

## **An Unfortunate Genitive**

For some unaccountable reason which calls for investigations by professors of socio-linguistics, the genitive 'of' appears to have acquired a bad odour and is widely avoided in newspaper English and also in private and official correspondence. The impression has gained ground that if you address Mr. X as the editor of The Daily Chronicle instead of as the editor The Daily Chronicle without a comma to separate the word editor from the name of the newspaper you would be adding to his dignity. Similarly, Mr. Y is always written to as the Secretary Ministry of Education. Mr. Z as the general manager the Ramna Jute Mills, and the genitive 'of' to indicate the relation between the persons and the organisations they are associated with is omitted.

This change in usage is perhaps traceable to the way we write addresses on letters where each separate line is allowed to stand out independently, even without signs of punctuation for the sake of space-saving. A comma at the end is not necessary where there is no danger of two words in an address being mixed up. But now this has grown into so strong a habit that even in speech you are likely to be identified as the secretary Undemocratic Party when you are being introduced to someone.

Young people, boys and girls in school, tend to accept the omission of the genitive 'of' as correct grammatical forms and dispense with it in their writing and speech as a mark of sophistication. Saying 'Mr. S is the organiser the new Sports Club', somehow has the ring in their ears of a smart turn of speech.

One wishes there were people to point out repeatedly that the omission of the genitive is neither correct grammar nor correct idiom. Abbreviations and omissions in addresses and also advertisements should never be taken to represent the standard in correct speech or writing. Abbreviations are necessary in many places, but when somebody refers to an editor as 'the editor The Guardian' he is not trying to abbreviate anything; he is merely conforming to a fad or fashion.

This is the sort of usage that Fowler or Sir Ernest Gowers would have probably stigmatised as an illiteracy. Eric Partridge would have used a stronger term to describe it. The only advice we can offer our readers is that they should beware of such allurements.