

MARY'S GRAMMAR

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BY

Jane Marcet

YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS

CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA

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PREFACE

I have so often pitied children who have been studying a grammar which they did not understand, that I thought I could not do them a better service than endeavour to render so dry and abstruse a subject easy and familiar. In the elucidation of the first elements of grammar, I hope my attempt has not entirely failed; but had I been aware of the *metaphysical* difficulties I should have to encounter in a further development of the subject, I do not think I should have undertaken the task. It is true, that the consideration of such difficulties seldom occurs to the minds of children, and may, perhaps, without inconvenience be disregarded in a work intended for them alone.

They form, however, an insuperable obstacle to my rendering this little work as clear and intelligible as might be wished; and will, I trust, afford some apology for its imperfections.

The stories have been introduced with the view of amusing children during the prosecution of so dry a study; but they may occasionally be used with advantage as parsing exercises.

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LESSON I

NOUNS

A LITTLE girl was sitting one day with a book in her hand which she was studying with a woe-begone countenance, when her mother came into the room. “Why, Mary!” said her mother, “what is the matter? you look as if your book were not very entertaining.”

“No indeed it is not,” replied the child, who could scarcely help crying; “I never read such a stupid book; and look,” added she, pointing to the pencil-marks on the page, “what a long hard lesson I have to learn! Miss Thompson says, that now I am seven years old, I ought to begin to learn grammar; but I don’t want to learn grammar; it is all nonsense; only see what a number of hard words that I cannot understand!”

Her mother took up the book, and observed that the lesson marked out for her to learn was not the beginning of the Grammar.

“No mamma, the beginning is all about the letters of the alphabet, and spelling; but I am sure I know my letters, vowels, and consonants too, and I can spell pretty well; so Miss Thompson said I might begin here,” and she pointed out the place to her mother, who read as

follows:—"There are in the English language nine sorts of words, or parts of speech: article, noun, pronoun, adjective, verb, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection."

When she had finished, Mary said, "Well, mamma, is not all that nonsense?"

"No, my dear; but it is very difficult for you to understand, so you may skip over that. Let us see what follows." Mary seemed much pleased, and her mother continued reading. "An article is a word prefixed to nouns to point them out, and show how far their signification extends."

"Well, mamma, that is as bad as the rest; and if it is not real nonsense, it is nonsense to me at least, for I cannot understand it; so pray let us skip over that too."

"Let us see if something easier comes next," said her mother, and she went on reading. "'A noun is the name of any thing that exists; it is therefore the name of any person, place, or thing.' Now, Mary, I think you can understand that: what is your brother's name?"

"Charles," replied Mary.

"Well then, Charles is a noun, because it is the name of a person."

"And am *I* a noun as well as Charles, mamma?"

"*I* is not your name," replied her mother; "when I call you, I do not say, 'Come here I.'"

"Oh no, you say, 'Come here, Mary.'"

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“Then *Mary* is a noun, because it is your name.”

“But sometimes you say, ‘Come here, child;’ is child a noun as well as *Mary*?”

“Yes, because you are called child as well as *Mary*.”

“And when I am older, mamma, I shall be called a girl and not a child; and is girl a noun too?”

“Yes, every name is a noun.”

“Then papa is a noun, and mamma is a noun, and little *Sophy* is a noun, and baby is her other noun, because it is her other name; and John and George. Oh what a number of nouns! Well, I think I shall understand nouns at last;” and her countenance began to brighten up.

“There are a great number of other nouns” said her mother. “Sheep and horses, cats and dogs, in short, the names of all animals are nouns, as well as the names of persons.”

“But the Grammar does not say so, mamma?”

“It is true,” replied her mother, “that it does not mention animals; but when it says that a noun is the name of every thing that exists, animals certainly exist, so they are included.”

“Well, I think, mamma, the Grammar ought to have said persons and animals.”

“Or it might have said animals alone; for persons are animals, you know, *Mary*.”

“Oh yes, I know that men, women, and children

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are all animals; and they are nouns as well as geese and ducks, woodcocks and turkeys: oh! and my pretty canary-bird too; and I suppose the names of ugly animals, such as rats, and frogs, and toads, and spiders, are nouns also?"

"Certainly," replied her mother; "but look, Mary, the Grammar says that the name of a place is also a noun."

"What place, mamma?"

"All places whatever. A town is a place that people live in."

"Yes," said Mary; "so London, and Hampstead, and York, are nouns; but a house is a place people live in, too, mamma."

"Therefore *house* is a noun as well as *town*. What is this place we are now sitting in called, Mary?"

"It is called a room, so *room* is the name of a place to sit in, and *stable* a place to keep horses in, and *dairy* a place to keep milk and butter in; and they are all nouns." "And *cupboard* is a noun, mamma, because it is a place to keep sweetmeats in."

"Certainly," replied her mother.

"Then the *house*, and the *garden*, and the *church* and the *fields*, are nouns? What great nouns!" exclaimed Mary; "and are little places nouns?"

"Certainly, this little box is a place to hold sugar plums, therefore box is a noun; and the key-hole of

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the door is a place to put the key in, so key-hole is a noun.”

“And drawer is a noun, I am quite sure, mamma; for it is a place I keep my toys in. But, mamma, I think the key-hole of the lock, and the box for sugar plums, are more like things than places?”

“They are both; for things that are made to hold something, such as a drawer and a box, are also places; especially if they are made for the purpose of keeping the things safe.”

“Oh yes,” said Mary; “papa’s desk is a place where he keeps his letters and bills so carefully; you know, mamma, I am never allowed to touch any thing in it. Then there is the tea-chest, which is a place and a thing too. It is a very pretty thing, and a very safe place; for you know you always keep it locked. Oh, I begin to like nouns, they make me think of so many pretty things.”

“I am glad to hear it, my dear,” said her mother; “but I think we have had enough of them to-day. You must not learn too much at once, or you will not be able to remember what you learn. We shall find enough to say on nouns for a second lesson.”

LESSON II

CLASSES OF NOUNS

THE following day Mary came skipping into the room with her Grammar in her hand.

“Well, my dear,” said her mother, “I am glad to see that your face is not quite so long as it was at the beginning of your last lesson.”

“Oh no, mamma,” said Mary; “it is quite a different thing now that you talk to me about my Grammar, and explain it so nicely.”

“I do not promise you, Mary, that it will be always entertaining. We cannot learn without taking pains; but if you understand what is taught you, the pains are not very painful,” said she, smiling.

“Well, you have now learnt that nouns are the names of persons and of places; but the Grammar says that they are also the names of things.”

“Oh yes, I understand that, without any pains at all, mamma; do, pray, let me tell you what things are nouns.”

“I hope you do not mean to name them all,” said her

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mother; “for as you know that every thing is a noun, you would never have finished.”

“Oh no,” replied Mary; “I cannot name every thing in the whole world, only some of those I know best. Table is a noun, and chair, and stool, and my doll, and my toys, too:—but, mamma,” cried she, suddenly interrupting herself, “if every thing is a noun, what can the other parts of speech be?”

“The *name* of every thing is a noun, my dear; but not every word. The words *for* and *pretty*, for instance, are not nouns.”

“No,” said Mary; “for the words *for* and *pretty* are neither persons, places, nor things; so they cannot be nouns. When I want to find out a noun I must think of a person, place, or thing.”

“And name it,” added her mother.

“Well, but, mamma, if I were to teach Sophy grammar,—I mean, when she is a little older,—do you know how I should set about it?”

“No, indeed, I cannot guess,” said her mother, laughing; “but I should be very curious to know what new method you have discovered, after such a profound study of grammar as you have made.”

“Nay, mamma, do not laugh at me,” said Mary, half vexed.

“Well, come, tell me what your method is?”

“Why, then, I should tell Sophy that a noun is the name of every thing, and then it would be done at once;

for when she knew that every thing was a noun, there would be nothing more to learn about it.”

“Your method,” said her mother, “is the most simple and correct; but do you not think that if she learnt it thus all at once, she might forget it all at once, also? Do you not think that all we have said about nouns, and the dividing them into classes of persons, places, and things, has helped to imprint them on your memory?”

“So it has, mamma. I should not have remembered half so well what a noun was, if we had not talked of so many, and found out whether they were persons, places, or merely belonged to things.”

“When you speak of one nouns only,” said her mother, “it is called singular, because it means one single thing—as a horse, or a box, or a chair; but if you speak of more than one, it is called plural.”

“Yes, I know that,” said Mary; “but look, mamma! there is a singular noun, called a carriage, trotting down the hill so fast!”

“Does the carriage trot, my dear?”

“Oh no, I mean the horses; but you know they are nouns too, as well as the carriage. Horses are nouns, because they are the names of animals; and a carriage is a noun, because it is the name of a place—or of a thing,” said she, interrupting herself; “but it is certainly not the name of a person.”

“But,” said her mother, “there are some persons in the place, perhaps?”

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“Yes,” said Mary, “a carriage is a place that holds *people*, not *things* like a box or drawers.”

“I think I have seen things in a carriage, Mary, and felt them too, very inconveniently, when we go into the country, and it is full of packages: but what is there in this carriage?”

“I cannot tell yet, mamma, it is too far off:—oh, now I see a gentleman and a lady; and they are nouns, because they are persons; but, I cannot see inside to know whether there are any parcels.”

“And do you hear the sound of the carriage wheels?”

“Yes, that I do,” replied she; “it makes a fine noise; the horses are trotting so fast.”

“Well, then, *noise* is a noun; for whatever you can hear is a noun: and you can hear a noise.”

Mary looked astonished: “Then, mamma,” said she, “nouns are not only things of all kinds, but other words besides; for noise and sound are not things, at least not like common things that we can see and touch, such as chairs and tables.”

“That is true,” said her mother; “they are of a different nature, but still they are things. Whatever you can hear, see, taste, smell, or feel, is a noun. Do you not say, a loud noise is a very disagreeable thing—a sweet sound is a pleasant thing? Sound and smell are therefore things; but these nouns are certainly rather more difficult for you to understand, than those which you call common nouns; but you must take pains to

remember, that whatever we discern by any of our five senses is a noun."

"Our five senses!" repeated Mary: "those are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and feeling."

"And by what sense do you discern those nouns which you call common, such as tables and chairs?"

"Why, we see tables and chairs, and we can touch them too if we please; so we know them by two senses, seeing and feeling."

"And we discern a sound by the sense of hearing."

"Then," said Mary, "thunder is a noun, because I can hear it, and lightning is a noun, because I can see it; and you are a noun, mamma, over and over again: for, first, you are a person, then I can see you, and feel you when I touch you, and hear you when you speak, but I cannot smell you."

Her mother then took out her handkerchief, and Mary exclaimed, "Oh! I can smell you now so sweet!" and she jumped upon her mother's lap to smell the perfumed handkerchief.

"I hope you are not going to taste me, Mary," said her mother, drawing back, and laughing.

"But now be serious, Mary, for I am going to explain to you some nouns, which are more difficult than all the others."

Mary put on a very grave and attentive look.

"These nouns," continued her mother, "cannot be discerned by the senses, for they belong not to the body

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but to the mind; *virtue, honesty, happiness, greatness, goodness, wickedness*, are nouns of this description.”

“Well!” exclaimed Mary, “I never should have thought these words were the names of things.”

“Not of bodily things, which we can see, or feel, or perceive by any of our senses; but they are the names of things which belong to the mind, of which we can understand the meaning. If I say, *Happiness* is the reward of a good conscience, you understand what I mean by happiness?”

“Oh yes! it is something we like very much; that every body likes; *happiness* gives us joy and pleasure, and all sorts of good things.”

“And what is *goodness*?” inquired her mother.

“Goodness,” replied Mary, “is doing every thing that is right; and *greatness* is something very large.”

“Or *greatness*,” observed her mother, “may relate not to the body, but to the mind. Alexander was called *the Great* from his conquests, though he was but a little man.”

“But,” said Mary, “you say that we cannot perceive these nouns by our senses, and yet I am sure I can *feel happiness, and kindness, and goodness, and all those difficult nouns.*”

“What you feel is a sensation of the mind,” replied her mother; “but we cannot feel such nouns with our bodily senses as we do tables and chairs.”

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“Oh, no, certainly,” said Mary, “it is quite a different sort of feeling.”

Their attention was then caught by the carriage stopping at the door. “Oh, mamma,” cried Mary, “they are getting out. It is uncle and aunt Howard. I am so glad!—and uncle and aunt are nouns,—and I hope the little nouns are come too; you know who I mean, mamma? —Emily and Mary.”

“We must go and meet them,” said her mother. Mary ran on first, and arrived at the door just in time to receive them,—uncle and aunt, and cousins, too. To Mary’s delight, the whole family were come to spend the day, and grammar was no more thought of.

LESSON III

PRONOUNS

“WELL, Mary,” said her mother, the following day, “what difficult lesson of grammar have you to learn now?”

“Oh, my grammar is not half so difficult as it was, mamma,” replied Mary.

“Or as you thought it was, my dear.”

“Yes, but, indeed, it was very difficult till you explained it to me; but let me see what comes after nouns,” and she read,— “A pronoun is a word put instead of a noun, to avoid the too frequent repetition of the same word. I do not understand that at all, mamma.”

“I will tell you a story that will make you understand it.” Mary’s eyes brightened at the thought of a story; but her mamma told her it would consist of only a few phrases, to explain the pronoun. “There was a little boy, and the boy climbed up a tree, for the boy wanted to gather some cherries. So the boy laid hold of the branches, but the boy was so busy gathering the cherries, that the boy lost his hold, so the boy fell to the ground, and the boy was very much hurt.”

“What a number of boys you have said mamma!” observed Mary, “and yet there was but one.”

“And is it not tiresome,” said her mother, “to hear the same word repeated so often?”

“Yes; why do you not say the boy climbed up the tree, and he gathered cherries, and he fell down and hurt himself?”

“Then you think it better to put *he* instead of *boy*, to avoid the too frequent repetition of the noun?”

“Oh yes, now I understand it. Boy is a noun, and *he* is put instead of the boy, that is, instead of a noun, so *he* must be a pronoun; and are there a great many pronouns, mamma?”

“Not so many as there are nouns, for *he* will stand for other nouns besides a boy. Look at that man, yonder, *he* is whistling to his dog: what is the word *he* put for there, Mary?”

“Oh, *he* is put instead of man. The dog follows him, mamma; *he* is very obedient. So, then, *he* will do for boy and man, and dog too.”

“Very well; I am glad to see you understand it. Now can you tell me what pronoun you would use for that little girl with a blue bonnet, whom you see walking there?”

“Oh, what a pretty blue bonnet she has, mamma!”

“Well, you have said the pronoun without thinking of it.”

“Did I?” said Mary, surprised. “What was it?”

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“You said, *she* has a very pretty blue bonnet.”

“Ah, so I did: *she* is the pronoun put instead of the little girl; and *she* do, also, for the lady, who is with the little girl, just as *he* stands both for the man and the boy. Do you think *she* is her mamma?”

“Whose mamma, my dear?”

“The little girl’s mamma.”

“And why did you say *her* mamma, instead of the little girl’s mamma?”

“Oh, because it is much shorter and easier to say *her*, than to say little girl over and over again. Ah! now I guess why you smile, mamma: *her* must be a pronoun for the little girl as well as *she*. So, then, there is more than one pronoun for the little girl?”

“Yes, and there is more than one pronoun for man also; you may say he or him, or his: as he has a gun in his hand, and a dog following him. The pronouns, he, his, and him, all relate to the man.”

“Then,” said Mary, “if there is more than one pronoun for one noun, what a great number of pronouns there must be.”

“Not so many as you think; for observe that the same pronoun will stand for a great many nouns.”

“Yes,” said Mary, “as he stands for man and boy, and dog, and she stands both for lady and little girl.”

“You said just now, ‘I am very hungry;’ whom does I mean?”

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"It means me, mamma."

"And whom does me mean?"

"Why, your little Mary, you know, mamma."

"Well, then, I and me are both pronouns, which you say, instead of Mary, when you speak of yourself. But little Sophy does not know yet what pronouns mean; and she says, 'Give Sophy some bread; Sophy is very hungry.' "

"Ah, so she does," said Mary, "because she has not learnt grammar."

"But *you* used pronouns before you learnt grammar, Mary."

Mary was a little puzzled to know how she could use pronouns without having learnt them. At length she said, "I knew what *I* and *me*, and *she*, and *her*, and *him* meant, though I did not know that they were pronouns, and that they were used instead of nouns."

"Well, Sophy does not even know what *I* and *me*, and *she*, and *her*, and *him* mean; so she does not use pronouns yet."

"And when will you teach her, mamma?"

"She will learn it as you did: by hearing pronouns frequently repeated, she will at last find out what they mean. Now tell me when I speak to you, what do I say instead of Mary?"

"You say dear child, sometimes."

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“And do I not often say *you*? I say, ‘Are *you* tired of walking? Will *you* sit down?’ “

“Then is *you* my name, mamma, as well as Mary?”

“No, it is put instead of your name. A pronoun never names a person or a thing, but points them out, without naming them.”

“A pronoun is a funny sort of word,” said Mary, “for it talks of people, and tells you who they are, without telling you their name. Well! when I want to find out a pronoun, I shall think of some person, and find out a word that will stand for him, without mentioning his name. Now I am thinking of my writing master, and the pronoun *he* will do for him.”

“Very well,” Mary; but you must have mentioned the writing master’s name, before you use the pronoun; otherwise I could not tell whom you meant by *he*; for he, you know, will stand for any man.”

“Oh yes,” said Mary; “it is only when we have been talking about the writing master that I can use the pronoun, else you would not know what *he* I meant. But, mamma, when I spoke to *you*, I did not say your name first, and you afterwards.”

“No, that is not necessary; when you speak to a person, you know to whom you are talking, so that there is no occasion to mention the name. So, then, when you speak to another person, the pronoun *you* is used.”

“But, when we talked about the little girl with the blue bonnet, we said *she*, not *you*.”

“Because we talked *of* her, we did not speak to her. If we had spoken *to* her, we might have said: ‘You have a very pretty bonnet: is that lady *your* mamma?’ Now, Mary, can you find out a pronoun that will stand for both, the little girl and the lade, at the same time?”

“Oh no, mamma, that must be very difficult; for the lady is a great woman, and the little girl is quite a child: they are so different, that I cannot conceive how the same pronoun can stand for them both.”

“*Them* both!” repeated her mother; “whom do you mean by *them*?”

“I mean the lady and the little girl; oh dear! *them* is the pronoun for them both; and I said it without knowing it.”

“Look, Mary, *they* are just going out of sight, we can see *them* no longer;” and she laid an emphasis on *they* and *them*, to show that those two words were pronouns.

“How odd it is, mamma,” said Mary, “that one pronoun should stand for two nouns at once!”

“They are plural pronouns,” said her mother, “whilst those which are put in the place of one single noun are singular.”

“Then *he*, and *she*, and *him*, and *her*, are singular pronouns,” said Mary; “and *they*, and *them*, and *their*, are plural. Now do let me try if I can find an example.” Then, after thinking a few moments, she exclaimed with exultation, as if she had made a great discovery, “Look at those sheep, mamma; *they* are feeding in the

PRONOUNS

field. Here is a box of sugar plums, may I taste *them*? See, mamma, what a number of nouns I have made the pronouns stand for; all the sheep, and all the sugar plums!”

“But, the sheep and the sugar plums make only two nouns, my dear.”

“What do you mean, mamma? Don’t you see how many sheep there are in that field? and then the whole box is full of sugar plums?”

“All the sheep,” replied her mother, “are sheep; and sheep is one noun, or one name for those animals we see feeding. Then, all the sugar plums in the box is one noun also; and in the multiplication table, I believe, Mary, that twice one make two.”

Mary laughed, and her mother continued, “Now, the lady and the little girl are two different sorts of nouns.”

“Yes,” said Mary, “they are not just alike, as the sheep are, and the sugar plums are. But, cannot one pronoun stand for a great many different sorts of nouns?”

“Certainly; look at the nosegay I gathered this morning; there are *roses, jessamine, pinks, carnations*, and a variety of other flowers; *they* smell very sweet, and *their* colours are very bright. The pronouns I have been teaching you are called personal, because they stand for persons and things, but there are other pronouns, which I shall not explain to you at present, as they are too difficult.”

Her mother then gave her a piece of cake, and told

her she might go and play in the garden, as her lesson was now over.

“Oh, mamma!” cried Mary, “I have found out a pronoun all alone; not a pronoun that stands for a great many nouns, but only for one single thing. Guess *it*, mamma;” and she laid a slight stress upon the word *it*, to help her mother.

“*It* is the word,” replied her mother. Mary wondered her mamma could guess right so easily. She then ran on with a string of examples. “Here is my book, shall I put *it* by? Where is my bonnet? I must put *it* on; and my tippet? Tie *it*. So, *it* stands for every thing that is not a person or an animal.”

“*It* is often used for animals also,” said her mother, “especially for small ones: look at that bird, how fast *it* flies; and that caterpillar, how slow *it* crawls.”

A STORY

THE BEE

A Fable from Pignotti

THE next morning, when Mary brought her Grammar, her mother said, “No, my dear, we shall not go any farther to-day, I will read you a little story, and you shall afterwards look out for all the nouns and pronouns in it. That is called parsing.”

“Oh, how I shall like that!” said Mary: a story and nouns and pronouns too; how funny it will be to find them out!”

“It will require more painstaking than you are perhaps aware of; but now for the story.”

“There was once a little girl——”

“*Girl*,” said Mary, “that is a noun; and what did the little girl do?”

“She was playing alone in a pretty garden; she was very young, and ran over the beds of flowers, and rolled on the grass, filling her little hands with daisies.”

“What a number of nouns and pronouns, too!” said

Mary, half to herself; "but go on, mamma, I will not interrupt you again."

"All at once," continued her mother, "the little child, as she was lying on the grass, heard a buzzing noise over her head, and looking up, she saw a large yellow and purple bee. The sun shone upon its wings, and made them look as bright as gold; and she thought it was the most beautiful insect she had ever seen. The bee whirled round and round her several times, as if at play; and every time it came nearer, she stretched out her little hand to catch it; but, it was all in vain, and at length the bee flew far away. The little girl got upon her feet as fast as she could, and ran after the bee; but, it flew about above her reach, till it was weary, and then settled to rest on a full-blown rose. When the child saw it remain quiet, she went up to the rose-bush, as gently as possible, treading softly on tiptoe; and, when she came within reach, she suddenly stretched out her hand, and grasped the bee and the rose together.

"The bee, angry at being thus disturbed, thrust out its sharp sting, and pierced through the skin of the poor little hand that held it. The wounded child screamed with pain; and the mother, hearing her cries, ran to her assistance: she took the sting out of her hand, bathed it with hartshorn, and, when the child was a little recovered from the pain and fright, her mother said: 'My dear child, do not seize hold of every thing that looks pretty, without knowing what it is; for there are many pretty things which would hurt you.' "

Mary was so much taken up with the child's

THE BEE

sufferings, that she quite forgot the nouns and pronouns; but when the story was ended, her mother desired her to read it over attentively, and to find out the nouns and pronouns it contained.

Mary made out above thirty nouns, and nearly as many pronouns; but she did not go through the whole story at once: her mamma divided it into parts, of six lines each; and Mary did it at different times, which made it easier for her.