CHAPTER I

SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

BEFORE dealing with any particular aspects of English teaching in practice, the Committee felt it necessary to clear the ground with regard to certain points which are not separately perhaps of extreme importance, but about which there must be some agreement if what follows is to be clear and of real value.

Time allotted to English

It is evident that time must, to some extent, be the crux of the whole position, and that it is hopeless to expect progress, or good work, where a quite inadequate amount of time is allotted to the teaching of English.

At present there is the greatest variety in time, ranging from $7\frac{1}{2}$ hours allowed in one Secondary School to some young boys who were not learning a second language, to $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours in the case of some boys of 15 in a London Secondary School. In the opinion of the Committee the following times are the minima, if its recommendations are to be carried out:

Boys under 11	5 hours a week.
Boys 11–13 ...	4 hours a week, and more if English is the only language studied.
Boys 13–16 ...	$3\frac{3}{4}$ hours a week.

N.B. These are actual hours, not periods, and should not include time given to Scripture, History, or Geography.

Teachers complain less of the scanty time at their disposal than of the practice of dividing the English work in particular forms among several men. However difficult it may be to arrange in the time-table, it is essential that all the English work in any one form, or set, should be taken by the same teacher; literature, grammar, reading, writing, discussions, are all phases of the same subject, and should never be taught in water-tight compartments. At the same time it must be recognised that one specialist, or even several, cannot take all the

English work in a large school; some of it will be in the hands of non-specialist masters.

A wise distribution of periods is quite as important as their number. To take one example, linked periods are useful, probably essential, in Science: they should never be permitted in the permanent time-table for English, but may occasionally be arranged for the completion of a lengthy dramatic reading or debate.

The Character of Homework

Broadly, there is a marked cleavage between those who would have homework mainly a repetition of work done in class, and those who value it as an opportunity for quiet original work done in a different atmosphere from that of the classroom. Probably neither opinion is always right; classes vary, individual boys vary, and, above all, homes vary. As a rule, homework in the lower part of the school should be of the first type—intended to drive home and reinforce something taught in class, but opportunities should always be given for the boy who can do good original work to do it away from school. It is a useful plan to set this some time (say a fortnight) before it has to be shown up, so that there is an opportunity for reference to books, or other authority, and for thought. It is quite common to set an original composition every week for homework; experience shows that this is too often. Letters, dialogues, short scenes between characters are suitable exercises for homework. Purely descriptive work, too, is nearly always better done at home.

It may be practicable in the lowest forms to set aside the last one or two periods of the day for preparation under proper supervision. In several schools this plan has been tried with success.

In the upper part of the school, naturally, the character of the homework will change. More original work will be expected, whether it consists of reading something not previously considered in class, or of writing, unaided, essays or compositions. Even here, however, it is the proportion which should be changed, and not the principle; there should still be a certain amount of work which will test attention, care, understanding, apart from originality.

Correlation with other subjects

In educational circles, a short time ago, "correlation" was a blessed word which had only to be pronounced to attract attention and command respect. There has been a reaction, and English masters have found that in the name of correlation they are expected to do work which is not their concern only. What is wanted is not so much formal correlation as a greater sense of co-operation, which will make much incidental correlation practicable and desirable. English will help History by encouraging the reading of historical novels, just as History will give the background for much of the reading; at the same time the English teacher must not be cramped by being confined to the literature of a short period of History. Grammar teaching offers another opportunity for co-operation, which does not mean that the English master alone should be held responsible for sound conceptions of grammar. It is the great recommendation for the adoption of a Common Terminology that it makes easier such co-operation; for often the English master can illustrate or emphasise points by reference to other languages. To take a very simple example, the French *canne à pêche* clinches the argument, for a boy who knows some French, that "fishing" in the compound word fishing-rod is a gerund and not a participle.

The Science or technical teacher will often be able to suggest subjects for essays, not necessarily purely descriptive, but embracing wider views. For example, to ask boys on the technical side of a school to write on "The qualities necessary to a successful engineer" will be helpful to the English master, for there will be some chance for originality and enthusiasm, while it will help the Engineering master by lifting his subject from the plane of mechanical detail, and concentrating, if only for a space, on ulterior aims.

Good Elocution

Nothing is more important in these days of careless pronunciation than to encourage the correct speaking of English. Throughout the school course this aim must be kept in view, to be realised not only through reading aloud and repetition, but also by means of form discussions, debates, dramatic readings or presentations, while oral composition

among the juniors offers valuable opportunities. There should be some reading aloud on the part of the teacher, and his reading should serve as a model; he should make every effort to read clearly, naturally, and in sympathy with his subject-matter, shunning stilted, affected, or artificial methods.

The following are individual opinions:

"'Lectures' by the boys, with insistence on perfect distinctness, or occasional readings to which the rest of the class listen without books, do much to correct faults of slurring, dropping final consonants, and so on. I dislike any methods which concentrate on style and manner without regard to the matter, as leading to the stagey and pedantic speech of the ordinary 'elocutionist.' The boy must have a definite aim before him, namely, to express adequately the meaning (including the emotional tone) of what he reads. Therefore, choose good poetry for him, and teach clear speech, variation of pitch, pace, and expression, incidentally and as a means to that end."

"The reciting of prose does more to promote good speaking than does the reciting of verse. The memorising and reciting of selected prose passages draws attention to the rhythm of the various models of English sentences."

Phonetics

Having regard to the commendation of phonetics by the Departmental Committee, it was desirable to make as definite a recommendation as possible on this point. At present, however, the body of experience is insufficient to justify any detailed advice. Among the supporters of phonetics in English teaching some are strongly of the opinion that it is important for phonetics to begin very early if the value is to be great; others are equally sure that phonetics, and particularly the use of phonetic script, should be postponed till the age of 13. The great majority of the members of the Committee were inclined to think that in most Secondary Schools difficulties of pronunciation could be overcome without any elaborate machinery of phonetics. It is agreed, however, that it is most desirable for teachers of English themselves to have some training in phonetics, so that faults of pronunciation may be corrected systematically and scientifically, while individual teachers must judge how far it is possible and desirable to use phonetic methods in teaching. In short, some very wise words recently written by Mr George Sampson fairly represent the conclusion reached on the subject. "The most valuable result a teacher

gets from taking a course in phonetics is not the ability to pass on instruction to a class, but the training of his own ear to distinguish sounds."

Behind the question of good elocution and the use of phonetics is another, that of standard English speech. There is a dread among some members that southern English speech may be taken as a standard if phonetic methods are generally adopted, and they urge very strongly that nothing should be done to inculcate a method of speaking different from the cultured speech of the pupil's own town or district, and this view meets with general support.

CHAPTER II

THE TEACHING OF GRAMMAR

While for the sake of convenience the subject is treated under separate headings, it must never be forgotten that the various branches of English teaching are but means to a single end, and that an attempt to regard the writing of English, for instance, as something which can be isolated from the reading and appreciation of English literature is a mistake and will lead to disaster.

The Case for Grammar Teaching

It is unanimously agreed that from the earliest stages of the Secondary School course some training in formal grammar is necessary and desirable. Without it, it is hardly possible to promote clear thought about the purpose and structure of language or to expect clear expression. To take but one example: those who have had to read illiterate English will find nothing commoner than subjects without predicates or predicates without subjects; only through grammatical teaching can the enormity of this be realised. There is, it is true, a difference of opinion between those teachers who regard grammar as a useful training in clear thinking, and therefore valuable in itself, and those who regard it as a means to an end, a useful servant if nothing more. There is, however, no difference as to its usefulness, and any teacher who has tried to improve the writing

of English among people who have had no training at all in grammar will understand and appreciate this point. The writing of English can be taught without a knowledge of grammar, but at the expense of much patience and energy. Remember the girl who tried to show Kipps the difference between "as" and "has."

The fact that grammar has been abused in the past by being made the instrument of the dullest mechanical drudgery—there are still people who claim to have parsed their way through Book I of *Paradise Lost*—does not detract from its real value if rightly used. We admit that even to-day in our Secondary Schools there is much mechanical work done in the name of grammar which is deadening—an enemy of all true progress in education. The treatment of grammar purely as a sort of mental gymnastic should be sternly discouraged.

In this respect we take our stand with the Departmental Report and urge concentration on the vital and essential points of grammar, those common to all languages and without which neither the structure of sentences nor the functions of words can be apprehended.

Under the age of 11

The unit of language is the sentence, not the word, and it is only by considering, first, the structure of a sentence that the functions of the constituent words will be understood. The first step, then, will be the consideration of an easy simple sentence and its division into subject and predicate. Dealing with the subject separately will naturally disclose the function of the noun, pronoun, and adjective, just as an examination of the predicate will involve an understanding of the verb and adverb.

From this beginning, if a large variety of sentences be taken, a boy, by eleven, should have an elementary knowledge of the structure of any ordinary simple sentence, including inversions, and of such conceptions as person, number, inflexion, case, voice, the difference between the indicative and the imperative mood, and tense.

If some other language is being learnt at the same time, parallel examples should be taken in it, for the sake of illustration and contrast. It is most important for boys to grasp the fact that all civilised people have the same problems to

solve in their languages, that often they solve them in the same way, but that sometimes they do not.

It is extremely valuable that any form of analysis that is adopted should be one which can be used higher in the school, so that a form which can be elaborated easily and logically is to be recommended.

There are several text-books published which set out a course along the lines recommended, but at this stage, except for exercises, which save time and energy, a book is hardly necessary. The work done should be mainly oral, though some time should be devoted to written work from the very beginning. As the pupil grows older the time for written work may be increased.

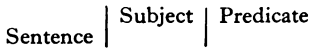
The thing that should be avoided is acquiescence in mechanical methods—describing English nouns as of neuter gender, for example. Again, definitions should never be given first; if used at all they should be the summary of the child's own experience.

NOTE. Some teachers prefer not to limit themselves at this stage to the simple sentence; there is no reason why the complex sentence should not be handled, provided it is treated as a simple sentence; in fact there are many advantages in accustoming boys early to the idea that groups of words can function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs.

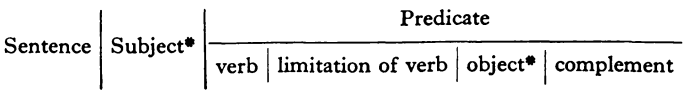
Throughout the grammar teaching, the Terminology suggested by the Joint Committee, and endorsed by the Departmental Committee, is recommended, though certain criticisms are set forth in an Appendix to this Memorandum.

Suggested forms of analysis:

A. (1) For beginners:



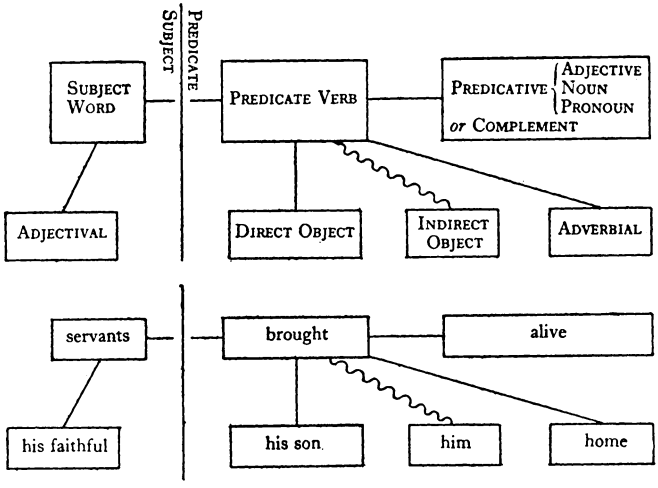
(2) For more advanced pupils:



* Subject word and object word can be underlined if it is desired.

Or

B. His faithful servants brought him his son home alive:



The following are individual opinions:

"I am strongly in favour of a certain amount of formal grammar as a necessary basis for language study. My own syllabus makes provision for analysis of simple sentences: first, into two divisions —Subject and Predicate—later, distinguishing an object, if the verb is Transitive. Beyond these three divisions I do not go, as I think there is in this all the material necessary for teaching the corresponding functions of Nouns and Verbs, Number, Case, etc. I find that analysis is made much more easy by constant exercise in synthesis, *e.g.*, when children are beginning to learn what is meant by the object of a verb used transitively, a multitude of examples (formed by the class) of sentences with 'boy' as subject, 'boy' as object, 'boy' as part of the predicate, certainly fix on the mind the different functions. In addition to the above, I find that adjectives and adverbs are easily taught as additions to the noun and verb. This is the extent of grammar teaching I would advocate at this stage."

and

"Definitions of the parts of speech should in no case be taught first. A definition should be a statement of the function of a word as discovered by a study of examples, *i.e.*, sentences in which the words occur."

The age 11–13

Most of the grammar work will still be oral, though for reasons already given some written work must be done. Assuming that by the age of 11 a boy has a firm grasp of the analysis of a simple sentence, he can now proceed to that of double and complex sentences. There is no need, usually, for the detailed analysis of separate clauses, it being sufficient that their part in the structure of the sentence should be understood, though it may be profitable, on occasion, to examine the clauses in detail orally; an elliptical clause of degree is a case in point.

Quite early, boys should be accustomed to the notion that a group of words can have the same function as a noun, adjective, or adverb, and that sometimes such a group is a clause. The conception should be exemplified by the expansion of simple sentences, and it is here that we find a natural link between grammar and composition.

The essential matter is the realisation of the function of the words in a sentence. It follows, therefore, that the expression of this function, orally or in writing, has a definite value.

Parsing of phrases (adverbial, adjectival, etc.) should go side by side with parsing of single words, and so connect parsing with analysis—the two are all too often divorced, and yet are one and the same thing.

Parsing in the old formal mechanical way is waste of time; it is one thing for boys to understand the meaning of voice, mood, etc., and another to spend time in writing out these particulars about every verb in a long sentence.

By the age of 13, in addition to the functions of the parts of speech, the following points should be known:

VERB (*a*) Distinction between Finite and Infinite.

(*b*) *Finite Verb*. Voice, Mood, Tense, concord with Subject.

(*c*) *Infinite Verb*. The Infinitive, the Participles, the Gerund, basing the distinction on form and function.

NOUN OR PRONOUN. The important point is the case, and the reason for the case, since it involves clear thinking about the exact function of the word in the sentence. Some teachers also like to note the kind of noun, but all agree that, while the

conceptions of gender and number should be understood, it is a waste of time to write the gender and number of English nouns as a matter of course.

From the age 13 onwards

For another year at least the teaching of grammar should be systematic, concerned with the analysis of ordinary sentences of all kinds and outstanding inflexions and points of syntax; the subjunctive mood, its forms and use, probably encountered about the same time in other languages, is the most important of these. More difficult constructions, such as those involving the use of the infinitive and the participles, can be explained, as well as the simpler idioms.

Regarding grammar teaching as very necessary indeed to a proper training in the language, but still subsidiary, most teachers prefer to stop the systematic teaching of grammar about the age of fourteen in order that the time may be given to more valuable aspects of the English teaching. This is not to say that grammar will be completely disregarded; there must be some grammar teaching incidental to any course of reading, while it will naturally arise in the correction of what has been written. Grammar must be used to explain difficult points of syntax, idioms, and those older forms of English which are encountered in literature or have survived into modern times.

We are speaking generally; in the case of particular sets or forms it may be necessary to continue the grammar teaching for at least another year, possibly until the General School Examination. In this case there will be the same general object in view: the revision of what has already been done, and an extension to include the more difficult applications of general principles already laid down. The systematic study of historical grammar should be reserved until after the First School Examination.