

Register 10/2/91.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—In to-day's *Register* you have a letter on the above subject from the pen of Professor Boulger. Whilst I appreciate the Professor's great knowledge as a philologist, and am glad "for the sake of sound learning in South Australia" that he has come forward in the cause of good English, still I must dissent from him in his assertion that "The loud and liquid notes of this bird is heard from day to day" is good English, or "is not bad English." What is the criterion of good English? Is it not that which is most generally used by, and is most acceptable to, the cultured classes of society in any given age? What was good English in Shakspeare's time is not necessarily good English now, and, in fact, is not good English now. The spelling has changed. Very many words have become obsolete. Many new words have appeared, and changes have taken place in the grammar of the language. The Professor speaks of "are" as being of foreign origin and as not having been freely used till nearly the end of the seventeenth century in connection with a plural nominative. Since that time "are" has been freely used, and is now used with a plural nominative only. This shows not only that our language has changed, but that what was then considered good English is not now acceptable as such, but is looked on as bad English, and is avoided. The Professor is most unhappy in his selection of examples, *e.g.*, "the wages of sin is death" and "moneys is your suit." In each of these sentences the predicate is made up of the verb "is" and a singular noun, whereas in the sentence under discussion the predicate is made up of the verb "is" and the participle "heard," or the predicate is simply a compound verb. In the quotations from the Bible and from Shakspeare the noun in each case following "is" is in opposition with the subject, and being singular indicates, or rather necessitates, a singular signification of the subjects with which they respectively agree—although each subject is of plural form. There is but one criterion in English as to the singularity or plurality of a verb, and that is the singular or plural signification of the subject.

I am, Sir, &c.,

February 7.

THOMAS NOYE.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—By "English" in my letter of the 6th I meant the language spoken and written by Englishmen from the time of Alfred to the present day. A language as long as it lives is perpetually changing its forms, and for ordinary purposes the standard of accuracy may be based on the current usage of the day. But an "expert" in Greek does not call the *schema Atticum* bad Greek because it is unknown in modern Greek. A Latin scholar recognises *senatus populusque decrevit* as correct, although the usage of the brazen age be different. "We be twelve brethren" would not be changed into "we are a dozen brothers" by any intelligent reader of the Authorized Version. I am aware of the impossibility of bringing back *les neiges d'antan* in speechcraft, and fully appreciate the pointed wit, elegant persiflage, and exquisite good taste of "The Witness Referred To" in the admirable specimen which he gives of the probable result of such aspirations. But that is "from" the question, which is whether "loud and liquid notes is heard" can or cannot be regarded as good English. Any one who peruses the list in Abbott's Grammar, referred to by one of your correspondents, will see that Shakspeare very frequently used in connection with a nominative plural a verb in what seems to be the singular form. This usage is not peculiar to Shakspeare. We find it as far back as Skelton and as late as Cleveland. To Dr. Abbott's list I may add:—

"She lifts the coffer-lids that close his eyes,
Where, lo! two lamps, burnt out, in darkness lies."
V. and A., 1128.

Maetzner believes that the *s* in such cases represents an attempt to preserve a suffix. Mommsen and Delius confirm his opinion, and all three contend that such a theory explains "many apparent singulars in Shakspeare, which editors have in part tacitly transformed, and partly tried to explain artificially." As regards the form *is* I hold that it performs a double duty in Elizabethan English, representing not merely the *asti*, but also the *asanti* of the *Ursprache*. In fact *are* (= *ase*) itself is merely a docked survival of *asanti*. I do not see how the fact of the verb being used as an auxiliary can affect the form. If "there is no more such masters" be correct English, and it is Shakspeare's English, we need not stickle at "the notes is heard." The fact is that the archaic and the modern forms represent respectively different stages of morphological evolution in our language, and unless we wish to make a solution of continuity in the history of the English tongue, it is absurd to reprobate the earlier form as bad, even though it might fail to satisfy the Education Department, or its *simulacrum* the University Council.

I am, Sir, &c.,

E. VAUGHAN BOULGER.

The University, February 9.

Register 11/2/91.

IS OR ARE IT CENTENNIAL?

TO THE EDITOR.

Sur—When I got up out of bed this mornin' and called the missus Jēeny, begor, you should see the look she gave me. "Jēeny, you black-guard; sure, why don't you say Jenny?" says she. "Bedad, owld woman, Ihear you come from the French." "French, you schaemar. Bad luck to you, wasn't I born in Ballyhooley, in owld Ireland?" Faith, 'twas no use talking to her at all, so I asked Jimmy as he had his buks under his oxther goin' to skool, what 'twas all about in Coort, and he says about centēnnial, which, says he, comes from a place calleds ent-um, in the hundred of ānus. And, begor, I think he's right, Sur, though devil a one of me knows what he manes.

I am, Sir, &c.,

BRIAN BORU O'TOOLE.

Hindley-street, next door to Mr. Aldine's.

CENTENNIAL.

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir—Among the better-educated people at the Philadelphia Exhibition during the first month or two of its existence, and more particularly among European visitors, the pronunciation of the words "centēnnial" and "centēnary" was with the ē long, but after that time, in deference to our American hosts, we adopted their pronunciation "centēnnial," but retained "centēnary" as a compromise.

I am, Sir, &c.,

W. WEST-ERSKINE.

Adelaide, February 10.

The Calendar

The Advertiser

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1891.

THE revolving months have brought with them, in due course, the Adelaide University Calendar for 1891. If calendars, like opinions, are to be tested by weight, the calendar of 1891 has nothing to fear by comparison with that of 1890. The body of the volume contains five more pages than its immediate predecessor, while the appendix of 1891 considerably exceeds that of 1890. It is to be presumed that to no small section of those associated with University work the appendix rivals in importance the postscript of a lady's letter. The appendices, year by year, are interesting museums, where, in orderly arrangement and duly labelled, are the latest instruments of torture used by the modern types of grand Inquisitors. We confess to some doubt as to whether it is altogether judicious to parade these things so prominently. A contemplation of the rack, the thumb-screw, or any of the media for eliciting truth, resorted to by a less effeminate age, did nothing to lessen the agony of actual application when the hour of torture came. The body could not be educated up to the standard. But it is different with examination papers. There is a limit to the authors and books used in a University course. There is a limit to the range of questions which can be set. And when the end of the tether has been reached, the crammer's jubilee will have arrived, and he can take a comprehensive survey of the field of examination, conscious that he is master of the situation.