

INTRODUCTION.

How, in this case, is a foreigner to understand the author? and how can such sentences be translated into another language without a deviation from the original?

The propriety of using the indicative form of the verb to express a present or past event conditionally, does not rest solely on usage; it is most correct upon principle. It is well known, that most of the words which are used to introduce a condition or hypothesis, and called most improperly conjunctions, are verbs, having not the least affinity to the class of words used to connect sentences. If the Saxon *if*, give, having lost its first letter; if for the ancient *gi*. *Though* is also a verb now obsolete, except in the imperative mood. Now let us analyze this conditional tense of the verb. "If the man *knows* his true interest, he will avoid a quarrel." Here is an omission of the word that after *if*. The true original phrase was "If that the man knows his true interest, he will avoid a quarrel"—that is, *give* that [admit the fact which is expressed in the following clause] the man *knows* his true interest, then the consequence follows, he will avoid a quarrel. That in this sentence is a relative or demonstrative substitute for the following clause. This will more plausibly appear by transposing the clauses. "The man *knows* his true interest; *give* that [admit that:] he will then avoid a quarrel. Now let the subjunctive form be used. "The man *knows* his true interest; *give* that; he will avoid a quarrel."

Here the impropriety of this form of the verb appears in a strong light. It will appear more clearly by the use of other words of equivalent signification. Grant the man *knows* his true interest, he will avoid a quarrel. Allow the man *knows* his true interest. Suppose the man *knows* his true interest. We never use the subjunctive form after the three last verbs which introduce the condition. *Though* is sometimes followed by the indicative; sometimes by the subjunctive; but it ought always to be followed by the indicative, for it supposes the fact to be given; and *so does admit*, when used in hypothetical sentences. Admit that the man *knows* his interest. We have then decisive proof that the use of the indicative form of the verb after *if*, when it expresses a conditional event in present time, is most correct; indeed it is the only correct form. This remark is equally applicable to the past tense, conditional.

The language of Addison, Johnson, and other distinguished writers of the last century, in the use of the indicative, is therefore, more correct than the language of the writers in the age of Elizabeth; and their practice is principally the common usage of our country at this day.

I have, therefore, constructed a grammar on this usage; bringing down the standard of writing a century and a half later than Bishop Lowth. I have done this, first, on the authority of strict analogical principles, as above stated; secondly, on the authority of the best usage of that cluster of distinguished writers who adorned the beginning of the last century; and thirdly, on the authority of universal colloquial practice, which I consider as the real and only genuine language. I repeat, that the general and respectable usage, in speaking is the genuine or legitimate language of a country to which the written language ought to be conformed. Language is that which is uttered by the tongue, and if men do not write the language as it is spoken by the great body of respectable people, they do not write the real language. Now, in colloquial usage, the subjunctive form of the verb, in conditional sentences, is rarely used, and perhaps never, except when the substantive verb is employed. Our students are taught in school the subjunctive form, *if thou have, if he come, &c.* and some of them continue, in after life, to write in that manner; but in the course of more than forty years, I have not known three men who have ventured to use that form of the verb in conversation. We toil in school to learn a language which we dare not introduce into conversation, but which the force of custom compels us to abandon. In this respect, the present study of grammar is worse than useless.

This colloquial custom accords with other languages. The French say and write *s'il est*, if he is. The Latins often used the same form, "*si quis est in me ingenii, iudicet*," but the use of the Latin subjunctive depends on certain other words which precede; as "*turn sit eris*," as he is a citizen, or, since he is a citizen; and the present tense is often used to express what we express by an auxiliary. That the Greeks used the indicative to express a conditional present tense, we have seen by citations above.

By this arrangement of the verb, the indicative form after *if* and other verbs introducing a condition or hypothesis, may be used uniformly to express a fact or event under a condition or supposition, either in the present or past tense; the speaker being uncertain respecting the fact, or representing it as doubtful.

If the man is honest, he will return what he has borrowed. If the ship has arrived, we shall be informed of it tomorrow. If the bill was presented, it was doubtless paid. If the law has been passed, we are precluded from further opposition.

On the other hand, when it is intended to speak of a future contingent event, I would always use the auxiliaries that are proper for the purpose. "*it shall or should rain tomorrow*, we shall not ride to town." I would never use the subjunctive form *if it rain* in prose; and in poetry, only from necessity, as an abridged phrase for *if it shall or should rain*. In this manner, the distinction between the tenses, which are now constantly confounded, may be preserved and made obvious, both to natives and foreigners.

The effect of the study of Lowth's principles, which has been greatly ex-

tended by the popularity of Murray's grammar,* has been to introduce, or establish a form of the verb in writing, which is obsolete in colloquial language; to fill our books with a confusion of tenses, and thus to keep the language unsettled. Nothing can be more perplexing to the student than every where to meet with discrepancies between rules and practice.

There is another erroneous manner of writing, common to the best authors in the language, which seems to have escaped notice. This is, to connect a verb in the past tense with a preceding one in the same tense, when the latter verb is intended to express a very different time from the former. "Then Manasseh knew that the Lord, he was God." 2 Chron. xxiii. 13.

The Latins, in this case, would probably have used the infinitive; Manasseh *vidit* Jehovah deum esse. In English we ought to write and say, "Manasseh *knew* Jehovah to be God," or, Manasseh *knew* that Jehovah is his God. In most similar cases, the use of the infinitive in English is as elegant as in Latin. But there are many cases where the infinitive cannot be used. We cannot use it after *say*; "*he said* him to be a good man," is not English; though *he declared, or affirmed, or believed* him to be a good man, is elegant.

In order to understand the impropriety of the common mode of using the latter verb, as in the example above cited, it may be remarked, that the present tense is that which is used to express what exists at all times. Thus we say, God is or exists, whenever we speak of his permanent existence; we say, gold is silver or ductile; iron is a most valuable metal; it is not convertible into yellow; plants and animals are very distinct living beings. We do not say, gold *was* yellow; iron *was* a valuable metal; for we mean to express permanent qualities. Hence, in the passage cited from Chronicles, the first verb *know*, referring to a fact past, is correct; but the last, which is intended to express the permanent being or character of God, should be in the infinitive or the indicative present tense. The following are examples of correct language: "His master had taught him that happiness consists in virtue." Anacharsis, ii. 120.

"Sabellius, who openly taught that there is but one person in the God-head." Encyclopædia.

"Our Savior taught that eternal death is the proper punishment of sin." Emmons.

But very different is the following: "Having believed for many years, that water *was* [is] an elastic fluid." The following would be still better: "Having believed water to be an elastic fluid."

So the following: "We know not the use of the epidemics of shells. Some authors have supposed that it secured [secures] the shells from being covered with vermes." Elin. Encey.

"It was just remarked, that marine fossils did not [do not] comprise vegetable remains." Ib.

If my reader will turn their thoughts back on their old friends, they will find it difficult to call a single man to remembrance who appeared to know that life *was* short [is short] till he was about to lose it.

Rambler, No. 71.

"They considered the body as a hydraulic machine, and the fluids as passing through a series of chemical changes; forgetting that animation *was* [is] its essential characteristic." Darwin.

"It was declared by Pompey, that if the Commonwealth *was* [should be] violated, he could stand up with his foot and raise an army out of the ground." Rambler, No. 10.

In the foregoing sentence, the past tense is used for the future contingent.

"It was affirmed in the last discourse, that much of the honorable practice of the world rested [rests] on the substratum of selfishness; that society *was* [is] held together, in the exercise of its relative virtues, mainly by the tie of reciprocal advantage; that a man's own interest bound [binds] him to all those average equities which obtained [obtain] in the neighborhood around him; and in which if he proved [should prove] himself glaringly deficient, he would be abandoned by the respect, and the confidence, and the good will of the people with whom he had [might have, or should have] to do." Chalmers's Com. Dis. 4.

"In the last discourse, I observed that love constituted [constitutes] the whole moral character of God." Dwight's Theology.

"And he said, my father Abraham; but if one *went* [shall or should go] to them from the dead, they will repent. And he said to him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one *rose* [shall or should rise] from the dead." Luke, xvi. 30, 31.

"Dependent that of parties in the national legislature itself, as often as a period of discussion *arrived*, the state legislatures, who *will* always be not

* Lindley Murray, in the introduction to his grammar, "acknowledges, in general terms, that the authors to whom the grammatical part of this compilation is principally indebted for its materials are, Harris, Johnson, Lowth, Priestley, Beattie, Sheridan, Walker, and Coote." But on examination, it appears that the greatest portion of the grammatical part is from Lowth, whose principles form the main structure of Murray's compilation. Some valuable notes and remarks are taken from Priestley's grammar. I studied grammar in the original—long before Murray's compilation appeared, and, in citing authorities, deem it proper to cite the originals.