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IS MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING A FAILURE?

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IS MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING A FAILURE?[1]

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We traffickers in living tongues are admirable exponents of that attitude of mind which some sociologists call "the noble discontent." Discontented we all are; if not with our own ministrations, at least with the efforts of our fellows, and especially with the operations of those instructors who immediately precede us. If we be high-school teachers, let us recall what we said, at the beginning of the year, about the modest attempts made to impart a little German to our pupils in the grammar school: did we not express a preference for children who had not tried to study a foreign language in the grades at all, devoutly wishing that our charges had spent their extra time on English grammar? What does the college instructor remark, when he first sizes up the hopeful product that comes to him from the high school? Does he not invariably declare that the years spent on French in the preparatory school have been worse than wasted, and that his best students are those who never opened a French book before? As to the observations of collaborators in the same institution, each on the pedagogical ability of his colleague in the next grade below, they are better forgotten than remembered. And the saddest part of it is—making allowance for the exaggeration due to recurrent disappointment and discouragement—allowing, too, for the different standards of successive teachers, each of whom has his peculiar antipathies among the countless possible kinds of failure—the saddest part of it is that these uncomplimentary estimates are, for the most

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Through the kind assistance of the Board of Regents of the University of Michigan and the courtesy of the publishers of the *School Review*, it has been possible to secure some reprints of this address for distribution. Those desiring a copy may forward their request to MR. LOUIS P. JOCELYN, Secretary Michigan Schoolmasters' Club, South Division St., Ann Arbor, Mich.

part, substantially correct. The amount of positive, accurate knowledge carried from one grade to another, seems, in proportion to the quantity of ignorance and misapprehension, insignificant.

But, it may be urged, all this is true of other subjects as well. The teachers of English composition, history, music, drawing make the same lament; and the [illegible] omy, hygiene, physiography, me[illegible] and zoölogy do not give rise to a li[illegible] are disposed of in a single year. Bo[illegible] affirm that the American schoolboy shows a general deficiency of from one to three years, as compared with the French or German child of the same age. Are not his shortcomings in modern languages merely one manifestation of a national incompetency in matters of education?

True it undoubtedly is that our boys and girls are, on the average, some two years behind those of France and Germany in common book-learning. We shall perhaps be able to pursue our subject with a clearer understanding if we turn aside for a moment to consider the origin of this backwardness. The blame has sometimes been put, and with some justice, upon our migratory habits and upon the heterogeneous character of our population. But there are other and more fundamental causes: three, especially, call for more extended examination.

The most obvious source of the transatlantic superiority is the Spartan discipline maintained in the foreign schools, a discipline which forces pupils through a curriculum so crowded that neither American scholars nor American parents would submit to it for a year. The school child in Europe is in a state of bondage: from the age of six to eighteen he scarcely knows any occupation but study; his whole life centers in school, while, as we all know, for the American youth of that age school is merely one element in a highly variegated existence. No doubt we might advantageously imitate our neighbors by insisting on more expert school management, by strengthening somewhat our grip upon our students, and above all by making the award of diplomas depend in some degree on the successful performance

of school duties. In a community where public instruction is directed by a committee chosen by parents, who in turn are controlled by their children, we have a kind of indirect educational self-government which makes strict standards impossible. Fortunately there are some American cities to which this criticism no longer applies; but those towns are few indeed in which the general administration is in the hands of the really competent. If, however, it came to an absolute choice between our happy-go-lucky method—with the abundant opportunity it affords our children for wholesome exercise, play, spontaneity, and varied experience—and the scholastic sweat-shop of the Europeans—with its renunciation of so much that makes childhood worth living—we might well prefer our backwardness to a proficiency bought at such a price.

Another reason for the quicker progress of the foreign pupil is the greater inducement offered him to study. There is no doubt that our children are as intelligent as those of other nations. In organizing a concert, a dramatic performance, a magazine—in fact, in any task that does not fall within the scope of school routine, the young American is the equal of any boy on earth; in resourcefulness and enterprise it would be hard to match him. Only when he turns to prescribed study does he show himself a drone. And why? Because he sees nothing to be gained by application. Under our ordinary administration nothing but death can prevent him from getting his diploma; and the promises of the joy of superior enlightenment, of enhanced civic usefulness, of higher social prestige are to him not only vague and unsubstantial, but contrary to everyday experience. Who are the men that tower above their fellows in the columns of the newspapers? They are for the most part the untutored geniuses whose education went little if at all beyond the red schoolhouse. All the talk about the advantages of learning is, like the stories of storks and Santa Claus, only a part of the well-meaning fiction with which grown-up folks try to blind their offspring to the realities of life. Our boy good-naturedly studies a little, to oblige his parents and teachers; but as to really exerting himself, he very seldom thinks that

worth while. Not so the schoolboy in the crowded Old World. He knows only too well the value of scholarship; he foresees the cruel competition, the fierce struggle for existence, that await him; and he has reason to strain every nerve to attain that degree of proficiency which may assure him a modest livelihood in the career that fate has marked out for him. As America fills up, as the opportunities for money-making without capital decrease, as the requirements in the performance of all labor advance, the value, the necessity of special training and of general discipline will become more and more apparent; and some day the American boy's outlook upon the future may be as clear and calculating as that of his European brother. May that day be slow to come!

The third and least important cause, which is a direct outcome of the pitiless competition just mentioned, is the better equipment of the teacher in France and Germany. The qualifications demanded of this unfortunate being—who in return receives starvation wages—would be likely to debar 99 per cent. of the secondary-school instructors in America. But are all these requirements really conducive to the welfare of the pupils? No, in large measure their only effect is to reduce the host of candidates. A long training in Romance philology, with original investigation of some topic in Old French or Provençal, does not perceptibly increase the efficiency of a teacher of elementary French, nor is it necessary even for an adequate presentation of modern French literature. On the other hand, the absolute requirement of a thorough practical knowledge—obtained in part by at least a year's residence abroad—of the language to be taught is one that we shall do well gradually to adopt. There is nothing more essential to the teacher than the confidence that springs from complete mastery of his subject. When his chief preoccupation in the classroom is not to impart what he knows, but to conceal what he does not know, the value of his labor is questionable. A very gratifying improvement in this respect has occurred in American schools in the last quarter of a century; in another twenty-five years, at the same rate of progress, the standard for high-school teachers of foreign languages in

our principal cities will not be inferior, in the really important things, to that maintained in France and Germany. And this increased equipment need not be accompanied by any diminution of human sympathy.

In addition to these three very patent reasons for the comparatively slow advance of our children, there is a fourth, which has not been set forth until recently, and even now does not receive the consideration it deserves. The difficulties of English spelling are in themselves enough to account for the whole deficiency under discussion. They have been, during the past year or two, so often and so well set before the public that there is no need of expatiating on the subject now. There seems to be no doubt that our children spend two or three years in learning—or rather in trying to learn—to spell. For French and especially for German children this process is much easier, owing to the more logical character of the orthography; in actual time spent, it is safe to assume that English and American pupils labor under a handicap of at least a year. But there is a disadvantage worse even than the loss of time—a drawback so serious as to impair the efficiency of all school work. It has been admirably stated by an Associate City Superintendent of Schools in New York:

> Next to learning by imitation, the child must be taught to learn by association and analogy. He develops strength of mind by the exercise of judgment. He must reason from known facts in the solution of his little problems. If he comes to a new printed word and halts, the teacher asks him to think of the oral word for which it stands. Having learned that *puff* and *muff* stand for well-known oral words, he is staggered at *rough* and *enough*, frequently used in conversation. Having learned that these characters stand for well-known spoken words which he wrote *ruff* and *enuff* from his knowledge of *puff* and *muff*, he is again confused when the teacher tells him that *dough* is the spelling of the well-known word his mother uses when speaking about bread-making, and that *cough* stands for the malady so prevalent in the nursery during winter time.
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> The stage of the child's tuition during which all the similar incongruities of our spelling must be mastered, occupies many years of school life, and the process has well-nigh produced a disbelief in reason as a means of learning, and a total lack of confidence in inference. The result of falling into absurd and ridiculous situations through the exercise of his judgment,

appears in a hesitancy or fear of drawing any inferences upon data relating to other fields of knowledge. The child has lost faith in his own conclusions with respect to problems in arithmetic, biology, geography, history, etc. To what extent of subject-matter and time the school child has suffered irreparable loss, by failure to acquire confidence in the exercise of his judgment as a result of his early stultification during the process of learning to master the spelling of common words, may never be determined.

When we consider these four drawbacks—the lack of sufficient authority and competence on the part of the school management, the absence of any strong incentive to study, the inadequate training of teachers, and the stultifying effect of our eccentric spelling—far from wondering at the backwardness of our boys and girls, we may feel a justifiable pride that they are no farther behind, and we may conclude that both they and their instructors must be made of superior stuff to achieve anything at all. It is therefore apparent that a comparison of the results obtained in any one field of knowledge in our country should not, in fairness, be made with the work done in that same line abroad, but rather with the product in other branches at home; and a just estimate of the value of our modern language teaching can be reached only by setting it beside the instruction given in other departments here in America.

Such a comparison can never be made with objective exactness: it must express itself in terms of individual opinion based on observation. And inasmuch as one's judgment derives its value largely from the scope of the investigation on which it is founded, it may not be inexpedient to set forth the personal views of one who has had opportunities to study the question from the standpoint of a college instructor in elementary French and German, from the comprehensive experience of a director of all the modern language instruction in the public schools of a large city, and finally in the capacity of chairman of the Romance department in a great university. In school and college alike one significant fact constantly obtrudes itself—namely, that the previously mentioned denial of the worth of all foregoing instruction in a subject—constantly on the lips of modern language teachers—is seldom or never heard from the

mouth of an instructor in classics or mathematics. In these older topics one often hears, to be sure, complaint and impatient criticism; but only in very exceptional cases does the work done under a predecessor appear wholly fruitless. The steps may be slow, but they are sure; at each promotion the scholar has added a definite acquisition to his sum of knowledge. In the other new subjects, however—such as "science," history, and English composition—the efforts seem, judging from such comments as one may gather in the course of years, to be fully as futile as in French and German. An eminent professor in a scientific school has been heard to declare that he would rather have, as advanced students of applied science, men who had devoted themselves to Latin than those who had spent their time on scientific studies; and his voice is one of many. College instructors in English composition are sometimes heard to regret that their pupils ever tried to write English at school. It appears to be the unanimous opinion of college professors of modern languages that their best pupils are those whose school years were given mostly to Greek and Latin, while their poorest are those in whose previous curriculum French or German or "science" was the principal factor. On the other hand, the boy from a good classical school finds that his college Latin, Greek, and mathematics are the natural continuation of what he has already acquired; and his instructor, with no great upsetting or reviewing, simply takes him on from the point he has reached under the guidance of his former teacher.

It would seem, then, if our data and inferences are correct, that Latin, Greek, and mathematics are so taught as to allow but little waste in the passage from one teacher to another, while in other subjects the apparent or real loss is most discouraging. Furthermore, school study of the classics furnishes not only an excellent basis for further work along the same line, but also the best foundation for studies of a different character; while modern language courses, in common with "science" and some other topics, far from fitting a pupil to take up new branches of study, do not adequately prepare him to continue what he has begun. It is likely enough that French and German, as taught

today, are more effective than most of the other new studies, but they are still vastly inferior to the classics. And inasmuch as the modern tongues to a considerable extent have replaced Greek and Latin in the secondary-school curriculum and in the ordinary college training, we cannot regard any instruction in them as satisfactory which does not produce results comparable to those derived from the study of the old humanities.

Is the inferiority of the modern to the ancient languages, as a means of mental discipline, inherent in these tongues, or does it arise from causes that can be overcome? A priori it is not obvious why German, for instance, should not furnish nearly as good an instrument for training the attention, the reason, and the memory, as Latin. Moreover, long-continued search does reveal some exceptional instances in which French and German have in fact been made to bear most gratifying fruit. For it must be understood that in all that has preceded we have been considering the general average, and not the unusual specific case. Until we have, then, conclusive evidence to the contrary, we may proceed on the assumption that the modern languages can be used to good purpose in education. What we need to do first of all is to discover the obstacles that have hitherto prevented success.

From time immemorial until our own generation the fundamental discipline of educated men throughout the civilized world has been derived from Latin and Greek, with more or less admixture of mathematics. The great writers, the imposing figures in history, the mighty scholars of every type have formed their intelligence on the classics; all that we revere in the intellectual past derives from that abundant source. The majestic tradition of classic study gives to the old humanities a dignity that newer branches of learning can never attain, unless it be after many centuries of like achievement. In the far-distant future we may picture a time when French and German will be invested with the glory of ancient and perennial success; but that thought affords us no present help, save the gift of an ideal toward which our efforts may converge, a faith that may brighten the hours of discouragement. Under the conditions

that face us today we cannot hope that either pupils or teachers will approach our modern tongues in a spirit of reverence comparable to that which properly hallows the study of Greek and Latin. We must respect our subjects; we must, if we can, make our students respect them; but that respect will at best fall far short of veneration. Hitherto the living languages have not enjoyed even the moderate consideration that justly belongs to them; and the slight esteem in which they have been held is due mainly to the short-sighted policy of pedagogues who have too often sacrificed the substantial to the showy, the facile, and the frivolous. If we wish others to take us seriously, if our pupils are to devote sober attention to our instruction, we must set a high standard for ourselves. No magisterial airs will help us, no lectures or upbraidings: what we need is, in the first place, a thorough and ever-increasing knowledge of the matter we are to teach, and, secondly, a wise earnestness that is satisfied with nothing less than the real intellectual development of our scholars.

On this score, then—the honor in which our department of learning is held—we cannot, for long ages, equal the classics; but we can distinctly improve our present position. And we have an advantage which, if rightly used, may offset the lack of time-sanctioned regard: I mean the attractiveness born of actuality. If German, French, and Spanish cannot be revered, let them benefit by that affection which the youthful mind instinctively bestows on all that is alive. Let the learner realize that in studying a foreign tongue he is penetrating the life, the thought, the feeling of real people—people who are like himself in most things but interestingly divergent in others. Let him be led to compare the effects of different material environment, dissimilar national traditions, contrary ideas of beauty, various methods of utilizing words for the expression of what is in the mind. Nothing is more fascinating than such comparisons and contrasts, affording as they do ever longer and deeper glimpses into a world so near yet so remote from our ken. Few things, on the other hand, can be made more tiresome, if imparted in formal lectures, with an appalling apparatus of specimens, charts,

and wall-pictures of cheap and hideous design. The pupil must be aroused to see things for himself; his curiosity must be awakened by an incidental explanation, a casual remark, a timely anecdote. Tact, insight, and overflowing fulness of information must be the teacher's stock in trade. Even a comparison of grammatical forms and constructions can be made of absorbing interest, if not carried too far: a revelation of the manifold ways in which human ingenuity uses speech, combined with a discussion of the relative merits of a foreign and a corresponding English idiom or inflection, may impress the facts indelibly on the hearer's memory, while kindling his desire for further knowledge. Such study has the additional advantage of imparting to the child an understanding of the real structure of English, of which he is likely, otherwise, to remain in eternal ignorance. Moreover, in languages that offer such a wide range of choice, the reading can be so selected that the subject-matter itself shall be an inducement to continued effort. Short stories of adventure, devoid of mawkish sentimentality, are most pleasing to the young beginner. Longer and more diversified works attract the student who is older or more advanced. Poetry, judiciously administered, may serve to train the ear, to cultivate the sense of beauty, to reveal the latent harmonies of language; and verse of the right kind, rightly presented, will appeal to the average girl or boy. The pieces chosen should not be too childish; children relish literature, especially poetry, that is a little above them, but look down with speechless scorn on that which lies in the least beneath their level. Furthermore, teachers should not forget that poetry is a kind of music; it is intended not merely for the mind, but for the hearing. The reason why verse, particularly French verse, is so little and in general so unsuccessfully used in the schoolroom is that very few instructors know how to read it. The real rhythm, the proper intonation can be acquired only by close and patient imitation of a native elocutionist. The teacher who does not possess the art does well, until he masters it, to avoid the Castalian spring; and he who does possess it should habitually do the "reading aloud" himself, instead of compelling his pupils

murder the verse. Only after the learner has heard the poem
any times should he be allowed to attempt it.

One reason why the living tongues are relegated to a lower
me than Greek and Latin is that people—including scholars
d teachers—harbor a totally false conception of their diffi-
lty. Our modern languages are fully as hard as the ancient,
d require to be studied just as industriously. I do not believe
ere is or ever was a language more difficult to acquire than
ench; most of us can name worthy persons who have been
siduously struggling with it from childhood to mature age,
d do not know it now: yet it is treated as something that any-
e can pick up offhand. When I thus compare the old and the
w tongues, I have in mind, of course, the degree and kind of
ainment that is expected in each. If we were as careful of
tin pronunciation as we try to be of French, if we compelled
: pupils to talk Greek, as we labor to make them speak Ger-
n, the comparison might result differently; but even then the
ance, in my opinion, would be not far from even. The
stacles to proficiency in the classics are more apparent than
l, and they present themselves most conspicuously at the out-

The inflections seem formidable, but, if attacked at the age
en memory is good, are soon mastered; and the very abun-
ice of forms, with definite rules for the use of each, removes
great measure the endless and desperately intricate syntactical
blems that beset the student of French. The copiousness of
in and Greek grammar, for a scholar who really learns the
language, is an advantage rather than a drawback: in a book of
moderate compass he has all that he needs to know, every
emergency is foreseen, every construction has its formula; a
French grammar of equal size makes no provision for three-
quarters of the puzzles that an ordinary student encounters.
Aside from the difference in the inherent difficulty of languages,
there is a great divergence in the adequacy of textbooks. The
classics have been studied so long and so well, and the field they
cover is so definite and so restricted, that they are furnished
with an equipment which the modern tongues can probably
never rival. The completeness, the accuracy of a Latin lexicon

or a Latin grammar may well fill us with envy. When I look up a strange word in a Latin dictionary, I do so with the firm belief that I shall find it, and my faith is nearly always rewarded; but when I come upon an unknown term in French, I turn to Littré or the *Nouveau Dictionnaire* with a disheartening apprehension that it will not be there, and my foreboding is usually justified. The same thing is true of grammars and of textbooks generally. The task of the Greek or Latin teacher, compared to ours, is an easy one; and so is that of the pupil, if the learning of a given definite amount of Latin be compared with the acquisition of the same amount of French. It is an incalculable advantage to a language to appear harder than it is: both scholar and instructor approach the study seriously, school-boards allow adequate provision of time and books, parents are contented to have their children work hard, and the satisfaction of achievement is multiplied fourfold. French staggers under the fearful burden of apparent easiness. The alphabet is identical with ours, although the letters all stand for different sounds; a large part of the vocabulary is spelled like English, although the meaning of the words is hardly ever exactly the same. The superficial resemblances impress the learner; the fundamental distinctions he ignores. It takes him four years or so—if he keeps on that long—to convince himself that French really demands application, and then he awakens to the fact that he has not been learning the language at all. What he has been learning is a sort of pidjin-English made up of English substitutes for French sounds and English transliterations of French words, arranged in such fashion as to signify nothing in any tongue that man ever spoke. In fact, he has never expected his text to mean anything, French being, in his conception, a kind of speech in which people talk a great deal without ever saying anything in particular. Let us consider an ordinary university class in French literature, made up of students of average ability, who have had, for the most part, some four years of French, usually three at school and one in college: it is safe to say that of these boys, at the beginning of the year, not more than one in ten can read a page of easy French under-

standingly. They think they understand it, while in reality they miss the point of nearly every significant sentence they read. When such pupils are once awakened from their delusion, if they are not too discouraged to continue at all, they are ready to make good progress, having realized at last that their slipshod ways have led to naught. Unhappily few reach the Socratic stage of knowing that they know nothing; and parents and school authorities are not likely to suspect the truth. German has the good fortune to seem rather hard, though not so hard as Greek and Latin: it has a queer-looking alphabet, and the beginner is obliged to memorize a good many declensions. The result is that German, in general, is much better studied and better taught, in secondary schools, than French, and a more substantial knowledge is attained. Anyone who has given elementary instruction, in school and college, in both these languages, can testify that German is twice as satisfactory to teach as French, the reason being, no doubt, that the former language looks a great deal harder while it is in reality considerably easier. What are we to do about it? We can hardly erect scarecrows along the path of the French pupil. We can, however, refrain from distorting the truth; we can insist upon accuracy from the start, in pronunciation, in comprehension, in inflection, in construction; we can refuse to be satisfied with approximations and meaningless guesses. The whole tendency of French instruction has been to disguise its difficulty; to represent the subject as one in which serious exertion is unnecessary—a thing that can be caught by intuition; to grade the progress and conceal the obstacles so adroitly that the learner shall never be aware of them. The object of this disingenuous policy has no doubt been to induce children to study French; its effect has been the opposite, for while it may often have led pupils to elect French as a part of their programme, it has uniformly deterred them from studying it.

In the case of a branch of scholarship so recently developed it is natural that there should be no underlying uniformity of purpose; and that, presumably, is why our efforts are so scattering, so unfocused. If we had a clear conception of what

we are teaching a language for, we should be more likely to concentrate our forces and thus avoid the waste incident to unsystematic endeavor. Why, in fact, is it worth while to teach or to study French or German? How many of us can answer that question? How many have so much as asked it? The first and most obvious answer, the one given in three cases out of four, is that we teach French and German in order that our pupils may know these languages, because it is a pleasant and useful thing to know them. And if we inquire further in what this pleasure and this utility consist, either we receive no response at all or we are told that it is delightful to converse with foreigners and profitable to be able to conduct foreign business correspondence. By this time it must be obvious that we are on the wrong tack. How many of our pupils, unless they have enjoyed exceptional advantages, can speak French to a Frenchman with anything like pleasure to either party? How many ever secure positions as foreign business correspondents through the training that we give them? No: if this is our object, we must confess that our instruction is a gigantic failure. And even if we succeeded, the end attained would be insignificant in proportion to the expenditure of time and labor. Only a tiny fraction of those who study French will ever go abroad or have frequent opportunity to display their skill at home; and if all those who study German are to become commercial correspondents, that profession will have to expand a thousand fold. It is just such frivolous and inane statements as those cited, and the thoughtlessness from which they spring, that have prevented our subjects from winning the esteem of the community. If our branch of learning has no better claim to consideration, it is not worthy of a place in any public-school curriculum.

Let us look at the matter from another side. The modern tongues have been introduced into schools and colleges mainly as a partial or total substitute for the classics. Now, as I have said before, it is through the classics that the man of European stock, from ancient times almost until our own day, has received his mental discipline: it is they that have taught him how to

observe, how to discriminate, how to reason, how to remember; they have afforded practice in analysis and synthesis; they have cultivated the taste and broadened the horizon. It is they that have given man the intellectual power to cope with any problem that may confront him; it is they that have made him an educated being. Among the other topics that our children study, mathematics stand forth as affording a part, but only a part, of the necessary discipline: they teach concentration and accuracy, but not much more; and there is no indication that mathematical study will increase as Greek and Latin dwindle. Natural science and the host of minor subjects recently adopted, while they impart interesting and sometimes valuable information, furnish none of the requisite training. It is to modern languages that we must look for the shaping of that strong, versatile, well-rounded intelligence without which civilized man will relapse into barbarism. Perhaps, in spite of the best endeavor, French and German will prove inadequate means; if they do, either the classics must be restored or another discipline must be found, else our race will degenerate. At all events we must see to it that they have a fair trial. We have a duty and a glorious opportunity. Our object must be the discipline of the mind, the training of observation, judgment, and memory, the development of esthetic discrimination and enjoyment, the opening of a wider outlook on the world, the cultivation of a love of good reading. If we strive with all our might for these things, we shall soon find, I am sure, that our own work will assume a new dignity, our pupils will face their books with a better spirit, our department will deserve and win a respect which it has never enjoyed before; and, lastly—as a by-product, so to speak—our scholars will learn a great deal more French and German than they ever acquired when the mastery of these languages was our sole ideal.

The long vogue of the classics has given them more than an exalted position and a superior array of textbooks; it has provided them with a consistent, effective, and long-tried system of instruction. In our groping we may find a guide in the traditional practices of our elder companion; or, to speak con-

cretely, the French teacher may learn something by occasionally looking in upon his Latin colleague next door. It cannot be repeated too often that Latin instruction has been a success; for a thousand years or so it has been the one conspicuous success in the field of education. Our successes are still before us. A modestly receptive frame of mind is the appropriate one for us when we are face to face with classical practices. When the living tongues first began to supersede the ancient in our schools, their advent was accompanied by a spirit of enthusiastic innovation similar to that which quickened the Romantic movement in art. There was the same talk of bursting narrow bonds, discarding outworn tradition, and returning to nature. The Romantic ebullition soon subsided, leaving, however, some permanent and beneficial mementos of its passage. So it has been with the Romantic period of linguistic pedagogy: the excitement is calmed, the extravagant claims of iconoclasts are exploded, the revolutionary spirit has abated, the allurements of the new no longer blind us to the abiding worth of the old. Something, however, we have gained: the conviction that language is a thing alive and that its inherent interest must be utilized as the best incentive to study. Our experience has profited our classical brethren as well as ourselves; and if we examine their policy today, we shall see that while it has suffered no fundamental alteration, it has grafted upon itself some of the fruits of neo-linguistic theorizing. It has not, however, fallen into the error of believing that all difficulties can be solved by a formula—that will-o'-the-wisp which has led us on such mad chases. The idea that there is a pedagogic panacea, a sovereign method that can make everything right, is a fallacy that we have now well-nigh outgrown, although it still smolders, and sometimes crops up where one would least expect it. A few years ago I received a visit from a Japanese professor, an eminently learned and practical man, who was traveling around the world on a quest for the one sovereign method of teaching a foreign language. It seems that in Japanese schools the children have English, if I remember aright, six hours a week for ten years, but seldom learn enough to be of

material use. The authorities—trusting that the western world, which had been in the business a good while, had found the right formula—sent my visitor on his mission. I described to him all the methods I knew—the "natural," the "direct," the "cumulative," the "categorical," all that had ever been written with a capital *M*—but I soon found that he knew them as well as I did, and had tried them all. "Have you devised nothing better?" he asked. "Nothing," I admitted; "haven't you discovered a way?" "None," said he. And we parted, sadder but no wiser than before. East and West may put their heads together: the precious formula will never come. This the Latins seem to have known all along, although there was a time when they, too, were a little dazzled by Friar Tuck's lantern.

But Latin tradition possesses something besides the negative virtue of skepticism. It has the very positive merit of doing one thing at a time and doing that thoroughly; of building only on a firm foundation; of never stepping forward until the present foothold is secure. That, with a fitting sense of the dignity of the subject taught, and an unquestioning faith in the utility of every part of it, is the most valuable lesson that our classical colleagues can teach us. In our eagerness to hurry on to the things that seem practical and interesting, we almost invariably neglect those prosaic fundamentals without which there can be no real progress—nor even genuine, sustained interest, because there is no understanding. The inflections of verbs, the use of pronominal forms, the significance of tenses and moods, the meaning of connectives afford the indispensable clue to the foreign sentence: to proceed without them is as futile as to engage on mathematical operations with no knowledge of the signs of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The attitude of the average schoolboy confronted with a French sentence is that which a person unacquainted with the plus-mark might assume toward the formula $a+b$. "It is something about *a* and *b*," he says, " but what *a* has to do with *b* I cannot tell." It is just this knowledge of the relations of words and clauses that is all-important in the comprehension of a foreign tongue. We must look out for the plus and

minus symbols, and we must realize that the thorough mastery of them requires much time, drill, and patient repetition. It does not follow that the first two or three years of study should be nothing but a dull grind: the very practice in conjugation and syntax can be interestingly diversified, illustrated by attractive texts; the ingenuity of pupils may be aroused in devising new variations and in executing manifold imitations of model constructions. Furthermore, a considerable amount of fairly rapid sight-reading or translation, done at first mainly by the instructor, may be introduced, as a relief and a stimulus, from the very start. The exhilarating exercise of swift reading should never be abandoned; but we should avoid the almost universal mistake of making all translations rapid and superficial. Here is one of the chief causes of our failure. For several years, both in school and in college, a given portion of text should be minutely analyzed and parsed. In no other way can pupils be made to heed the really essential things; in no other way can the belief be hammered into them that the foreign writer actually means something, and that his words, when turned into English, must invariably make sense.

Our young school-children need constant oversight. They are often left too much to their own devices. For instance, after they have had a few lessons in grammar, a bit of German is assigned to them to translate at home. This is a task for which they are totally unfit. To ask them to do it is to put upon them the work that belongs to the teacher. For a long time, all, or nearly all, the new reading or translation should be done in the classroom, and the pupil's home lesson should be a review. The same thing is true of grammar: very few children are capable of assimilating linguistic principles from a book until the rules and examples have been carefully expounded by the living voice. The bane of much of our instruction is that the master does not teach—he "hears lessons." Vigilant watch must be kept, also, to prevent the child from falling into error through ignorance of English. This applies not only to the interpretation of grammatical statements, but likewise, and still more, to the translation of foreign texts. It is impossible,

without the closest and most sympathetic attention, to imagine what idea a common English word may suggest to the youthful mind. I remember that in a class which I was visiting a little girl translated the German *schlau* by *pretty*. Her teacher corrected, rebuked, and passed on. Wondering how the child got such a notion, I turned to the vocabulary of the reader, and there I found the definition, *schlau=cunning*. The only meaning that this child, or almost any American of her years, ever attached to *cunning* was *pretty*. A large proportion of the faulty translation that so vexes teachers is due merely to lack of familiarity with English words; and for this the child is seldom to blame. The difficulty is increased in the case of boys and girls of foreign parentage who have no native language at all. In the evening high schools of Boston I have met many a youth of eighteen or twenty who scarcely had the gift of human speech: his parents, perhaps, spoke only German, the school teachers had spoken only English, and he had never learned either tongue well enough to do anything but express the most rudimentary concepts. Such pupils naturally demand special treatment and unwearying patience.

In our field of education, more, perhaps, than in any other, the attempt has been made to fit the same coat upon all comers: sometimes the infant has been smothered in the pedagogic raiment of the grown-up; oftener the adult has been all too scantily clad in the educational dress of babyhood. It seems self-evident —but it obviously needs to be repeated many times—that the method best suited to one age not only may be, but must be, ill adapted to another; that a course which is natural to the child must be unnatural to the man. Some general principles the pedagogue should always bear in mind; but the application of them, the method itself, should vary with perfect freedom according to the age, antecedents, and ability of the scholars. It should vary, also, in accordance with the character and competence of the master. Few spectacles are more painful than that of a teacher conscientiously endeavoring to pursue a course for which he is by nature or training unfit. Everyone who adopts the pedagogic profession should strive to

qualify himself to pattern his instruction after any rational system that may be required; but every born teacher will develop out of the system adopted a way of his own.

If a language is to seem alive it must be read aloud and spoken. And here we meet the greatest of the permanent and unavoidable obstacles in our field of instruction—the difficulty of pronunciation. Here again the French teacher has a harder task than the German: firstly, because the French sounds and intonations are more remote from American habits, secondly, because the standard exacted by the French ear is higher than that demanded by the German, and thirdly, because proficiency in German pronunciation is often facilitated by the presence of many pupils of German extraction. I shall therefore consider primarily the French side of the problem, although the general principles involved belong equally to German. It is well to accept once for all the fact that French pronunciation is hard and requires a vast amount of intelligent teaching and patient exercise. Almost invariably it is slighted. In bad schools it is scarcely taught at all, the teacher expecting that scholars will "pick it up"—heaven knows where. Hosts of boys are sent up to college who do not even know that the *s* at the end of plural nouns is silent. For such pupils French is no living language—it can hardly be a language at all. Other teachers, more conscientious, waste a great deal of time in hearing pupils read aloud without ever having taught them how to read. Such reading merely confirms them in their bad habits. The commonest mistake consists in offering only a brief (and generally incorrect) exposition of principles at the first lesson and then trusting to subsequent occasional directions and a large amount of uncorrected reading. There is only one time to learn to pronounce, and that is at the very beginning: if scholars do not pronounce right, they will pronounce wrong; and when they have pronounced wrong for some months they are generally incurable. Not only do they take no pleasure in their work, feeling that what they acquire is a mere sham, but they are afraid to open their mouths to utter a French sound; if they want to ask the meaning of a French word, they do not dare to speak,