

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

THE "SPLIT INFINITIVE" AND OTHER IDIOMS

HERBERT WILLIAM MAGOUN, PH.D.
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

AMERICA is sometimes called a country of fads. There is a certain amount of truth in the allegation; for we do take kindly to innovations, even when they are not only no improvement on but also when they are positively inferior to what we already have. We are unduly fond of change and variety. It seems to be in the blood. Furthermore, we are not always as particular as we might be with regard to the method of obtaining it. If it is new or "up to date" or "the latest," that suffices. We must have it. We wish to be known as persons who are not "behind the times." Correctness and accuracy are not as important in our eyes as being right up to the minute in the newest ideas. We do not question those ideas as closely as we ought, and we are therefore credited, on the part of our European critics, with a degree of gullibility that is by no means flattering. In part we deserve it.

One of our recent ideas, stoutly maintained by Andrew Lang, is the notion, falsely credited with the support of Thomas R. Lounsbury, that the infinitive is never to be "split," meaning thereby that its "to" is never to be separated from it by an adverb. How much mischief this mistaken doctrine has created, was not brought to my attention, until a recent graduate of a country high school threw up her hands in holy horror over such an infinitive and decided that its perpetrator must be an ignoramus. She could hardly have been convinced that the actual ignoramus was the man who was responsible for her views. In reality, she belonged in the same narrow-minded class as a worthy Southern gentleman named Dixon, who said, late in life, that he had many sins to answer for, but he did thank the good Lord that he had never sunk so low as

to vote the Republican ticket! Comment is hardly necessary.

While this incident was still fresh in my mind, the editor of *The Boston Transcript* drew a vigorous protest from Hon. John D. Long by condemning such infinitives in an editorial. The protest was never answered, so far as I am aware. This is what he said:—

“Will you tell me why in your editorial you say that the split infinitive is a ‘grammatical abomination’? Is the outcry against it anything more than a fad—a conventional way of suggesting that the would-be critic is up in his English? Why not split the infinitive as well as the indicative, which everybody does, as, for instance, Macaulay writes ‘Berlin was again occupied by the enemy’? Would it have been any less elegant or clear to say ‘the enemy were able to again occupy Berlin,’ so far as the split infinitive is concerned?

“Can you give me the reason for your objection? I can find none in the grammars or books on rhetoric. It is true that it is suggested there that the split infinitive is not used by the best writers but in the same connection it is admitted that it is used by many of them and that this use is steadily increasing. Also it is said that it is a clumsy form of expression, but I fail to see why ‘To serve nobly’ is a neater term than ‘to nobly serve.’ Often in verse the accent can be made to fall properly only by putting the adverb between the two words of the infinitive.

“Then there are many cases in which one must use the split infinitive. A friend suggests the phrase ‘I wish to more than thank you.’ In that phrase where else can one put the ‘more than’? The London Times is pretty good authority—good as the Transcript—and its editorials over and over again split the infinitive. Here is one of its sentences. ‘Negotiations are proceeding to further cement trade relations.’ Where else can you put ‘further’? If before ‘to,’ the reader is uncertain whether it does not modify ‘proceeding’; if after ‘cement,’ whether it does not modify ‘trade.’ At least one example of the split infinitive is found in Macaulay, in De Quincey and in Dr. Johnson, though its use by them is rare, as it is with all writers, it being more natural for everybody to keep the infinitive together than to divide it.

“To be sure, in some languages, like the Latin, the in-

infinitive is one word that cannot be divided, as *amare*, to love; and it may be claimed that the English infinitive is really one word, though made of two words, and therefore cannot be split. But the same is true of the Latin indicative, as *amavi*, have loved. One of our dictionaries says that the preposition 'to' is a part of the infinitive. But in this connection 'to' is not a preposition; it is rather an auxiliary, just as 'have' is an auxiliary in the perfect indicative; and 'have' is there just as much a part of the perfect indicative as 'to' is of the infinitive.

"There is nothing in the objection that the use of the split infinitive may lead to careless or confused English. No good writer will ever use it unless it fits in readily or effectively, and a bad writer will misuse any of the forms of syntax.

"For myself, I split and justify others in splitting the infinitive wherever it seems more apt to do so, or whenever better emphasis can be given by so doing.

"I suggest that the Progressives in their next platform put in a plank in behalf of the much abused split infinitive" (Boston Transcript, Feb. 4, 1913).

Mr. Long's main position is unquestionably correct. "To" is no more a part of the infinitive than "have" is a part of the "perfect tense," and herein lies all the trouble. Realizing that fact, men are acting accordingly.

English has but two tenses. Gothic had but two,—the present and the preterit or past. That limitation accounts for the development in Anglo-Saxon and in German of the modal phrases that now serve for modes and tenses in German and English. English, however, has broken away from the ancient idiom, and "leveling by analogy" has been the most potent factor in the process. All our other so-called tenses, then, are merely substitutes that answer the purpose. They are makeshifts that have usurped the function of tenses in one way or another. Some of them are legitimate and some of them are not. "Have written" is legitimate; but "have lost" and "have gone" are monstrosities. They become even worse when combined with shall or will. The purists swallow them, however, with never so much as the quiver of an eyelash and then balk at "had rather

be" and "had better go," insisting that "have lost" and "have gone" are "perfect tenses" and that there can be no parallel in the premises. It is a good way to advertise their limitations.

The original idiom came from the Latin. A few verbs, especially *habeo* and *teneo*, were employed in a sort of circumlocution to express fixedness of condition or finality of purpose. Thus, *bellum habuit indictum*, "war he had, a declared (one)." So, *excusatum habeas me rogo*, "excused have me, I beg." Likewise, *duces comprehensos tenetis*, "the leaders, arrested, you have-in-your-power." The verb governed the object, and the participle limited and agreed with that object, as the examples indicate. At times the fact might be obscured. Thus, *habeo statutum*, with a clause covering the thing resolved upon, might seem like an ordinary English "perfect," because that clause might not be recognized as a neuter substantive limited by *statutum*. Such, however, it would be, and the idiom would remain unchanged. An inflected tongue makes for stability of that sort. English is not inflected, and therein lies the difference.

Epistolam habeo scriptam, "a letter have I, a written (one)," was stable enough in Latin, but in English it easily passed into "I have written a letter," with the relationship of the parts so befogged that "have written" came to be taken as a tense. It expressed the same general idea as a perfect and came to be regarded as one. A true tense, however, is always a single form, not a phrase, and, for that reason, we have but two tenses in English. On the basis of its origin, then, "have lost" involves a flat contradiction (*I possess the thing that is lost*), while "have gone" contains an intransitive perfect participle (*I possess a gone self*) in an idiom that really demands a transitive one (*I possess a having been made to go self*).

German and Anglo-Saxon are more logical. The former has *Ich bin gegangen* and the latter, *Ik eom gegân*, "I am having-gone." The relationship of the parts is strictly

correct, the participle limiting the subject, and the idiom is therefore sound. The English one is anything but sound. Leveling by analogy has foisted a transitive construction onto all intransitive verbs; but most persons, not knowing this fact, are better satisfied with their English idiom than they are with the German one. The sensible thing to do, then, is to let well-enough alone. Indeed, if a serious attempt should ever be made to eradicate anomalies of that sort from the English tongue, it would soon appear that the language itself cannot continue to exist without them. It is practically made up of such things.

Did you ever analyze a compound tense to see what an auxiliary verb really is? "I will go" means, in the last analysis, *I will a going* of some sort. In other words, "will" is the verb, and "go" is an infinitive used as its object. "I can do" is somewhat similar, although the situation is made more complicated by the nature of "can." It is an old preterit employed as a present. That is why it makes no infinitive "to can." It originally signified to "know," hence (after getting the required knowledge) to "be able." Instead of saying "I have acquired the necessary knowledge as to the doing of something," we simply say "I can do it." The "do" is still an infinitive; but its relation to the "can" is rather that of an adverbial accusative than that of a true objective, if we adhere to etymological considerations as seems necessary in the premises.

There are other preterit-presents in English, as may, shall, and must. New preterits have been developed, giving us forms like "could," "should," and "might," all of which are noteworthy. Thus, "could" not only has the "ablaut" of a strong verb and the *-d* of a weak one but also an inserted *l* on the analogy of should and would. Ablaut is a variation in the root vowel, as in "sing, sang, sung," or "sink, sank, sunk." It is common in Anglo-Saxon and German. Where the same result is obtained by the use of *-ed* or *-t*, the verb is a weak one, technically speaking. Stem

variation is a Semitic characteristic. In the Aryan tongues the tendency is to eliminate it. Hebrew fairly revels in it. In reality, it is an indication that the two families of languages were once related, a fact no longer denied, since it may be regarded as already established by the labors of Dr. Drake, an American, and Professor Möller, a Dane.

In a single instance a tendency toward stem variation has come under my notice. On the analogy of "throw, threw, thrown," a form "shew" was developed in the State of Maine and was in common use in my boyhood. As that was the original form of the present, it was very properly condemned by linguists. Where *e* and *o* are found in such connections, *e* is a "middle" form and *o* a "strong" one. The "weak" form omits the vowel altogether, as in *γῆ-γν-ομαι*. A similar phenomenon is found in noun stems of the Aryan tongues, as will appear below. Other combinations of vowels are employed for the same purpose and in the same way.

Coming back now to our auxiliary verbs, so-called, it will be seen that they are actually verbs whose true sense and office have been either obscured or forgotten. They have thus become parts of verbal phrases which serve the purpose of modes and tenses. If we choose to call them so, it is really misleading, and yet no philologist will be likely to attempt to force an exact usage down the throats of the partly educated, because no good purpose will be served thereby and more harm than good might result. The purists have furnished the philologists with so striking an object lesson along these lines that they are not inclined to incur a similar liability.

In the light of the above facts, the fight against "had rather" and "had better" seems puerile. Both are idioms with more to justify them than there is to justify various other things that pass without question. They happen to be somewhat singular, and the true character of the other idioms is not known. As a result, purists insist that you cannot parse "had . be," while "have lost" and "have

gone" are "tenses." You cannot parse them, however, on the basis employed with "had . be," and, although it is not necessary, there is no more reason, intrinsically, why "had . be" should not be given a place as a tense than there is why "have gone" or "have lost" should be, except that of insufficient knowledge concerning the latter, which is no reason at all.

The real question is one of service. Do expressions like "had rather be" and "had better go" fill a place in English that it is desirable to have filled? "Had rather be" can be analyzed and parsed. It means *would hold it preferable to be*, which equals "would prefer to be." The "had" is accordingly a subjunctive (or "potential"), as appears in "Had I known that, I had done differently." The "be" is therefore an infinitive depending on "had" precisely as "be" is an infinitive depending on "will" in "will be." The remaining word, "rather," is an adjective. The corresponding idiom, "would rather be," makes it an adverb, and "had rather" has accordingly acquired a value resembling that of the "break in upon" discussed below. It has a forcefulness that is lacking in "would rather" and is therefore justified.

When it comes to "had better go," we have no real alternative; for "would better go"—even if it does have back of it the authority of Walter Savage Landor—is altogether abominable and without excuse, in spite of the fact that it does satisfy the purists by coming within the bounds of their parsing knowledge. "Had better" means *should hold it better to*, the "had" retaining its subjunctive ("potential") character. It implies that there is a need or duty which it will be well to meet. Every speaker of English feels the force of it. "Would better" utterly fails to measure up to the requirements of the situation; for it has no such content, and it is not likely to have. So long as English continues to owe much of its richness and flexibility to such idioms as these—that it does so now is a matter concerning which there is no room for a difference

of opinion — it will be well not to meddle unduly with what is, or has been, accepted usage in the classics of English literature.¹

It is astonishing how narrow the viewpoint really is of some of our would-be leaders in English. The use of "don't" in the third singular, while not strictly correct, is justified by the fact that it is a development along lines that are coextensive with the whole history of the Aryan tongues. The entire Indo-Germanic family of languages, to which English belongs, is simply studded with similar levelings by analogy. In Latin we have *pēs*, *pedis*, but in Greek *πους*, *ποδός*, indicating that the parent language probably had *pos*, *ped*, *pd*, in use — an Avestan compound shows the last — as the strong, middle, and weak stem forms, although a somewhat different explanation has been suggested. Sanskrit usage supports the explanation here given, and so do the English words, *foot*, *feet*. The leveling by analogy is admitted without question.

That sort of thing is encountered everywhere. The use of "you" for "ye" and, especially, for "thou" is a case in point. "Them will go" would horrify us all, but the time was when "you will go" was quite as bad, and the two are actually parallel forms of expression. The use of *Sie* in German is similar but worse, if anything, although it is an established idiom. Leveling by analogy accounts for both anomalous forms, and "tinkering" will not help matters. It may make them worse. The purists have several "successes" of that kind to their credit; but they are hardly things to be proud of.

Take the modern (New York) expression, "five cents the copy." It suggests a high hat, a long coat, and a thimbleful of brains. "Five cents a copy" was a perfectly

¹That such is the case with both of these idioms has been duly shown. See *American Journal of Philology*, vol. ii. pp. 281-322, "On the Origin of 'Had rather Go' and Analogous or Apparently Analogous Locutions," by Fitzedward Hall, or, if that is not available, chapter ix. of Professor Lounsbury's book entitled "The Standard of Usage in English."

good idiom, and it was correct. It means *five cents for one* (each) *copy*, and it applies to all copies of the issue. "The" necessarily discriminates. It is a definite article, and in all languages that have such a word it is a weak demonstrative (this or that). "Five cents the copy" may accordingly refer to the copy that bears the words, with the possible intimation that no other copy will have the same price. If the next should happen to read "six cents the copy" no incongruity would be involved, and each might vary the price without doing violence to the linguistic requirements of the situation. Moreover, "five cents the copy" may mean *five cents for the copy* (some particular reproduction) *of this one*, with no reference to the one so marked or to the issue as a whole.

Verily, "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing." That is the trouble with most purists. They accordingly wish either to divorce English entirely from its historical connections and make it a law unto itself or else to force it to conform to some etymological limitation that it has long outgrown. None of their schemes are really feasible. If they were, the result might be altogether mischievous. A good physician hardly feels competent to prescribe for a patient until he has acquired a knowledge of the family history of the sufferer with relation to the diseased conditions. The purists would "doctor" English without any such knowledge and without attempting to obtain it before proceeding to business. That is why they are purists.

They are useful — in a way. A certain amount of pruning is desirable, if the fruitful branches are only let alone. "Suckers" need to be removed, and language develops that sort of thing in the form of slang. The trouble with them is this. They will not restrict their efforts to legitimate lines but must needs undertake to remodel the tree itself. "Dehorning" an aged apple tree is sometimes advisable. It is not advisable to attempt to dehorn a language, which is about what the purists would ultimately do if they were allowed to have their own way. The result

would hardly be ornamental or attractive. There is a limit to such activities.

For that reason, it is time to revolt when they attempt to rob us of the "split infinitive." It has its place. "So to speak" is an idiom that is often used. It serves a useful purpose. It does not mean *to speak in such a manner*, although "to so speak" does mean just that. A careful discrimination is made possible by the two arrangements. "So much as to suggest" is not the same in meaning as "to so much as suggest," and the elimination of second forms of that kind destroys one of the strong points in English diction. That we can do things like that is one of the beauties of our mother tongue. The fight against it is already working destructively in other directions, as will appear shortly. It is a perfectly good construction, and a literary one.

Mr. Long mentions "to more than thank." To it has been added "to more than double." In opposition, it has been urged that you cannot parse "more" singly in this phrase, any more than you can "to," and that each word is a part of the verb, which is a compound like "pussy-foot" or "double-cross." This has but one weak spot — it is not true. The two compounds are genuine; for each expresses a simple idea. "More than double" is complex, and it is elliptical. It means *to do something in excess of what one would have done if he had doubled the original*. No comparison is therefore possible in the premises. It is true that no "do" is now felt in the phrase; but neither is "house" felt in the sentence, "I am going down to father's for the summer." In each case the missing word is necessary before any parsing can be done. Prepositions do not govern the possessive case in English. They do govern the corresponding genitive case in German, Greek, and Sanskrit, so far as Sanskrit can be said to have such a construction; but their adverbial origin still shines through in places, especially in Sanskrit. English now includes several participles (excepting, notwithstanding,

concerning, regarding, respecting, saving), some imperatives (except, save), and an adjective (like) among its prepositions; but we may easily go too far in such matters.

As to the "to," let this be remembered. It belongs to no true infinitive, but is a corruption taken from the gerund, which was used as the object of the preposition. It has retained its prepositional force in countless instances, as paraphrasing will show. "House to let" means a *house for letting*, and the "to let" parallels the other phrase in "house for sale." Similarly "good to eat" means *good for eating*, and the illustrations might be multiplied indefinitely. If the "to" in the "more than double" phrase indicates purpose, it is a genuine preposition still; for it means *in order to* and can be paraphrased with "for" (*for the purpose of more than doubling*). That the "for" idiom is not in use makes no difference. The only requirement is that the construction shall make sense. In case the "to" has lost its prepositional force (is merely a corruption from the gerund), it is to be parsed as the "rhetic sign." It has practically dropped out of use after various verbs once followed by it, such as *bid*, *help*, and *make*.

If "more than" is to be dealt with without supplying the suppressed "do" after the "to," it must be taken as an adverbial element modifying "double." That it changes the meaning of the verb does not matter. We do that sort of thing often in English. "I broke in upon his meditation" becomes in the passive "his meditation was broken in upon by me." Until such combinations are regarded as compounds, it is certainly out of the question to treat "more than double" as one. "In upon" is a part of the verbal idea, an integral part of it, and the words are "post-positions" — I have been calling them such for about forty years, beginning in my Junior year in college while teaching Whitney's "Essentials of English Grammar," the best book of the sort ever written even if it was too deep for ordinary teachers of that grade, — which are as much a

part of the verb as the separable prefixes are in German after they have been relegated to the end of the sentence. "To begin" is *anfangen*, to "lay hold on." In the infinitive we have *anfangen* or *anzufangen*. The participle corresponds. In other constructions, unless the inverted order is required, the "on" goes to the end, as in *Ich fing diesen Morgen sehr früh zu schreiben an*, where my early morning writing is expressed with all the words save one between the two parts of the verb. The arrangement is common and familiar.

We are unduly superficial in our parsing. "He made note of the fact" would be analyzed as, — a pronoun, followed by a finite verb, which is in turn followed by an object limited by a prepositional phrase. We forget the passive, "the fact was made note of by him." We can paraphrase the verbal idea by "was noted," and "note" therefore becomes a complementary accusative followed by an adverbial particle, if we insist upon an exact analysis. The idiom is justified by its emphasis of the idea of noting, and it is likely to be regarded as perfectly good English until some purist gets tangled up in the parsing. "Made note of" is a verbal phrase which performs the same function as "noted." That, however, does not prevent us from saying "made careful note of," with an adjective in between the parts.

The truth is this. No verbal phrase that happens to do duty as a mode or a tense is so much of a unit that it cannot be separated when clarity is promoted thereby. Exactness often demands just such a separation; and yet the agitation against the "split infinitive" is reacting against "split" tenses, so that they too are beginning to be avoided. The results are already deplorable; for the example of the newspapers is being copied elsewhere. Note these specimens:—

"He warned registration officials that favoritism *easily* could be detected" (Boston Journal, May 11, 1917, p. 1, near end).

"Some influential men of this group *even* have suggested that Germany go so far," etc. (*Ibid.*, May 21, 1917, p. 7, col. 8).

"He asserted that the invention *soon* will be demonstrated by the government, which *already* had been advised of the details" (*Ib.*, May 23, 1917, p. 1, col. 6).

"The situation as indicated in the registration returns *only* can result in most careful action on the part of exemption boards" (*Ib.*, June 8, 1917, p. 1, col. 1).

"How much of the burden of Russia's needs will be assumed by this country *yet* is to be determined" (Boston Transcript, May 24, 1917, p. 4, col. 5).

"More than 10,000 miles of wire *already* has been withdrawn from commercial service" (*Ib.*, May 25, 1917, p. 4, col. 4).

"Numbers of prisoners are reported *already* to be reaching the collecting Stations" (*Ib.*, June 7, 1917, p. 3, col. 2).

"He expressed the conviction that . . . the freedom which has been achieved *still* will be cherished" (*Ib.*, July 14, 1917, Part III., p. 6, col. 4).

"Yes, the world is coming back to God and it *also* is coming back to Jesus" (*L. c.*, col. 1, quoted from the Congregationalist).

"The talks he *recently* has given at forums . . . have deeply stirred . . . his hearers" (Grinnell Review, May, 1917, p. 153, col. 2, quoted).

"Grandsons, sons, and husbands *already* have been sacrificed on the firing line" (Geographical Magazine, April, 1917, p. 322).

"We ask how a textual critic . . . can dare *so* to garble this text" (Bibliotheca Sacra, April, 1918, p. 286).

Most of these specimens were picked up in a few days at random as they thrust themselves upon my notice. Then I began to invert the order as I read.

That the "split infinitive" was not always observed and duly eliminated was proved by an occasional example, such as,—

"His successor would not delay the solemn confirmation by the country of the decision *not to in any way divide* the activities and efforts of the world democracies" (Boston Journal, May 18, 1917, p. 2, col. 7).

Even the Boston *Transcript* nodded now and then as is

shown by a "to So Assist" in a subheading of the issue of May 17, 1917 (p. 1, col. 5). How much of a pain was caused I cannot say.

Not content with such achievements, this linguistic octopus is now encouraging the habit of avoiding the insertion of any adverb after the preposition "to." Witness the following:—

"It develops upon the government to find out *just* to what extent the party local is allowing itself to be used as a point of vantage for the German spy service" (Boston Transcript, June 11, 1917, p. 10, col. 3).

"In this situation the Western Allies can look forward *only* to one possible solution—to the prosecution of the war," etc. (Review of Reviews, March, 1918, p. 271, col. 2).

All italics are mine. It is hardly necessary to call attention to the fact—it is painfully evident—that "squinting constructions" are here encouraged.

This is leveling by analogy at its worst. The starting point is to be found in the habit of placing the adverb before the "to" of an infinitive. Any "to" is now likely to be similarly affected regardless of the effect produced. Moreover, the adverb is constantly placed before an auxiliary verb instead of with the word it modifies. Mr. Long's suggestion is therefore being taken seriously but *in the wrong way*. If the examples were confined to the newspapers, it would matter little. Unfortunately, they are rapidly creeping into other publications, and I cannot help wondering what the end will be.

English has been extremely flexible, capable of fine distinctions, and remarkably expressive. The tendencies here noted may ultimately result in making it stilted, inaccurate, and stupid. Possibly some of us, just by way of a counter irritant, ought to conscientiously "split" every infinitive that we conveniently can, in order to help in overcoming this inane and misdirected effort. In the endeavor to write elegant English—by avoiding "split infinitives"—these good people, whose zeal far exceeds their

knowledge, are foisting upon us English that is not merely inelegant but actually hideous.

When Latin became set in form it died. In its place arose French and Portuguese and Spanish and Italian and Provençal. When the purists finally succeed in getting English into a set form it too will die. What will take its place? The patois of the street and the slang of the college "dorm." When the effort to keep our music "classical" had made it artificial and evidently "manufactured," the inevitable reaction took place and "rag time" came into its own. It did not confine itself to the circles of the uneducated but grasped college men and college women likewise. Wanting something real, they took that. It was more genuine than the music made by rule. It had the virtue of spontaneity, and they liked it for that reason. The "split infinitive" has that same virtue. To avoid it is to be artificial. Making language by rule is like putting a strait-jacket on a sane person,—it serves no useful purpose.

As a written tongue Latin survived for centuries, though it had ceased to be spoken except in monasteries and similar places. A similar fate may overtake English, if it becomes sufficiently stilted. Nature will attend to that. Tendencies in these directions are even now manifest; for colloquial English and literary English are already different things, and the breach is widening. Why should we help it by espousing a fad?

Every teacher of English seems to have some pet notion or some pet aversion. One professor in a well-known institution insists upon having a noun after all demonstratives. What becomes of their pronominal character on such a basis? He likewise has a holy horror of a sentence beginning with "And." What would he do with the English Bible? Another cannot abide "at all." It is doubtless overworked; but it does serve a useful purpose at times. Why not let it alone? Professor Lounsbury apparently disliked a "split infinitive"; but he defends it

in the eighth chapter of his "Standard Usage in English." Some of the rest of us dislike the unintentional and wholly unexpected results of his antipathy.

Beyond a peradventure he was an admirable teacher, and his book deserves the indorsement of scholars and laymen alike. And yet, as a popular American philosopher, under the sobriquet, Josh Billings, reminds us, "Every man's gut somethin' to him that spiles him." We need to remember that. Professor Lounsbury set an unfortunate example. He was innocent enough, and his teachings were sound; but he wrote on page 39, "he was almost invariably wrong whenever it was possible so to be," which means *wrong to be*. He undoubtedly copied the Anglo-Saxon idiom; for inverting the order did not eliminate a monosyllabic ending, and obscuring the character of the ending by not allowing "so" to be final, would have been mere camouflage. The inverted order evidently pleased his fancy; for we find on page 60, "if so we choose to call them," with no regard whatever for the idiomatic use of "if so" in other connections.¹

Perhaps I ought to say that I am not a teacher of English and have not been for some decades. I did teach it incidentally for six years before going to the Johns Hopkins University for my postgraduate work. Since then my teaching has included Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, with a brief substitution in German; but English has been a means, not an end. That may not have been a detriment;

¹Two other items may be mentioned incidentally. On page 159 a most curious slip in the use of "would" and "should"—such things are common—occurs, the two being interchanged, and on page 142 a prominent writer is taken to task for using the expression "setting hen." As the hen incubates the eggs and hatches chickens, the *sprachgefühl* of the farmer is sound, the Century Dictionary to the contrary notwithstanding; for the intransitive verb "sit" is quite inadequate to express what the hen actually does. She is not "sitting" in any true sense of that word: she is *hatching chickens*, and "setting" is employed to indicate that fact. The expression "sitting hen" is really too pedantic for a red-blooded person to tolerate.

for those who go to Europe to learn French (or German) do not learn it, while those who go there to learn something else always do. They are compelled to. Possibly it may have been something of that sort which made Professor Gildersleeve such a master of the English tongue. I have never met his equal and do not expect to. He had already become one of the world's great scholars in Greek and had been recognized as such when I became his student. It puzzled me then that a man of his acumen and infallible judgment should never have a good word for a purist. I understand it now.

Language is not a thing to be shaped as a carpenter shapes wood with his tools. It is rather a growth, to be pruned where necessary, to be cultivated, and to be allowed a fair chance to be a normal product of nature. When a useful purpose is served by some innovation—I notice that the expression "where he is at" is gaining a foothold in colloquial speech,—it should be given a chance. If it serves no useful purpose and ultimately involves a positive detriment, as the agitation against "split infinitives" has plainly done, it cannot be repudiated with too great haste or emphasis.

The fact that German *zu* always immediately precedes its infinitive should have no influence in English. Their curious inverted way of putting things favors such an arrangement in German. In both languages the force of the "to" is more or less obscure, because it was not originally a part of the infinitive, having been borrowed from the gerund. Both constructions were employed in Anglo-Saxon to express purpose. Thus, we find *grêtan eôde*, "to-greet went," with an infinitive, but *ût eôde se sædere tō sâwenne*, "out went the sower to sow" (Mark iv. 3), with the gerund.¹ English now uses "to" or "in order to" in such connections, while German employs *um zu*. The lat-

¹ The limitations of modern fonts sometimes prevent distinctions from being observed, and the *sædere* therefore lacks its caret over the diphthong. It should be long.

ter closely parallels our obsolete "for to" (anciently sometimes spelled "forto"); but the construction was not limited to expressions of purpose in English.

The natural place for "to" or any other preposition is immediately before its substantive, whether that substantive is a noun or an infinitive; and yet, provided the restrictions of Mandarin English do not constrain us to employ the word "attend," we are liable at any time to say such things as, "did he come to your brother's recent birthday party?" In German we find an idiom that is even more remarkable; for the prepositions *um*, *ohne*, and *statt* (*anstatt*) may be widely separated from the infinitives—the *zu* is retained—which they govern. Whitney furnishes this illustration, *anstatt aber die hiedurch erzeugte günstige Stimmung zu benutzen*, 'instead, however, of improving the favorable state of mind thus brought about.' Incidentally, it may be mentioned that the rules governing the German and English constructions in this example can no more be interchanged than can the order of the words, even if Whitney has labeled forms such as "improving" is in this connection "participial infinitives" or infinitives in *-ing*. He avoided calling them *gerunds*—that is what they are—lest the term be found forbidding and unnecessary.

The "split infinitive" is comparatively rare for the same reason that these other constructions are comparatively rare; namely, the need does not often occur. When it does occur, there should be no hesitation about using it. Clarity is of the first importance. To make an artificial rule excluding such infinitives altogether because they happen to be rare is like promulgating a law that all orchids should be exterminated because there are but few of them. If one procedure runs counter to the dictates of common sense, the other is no better.

The power and beauty of a language do not depend on its observance of a set list of rules, precisely as the beauty and attractiveness of a musical composition do not depend

on a slavish observance of the laws of counterpoint. As a matter of fact all great composers break those laws at one time or another, and their power depends in part upon their occasional transgressions. A timid soul would not dare transgress, and his music is artificial and stilted in consequence. A similar fate overtakes the timid soul who dares not "split" an infinitive, because it has been declared that it is not "good form" to do so. If the resulting expedients are not "bad form," it is difficult to classify them.

English "to" is really under no more obligation to immediately precede its infinitive than is Greek *ἄν* — an untranslatable word indicating contingency — under obligation to always precede its verbal form. With the Subjunctive it is regularly joined to, or compounded with, the introductory relative or particle, with the Optative it is more or less mobile, with the Indicative (secondary tenses and future) it is likewise mobile; but with the infinitive and participle it usually, not always, precedes or follows its word. Clearness of meaning settles that point. Language is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Isocrates made it an end, and no one pays any attention to what he said. They are too busy noticing how he said it. Thucydides is read for what he has to say; for he says it with telling effect even if he does shock the grammatical idealist in almost every line. Purists are apt to be disciples of Isocrates. They lack breadth of vision and soundness of practical judgment.

Fortunately this matter has been carefully threshed out by Fitzedward Hall in *The American Journal of Philology*, vol. iii. pp. 17-24, "On the Separation, by a Word or Words, of To and the Infinitive Mood." Professor Lounsbury in his eighth chapter adds still more material. It is thus brought to light that such authors as Henry More, Sir Thomas Browne, Samuel Pepys, Richard Bentley, Defoe, Franklin, Edmund Burke, Dr. Johnson, Madame D'Arblay, Robert Burns, Southey, Keats, Coleridge, Lord Byron, Charles Lamb, William Taylor, Wordsworth, Lord Ma-

caulay, De Quincey, Herbert Spencer, Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, Charles Reade, and Robert Browning have made use of the construction from one to many times, and the idiom has been traced back as far as Wyclif in the fourteenth century. The most remarkable cases are very old. Some of them have as many as five words between the "to" and the infinitive proper.

Now, it happens that the Gothic possessed and used a true infinitive, while Anglo-Saxon sometimes substituted for such an infinitive a gerund with *tô*. The difference between the forms came to be overlooked, although the gerund was properly a dative, the infinitive being prevailingly an accusative. At times it borrowed the *tô* and became, in effect, itself a dative; for its construction here, as elsewhere, was that of a neuter noun. It naturally showed the inverted order, as that was common in the language. "To do well" might be an infinitive (*wel dôn*) or a gerund (*wel tô dônne*), the latter being found in Matthew xii. 12, where the whole phrase becomes the subject of a verb and therefore to all intents and purposes a nominative. With nouns and adjectives, the gerund was the proper form to use; but in English all such distinctions have disappeared along with the inverted order. Why attempt to restore the latter, when to do so is simply to lend confusion to forms of expression that would otherwise be clear and devoid of any possible "squint."

It is a question of the greater outweighing the less. On that basis, the anomalous English "tenses" can be justified. They are needed. So can the "had rather" of Shakespeare and the English Bible — see Psalms lxxxiv. 10 and 1 Cor. xiv. 19 (any version) — be justified, along with the "had better" that parallels it but is less common. No one seems to have assailed "had to go" as yet, but it is slated for attack as soon as some purist discovers its limitations. It resembles "had better" in a way; for each implies an owing (ought), and the "had" is therefore peculiar and not to be confounded with an ordinary auxiliary verb.

Each is as different from an ordinary "had" as the second "do" is different from the first in "how do you do?"

Any peculiarity of usage is an idiom, which amounts to saying that it is a construction that is more or less idiotic — the two words go back to the same Greek basic form, which in turn reverts to the idea of individual idiosyncrasy or individual possession, i.e., it applies to something that is "private" or "personal" in character, — and if the construction is a trifle more idiotic in some instances, utility may serve as a legitimate excuse for its retention. On this basis, "have lost" becomes secure.

Scholars who know the weaknesses of English best, have most patience with those of its idioms that are anathema to the purists. They cannot see that the pot has any particular advantage over the kettle in the matter of blackness. If "had better" is idiotic, then "would better" is more idiotic, and we had better let well-enough alone. Even the double negative has some justification; for it is the proper construction in Greek, and such forms are therefore germane to the Aryan family of languages. They have not been stamped out of colloquial English and probably never can be. We try to get rid of them on the basis of logic; but logic and grammar have never been on good terms. When a man buys a yoke of oxen, he buys, logically, the oxen. Grammatically, he buys the yoke. It may be well not to mix things that differ.

"Had as lief" may occur to some. It means *would hold it as good* to; for the "had" is of the same sort as the others. "Had to go" may mean *held it best to go*; but its genesis is not so clear as might be desirable. The genesis of some other things is clear enough; for the restoration of the inverted order is eliminating a legitimate arrangement with the adverb after the infinitive. *The Review of Reviews* for April, 1918 (p. 374, end), illustrates the point with, "this leaves the French with more than two-thirds of the line still to look out for." Does Mr. Simonds mean "leaves still" or "look out for still"? The supposition

is that he means the latter. Why not say it and avoid the "squint"?

One other point might be made; for if it is sensible to insist that no adverb shall be allowed to come between a "to" and its infinitive—it always belongs to the infinitive and never to the "to," as even the dullest must apprehend,—then it is also sensible to insist that no adverb shall be allowed to come between a subject and its verb, since the two are inseparably connected in thought and ought not to have such an element between them. On such a basis, forms like those cited above, in which the so-called tenses are kept intact, at once become inadmissible, and the restriction is certainly more desirable than the present avoidance of "splitting tenses" ever can be, with its "squinting constructions" and other abominations. As a matter of fact, either restriction merely registers a bit of stupidity, and it should therefore be avoided. As a rule, it is well to keep adverbs in the latter part of the sentence and not allow them to come between the verb and its subject; but there are times and places in which linguistic exigencies completely nullify any such limitation. Common sense should make that evident. Unfortunately, our educators have not yet perfected a method for developing that most desirable faculty.

The logic of the situation is this. The "split infinitive" has been in good and regular standing in English for at least five hundred years and probably much longer than that, its most remarkable examples being very old. It is therefore a perfectly sound and legitimate construction whenever and wherever clarity is to be gained by its use. The opposition to it is based on ignorance of the origin of the idiom and a false notion that "to" is an integral part of the infinitive, which is clearly absurd; for it is the result of a corruption, and the language contains countless other infinitives without any "to," in its "tenses," and likewise many forms in which the "to" retains its full force as a preposition. Such forms are properly gerunds;

but English grammar does not recognize the fact, and the purists do not know it. This much may be regarded as settled by the historical data in our possession.

For the rest, let this suffice. Language is a tool, or instrument, for the transmission of thought. It is not an end in itself, and men were not made to be its servants. Exactness and clarity in the expression of an idea is the supreme consideration, and where they can be obtained best by "splitting" the infinitive it should be "split" regardless of the protests of purists. Like the impecunious, they are always with us and sometimes become a burden to the community. Furthermore, compound "tenses" should be "split," in the same fashion, as often as may be desirable; and the adverb should be placed with the verb to which it really belongs, not thrust in before an auxiliary, to which it does not and cannot belong, under the mistaken notion that the said auxiliary is an inseparable part of a verbal tense. If a person is ignorant of the history and genius of our mother tongue, it may be just as well not to advertise the fact with undue prominence.