominative relative attracts the object pronoun into its own case.

(c) A somewhat more difficult problem arises with the case of pronouns after certain conjunctions and prepositions, especially *than* and *as*. Murray, following Lowth almost word for word, and giving the same examples, says: ‘When the qualities of different things are compared, the latter noun or pronoun is governed not by the conjunction *than* or *as* (for conjunctions have no government of cases) but agrees with the verb, or is governed by the verb or the preposition, expressed or understood: as, “Thou art wiser than I”; that is, “than I am”. “The sentence is well expressed by Plato, but much better by Solomon than him;” that is, “than by him”’. Cobbett, as usual, is dogmatic, making the obvious syntactical distinction: ‘“I love you as well as *him*” means, that I love you as well as *I love him*; but, “I love you as well as *he*”, means, that I love you as well as *he loves you*’. On the whole, later grammarians have condoned, or recommended, the objective form where the nominative would be grammatically correct. Jespersen (*Essentials*) notes that ‘sentences like “He is bigger than me” are not only universal in colloquial speech, but are found in many writers of repute’. Fowler in a complicated argument quotes the statement of the Oxford English Dictionary that the prepositional use of *as* and *than* ‘is now considered incorrect’. But Partridge will have none of this, and argues unhesitatingly for the objective form, admitting, however, that American grammarians are against him. There is a parallel between this and the ‘It’s me’

construction, since the pronoun may be considered disjunctive, as in French 'Il est plus haut que *moi*'; it is not necessary to postulate a prepositional function for *as* and *than*. Even so, it is remarkable that usage does not, where possible, avoid ambiguity by the simple expedient of avoiding the ellipsis – which is Cobbett's way. 'He loves you more than I do' is good idiomatic English; 'He loves you better than I' is correct, but leaves the unemphatic pronoun as it were in the air; 'He loves you better than me' has, if the objective for nominative be admitted, two possible meanings.

In modern usage *whom* (not *who*) always follows *than*. It is noteworthy that here the written rather than the spoken word has determined the usage, for, as Jespersen rightly says, the construction is a literary, not a colloquial, one. In view of this, it is amusing to note that it caused a typical outburst from Cobbett: 'It is a very common parliament-house phrase, and therefore presumptuously *corrupt*'. The same kind of argument is not unknown today in connection with gobbledegook (see p. 117). But the genius of English has always defied, and still defies, mere prejudice and pedantry.

Oddly enough, there is always the opposite tendency – to use the nominative after the prepositions *but*, *except*, and the archaic *save*, as in Shakespeare's 'There's none but he whose being I do fear'. Fowler quotes a correspondent who states that in a considerable number of examples collected from good writers only five per cent have the objective form, and he implies (as does Jespersen) that here *but* etc. are, or may be regarded as, conjunctions.

(d) The general question of the case of pronouns, especially the interrogatives and relatives, has already been touched upon. Certain modern grammarians have seen in the defiance or ignoring of strict grammatical form evidence of the slow but certain loss of such inflection as we have in pronouns; and set out to hasten the process. Hugh Sykes Davies, for example, says in *Grammar Without Tears* 'that the variable forms of *who* should be encouraged to disappear', and even goes so far as to suggest that 'it is better to say "the man I found the hat of" than "the man whose hat I found" '.

But this is to ignore the genius of the language, and also the fact that, as illustrated in this section, it is often the inflected (objective) form of the pronoun which is preferred to the 'correct' uninflected form (nominative). This is sometimes true of the relative pronoun itself in the construction which Jespersen describes as a 'relative clause . . . concatenated with another clause'. One of Jespersen's examples is 'I met a man whom I thought was a lunatic', where the relative has a double relationship – to the verb *thought* and the verb *was*, of which it is grammatically subject. Jespersen contents himself with noting this usage as an established fact, merely observing 'but then such sentences are often blamed as incorrect'. Fowler and Partridge are on the side of grammar, though Fowler has an uneasy feeling (by no means unjustified) that *whom* for *who* will develop into what he calls 'a sturdy indefensible'.

3. '*shall*' and '*will*'

To the note on the discrimination between these auxiliaries (p. 37 ff.) may be added the pronouncements of one or two older grammarians. Lowth says: '*Would* expresses the intention of the doer; *should* simply the event. *Will* in the first person singular and plural promises or threatens; in the second or third Persons only foretells: *shall*, on the contrary, in the first Person simply foretells; in the second and third Persons commands or threatens'. Except that he does not recognise the determinative force of *will* in the first person, Lowth here anticipates the rulings given by later writers.

Coote (1788) does not recognise any distinction: 'The first (= primary) future is expressed by the addition of *shall* or *will* to the infinitive mode; as "I *shall* or *will* receive": "thou *shalt* or *wilt* pay" '. But ten years later Lindley Murray is conscious of it; and he is quoted in an interesting note by Bain: 'Lindley Murray considers the translation of the concluding verse of the 23rd Psalm to be incorrectly rendered. "Surely goodness and mercy *shall* follow me, and I *will* dwell in the house of the Lord for ever;" he would make it "will

follow" and "shall dwell." But this is a question of meaning. As now rendered, the first clause is a promise, "goodness and mercy are ordained to follow me," which is not improbably the true meaning. The second clause would imply "it is my determination and preference to dwell in the house of the Lord;" but if the meaning be, "I am destined to have bestowed upon me a dwelling in the house of the Lord," the suitable auxiliary is *shall*.

4. *Position of Adverbs and Correlatives*

The position of *only* in the sentence has already been touched upon (p. 63). In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) Blair has an interesting comment on this:

In the position of adverbs, which are used to qualify the significance of something which either precedes or follows them, there is often a good deal of nicety. 'By greatness', says Mr Addison in the *Spectator*, No 412, 'I do not only mean the bulk of any single object, but the largeness of a whole view.' Here the place of the adverb *only*, renders it a limitation of the following word, *mean*: 'I do not only mean'. The question may then be put, What more does he mean?

The fact is, with respect to such adverbs, as, *only*, *wholly*, *at least*, and the rest of that tribe, that in common discourse, the tone and emphasis we use in pronouncing them, generally serves to show their reference, and to make the meaning clear, and hence, we acquire a habit of throwing them in loosely in the course of a period. But, in writing, where a man speaks to the eye, and not to the ear, he ought to be more accurate, and so to connect those adverbs with the words which they qualify, as to put his meaning out of doubt upon the first inspection.

It almost goes without saying that Cobbett is more dogmatic, giving an example from the *Rambler*: 'For thoughts are *only* criminal, when they are first *chosen*, and then voluntarily *continued*'. But Addison and Johnson are by no means the

only writers who have placed *only* out of its strictly logical position. Indeed, this is a common and familiar usage. Bain raises a warning finger, but Onions is lenient: 'Some laxity is allowed in the placing of *only*, *merely*, *simply*: I *merely* came to inform you of the fact. Instead of: I came *merely* to inform. He has *only* stayed for a week. Instead of: *only* for a week. Obs. "Came to inform", "stayed for a week" are evidently regarded as indivisible units of speech'. This laxity is, on the whole, approved by Fowler as long as clearness and perspicuity are not in danger. Partridge, however, is an apostle of correctness, though he admits that the examples he gives of what he calls misplaced *only* are good English, in that they occur in the work of good writers. 'But are we', he comments in a footnote, 'to sacrifice lucidity and clarity and the subtle employment of nuance to the sacred cause of carelessness? Is the lowest common denominator to be the norm?' The answer to his first question is that, rightly or wrongly, we do; that the usage exists, and has existed for a long time. The answer to the second is that the lowest common denominator (by which he apparently means colloquial speech) has, in this as in other matters of language, often determined the literary usage. At the same time, it is a general principle of usage as well as of grammar that the adverb and especially the adverb phrase should be so placed in the sentence as to express the writer's meaning without ambiguity; that is, it should stand in close relationship to the verb or part of the sentence it is intended to modify. This principle, in fact, applies in the last resort to the position of *only* itself and similar adverbs.

One type of adverb phrase, that in which a gerund is governed by a preposition, is worth a special note. Its misplacement is as common as that of the participle phrase (see p. 68 ff.), and may be sometimes more serious.¹ Here is an example from Goldsmith: 'After thus grieving through three scenes, the curtain dropped for the first act'. Grammatically,

¹ Rather oddly, Partridge seems to confuse the two, giving as an example of 'Participial Phrases, Disconnected' the sentence 'After walking about two miles from Llangollen, a narrow valley opens on the right'.

that sentence has no shape at all, since the adverb phrase cannot be related to the predicate. But, like the misplaced or unconnected participle phrase, the construction has had in the past, and still has, a certain respectability. In effect, the reader is left to divine the meaning without the mechanical aid of a sentence construction which would put it beyond doubt. Since the remedy is simple (for example, substituting an adverb clause for the gerund phrase), and since the excuses already advanced for the misrelated participle phrase cannot here be justified, there seems every reason for a sustained attack upon a regrettable tradition. Yet, strangely enough, this loose construction has been on the whole neglected by modern grammarians, including Fowler.

Similarly, there is a general idiomatic laxity in the placing of correlatives (like *either . . . or, both . . . and*) in the sentence. In *Good English* (p. 48) I myself ventured to dogmatise: "The important thing is to place [correlatives] in the right position, so that they introduce, to use . . . the language of mathematics, "like terms". Thus if I write "I neither saw him nor her", *neither* is out of position unless *nor* is followed by a like term, that is, a verb: "I neither *saw* him nor *met* her". But the more obvious meaning demands that *neither* should come before *him*: "I saw neither *him* nor *her*" '.

It must be admitted, however, that usage is against me, and that some modern grammarians, as well as most writers, would regard my ruling as a piece of pedantry. Partridge, indeed, says that 'the only rule is that the division must be made with logical precision'. But the battle is already lost. Here, for example, is Goldsmith:

either praising the beauty of such as were handsome or the dresses of such as had nothing else to recommend them;

and here is Hazlitt:

There is an inward unction, a marrowy vein, both in the thought and feeling.

Milton's prose has not only this drawback, but it has also the disadvantage of being formed on a classic model.

The meaning is clear in all the sentences, even in the third, which is knocked away by the correlatives. It is not the purpose of this book either to defend or to condemn. All that can be said is that here, as elsewhere, when a particular usage establishes itself before the grammarians pounce upon it, it tends to become idiomatic. And then the grammarians protest in vain. The worst (or best) they can do is to make the consciously careful writer uneasy, to be afraid, like Andrew Lang when he read *The King's English*, 'to put pen to paper'.

5. *Grammatical Idioms*

The term *idiomatic* has been used once or twice in the preceding paragraphs; and the implication is that certain grammatical illogicalities have become, through long usage, recognised as legitimate and proper. In this sense, the older grammarians rarely, if ever used the term *idiom*. On the whole, they took their stand on grammatical 'correctness'. Modern grammarians, on the other hand, have tended to crystallise as grammatically idiomatic expressions to which older usage afforded a certain latitude. To take a simple example: it is popularly held today that the preposition following the words *different* is *from*. But if we consider usage itself, we are bound to admit that this is a mere superstition. The quotations in the *Oxford Dictionary* are pretty well equally divided among *from*, *to*, and *than*. For *from* the argument is primarily based on etymology; but it can be supported, as Partridge remarks, by the fact that *differ* is always followed by *from*,¹ never by *to* or *than*. Analogy therefore is on the side of *from*. As for *than*, that could be conveniently ruled out on the principle that *than* always follows a comparative, and (with the single exception of the word *else*) nothing but a comparative. But when all is said and done, the fact remains that writers go on using *to* and *than* equally with *from*. A ruling that has academic and even logical backing cannot prevail against usage.

¹ Except when it is the equivalent of *disagree*, when it may be followed by *with* ('I differ *with* him on the question of football pools').

But this is, it must be admitted, debatable ground; and no one can tread it with any certainty. All modern writers on good English have an urge for tidiness in grammatical idiom, corresponding with the older urge for formal grammatical correctness. In effect, they set up their own private academies. The trouble is that they are always betrayed into inconsistencies; sometimes they enthusiastically enlist the usage, especially of the past, in a battle against what they consider to be a popular superstition engendered by the academic education of the schools (their attitude to *different*, *averse*, *compare*, and the like is a case in point), and sometimes they formulate their own principles or rules in the teeth of usage, both past and present. Thus Fowler says on the word *aggravate* that its use 'in the sense *annoy*, *vex*, should be left to the uneducated. It is for the most part a feminine or childish colloquialism, but intrudes occasionally into the newspapers'. But he conveniently ignores the *Oxford Dictionary*, which has the entry '7. to exasperate, incense, embitter (a person); *fam.* to provoke, arouse the evil feelings of', and gives the two examples:

If both were to aggravate her parents, as my brother and sister do mine – Richardson.

Threats only served to aggravate people in such cases. – Thackeray.

Even if, as the *Oxford Dictionary* implies, the use of the word with a somewhat weaker meaning is *fam.*, the construction at any rate has authority behind it. There are other examples of a similar syntactical leap, as it were; thus, 'to execute the sentence of the court upon a person' becomes 'to execute a person'. It is not easy to see why *aggravate* should be denied a natural linguistic change.

They are also faced with the real difficulty that, after all, new (or, indeed, older) constructions which for one reason or other they condemn do, in fact, become common in modern usage; that usage, like everything else in language does not continue in one stay. Here, for example, is Fowler on the

verb *prefer*: 'To use simple *than* instead of *rather than* is clean against established idiom, as bad as saying *superior than* or *prior than* instead of *superior* or *prior to*. But this solecism, of which there is hardly a trace in the OED article (1908), has recently become common. . . . The main point is that *prefer than* without *rather* is not English'. He then proceeds to give 'an array of quotations' from (apparently) reputable newspapers and books, which is, he remarks, 'in amusing contrast with the solitary specimen (dated 1778) that the OED could show'. This is to argue, in effect, that the language must not be allowed any development after 1908 or 1778. But Fowler was writing professedly on *Modern English Usage*; and on his own showing *prefer than* is modern English usage, and therefore no longer a solecism. If he had been consistent, he would have written something like this: 'The use of *than* after *prefer*, which was formerly considered a solecism, has now become (or is rapidly becoming) an established idiom'. It is true that most (probably all) modern grammarians follow him, remembering the rule that *than* must follow a comparative ('prefer rather than'). But Fowler's 'array of quotations' and a similar array that they might easily find for themselves with a little searching are hard to explain away. Partridge rather maliciously quotes a sentence from Sir Alan Herbert: 'Modern dictionaries are pusillanimous works, preferring feebly to record what has been done than to say what ought to be done', but excuses him on the grounds that *What a Word!* is not a grammar. Which things are an allegory.

Three factors which play an important part in syntactical idiom are ellipsis, analogy, and variation of function. Ellipsis, the 'omission from the sentence of words needed to complete construction or sense' (COD), is by its nature a word-saving device which has the general effect of making the sentence compact and concise. Thus a double sentence in which the predicates of the two clauses are identical, like 'Jack went up the hill and Jill went up the hill', may be and usually is recast as a simple sentence with a double subject, the predicate being expressed only once: 'Jack and Jill went up the hill'. So, too, an auxiliary verb may do duty for a compound tense

that has been previously used in the sentence: 'If you are going, I am [going]'. We have already noted (p. 90) the ellipsis in modern English of the relative pronoun. Somewhat akin to that is the omission of the conjunction *that* introducing a noun clause: 'I knew [that] he was very ill', and the omission of the second subordinating conjunction when two subordinate clauses are themselves co-ordinate: 'When the meeting was over and [when] the people had gone home, the officials met privately'. This simple ellipsis of connectives, which arose after the Old English period, though it is by no means common in mediæval English, is an established element in the modern sentence pattern.

We may say, in general, that ellipsis is sound and idiomatic as long as it does not lead to ambiguity, or seriously conflict with a logical principle of grammar. In this connection, it is interesting to note how an elliptical construction may come under critical fire. Brennan, for example, in his *Composition and Punctuation familiarly explained* (1829) says: 'The poor writer has a great horror of *that, he, I, you, it, she, they*, and he scrupulously avoids them as destructive to beauty and elegance. He says "I am happy to hear you are well, and am rejoiced you will soon be coming to London." It would shock him to write, "I am happy to hear *that* you are well, and *I* am rejoiced *that* you will soon be coming to London". Yet the introduction of these words in italics, would show the writer to be above the common class'. The older grammarians frowned upon the construction in which two separated prepositions govern the same noun. Lowth says: 'Some writers separate the Preposition from its Noun in order to connect different Prepositions with the same Noun; as, "To suppose the Zodiac and Planets to be efficient of, and antecedent to, themselves"' (Bentley, Sermon 6). This, whether in the familiar or solemn style,¹ is always inelegant'. His example is not altogether convincing, since the two prepositions concerned are not precisely parallel in function; but his meaning is clear. Today such a construction is regarded as a neat and useful

¹ An example, by the way, of ellipsis in the correlative construction dealt with on p. 140.

idiom: 'I was interested in, and amused by, his remarks on the subject'. Only when the ellipsis goes too far, by the omission of the first of the two prepositions, does the purist object.

The modern grammarian will not admit the implied ellipsis in the sentence 'There will be an interval of ten minutes between each act'. Fowler is uncompromisingly against it: '[between] must not be followed by a single expression in which a distributive such as *each* or *every* is supposed to represent a plural'. He does not even recognise the possibility of ellipsis here. Partridge does, but considers it illegitimate. Jespersen, however, dispassionately records the construction, and by implication defends it: 'Note the elliptical expression: "He spoke slowly, pausing between every sentence", "Looking up furtively between each mouthful" – meaning really between every (each) mouthful and the next'. That laconic note expresses the commonsense, rather than the pedantic, attitude to ellipsis in its relationship to grammar and usage.

Analogy is the force of example. In his interesting article on it (MEU) Fowler deals with it mainly as a 'corrupter of idiom'. It gives rise to mistakes that are due, he says, 'to the assumption that some word or phrase may be treated in a way that would be legitimate if another of roughly the same meaning had been used instead'. Among his examples he quotes 'Mr H. Belloc, who has not often admitted to ignorance on any subject, has owned . . .', where analogy has endowed *admit* with the construction proper to *confess* ('admit ignorance' but 'confess to ignorance'). I have treated the subject in both *Good English* and *Better English* under the heading of 'Mixed Idiom'. Nothing more need be said here than that analogy has been powerful at all stages of the history of the language. An example from Addison ('no sooner but . . .') is discussed on p. 164. Here is another, from Milton: 'Flattery and court-shifts, and tyrannous aphorisms appear to them the highest points of wisdom; instilling their barren hearts with a conscientious slavery', where *instil* (*into*) has borrowed the construction of, for example, *fill* (*with*). But analogy can be curtly and harshly dismissed as a 'corrupter of idiom' only if we admit that idiom

itself can be subjected to academic rule. It has played, and still plays, an important and legitimate part in the shaping of the language.

Variation of function is a cumbersome term for one of the basic and commonest processes in English. It may be simply explained like this: in itself a word has no function and cannot be classified as a particular part of speech; it is syntactically 'living' only when it is at work in the sentence. English has a remarkable aptitude for using the same word in different functions, and therefore as different parts of speech. In Elizabethan times this liberty was used to the utmost. Abbott gives scores of examples in Shakespeare. It is the more curious, therefore, that it incurs the displeasure of some modern pundits, especially when writers give to new words the freedom which has long been enjoyed by the old. Luckily, both colloquial and literary usage defies them, and preserves for the language a pithiness which, but for this functional variation, it would lose. The subject has been touched upon (p. 49) in connection with the noun-adjective, and no more need be said upon it here, except that to cold-shoulder (= 'to give the cold shoulder to') such a convenient and flexible usage is to sin against the light.

A note must be added here on another functional idiom, the addition of an adverb particle to a simple verb. Lowth has a note concerning it:

Verbs are often compounded of a Verb and a Preposition; as, *to uphold*, *to outweigh*, *to overlook*: and this composition sometimes gives a new sense to the Verb; as *to understand*, *to forgive*.¹ But in English the Preposition is more frequently placed after the Verb, and separate from it, like an Adverb;² in which situation it is no less apt to affect the sense of it, and to give it a new meaning; and may still be considered

¹ Not a legitimate example: here *for* is not the 'preposition' but an Old English prefix.

² It is curious that Lowth does not recognise the particle, whether compounded or added, as an adverb in its own right, and more curious that some modern grammarians have followed him in this.

as belonging to the Verb, and a part of it. As, *to cast* is to throw; but *to cast up*, or to compute, *an account*, is quite a different thing: thus, *to fall on*, *to bear out*, *to give over*; &c. So that the meaning of the Verb, and the propriety of the phrase, depend on the Preposition subjoined.

This idiom, as we have already seen (p. 64), existed in Old English, and it has played an important part in the later development of the language. Verbs of this type are now usually called 'phrasal verbs'. American has many more of them than English itself. Here are two examples from Mr G. V. Carey's *American into English*:

The general uproar drowned *out* his protests.

Lie down on the bed and get rested *up*.

Onions notes two types: (a) 'verbs of Intransitive meaning, [which], when compounded with Prepositions, fixed for particular meanings, become equivalent to Transitive verbs', and (b) transitive verbs combined 'with certain adverbs, as *away*, *forth*, *in*, *off*, *on*, *up*, etc.'. But this division is not altogether necessary or sound. Some of the verbs which he cites under (a), for example, are transitive in their simple form, as, for example, *touch* (upon), *put* (upon). On the whole, it is better to regard the particle as an adverb, whether it is added to an intransitive or to a transitive verb: thus, in the sentence 'I laughed at the joke', *at* is not a preposition governing the noun but an (adverb) particle in the transitive phrasal verb 'laughed at'. Nevertheless, as Onions says, with pure transitive verbs the particle is more clearly adverbial, since it may stand after the object. He gives as an example 'Call *off* the hounds' or 'Call the hounds *off*'. When a phrasal verb, of whatever origin, is transitive, it may become passive ('He was laughed at', 'The hounds were called off'), and the adverbial force of the particle is then apparent.¹ All this is

¹ Even Fowler does not recognise this. He gives as an example of preposition at end, 'Too horrible to be trifled with'. But here *trifle with* is a transitive phrasal verb (verb + adverb particle) as distinct from the intransitive verb *trifle*. See also p. 64.

equally true of verbs that are followed by two particles. In 'put up with' both *up* and *with* are adverbs, and 'put up with' is a transitive verb: 'I cannot put up with that noise', 'That noise cannot be put up with'.

The sentence of Sir Alan Herbert's quoted on p. 143 and Partridge's comment may serve to point a moral with which to end this chapter. It is the function of the dictionary to record, not to adjudicate. That is why the grammarians, whose business is criticism, analysis, and adjudication, are always baffled by its apparent implication that whatever is is right. But the grammarian off duty, as it were, is always apt to slip into a construction of which, when he is on duty, he would not approve. There in a few words is the eternal conflict between 'correctness' and usage, between what has been or is being done and what ought to be done. For the 'ought', after all, eludes us still.

Chapter VI



THE SENTENCE ON THE PAPER

A NOTE ON PUNCTUATION

NO ATTEMPT has been made here to deal in any detail with the conventions of modern punctuation. Readers are referred to Mr G. V. Carey's brief but excellent *Mind the Stop* (Cambridge, 1939) and Mr Eric Partridge's *You Have a Point There* (Hamish Hamilton, 1953), a careful, interesting, and exhaustive treatment of a difficult subject. I have merely outlined the principles of older punctuation, and shown how they both differ from and are related to those of the modern system.

It is convenient to begin with the earliest printed books, since the light (and, as we should think, haphazard) punctuation of Saxon and Mediæval manuscripts raises questions which are beyond the scope of this chapter. Caxton used only three 'points' – a stroke (/) marking off word-groups or phrases, a colon marking a distinct syntactical break or pause, and a full stop marking either the end of the sentence or a brief pause. Here, to illustrate this early convention, is an example from Caxton's *The Art and Crafte to know well to dye*:

The thyryde temptation that the deuyl maketh to theym that deye. is by Impacyence: that is ayenste charyte/ For by charyte we ben holden to loue god aboue alle thynges. Now is it thus that to them that deye/ cometh ryght gret sorowe & payne of hert & of body. Be it that the deth come naturelly/ or that it come by any other euyll accydent. For by payne & sorowe many ther be that ben Impacyent & grutchynge. and deyen in suche wyse as they semen madde or oute of theyr wytte as it apyereth ofte/

The ambiguous use of the point soon disappeared. It is not to be seen in Tyndale's Translation of the Pentateuch (1530):

Than God sayd: let there be lyghte and there was lyghte. And God sawe the lyghte that it was good: & devyded the lyghte from the darcknesse/ and called the lyghte daye/ and the darcknesse nyghte: and so of the evenynge and mornynge was made the fyrst daye

And God sayd: let there be a fyrmament betwene the waters/ and let it devyde the waters a sonder. Than God made the fyrmament and parted the waters which were under the firmament/ from the waters that were above the fyrmament: And it was so. And God called the fyrmament heaven/ And so of the evenynge and morninge was made the seconde daye

Here the general system is clear, though (as in much modern punctuation) there are, or seem to be, inconsistencies. Thus we should expect a colon, not a stroke, after *heaven* in the last sentence of the second paragraph, especially as the break is emphasised by the use of the following capital A, as in the previous sentence. Similarly, we should expect a stroke after *lyghte* in the first sentence (paragraph 1) and after *fyrmament* in the second sentence (paragraph 2). It is curious, by the way, that there is no full stop at the end of the paragraphs. This, however, may be an idiosyncrasy of the printer, since the full stop is there in Tyndale's *Gospels* (1535).

Somewhat later the stroke was replaced by the comma (,), and another point, the semi-colon, was introduced.

Bacon's punctuation in the *Essays* illustrates early seventeenth century convention, and testifies to what appears an arbitrary use of the colon, semi-colon, and comma that depends rather on breath pauses than on the syntactical pattern of the sentence:

What is *Truth*; said jesting *Pilate*; And would not stay for an Answer. Certainly there be, that delight in Giddinesse; And count it a Bondage, to fix a Beleefe; Affecting Free-will in Thinking, as well as in Acting. And though the Sects of Philosophers of that Kinde be gone, yet there

remaine certaine discoursing Wits, which are of the same veines, though there be not so much Bloud in them, as was in those of the Ancients. But it is not onely the Difficultie, and Labour, which Men take in finding out of *Truth*; Nor againe, that when it is found, it imposeth vpon mens Thoughts; that doth bring *Lies* in fauour: But a naturall, though corrupt Loue, of the *Lie* it selfe.

‘Whereas,’ says the revised (1692) edition of Ben Jonson’s *Grammar*, ‘our breath is by nature so short, that we cannot continue without a stay to speake long together, it was thought necessarie, as well as for the speakers’ ease, as for the plainer deliverance of the things spoken, to invent this meanes, whereby men pausing a pretty while, the whole speech might never the worse be understood’. Accordingly, the four points or stops are systematically named and described, with some reference to the pause or ‘breath’:

The distinctions of an *imperfect* Sentence are two, a *Comma*, and a *Semicolon*.

A *Comma* is a mean breathing, when the word serveth indifferently, both to the parts of the sentence going before, and following after, and is marked thus (,).

A *Semicolon* is, a distinction of an *imperfect* sentence, wherein with somewhat a longer breath, the sentence following is included; and is noted thus (;).

Hither pertaineth the *Parenthesis*, wherein two comma’s include a sentence.

A *Pause* is a distinction of a sentence, though perfect in itselfe, yet joyned to another, being marked with two pricks (:).

A *period* is the distinction of a sentence, in all respects perfect, and is marked with one full prick, over against the lower part of the last letter, thus (.).

These were the four basic marks of punctuation recognised by grammarians up to Cobbett. Lowth says that ‘punctuation is the art of marking in writing the several pauses or rests, between sentences, and the parts of sentences’, and remarks

that although these pauses admit of great variety, 'the whole number of Points, which we have to express this variety, amounts only to Four'. He gives the traditional division of the sentence as standardised by the rhetoricians, relating it to the functions and names of the four stops:

The Period is the whole Sentence, compleat in itself, wanting nothing to make a full and perfect sense, and not connected in construction with a subsequent sentence.

The Colon, or Member, is a chief constructive part, or greater division, of a Sentence.

The Semicolon, or Half-member, is a less constructive part, or subdivision of a Sentence or a Member.

A Sentence or Member is again subdivided into Commas, or Segments.

To the stops themselves he assigns proportionate values in terms of pauses: 'the Period = 2 Colons; the Colon = 2 Semicolons; the Semicolon = 2 Commas'. But this mathematical arrangement, based on an artificial and unrealistic relationship between punctuation and pronunciation, has no true validity. In the work of eighteenth century writers, colons, semi-colons, and commas seem to jostle one another uncereemoniously, with little regard for their relative values; and the grammarians themselves find some difficulty in distinguishing one from the other. Certain modifying factors are evident in Cobbett. The semi-colon has lost something of its old dignity and is merely a stop to be used 'when the comma is not quite enough to keep the meaning of the simple sentences sufficiently distinct'. He is, indeed, forced into an un-Cobbettlike remark that has often been echoed since: 'You will now see, that it is quite impossible to give any *precise rules* for the use of these several points. Much must be left to taste: something must depend upon the weight which we may wish to give to particular words, or phrases; and something on the seriousness, or the levity, of the subject on which we are writing'.

The colon and the semi-colon are positively attacked by Justin Brenan, a disciple of Cobbett, in his curious and racy manual *Composition and Punctuation familiarly explained*

(1829). He even goes so far as to say that the 'one great test of the perfection of a sentence, I think, is, when we cannot, with propriety, introduce any stop except the comma', arguing that when the semi-colon is brought in, the 'entireness of the sentence is, in some degree, broken'. The older grammarians had often discussed and tried to define the difference between a colon and a semi-colon¹ – Murray, for example: 'The propriety of using a colon, or semicolon, is sometimes determined by a conjunction's being expressed or not expressed; as, "Do not flatter yourselves with the hope of perfect happiness: there is no such thing in the world"'. "Do not flatter yourselves with the hope of perfect happiness; for there is no such thing in the world"'. But Brennan, writing in the heyday of Murray's fame, is scornful of such nice distinctions: 'What a quantity of useless controversial stuff has been written upon the "proper" use of the semi-colon² and colon! But I am wrong in saying it was useless. For, at last, seeing such interminable contests amongst the doughty disputants, common sense prevailed, and the public settled the business by throwing their two favourite stops overboard. The schoolmasters, however, picked them up, and are still striving to keep them afloat, but all will not do'.

For the colon he would substitute the dash. Indeed, he cannot resist making a pun on the subject. 'The colon,' he says, 'has been literally *dashed* to pieces.' Here he is utterly opposed to Cobbett, who will have no truck with the dash, partly because no one could decide exactly how long to make it, whether 'the *inch*, the *three-quarter-inch*, the *half-inch*, the *quarter-inch*'. But Brennan is jauntily confident. He gives an example: 'What a lamentable situation his! Wife, children, mother, sisters, friends – all desert this hapless victim of perfidy and ingratitude!' 'Formerly,' he comments, 'a colon

¹ The traditional values of the colon and semicolon are, in fact, illustrated in Cobbett's sentence quoted in the previous paragraph: the colon marks the distinct break, and the semicolon a pause before a clause or other word group introduced by a connective.

² Brennan sometimes writes the word with the hyphen, sometimes without it.

would come after *friends*, but now that we have the more expressive dash, no one of good taste could adopt any other stop'. On the whole, modern usage would support him as far as this particular sentence is concerned; but the 'more expressive dash', though recognised as a useful stop for the aside that is not quite a parenthesis, is still suspect in the eyes of pedantic authority.

Even for Brennan the dash will not always serve. Sometimes the colon or the semi-colon is better replaced by a comma. He gives as an example: 'As men, from want of proper reflection, unthinkingly defend the grossest errors, and thereby cause much confusion and mischief: so, a monkey has, unwittingly, cut its throat by imitating his master, at shaving'. His comment is interesting: 'Now, I say, that there should be neither colon, nor semi-colon, but a simple comma, after *mischief*. The colon would never have been introduced here, but for that fruitful source of vicious punctuation – the vain attempt to fix portions of time for pausing on each stop.' Brennan is, in fact, one of the first to recognise, or at any rate to state, that the punctuation mark should be not primarily an indicator of pauses, but an integral part of the sentence pattern. Cobbett in the remark already quoted (p. 152) hints vaguely that punctuation was something more than a mechanical breath-timer. But neither he nor Brennan himself fully appreciates its syntactical significance.

The pause or 'breath' system is implicit, for example, in Brennan's notes on the comma. 'We may generally put it,' he says, 'whenever we think there is an ordinary rest before the end of the sentence'. But interpretations of a 'rest' differ. Brennan favours on the whole the high pointing, 'only of recent date', mainly because it 'relieves us from the frequent semi-colon, so embarrassing to inexperienced punctuators'. His example is so besprinkled with commas that we can only imagine they represent the pauses of a reader who is singularly lacking in breath:

Now, as this may, and often has, been, and is still, considered, by many persons, as a direct infringement, yet,

seeing that, under all circumstances, men will, in despite of law, run those risks, we cannot, here, take into serious account . . .

He suggests, however, that the commas could, in fact, be reduced to four – after *been*, *infringement*, *circumstances*, and *risks* – and so raises a question that has been discussed by many later grammarians. Partridge admirably sums the general argument in his Chapter ‘Not Too Little, Not Too Much: Close Punctuation and Open Punctuation’ (*You Have a Point There*, pp. 94 ff.).

What may be called the pause philosophy of punctuation often prescribed the insertion of a comma that obscured or upset the syntactical construction of the sentence. Thus up to the end of the eighteenth century the relative (adjective) clause is normally separated from the main clause by a comma, whether the clause is defining or non-defining:

I have somewhere read of an eminent person, who used in his private offices of devotion to give thanks to Heaven that he was born a Frenchman. – Addison.

A wretch, who in the deepest distress still aimed at good-humour, was an object my friend was by no means capable of withstanding. – Goldsmith.

In each sentence the relative clause is defining, and modern punctuation by taking out the commas emphasises its direct relationship to the antecedent – ‘an eminent person who . . .’, ‘a wretch who . . .’, not parenthetic, ‘an eminent person, who . . .’, ‘a wretch, who . . .’. It could hardly be expected that older punctuation would mark a functional distinction which (see p. 89) was not generally recognised. Murray, however, in a somewhat muddle-headed note records the development of a usage that was not yet fixed or certain, except where the close relationship of clause and antecedent was heralded by a demonstrative (‘instances of those beautiful strokes which please the reader in the old song of Chevy-Chase’) or emphasised by the omission of the relative

(‘the first opportunity he had of finding his expectations disappointed’):

Relative Pronouns are connective words, and generally admit a comma before them; as, ‘He preaches sublimely, who lives a sober, righteous, and pious life;’ ‘There is no charm in the female sex, which can supply the place of virtue.’

But when the two members are closely connected by a relative, restraining the general notion of the antecedent to a particular sense, the comma should be omitted; as ‘A man who is of a detracting spirit, will misconstrue the most innocent words that can be put together.’

In this example, the assertion is not of ‘a man in general,’ but of ‘a man who is of a detracting spirit;’ and therefore they should not be separated.

Clearly, he does not realise that in his first two sentences the relatives ‘restrain the general notion of the antecedent to a particular sense’; that, in fact, the two members are just as ‘closely connected’ as those in his third example. He was only groping towards a systematisation that was to come later on; and his note reflects the hesitant usage of writers who just preceded, or were contemporary with, him.

Similarly, in older punctuation a comma as a marker of pauses was allowed to stand between subject and verb, or between verb and object. On this Murray is explicit: ‘A simple sentence, when it is a long one, and the nominative case is accompanied with inseparable adjuncts, may admit of a pause immediately before the verb; as, “The good taste of the present age, has not allowed us to neglect the cultivation of the English language”’. Examples are common. There are some in sentences quoted in the text of this book. Here are four others:

She perceived now, that she had no pretensions to taste. – Goldsmith.

I have observed in several of my papers, that my friend Sir Roger, amidst all his good qualities is something of a humorist. – Addison.

To explain the nature of laughter and tears, is to account for the condition of human life. – Hazlitt.

A man who¹ publishes his works in a volume, has an infinite advantage over one who¹ communicates his writings to the world in loose tracts and single pieces. – Addison.

Today we have more respect for the pattern of the sentence; a comma is not allowed to divide parts which are properly and logically indivisible.²

In his example (p. 154), Brennan illustrates the extremes of high and low punctuation; and in both the punctuation depends upon phonetic pauses rather than on syntactical structure. Hesitation between the two, especially when there is a bias towards the low or open, often tends to illogicalities and the blurring of construction. Brennan's (low) comma after *circumstances*, for example, divides the connective (*that*) from its clause, whereas the two (high) commas marking off the phrase 'under all circumstances' have no such dividing effect: the *that* jumps the parenthesis and links itself with its clause, 'men will . . .'. Partridge quotes from my own *Good English* a modern example in which a half-hearted attempt at open punctuation gives a false and unintelligible sentence pattern: '. . . while light conversation, punctuated by squeals of pain is to be expected'. Here the two types of punctuation ('high – low' and 'close – open') in fact distinguish two slightly differing meanings: (high or close) 'conversation, punctuated by squeals of pain, is . . .', where the participle phrase is parenthetic; (low or open) 'conversation punctuated by squeals of pain is . . .', where the participle phrase, like a defining clause, is an integral part of the subject. In modern usage, punctuation is an important guide to meaning; it marks not only differences of grammatical construction but also degrees of weight and emphasis. The good writer, having recognised a basic system that has some relationship to syntax, may within the limits

¹ Note the omission of the comma, in the modern manner, before the defining clauses. See above.

² This does not mean that *two* commas cannot mark off a phrase that stands between subject and verb or verb and object.

of that system use his stops with a certain freedom. They play a considerable part in the shaping of his sentences and the formation of his style.

By 'stops' here are meant the four which were recognised by the older grammarians (full stop or period, colon, semi-colon, comma), together with the dash in its general function as described by Brenan (p. 153). 'Besides these', says Cobbett, 'there are certain grammatical signs, or marks, which are made use of in the writing of sentences.' Of two of these, the question mark and the exclamation mark, there is little to be said. 'If a sentence be with an interrogation,' says Ben Jonson, 'we use this note (?).' Murray has a word of warning: 'A note of interrogation should not be employed where it is only said a question has been asked, and where the words are not used as a question. "The Cyprians asked me, why I wept"'. Nevertheless, in the eighteenth century the indirect question was quite frequently followed by the question mark, partly, no doubt, because the comma preceding it (see above) gave it the semblance of a direct question. Modern punctuation, without the comma, has gone far towards abolishing this error.

What we now call the exclamation mark once had the delightful name 'note of admiration', where admiration reflects the old Latin sense of *admire*, 'wonder'. T. F. and M. F. A. Husband, in their *Punctuation* (1905), make reference to the theory 'that this mark was originally Io, the Latin exclamation of joy, written so I. The form of I became obscured and the o filled up'. However that may be, the exclamation mark has no other special historical interest. Its modern use is clearly outlined by Carey and Partridge. Cobbett, by the way, has an interesting and characteristic note that points a moral: ' "*He is going away to-night! He is going away to-night.*" ' The last simply states the fact; but, the first, besides stating the fact, expresses *surprise* at it.'

Quotation marks or inverted commas were latecomers; they did not begin to plague English until the end of the seventeenth century. Ben Jonson, of course, has no knowledge of them; and the modern text of both the Authorised and the Revised Version of the Bible, retaining in this respect the

original punctuation, reminds us how little they would be missed. The older grammarians do not recognise – or at any rate do not stress – their use in indicating direct speech. ‘Two inverted commas’, says Murray, following Lowth pretty closely, ‘are generally placed at the beginning of a phrase or passage, which is quoted or transcribed from the speaker or author in his own words; and two commas, in their direct position, are placed at the conclusion’. Cobbett says much the same, but uses and describes what we should now call ‘single quotes’. On the whole, they think of them literally as marks of quotation, rather than as marks of conversation. Johnson, however, used inverted commas for direct speech in *Rasselas* (1759). Here are four representative passages to illustrate his conventions:

1. “What,” said he, “makes the difference between man and all the rest of the animal creation? . . . Man has surely some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification, or he has some desires distinct from sense which must be satisfied before he can be happy.”

2. “Why, said *Rasselas*, should you envy others so great an advantage? All skill ought to be exerted for universal good; every man has owed so much to others, and ought to repay the kindness that he has received.”

3. “This, said the prince, I do not understand, but I had rather hear thee than dispute. Continue thy narration.”

4. (*Imlac* is speaking) “I suppose he discovered in me, through the obscurity of the room, some tokens of amazement and doubt, for, after a short pause, he proceeded thus:”

“Not to be easily credited will neither surprise nor offend me; for I am, probably, the first of human beings to whom this trust has been imparted.”

The chief points to be noted are: (*a*) in passages 2 and 3 the quotation marks are not broken by the interpolated expressions ‘said *Rasselas*’, ‘said the Prince’, whereas in passage 1 they are, according to the modern fashion; (*b*) in passage 4 the subsidiary speech is introduced, like the main

speech, by double quotes – there is no artificial distinction between double and single for this purpose; (c) the colon introducing the subsidiary speech (passage 4) is *inside*, not – where we should probably put it – *outside* the quotation marks.

This position of the colon suggests the problem of the relationship of quotation marks to the other stops. In good modern usage, this is a matter of meaning; stops are placed inside or outside the quotes according as they belong, in sense, to the quotation or speech or to the sentence of which it forms a part. The older writers and printers, as may be seen from many sentences quoted in this book, tended to enclose a stop within the final quotation marks without reference to the structure of the sentence. Indeed, this convention is still followed by some printing houses, including *The Times* Publishing Company. Thus in the following sentence the stops after the quoted phrases should in each case stand outside the closing inverted commas, as they belong to the sentence itself:

It is not much good English people objecting to the American mistranslation of *Kapellmeister* as ‘chapel master,’ which they now apply to the leader of the orchestra, but which is so loosely used that we are surprised to learn in this book that Handel held ‘the post of chapel master for the Queen of England.’

Oddly enough, the same printers are not consistent enough to apply this rule to colons and semi-colons:

To understand why this should be we must return to Professor Kemp Smith’s phrase ‘Descartes as Pioneer’; for his importance lies more in the directions in which he set other men thinking than in any of his own thoughts.

But this inconsistency is such as the discerning reader or writer shall adore, since it has brought the semi-colon into its rightful and logical place. It must be admitted, however, that in the issue of *The Times Literary Supplement* from which the above sentences are taken there are other inconsistencies of position which suggest that the printers, influenced perhaps

by the writers, punctuate by whim rather than by any intelligible rule. The thirty-fourth (1948) edition of the Oxford *Rules for Compositors and Readers* states clearly the conventions of what is called at the beginning of this paragraph 'good modern usage'. Partridge courageously faces all the complications and difficulties; but his examples of what he holds 'to be correct pointing' (*You Have a Point There*, pp. 179–80) only serve to strengthen the argument that quotation marks – at any rate for direct speech – should be abolished altogether.¹

Punctuation, thanks to Fowler, Carey, Partridge, and other modern grammarians, and to the style or convention of Printing Houses, has become in modern times both an art and a science. Certain broad principles have been enunciated; and sometimes a line has been drawn between right and wrong. But the writer still has considerable latitude. The colon, the semi-colon, the comma, and the dash are still apt to trespass on one another's property, if indeed each has a definite property for the others to trespass on. Moreover, printers, who control the punctuation of those writers who either cannot or will not punctuate for themselves, often disagree in their conventions, so that in minor matters at any rate there is no standard usage. Punctuation even more than the other departments of English lacks its Academy. Perhaps, after all, it is better so. In his *Rules for Compositors and Readers* Horace Hart recounts a story of Sheridan, who, called upon

¹ It is not always easy to decide when a stop is integral to a passage of direct speech – that is to say, when it should properly stand inside the closing quotes. Once we depart from the practice of the old writers, in which all stops, including semi-colons, were brought inside (see passage from Murray on p. 156), we are apt to find ourselves, at times, halting between two opinions. The discerning reader will, no doubt, find or think he has found inconsistencies in this book. Sometimes these arise because the original punctuation of quoted passages is usually followed; sometimes because I, being sometimes doubtful, have leant now to this side and now to the other. But the fact that the difficulty arises is only another argument against quotation marks.

to apologise to a fellow member of Parliament, said 'Mr Speaker I said the honourable member was a liar it is true and I am sorry for it', and added that the honourable member could put the punctuation marks where he pleased. The story has a moral that every reader, writer, and printer will interpret for himself.

Chapter VII



A P R A X I S

IT WAS the pleasant custom of some of the older grammarians – Lowth, for example – to end their books with what they called a Praxis, that is, a kind of analysis or parsing of a selected English passage, so that the principles and rules laid down in the text could be seen in action. I have taken a leaf out of their book and chosen a short passage from each of twelve writers to illustrate the pattern of the English sentence and some of the points of grammar and usage that have been dealt with in the previous chapters. The writers range chronologically from Dryden to Mr T. S. Eliot; and the passages exemplify, on the whole, the normal or middle style of modern English prose. Individualists like, say, Lamb, De Quincey, Carlyle, and some of the modern novelists (see p. 107 ff.) are not represented. To each passage is added a brief commentary and, where necessary, a general analysis of individual sentences.

1. If there was any fault in his [Ben Jonson's] language 'twas that he weaved it too closely and laboriously in his serious Plays: perhaps, too, he did a little too much Romanize our Tongue, leaving the words which he translated almost as much Latin as he found them: wherein, though he learnedly followed the Idiom of their language he did not enough comply with ours. If I would compare him with *Shakespeare*, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but *Shakespeare* the greater wit. *Shakespeare* was the *Homer*, or father of our Dramatick Poets; *Jonson* was the *Virgil*, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love *Shakespeare*. – Dryden: *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*

The first sentence is loose because it follows an older convention of punctuation (see Chapter VI). A modern writer

would substitute a full stop for the colon after *Plays*. The other colon, after *them*, is intended no doubt to emphasise the indefiniteness of the relative conjunction *wherein*, which has no recognisable antecedent. We should probably omit *wherein*, or its modern equivalent *in which*, and replace the colon with a semi-colon. The remaining sentences are good examples of the balanced or antithetical pattern. In more modern English there would certainly be a full stop after *writing*, marking off the final statement as a climax to the whole passage. Logically, a comma is necessary after *father*; and in modern usage (see Partridge, *You Have a Point There*, p. 38) a comma would normally be placed after the opening conditional clause, before the (now archaic) contraction *'twas*.

2. I no sooner saw this venerable man in the pulpit, but I very much approved of my friend's insisting upon the qualifications of a good aspect and a clear voice; for I was so charmed with the gracefulness of his figure and delivery, as well as with the discourses he pronounced, that I think I never passed any time more to my satisfaction. A sermon repeated after this manner, is like the composition of a poet in the mouth of a graceful actor. — Addison: *Spectator*

The first sentence is double, its two parts being divided by the semi-colon before the co-ordinating conjunction *for*. In this connection it is worth noting that the use of *for* as a true subordinating conjunction (= 'because' or 'in order that') dropped out of use quite early. Shakespeare has it: 'And for thou wast a spirit too delicate . . . she did confine thee' ('because'), 'And, for the time shall not seem tedious, I'll tell thee' ('in order that'). It is noteworthy that Addison uses the construction 'no sooner . . . but', which is condemned by modern grammarians on the grounds that *sooner*, being a comparative, should be followed by *than*. The opposite construction, 'hardly/scarcely . . . than' (for *but*) is similarly condemned today, though owing to the force of analogy it is, as Fowler lugubriously admits, 'surprisingly common'. Other points in the first sentence are: (i) the use of the possessive pronoun before the gerund — 'my friend's insisting' (see p. 78);

(ii) the construction 'charmed with . . . as well as with', where the two items (*gracefulness* and *discourses*) are clearly distinguished. To omit the second *with* by careless ellipsis is to make the expression ambiguous. The other possible construction, with another meaning, is 'as well as *of* the discourses': that is 'charmed with the gracefulness of (a) his figure and delivery and (b) his discourses'. If the preposition is omitted in the second element, it is *of* rather than *with* that the reader would normally supply; (iii) as the sentence stands *think* is a main verb in its clause ('I was so charmed that I think'); but the sense suggests that 'I think' is, in fact, parenthetic, and it might well be written so in more modern English: 'that I never passed, I think, any time . . .'.

The second sentence is simple in pattern. Here the participle phrase 'repeated after this manner' directly qualifies the noun like an ordinary epithet adjective. The construction 'Repeated after this manner, a sermon . . .' would have a slightly different meaning owing to a difference of emphasis. For the comma after *manner*, see p. 156.

3. To what I have formerly said of his writings may be added, that his diction was often harsh, unskilfully laboured, and injudiciously selected. He affected the obsolete when it was not worthy of revival; and he puts his words out of the common order, seeming to think, with some later candidates for fame, that not to write prose is certainly to write poetry. His lines commonly are of slow motion, clogged and impeded with clusters of consonants. As men are often esteemed who cannot be loved, so the poetry of Collins may sometimes extort praise when it gives little pleasure.
— Johnson: *Lives of the Poets*

Here the position of the participle phrases ('seeming to think . . .', 'clogged and impeded . . .') is interesting. Grammatically, they could be brought before, or any rate nearer to, the subject, but the nuance of meaning would be lost; they are purposely placed at the end as a kind of afterthought which is, paradoxically, an explanatory climax. The variation in position, within certain syntactical limits, of adjective and

adverb phrases and clauses, plays an important part not only in sentence rhythms but also in meaning and emphasis. In the last sentence we have a typical example of Johnsonian antithesis. For the formal *as . . . so* 'equals' sign, current English would prefer 'Just as . . . ' without the correlative *so*. The first sentence exemplifies a natural inversion: the subject (noun clause) follows the predicate, which is itself preceded by a modifying prepositional phrase. In this construction the anticipatory *it* (see p. 59) is not necessary, but it is possible. Though the sentence contains three finite verbs, and therefore, technically, three clauses, it is simple in basic construction: a subject and a predicate, the verb in the predicate being modified by a phrase which happens to contain a clause. To analyse it into clauses – the familiar school exercise – only serves to obscure its pattern. For more on this see appendix; and for the comma after *added* see p. 156.

4. I was equally surprised, however, at the ^{his} ~~self~~ ^{omission} of the actress, who should have considered ^{her} ~~self~~ ^{as} I ^{as} a queen, as at the little discernment of the aud^e ~~ience~~ ^{ience} who gave her such marks of applause before she attempted to deserve them. Preliminaries between her and the audience being thus adjusted, the dialogue was supported between her and a most hopeful youth, who acted the part of her confidant. They both appeared in extreme distress, for it seems the queen had lost a child some fifteen years before, and still kept its dear resemblance next her heart, while her kind companion bore a part in her sorrows. – Goldsmith: *Citizen of the World*

The first sentence illustrates two interesting points of grammatical idiom. Modern grammarians condemn 'equally as' in any context. The general argument is that the modern expression, which is always prepositional in function, is *equally with*, and that there is no such corresponding conjunctive expression as *equally as*. We may say or write, 'I am equally good with you', 'You and I are equally good', 'I am as good as you are', but not 'I am equally as good as you' or 'as you are'. But the truth is that *equally with* has

never become acclimatised even to literary English. Of the correct examples given only the second and third are truly idiomatic, not the first. Fowler observes that the construction with *as* 'is a relic of the time when *equally with* had not been established & writers were free (as with many other correlative pairs) to invent their own formulæ' – an observation, by the way, that has a bearing on much that has been argued and illustrated in this book.

In the Goldsmith sentence the *as* can be avoided either by the simple expedient of replacing it by *and* ('I was equally surprised at A and B'), or by substituting for *equally* a word or expression that is naturally followed by *as* ('I was as much surprised at A as at B'). But why the modern writers should have lost a convenient liberty which the older writers possessed remains a mystery, especially as on the whole they cold-shoulder *equally with*.

The other idiom is 'consider as'. This was considered good usage up to quite modern times, but now the favoured construction is the one illustrated in the first clause of this sentence, an elliptical accusative and infinitive ('considered [to be] good usage'). Here again, there has been an unnecessary and unnatural hardening of idiom. But in fact there are two constructions and they reflect different meanings of *consider*: with the elliptical accusative and infinitive construction it means *think, judge*; with the *as* construction it means *think of*. In Goldsmith's sentence either construction may be justified, according to the meaning.

There are three other points of interest in this passage:

(a) the absolute phrase at the beginning of the second sentence. In Modern English we should probably substitute for it an adverb clause of time.

(b) the ambiguous relative clause at the end of the same sentence. Is it defining or non-defining? Modern punctuation would leave no room for doubt; the comma heralds the non-defining clause. But older punctuation ignored the distinction. The point is mentioned on p. 155 and discussed further on pp. 89–90.

(c) the *while* clause in the last sentence. Here we have *while*

as a 'strong conjunction playing the part of weak'. So Fowler, following the OED's description of this use as 'colourless', and condemning it as 'characteristic of the flabbier kind of journalese'. But Fowler, as often, forgets or ignores the past. As this Goldsmith passage proves, the use of the colourless *while* is two centuries old; and it is arguable that, here as elsewhere, *while*, though a co-ordinating rather than a subordinating conjunction, has a stronger meaning than the simple *and*.

5. It is not easy to write a familiar style. Many people mistake a familiar for a vulgar style, and suppose that to write without affectation is to write at random. On the contrary, there is nothing that requires more precision, and, if I may so say, purity of expression, than the style I am thinking of. It utterly rejects not only all unmeaning pomp, but all low, cant phrases, and loose, unconnected, *slipsbod* allusions. It is not to take the first word that offers, but the best word in common use; it is not to throw words together in any combinations we please, but to follow and avail ourselves of the true idiom of the language. To write a genuine familiar or truly English style, is to write as any one would speak in common conversation who had a thorough command and choice of words, or who could discourse with ease, force, and perspicuity, setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes. — Hazlitt: *On Familiar Style*

On the whole, Hazlitt practises what he preaches. His sentences are varied in length and construction, and fulfil his own requirements, precision and purity of expression. Note:

(a) the preposition at end ('the style I am thinking of') with the omitted relative.

(b) the balance of the fourth sentence, with the dividing semi-colon instead of a connective, and the deliberate repetition ('It is not to take' . . . 'it is not to throw').

(c) the placing of the demonstrative *so* between the auxiliary and the verb. In modern idiom it would more usually come at the end ('if I may say so').

(d) the use of the infinitive phrase as subject, with or without the anticipatory *it*.

(e) the correct placing of the correlatives '*not only . . . but [also]*'.

(f) the slightly ambiguous construction 'to follow and avail ourselves of', where the *of* might be syntactically attached to *follow* as well as to the phrasal verb 'avail [self] of'. But where the first verb is simple and transitive and the second either phrasal or intransitive followed by a preposition governing the object, the construction is condoned in modern usage. The same laxity is not allowed with similarly related verbs that are followed by different prepositions (see p. 144).

6. The scene of consultation was a blacksmith's shed, very comfortably screened from the wind, and directly opposed to the morning sun. Some held their hands behind them, some had them folded across their bosom, and others had thrust them into their breeches pockets. Every man's posture bespoke a pacific turn of mind; but the distance being too great for their words to reach me, nothing transpired. I am willing, however, to hope that the secret will not be a secret long, and that you and I, equally interested in the event, though not, perhaps, equally well-informed, shall soon have an opportunity to rejoice in the completion of it. — Cowper: *Letters*

This is an example of Cowper's apparently artless epistolary style; yet the sentences are, in fact, artfully fashioned. In the first sentence and the last the past participle phrases are neatly placed and balanced: 'a shed, comfortably screened . . . and directly opposed . . .', 'you and I, equally interested though not equally well-informed'. The second sentence has a deliberate and effective parallelism of clause: 'Some held/ some had/ and others had thrust'; and the next contains a natural nominative absolute. Modern idiom would prefer 'an opportunity of rejoicing' to 'an opportunity to rejoice', but both constructions are allowed. The word *transpire* has here its older meaning 'leak out'; the modern 'notorious misuse' (Fowler)

of the word in the sense 'happen' dates from the early nineteenth century. But why *transpire* more than any other word should be condemned for developing in common usage an extra meaning neither Fowler nor any other pedantic objector has ever troubled to explain.

7. Not fully believing the message sent through Mary Garth, they had presented themselves together within the door of the bedroom, both in black – Mrs Waule having a white handkerchief partially unfolded in her hand – and both with faces in a sort of half-mourning purple; while Mrs Vincy with her pink cheeks and pink ribbons flying was actually administering a cordial to their own brother, and the light complexioned Fred, his short hair curling as might be expected in a gambler's, was lolling at his ease in a large chair. – George Eliot: *Middlemarch*

In basic structure this sentence is double, the two co-ordinate sections being linked by the 'colourless' *while* (see p. 167):

They had presented	— while —	Mrs Vincy was	}
themselves	(= and +)	administering	
		and	
		Fred was lolling	

But the sentence is carefully elaborated by (*a*) the introductory participle (adjective) phrase; (*b*) two appositional phrases separated, though not ambiguously, from their related pronoun:

they . . .

{	both in black
	and
	both with faces . . . ;

and (*c*) three parenthetic phrases, all nominative absolutes, and each being punctuated according to the degree of its parenthetic effect (strong – dashes; medium – commas; weak – no stops). There is only one subordinate clause in the whole sentence ('as might be expected in a gambler's'), and that is

an integral part of the absolute phrase. This is a good example of the sentence whose complex structure is phrasal, not clausal (see p. 181).

8. The chaos prevailing among writers or printers or both regarding the use of the hyphens is discreditable to English education. Since it sufficiently proves by its existence that neither the importance of proper hyphening nor the way to set about it is properly known, this article may well begin with a dozen examples, all taken faithfully from newspapers, in which the wrong use or wrong non-use of the hyphens makes the words, if strictly interpreted, mean something different from what the writers intended. It is no adequate answer to such criticism to say that actual misunderstanding is unlikely; to have to depend on one's employer's readiness to take the will for the deed is surely a humiliation that no decent craftsman should be willing to put up with. — H. W. Fowler: *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage*

Fowler's prose is consciously correct and consciously idiomatic, but not elegant. In this characteristic passage the build of the sentences and their general syntactical pattern are, as it were, open and visible. 'Put up with' gloriously defies the anti-preposition-at-enders;¹ 'different from' reminds the reader that whatever other men have done and, indeed, whatever he himself said in his own note ('that *d.* can only be followed by *from* & not by *to* is a SUPERSTITION'), Fowler himself is on the side of the angels; and two triumphantly singular verbs ('is known', 'makes') with alternative subjects ram home a simple rule that careless writers too often ignore or forget. A purist might object to the construction of the first sentence ('chaos prevailing . . . regarding'), especially if *chaos* is presumed to have any metaphorical quality. A symmetrical pattern is recognisable in the other two sentences: in the first, the long adverb clause leading up to the main clause, and the participle phrases (the second of them elliptical) unambiguously qualifying the appropriate nouns; in the second,

¹ or seems to. But see p. 147.

the careful balancing about a semi-colon of the infinitive phrases as subject. The punctuation 'a dozen examples, all taken faithfully from newspapers, in which' is important. Here, by marking off the participle phrase with commas, he brings the relative ('in which') into proper relationship with its intended antecedent (*examples*). If the comma after *newspapers* were omitted, *newspapers* would become antecedent, with a change in the sense.

9. Is it beyond hope that in this matter a quite respectable job may be found for those who ply the homely, slighted trade of the journalist? Not, of course, at the heart of the empire of letters, but somewhere out on the shady borderlands of its demesne, where language may often be corrupt and uncouth and yet commendably alive. These are the fields in which to trot a new word up and down like a horse that is for sale – to show its paces and bring out its points. Like the nimble groom who holds the halter and runs, the pressman can assist at the trial of an aspiring idiom. He can use it experimentally in his own fugitive pieces, for the more learned world to see how it looks. If you perish daily with your works you can risk doing things which could scarcely be expected from more durable practitioners. – C. E. Montague: *A Writer's Notes on His Trade*

This is a good example of easy journalistic style. There is an effective informality in the opening rhetorical question, and in the answer, which does not boast a main finite verb. In the next sentence the use of the dash, instead of a comma, gives a kind of conversational emphasis to the final phrase. Here, by the way, the preposition stands naturally before the relative; 'the fields in which to trot . . .' is more idiomatic than 'the fields to trot a new word up and down in'. The simile 'Like the nimble groom . . . the pressman' is a little object lesson in the management of this kind of parallelism. A careless writer is apt to blur the likeness by confusing the syntax; as (to take an extreme example), 'Like the nimble groom who holds the halter and runs, an aspiring idiom can be exercised by the pressman'. Though the general meaning

is discernible, the change from active to passive completely upsets the logical construction.

10. In the first place, there remains the not despicable virtue, after two centuries of existence, of being readable. Addison can fairly lay claim to that; and then, slipped in on the tide of the smooth, well-turned prose, are little eddies, diminutive water-falls, agreeably diversifying the polished surface. We begin to take note of whims, fancies, peculiarities on the part of the essayist which light up the prim, impeccable countenance of the moralist and convince us that, however tightly he may have pursed his lips, his eyes are very bright and not so shallow after all. He is alert to his finger-tips. Little muffs, silver garters, fringed gloves draw his attention; he observes with a keen, quick glance, not unkindly, and full rather of amusement than of censure. – Virginia Woolf: *The Common Reader*

Three or four points are worthy of comment:

(i) the position of the adverb phrase ‘after two centuries of existence’. This phrase modifies the expression ‘being readable’, and idiomatically precedes or anticipates it in the sentence pattern. If, logically, it stood afterwards, the comma would go (‘the virtue of being readable after two centuries of existence’), and there would be a slight shift of emphasis in meaning.

(ii) The semi-colon after the first clause of the second sentence seems hardly strong enough, especially if the introductory phrase ‘and then’ is intended to be parallel to ‘in the first place’. A full stop would be better.

(iii) On three occasions the writer disjoins (that is, leaves without connectives) nouns that are linked in construction and meaning: ‘little eddies, diminutive waterfalls’, ‘whims, fancies, peculiarities’, ‘little muffs, silver garters, fringed gloves’. This has the effect of relating each noun in turn to its appropriate verb; an effect which is especially noticeable in the last sentence, where the insertion of *and* before ‘fringed gloves’ would, by joining the three items in one multiple

subject, destroy the studied suggestion of detail – one thing *then*, rather than *and*, another. If each noun was singular the verb would be singular, and the sense of separateness would be emphasised.

(iv) The order of the adjectives in the last clause is interesting: '(not) unkindly' is deliberately brought after the noun (*glance*), linking naturally with *full* to balance the two simple epithet adjectives (*keen, quick*). It would, of course, be possible to say 'keen, quick, not unkindly glance, and full . . .', but the rhythm and therefore the effectiveness of the clause would be a little impaired.

11. I take this period to have persisted until about my twenty-second year. Being a period of rapid assimilation the end may not know the beginning, so different may the taste become. Like the first period of childhood, it is one beyond which I dare say many people never advance; so that such taste for poetry as they retain in later life is only a sentimental memory of the pleasures of youth, and is probably entwined with all our other sentimental retrospective feelings. At this period, the poem, or the poetry of a single poet, invades the youthful consciousness and assumes complete possession for a time. We do not really see it as something with an existence outside ourselves; much as in our youthful experiences of love, we do not so much see the person as infer the existence of some outside object which sets in motion these new and delightful feelings in which we are absorbed. – T. S. Eliot: *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*

This passage represents the rather academic literary prose which is fashionable today, with no particular graces, but having a certain unemotional tautness and precision. The first sentence contains an accusative and infinitive, and the second a misrelated participle phrase ('being a period . . .' qualifying 'the end'). In the third sentence there is the 'concatenated' construction, in which the relative clause and the semi-parenthetic 'I dare say' make a kind of syntactical unit (see p. 137). It is difficult to understand why 'many people'

and 'they' should be represented by a first person possessive plural (*our*) in the last clause. The final sentence is a little heavy and awkward with the echoing *much as* – *much . . . as*, and the two relatives at the end. Here, by the way, *that* might well have been substituted for the first *which*. The comma after *love* is an intruder unless another comma is inserted after *as* ('much as, in our youthful experiences of love, we . . .').

12. The present day philosopher of history, balancing uneasily on the razor edge between the hazards of objective determinism and the bottomless pit of subjective relativity, conscious that thought and action are inextricably intertwined, and that the nature of causation, in history no less than in science, seems the further to elude his grasp the more firmly he tries to grapple with it, is engaged in asking questions rather than in answering them. But he has taken the plunge, and can no longer find refuge in the blithe Victorian security that facts are facts, and that what the historian makes of them is a matter of his own personal competence or personal idiosyncrasy. – *The Times Literary Supplement*

I have attempted a diagrammatic analysis of the two sentences that make up this passage:

SUBJECT	PREDICATE
The present-day philosopher of history (1) balancing uneasily on the razor edge between the hazards of objective determinism and the bottomless pit of subjective relativity, (2) conscious $\Rightarrow$ (a) that thought and action are inextricably intertwined, and (b) that the nature of causation, in history no less than in science, seems the further to elude his grasp (adverb cl. of degree $\Rightarrow$) the more firmly he tries to grapple with it	is engaged in asking questions rather than in answering them

noun clauses, object of *conscious*
adjective phrases qualifying *philosopher*

SUBJECT	PREDICATE
(But) he	has taken the plunge – and – can no longer find refuge in the blithe Victorian security (a) that facts are facts and (b) that <i>what the history makes of them</i> (noun cl. subject) is a matter of his own personal competence or personal idiosyncrasy

noun clauses in apposition to *security*

APPENDIX

SINCE most of us derive our knowledge of formal grammar from school, and since all those who have an interest in English are concerned with the methods of teaching it in the classroom today, I append here, as a kind of epilogue to what has gone before, a short article on the subject which I wrote for *The Times Educational Supplement*. It is reprinted here (with minor alterations) by kind permission of the Editor and Proprietors of that paper.

It is astonishing that many – indeed, most – elementary English grammar books are still cluttered up with such bits and pieces of inflection as still survive in English. The terminology of Greek and Latin has always bedevilled the grammarians, even when they write for children, just as classical terminology has always bedevilled those who seek, in vain, to elucidate and systematise English prosody.

But there seems to be no excuse for talking of gender in English nouns, and little excuse for talking of case. These, with the division of the various parts of speech into categories (as common, proper, concrete, abstract nouns), and an inordinate emphasis on irregular forms, are the commonest irrelevancies of the school grammarian, who all too often cannot see the wood for the trees himself and seems determined that nobody else shall. So, with painful labour he sets out to teach children what they would automatically learn in the ordinary course of things; and rarely touches upon those elements in the language which, being most teachable, are most profitably taught. Worst of all, he is introducing to the latest generation of teachers a teaching method that should have been discredited and forgotten long ago.

For there are no English inflections which a child needs systematically and deliberately to learn. True, when he is very young, he may say – invoking unconsciously and with

good reason the spirit of analogy – *mans, drinked, gooder*, and the like; but by natural law, without any effort of his own, he will soon attain to *men, drunk, and better*. A few odd verb forms may trouble him a little – *drank-drunk, lain-laid, flowed-flown*, and one or two others of that kind. But that is all.

¶ In speech, at any rate, the child is not bothered with the problem of inflection, unless he happens to be born in a strong dialect area; in writing, if he has a difficulty it is one of spelling, not of grammar or accident. And it is to the realm of spelling that matters of inflection should be relegated. Even the apostrophe *s*, which may be cited as the one example of an actual inflection for case in English nouns, has no real grammatical significance. There is little point in talking about the possessive case, still less the genitive. It occurs in only a few nouns, after all, and is merely a modern spelling convention deriving rather haphazardly from an old inflection. What is more important grammatically is that this apostrophe form is adjectival, and that in many nouns the apostrophe and the *s* have both been lost, so that the simple noun is itself an adjective; we say, for example, ‘a table leg’, not ‘a table’s leg’. This is one of the most important elements in the language; but the school text-books rarely mention it.

The term *case* is unnecessary in English. Certain pronouns have separate object forms; but declensions, as we understand the term in Greek, Latin, and Old English itself, do not exist, and there is no purpose in speaking of the accusative, or even the objective, case. Inflected pronominal forms present no difficulty. We know by instinct and intuition that *him, her, whom, them*, are object forms; and if we allow ourselves to say or write ‘Between you and I’, ‘Who did you see?’, ‘He asked we two to join him’, it is only that in such expressions a kind of colloquial idiom has grown up, blurring grammatical distinctions that themselves live on rather precariously into the present.

Formal treatment of case is unnecessary, any treatment of gender in nouns absurd. The purist will argue that nouns have a hint, a faint reflection, of gender through their relationship with the personal pronouns (*he, she, it*) and even, more

remotely, with the interrogatives and relatives (*who, which*). But where there is no real inflectional relationship, as in the noun-adjective agreement in French, there is no grammatical gender. We have in English nouns certain distinct forms indicating difference of sex. That is all; and that is merely a matter of vocabulary. Some pairs, like *man-woman, boy-girl, father-mother*, are of course familiar to the child from his earliest years. He will learn *gander, doe, vixen*, and the rest of that motley assembly as he learns other words, when he comes to them naturally in life and reading. But the temptation to make a neat exercise in two parallel columns, Masc. and Fem., is too great for the writer of grammar books, and often, alas! for the teacher. At best, the child gains a little premature, if useless, knowledge which will help him in answering a school quiz or solving a crossword puzzle.

So, too, with other inflections – tense, with all the complicated and unnecessary terminology that grammatical reports and grammarians have overburdened it. In the higher realms the elaborate English tense system is worthy of study; Jespersen makes much of it. But it has no place in the school scheme of language. Only by chance, or with odd forms such as those already mentioned, does the child have any difficulty. The tabulation of tenses, the making of paradigms, the traffic of perfects and such eccentricities as the future in the past: all these are beside the point and a mere darkening of counsel.

This, however, is not to say that the treatment of accidentence should be neglected altogether. There is one interesting way of tackling it, and that is to take inflection for exactly what it is, a survival out of the past, a piece of fossilised language. We assume on the part of the child a natural knowledge of inflected forms, inaccurate in detail, perhaps, but developing and basically sound; and, assuming that, we seek to interest him in their history, in the reasons why they exist. This means that the teacher must have knowledge of the older language, a nodding acquaintance at least with Anglo-Saxon. Indeed, there is every reason why historical grammar should be part, and a compulsory part, of the English course in

training colleges. It would then gradually find its way not only into the grammar but also into the modern schools. Of course, any historical treatment would go far beyond inflectional forms; it would include simple explanation and study of the whole structure and vocabulary of English. Nor would this be an extra, an end-of-the-term project for the teacher with a bee in his bonnet. It would be vital to the general, systematic teaching of the language. For it can scarcely be denied that if a child is taught the why and the wherefore of word forms, and knows the often romantic origin and etymological meaning of words, he will be likely to use the language himself with more intelligence and a deeper understanding.

But even here, in this historical treatment, inflection should not be over-emphasised. The important thing is that analogy, the force of example, is exceedingly strong in language; only comparatively few words struggle against it. And one by one these give way or, to change the metaphor, fall in step with most. It is not difficult to find examples. Nouns in English form their plural by adding *s* to the singular. But King Alfred wrote *bec* as the plural of *boc*, Chaucer used *toon* as the plural of *to[e]*, and even in Shakespeare's time people wrote *sboon* as the plural of *sbo[e]*. Now all these words have conformed to the common usage: we write *books*, *toes*, and *shoes*. Yet *men*, *teeth*, *children*, *oxen*, *mice*, *sheep*, have held out. So have the tense and past participle forms of strong verbs. It is a strange paradox that the best way of teaching the principles of accidence is to point to these few dogged, if melancholy, last ditchers. Above all, it is the regular, the principle, which is important, not the irregular. There are far more guiding rules in English, even in spelling, than the purveyors of oddities admit or allow us to recognize.

More important still is word function, and the pattern of the sentence. Here again the approach has too often been an unfortunate one, mainly, it must be confessed, owing to the bad example of examiners.

Most school-leaving examination papers in English language, having required the candidate to write an essay, or even two, and to try his hand at a *précis*, propound to him the

time-honoured question 'Analyse the following sentence into clauses, and state the nature and function of each clause.'

But though it is time-honoured, it is honoured by neither scholarship nor commonsense. For in the structure of the sentence the clause is not a jot more important than the phrase; indeed, on the whole it is not so important. To put it briefly, the sentence is usually built up not on a clausal, but on a phrasal, pattern. And if this is so, the exercise of analysis into clauses is not only valueless; it is positively harmful, since it obscures precisely what it is supposed to elucidate—the method by which we group and order words in the sentence, the basic syntactical unit.

A simple example will make the matter clear. Let us take this sentence: 'Knowing he was fond of reading, I gave him a book for Christmas.' We have only to glance at it to realise that it contains two word groups, as we may for the moment call them. One is recognisably the basic sentence—the main clause we should call it in our analysis. The other is the group that ends at the comma, and its significant word is the first one, the present participle *knowing*. It is in fact a phrase relating to, indeed qualifying, the subject (*I*) of the sentence; in formal grammatical terms, an adjective (participle) phrase. And there is the sentence pattern—a subject qualified by an adjective, a transitive verb with two objects, direct and indirect, and a little idiomatic phrase ('for Christmas') whose function may be adjectival or adverbial at the discretion of the reader.

But at this point the examiner steps in with the stern reminder that he had asked for clauses. So, being anxious to pass, we pick out the clause in our participle phrase and duly classify it as a noun clause, the object of a verb which is now left high and dry in our sedate columns or tossed uncere- moniously into the main clause. But we have knocked the sentence out of shape; for structurally the noun clause is irrelevant. It might have been a simple noun or a noun phrase—fundamentally, the sentence would be built up in the same way. Our only virtue is that we have been able to recognise a clause and an object when we see one; our misfortune is that,

for the sake of a mechanical exercise, we have falsified the pattern of the sentence.

Now it is clear that a similar, more or less serious, falsification and obscuration will take place whenever noun clauses are concerned. For the noun clause, whether as subject, object, or complement of the verb, or as object of a preposition in a phrase, is an integral part of its whole. The sentence 'I don't know when the match will be played' certainly contains two finite verbs, but strictly it does not contain two clauses, because it is logically one and indivisible. To put it another way, in structure this is a simple sentence, and if it is to be analysed at all it should be analysed as such. There is no point in detaching and docketing the noun clause. The important thing is that here is a sentence of a basic English pattern—subject, transitive verb, object. It is only an accident that the object is a clause; there is no syntactical significance in it whatever.

So, too, and even more obviously, the clause which is object of a preposition. Suppose the sentence is 'I was interested in what he said'. The word-grouping here is 'I was interested / in what he said'; the verb of the sentence is modified by an adverb phrase of the usual preposition plus noun type. That the noun happens to be a clause does not matter. If we analyse into clauses we get a distorted or indeed erroneous picture of the sentence: 'I was interested in / what he said'. Grammatically, we have separated the preposition from the noun it governs, as if we made the grouping 'The cow jumped over / the moon' instead of 'The cow jumped / over the moon'. We have, in fact, forced a sentence whose structure is phrasal into a clausal pattern, and in the process have ignored the proper function of the preposition (*in*). Indeed, it is one of the by-products of analysis into clauses that the importance of the conjunction is exaggerated at the expense of the preposition, the key-word of the most familiar type of phrase.

The distortion of the sentence pattern is not so serious when adjective or adverb clauses are concerned. Nevertheless, to detach the adjective clause from the sentence 'People who live in glass-houses should not throw stones' is to pretend that the subject of the sentence is 'people', whereas it is

'people who live in glass-houses'. Again, the sentence *is* basically simple; the subject cannot logically be broken up into parts merely because one part happens to be a clause. Moreover, if we allowed the defining clause to be—as it is here and, indeed, always—an integral part of its own unit (subject, object, complement) we should more readily distinguish between it and the non-defining clause. And this is a distinction which analysis into clauses usually obscures altogether. For example, the two sentences

(a) The first boy who answers the question will get a prize.

(b) The first boy, who is carrying the cricket bag, plays for the school first XI.

are analysed in essentially the same way (main clause, subordinate adjective clause) or, to point the distinction but add to the confusion, the second sentence is said to be made up of two co-ordinate clauses, on the grounds that *who* = 'and he'. The truth is that here clause analysis sheds no real light on syntactical structure. After all, it is much more important and pertinent to point out that the clause in sentence (b) is enclosed between commas, and that those commas have the effect of brackets—that is, they put the clause in parenthesis.

The disturbing thing is that the sentence could, or should, be studied in a more rational and profitable way. It ought not to be difficult to show that all its apparent complexities arise out of a fundamentally simple structure. The points to stress are the subject-predicate pattern, the importance of the verb (*verbum*, the word) in the sentence, the fact that the meaning parts (nouns) and the qualifiers (adjectives and adverbs) may be expressed in a single word or a word-group (phrase or clause), and that the words which effect the various group-relationships are conjunctions and prepositions. Thus the clause would at least be put in its proper place, and the way would be opened up for some more general study of our syntax, idiom, and usage. The results of such study and teaching would not be so easily examinable. But would that matter, if they led to a more lively and intelligent understanding of the principles of English?

INDEX

Note: The names of the following grammarians and the titles of their works as set out on pp. 8–10 do not appear in this Index, since they are referred to *passim*: Joseph Priestley, Robert Lowth, Lindley Murray, William Cobbett, Alexander Bain, C. T. Onions, O. Jespersen, H. W. Fowler, E. A. Sonnenschein, and Eric Partridge. For the same reason there are no entries 'Chaucer', 'Shakespeare' and 'Authorised Version of the Bible'.

- Abbott, E. A. (*Shakespearian Grammar*), 80, 90, 92, 146
 absolute phrase, 70, 72ff, 167
 accident, 15ff, 177–80
 accusative, 16
 and infinitive, 76
 Addison, Joseph, 20, 70, 95, 106, 115, 129, 138, 164
 adjectives, demonstrative, 25
 inflection of, 25
 position of, 61
 adverb-conjunction, 85
 adverb-particle, 146–7
 adverbs, formation of, 26, 52
 position of, 62–3, 138–40
 agreement of subject and verb, 120ff
 alternative subject, 123
 Alfred, King, 15, 55, 72, 84–5, 96
 analogy, 145–6, 180
 analysis, 180–3
 analytic language, 45
and (in sentence construction), 82ff
and + relative, 114ff
 Andrew, S. O., 57
 Anglo-Saxon, 15ff
 antecedent, 88
 anticipatory *it*, 59
 antithesis, 100ff
Apollonius of Tyre, 67
Apologie for Poetry (Sidney), 68
 apostrophe *s*, 19–20
 apposition, 59–61
Areopagitica, 104
as, construction with, 135–6
 Atkins, J. W. H., 19
 attributive noun, 48–50
 Austen, Jane, 44, 78
 auxiliaries in compound tenses, 32ff
 Bacon, Francis, 102, 150
 Bain, Alexander, 9, 70, 90, 117, 122
 Baugh, A. C., 22
 Blair, Hugh, 138
 Bone, G. D., 100
 Book of the Common Prayer, 68, 73, 101
 Bradley, Henry, 117
 Brennan, Nicholas, 152ff
 Bridges, Robert, 91, 117
 Brown, Goold, 131
 Brown, Ivor, 117
 Bunyan, John, 78
Cambridge History of Literature, 19
 Carey, G. V., 147, 149, 158
 Cary, Joyce, 108
 case
 inflections, 16, 178
 syntax of, 133ff
 Caxton, William, 93, 96ff, 149
 Cecil, Lord David, 115
 Chronicle, Anglo-Saxon, 45, 55, 82, 120

- Citizen of the World* (Goldsmith), 166
- clauses
- co-ordinate, 96ff
 - subordinate, 96ff
- Coleridge, S. T., 103, 106
- collective nouns, 119
- Common Reader* (Woolf), 173
- complement and subject, 128
- complex sentence, 98ff
- compounds, 47-9
- compound tenses, 32ff, 76
- conjunctions, 83ff
- Coote, Charles, 9, 27, 123, 137
- correlatives, 64-5, 140-1
- Cowper, William, 169
- Craigie, Sir William, 117
- dative, 20, 50
- absolute, 72
- Davies, Hugh Sykes, 25, 90, 132, 136
- declensions, 17-8
- defining clause, 89, 167
- Defoe, Daniel, 105
- degree, inflection for, 26
- do*, 42
- double subject, 120-1
- Dryden, John, 88, 106, 113, 115, 163
- Elements of the Grammar of the English Language* (Coote), 9, 123, 137
- Eliot, George, 119, 170
- Eliot, T. S., 174
- ellipsis, 78, 91, 143-5
- emphatic tenses, 42
- 'equally as', 166
- Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (Dryden), 88, 113, 163
- Euphues*, 100-1
- Evans, Prof. B. Ifor, 117
- Fowler, F. H., 117, 129
- Froissart, 93
- function, variation of, 146-7
- 'fused participle', 79, 129
- gender, 25, 178-9
- genitive, 46
- gerund, 79, 128
- phrase, 139
- gerundial adjective, 79
- gobbledygook, 117
- Goldsmith, Oliver, 70, 94, 139, 140, 166
- Gowers, Sir Ernest, 117
- Grammar* (Ben Jonson), 19, 151
- Grammar of English Grammars* (Brown), 131
- Grammar Without Tears* (Davies, Hugh Sykes), 25, 90, 132, 136
- grammatical idioms, 141ff, 166-7
- Graves, Robert, 117
- Guide to Patterns and Usage in English* (Hornby), 45
- Hazlitt, William, 110, 115, 140, 168
- headlinese, 49
- Herbert, Sir Alan, 117, 143, 148
- Hilton, John, 109
- History of the English Language* (Baugh), 22
- Hodge, Alan, 117
- Hopkins, G. M., 91
- Hornby, A. S., 45
- Husband, T. F. and M. F. A., 158
- idioms, grammatical, 141ff, 166-7
- imperative mood, 30
- indirect question, 158
- infinite parts of verb, 31-2
- infinitive mood, 31
- in phrase, 74-6
 - split, 131
- inflection, 15ff, 177-80
- ing forms, 31, 77ff, 128ff
- interrogative pronoun, 23
- interrogative sentences, verbs in, 42

- inversion, 58
it (anticipatory), 59
 'it's me' and like expressions, 133
- Johnson, Samuel, 8, 91, 103, 106,
 112, 118, 138, 159, 165
 Jonson, Ben, 19, 30, 118, 151,
 158
 Junius, Letters of, 103
- King's English, The*, 117, 129
- Lives of the Poets* (Johnson), 165
 Lyly, John, 100-1
- Malory, Sir Thomas, 68, 87,
 96ff
 Mandeville, Sir John, 68, 96ff
Middlemarch (George Eliot), 170
 Millington-Ward, J., 45
 Milton, John, 20, 104
Mind the Stop (Carey), 149
 Montague, C. E., 172
 multiple subject, 120-1
 multitude, nouns of, 119
 mutation nouns, 18
 verbs, 28
- Nesfield, J. C., 92, 115, 132
New English Grammar (Sweet,
 Henry), 9, 43
 nominative absolute, 70, 72ff,
 167
 nouns, inflection of, 15ff
 case of, 16, 18
 gender in, 17
- object, direct, 16
 indirect, 20, 50-1
 Old English, 15ff
 omission of relative pronoun, 90-1
On Familiar Style (Hazlitt), 110,
 168
only, position of, 63, 138
- Our Living Language* (Rossiter),
 108
Oxford Book of English Talk, 73
Oxford English Dictionary, 142
- participle, present, 31
 past, 31
 phrase, 67ff
 partitive genitive, 46, 64
 passive voice, 43
 phrasal verbs, 64, 147-8
 plural, noun inflections for, 18
 possessive forms of nouns, 18-20
 of pronouns, 22
 Potter, Prof. Simeon, 105
 preposition at end, 61, 114
 prepositional phrase, 45ff, 66
 pronouns, inflection of, 20ff
 demonstrative, 24
 indefinite, 24
 interrogative, 23, 86-7
 personal, 20-3
 relative, 23, 86ff
 punctuation, marks of, 149ff
Punctuation (T. F. and M. F. A.
 Husband), 158
- question
 direct, 59
 indirect, 158
 quotation marks, 158-9
- Rambler* (Johnson's), 103
Rasselas, 157
Reader Over Your Shoulder, The
 (Graves and Hodge), 117
- Report on Grammatical Termi-
 nology, 46, 54, 79
 Revised Version of the Bible,
 94-5, 158
Robinson Crusoe, 105
 Robinson, F. H., 93
 Rossiter, A. P., 108
Rules for Compositors and Readers
of the Oxford Press, 161

- Saintsbury, George, 106
 Shakespeare, pronouns in, 92, 134
Shakespearean Grammar (Abbot), 80, 90
shall and *will*, 36ff, 137
 Sheridan, 161
Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 92
 Sidney, Sir Philip, 68, 102
Society for Pure English, 79, 117, 129
Some Disputed Points in English (SPE tract), 129
Spectator, *Tbe*, 88, 106, 115, 138, 164
 Steele, Richard, 88
 strong verbs, 26-7
 subjunctive mood, 29, 39ff, 53
 Sweet, Henry, 9, 43, 117, 130
 Swift, Jonathan, 78
Syntax and Style in Old English (S. O. Andrew), 57
 synthetic language, 45

 tense, inflections for, 28ff, 179
 tense system, development of modern, 32ff
than, construction with, 135-6

there, introductory, 58
Times Literary Supplement, 160, 175
 Trollope, Anthony, 115
 Tyndale, William, 150

Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (Eliot),
Use of Tenses in English (Millington-Ward), 45

 verbal phrase, 66ff
 noun, 31, 77-81
 verbs, inflection in, 26ff

 weak verbs, 27
 Wedgwood, Miss C. V., 104
what, 95
while, colourless, 168, 170
whose, 91
 Woolf, Virginia, 108, 173
Work of William Tindale, 100
Writer's Notes on His Trade (Montague), 172
 Wyclif, John, 51-2, 57, 68, 73, 75

You Have a Point There (Partridge), 149, 164

