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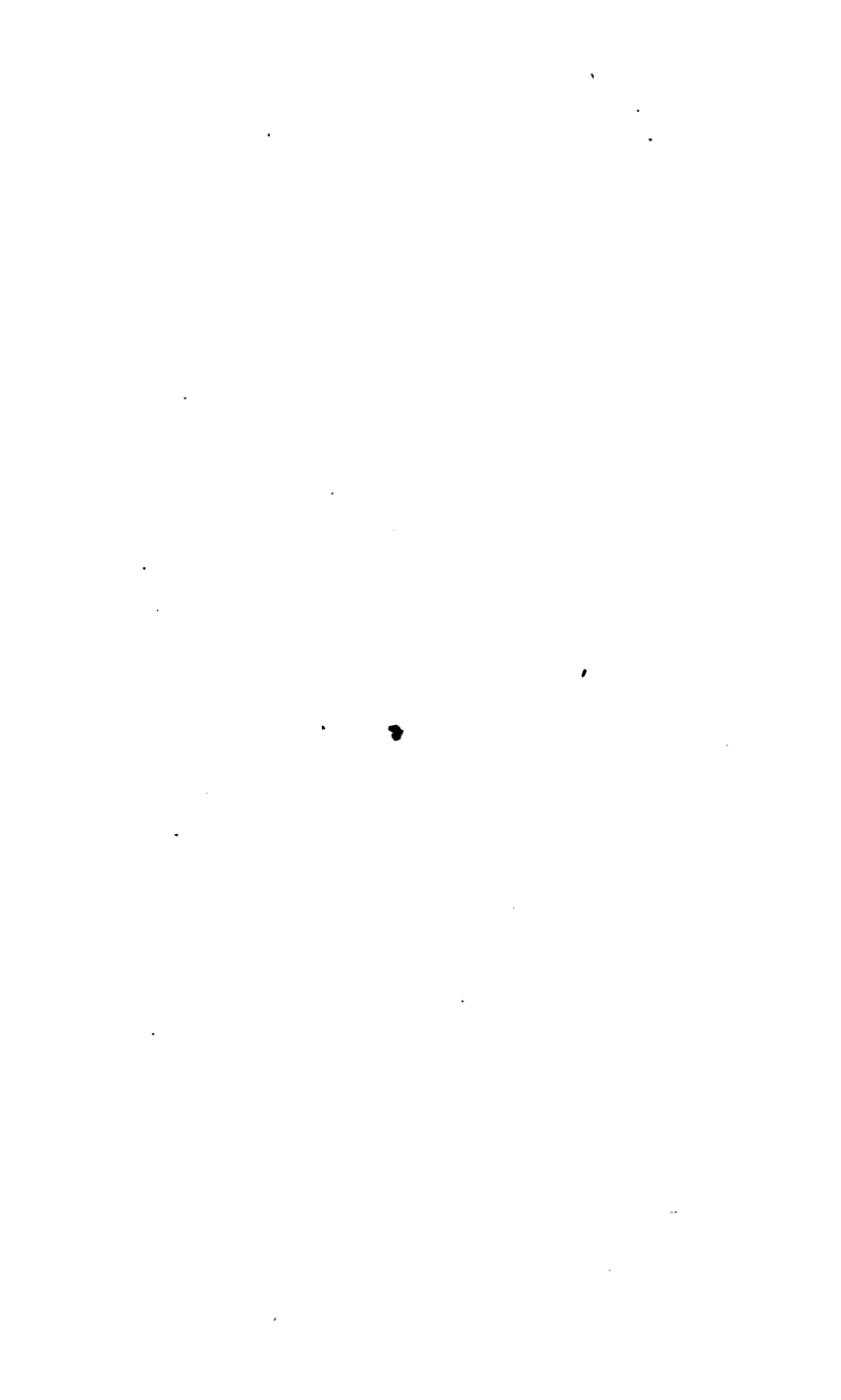


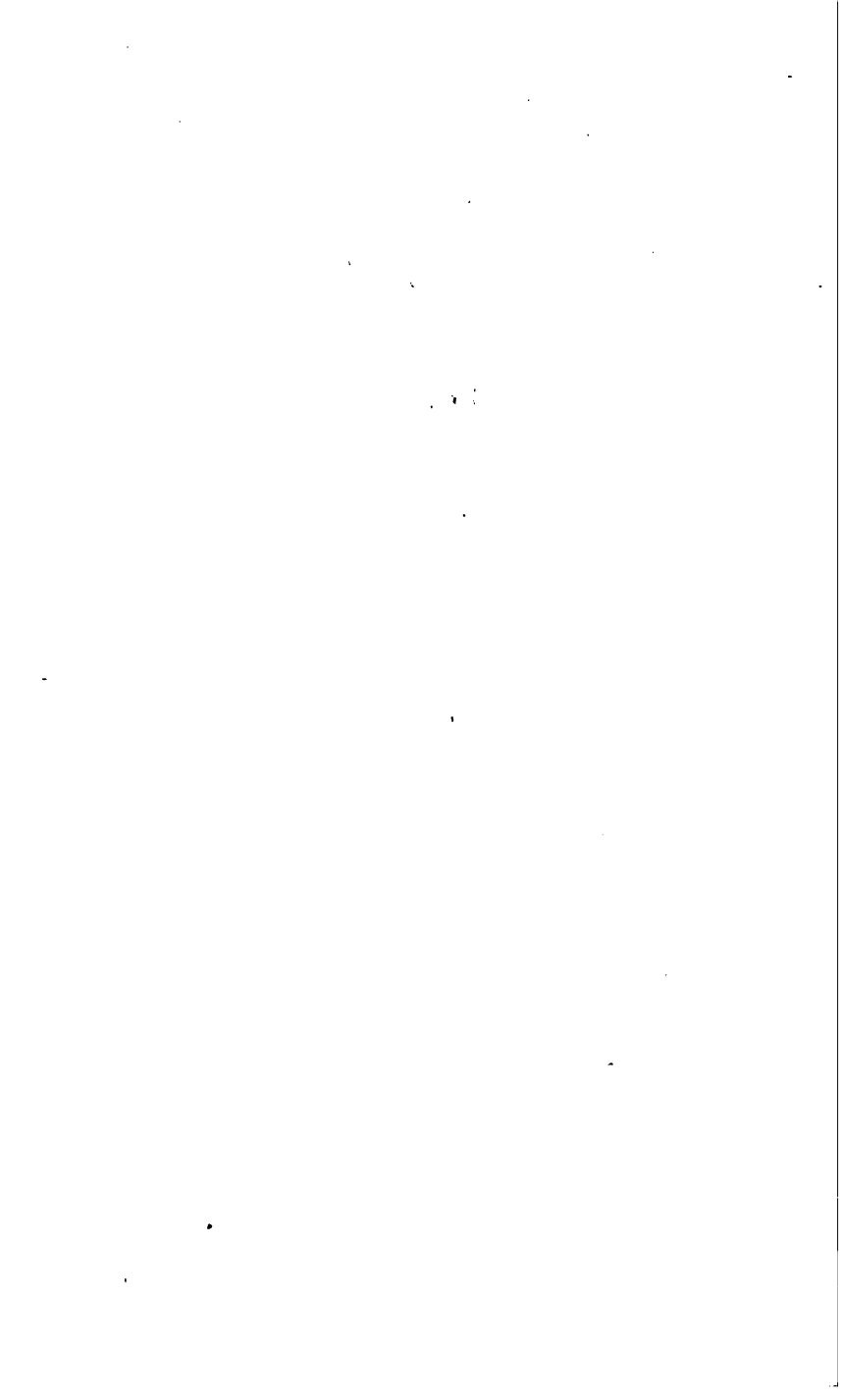
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THE STUDY OF MODERN LANGUAGES.

THOROUGH METHOD *v.* NATURAL METHOD.

A LETTER TO DR. L. SAUVEUR

By J. LÉVY.

Qui n'entend qu'une cloche, n'entend qu'un son.

FRENCH PROVERB.

BOSTON:
A. WILLIAMS AND COMPANY,
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WHY THIS PAMPHLET IS WRITTEN.

ON the 5th of April last, at a meeting of the classical and high-school teachers of Massachusetts, one of the points considered was the practicability of applying the Heness-Sauveur method to the study of the ancient languages.

The success of the new method in the teaching of modern languages was also spoken of, the arguments being rather one-sided.

One-sided also is, of course, a pamphlet just published under the title, "Introduction to the Teaching of Ancient Languages."

In the absence of any marked opposition, the new method monopolizes the floor. This might be wrongly interpreted by many, "silence gives consent."

Again, the new method exhibits a number of testimonials, some of which are signed by persons so respectable that, although certificates, like dreams, often go by contraries, these cannot but shake the convictions of people who have no opportunity to form a personal opinion on the subject.

Therefore it is not, perhaps, too audacious to ask all whom it may concern :—

Are you not jumping at a conclusion on the merits of a few incomplete experiments?

You have seen brilliant results, no doubt; but are you sure that these results were not produced *under too favorable conditions*?

Before advocating the introduction of the new method in our schools, have you seen it tested for a sufficient length of time *under ordinary conditions* ?

Supposing that some enthusiastic teacher has taught it with success in a school, were not, perhaps, the other studies unconsciously neglected in the mean time ? Think twice of this.

Should not speaking modern languages be left in its right place, after the English branches, and be considered as the complement, not the corner-stone, of a sound education ?

It is claimed that the new method lends itself to the highest teaching. Perhaps it does,— but in the foreign language. Are American girls and boys sent to school to become American thinkers ? Or German, French, Italian talkers ?

On the other hand, is a foreign language studied *in schools* merely as an accomplishment ?

Does not the comparative study of two languages give more definiteness of thought ?

Is it not more important to train the mind to grasp ideas than words ?

If very young children must learn only sounds by imitation, because they are unable to use the power of discrimination and comparison, should everybody be prevented from using that power ?

An uneducated foreigner comes to Boston, he acquires a smattering of English : is his mind better trained than that of his brother who remained at home ? Will not the result be the same for any educated person who follows the same parrot training ? Has the mind been improved ? The vocabulary is richer ; that person may give more names to the same object ; but what then ?

Twenty years ago the standard of height was lessened in the French army ; tall men were growing rare. At

about the same time, in some singing schools, the pitch was lowered, because it was not easy to find tenors and sopranos. Is human intelligence on the decline also, that we should shrink from asking of our schools thorough linguists ?

Between the *fossil* system of teaching nothing but grammar, and the *radical* system of teaching no grammar, there is *mean* ground : on this rational basis most schools in Boston and vicinity rest their teaching of modern languages.

If the new method is really *the* method, it ought to come out victoriously from a public and impartial trial.

This paper is written to propose such a trial. If the epistolary form has been chosen, it is not for the childish satisfaction of making personalities, but because the direct address is more forcible.

And now, before beginning, the writer would express his regrets that the task has not been undertaken by a more competent person. He is fully aware of the insufficiency of his qualifications ; but, deeply convinced of the justice of his cause, he hopes that "*Si natura negat, facit indignatio versum.*"

DR. L. SAUVEUR:

Dear Sir,— In your “Introduction to the Teaching of Ancient Languages,” you say (page 9), “For all our struggles we feel repaid, now that we see the Natural Method introduced into the best educational institutions, and receiving the full approval of the faculties of the leading colleges in this country.” You omit to name these educational institutions, and I take the liberty to suggest that the words “*full approval*” are rather premature, to say the least.

Further on (page 14) you say, “Were the Romans and the Greeks still alive, were their languages still living languages, there would be no difficulty. Greek and Latin would be taught by the Natural Method, as French and German are now taught.”

So, according to you, Sir, those educational institutions which have adopted your method are the best. You do not say whether they have adopted your method because they are the best, or are the best for having adopted it.

However it may be, your declaration falls rather heavily on poor Boston, where but very few schools, if any, adopt your system. Were I at liberty to give names, I could mention a large number of excellent schools where your method has been deliberately condemned. I could even adduce one, one of the very best, which, after one year of *fair trial*, has been obliged to discard it, the results being far from satisfactory.

So, again, still in your words, “French and German are now taught” according to your method. O Sir, who told you this? Such an unwarrantable idea could not originate

in your own mind. You have reason to know that stern facts contradict this statement. Can the exaggerated praises of too indulgent friends have thus deluded you?

“Détestables flatteurs, présent le plus funeste. . . .”

No, dear Sir, *French and German are not taught now according to the Natural Method*. A few, a very few, have adopted it, but the name of those who reject it is legion.

Routine! say you, conservatism! You are a great admirer of La Fontaine, let him answer:—

“Ce chien voyant sa proie en l'eau représentée,
La quitta pour l'image, et pensa se noyer.

Il n'eut ni l'ombre ni le corps.”

Book VI, Fable XVII.

Would it not have been better for that dog had he been more conservative?

Well, here in Boston we are conservative. We do not choose to drop a sound method and grasp at a mere shadow. We take the liberty to think that, although a new idea is entitled to a fair trial, it does not follow that it should be adopted, merely on the ground that it is a new method.

For several years we have observed the working of your system; we have noticed that its limited success does not warrant the pomposity of your public statements; and we have arrived at the following conclusions:—

1. There is a sort of quibble overhanging the whole question. Some teachers, who claim that they follow your method, teach grammar, allow English to be used, etc.

You are not responsible for this? It is true you proclaimed very loudly, at first, that you would disown such teachers. Why, then, do you now count them among your followers?

You yourself, dear Sir, have not been true to your first programme ; you have published several text-books, even a grammar, which you require your pupils to use. A grammar! When grammars have been so disdainfully treated by you!

“Frailty, thy name is ”—New Method.

Your rather numerous text-books, written in behalf of a system which condemns them, remind one of Gribouille, who entered the river up to his neck, that the rain should not spoil his coat.

It is quite natural that you should feel the necessity of writing books, both to expound your ideas, and to show the way to other teachers ; but why is every pupil required to use them? The real beginners who enter your classes cannot read French ; the use of a dictionary is strictly forbidden ; yet, at the first lesson, they use one of your text-books. Why? The pronunciation and the spelling of French are so different that the pupils cannot recognize the oral lesson in the printed one. They are then faced by this dilemma, — either to throw the book away, or try to learn something by the aid of a dictionary. Did it never occur to you, dear Sir, that this is a dangerous temptation? How many people read the last chapter first! Could not some undisciplined pupil infringe the orders, thus setting all your efforts at naught, and defiling the genuineness of your method?

Do you think the word “quibble” too hard?

2. Generally, pupils, whether in schools or private classes, can devote only two or three hours a week to the study of French or German. Your system requires twice, thrice that time, — often more ; and it is said that, when limited to the average conditions, it meets with many failures. The first year, you asked fifteen hours a week in Boston and Cambridge.

Unless I am greatly mistaken, you never tried, in any school, your method for any considerable time, say one year. Anxious as you are to secure the triumph of your ideas, how is it that you never undertook the task of teaching under *ordinary circumstances*? Once in a great while we hear that one of your adherents has been engaged in a school; you, never. Must we say of you what Boileau said of Louis XIV?

“Louis, les animant du feu de son courage,
Se plaint de sa grandeur qui l’attache au rivage.”

3. Only a small number of your pupils are real beginners; most of them have studied formerly under regular teachers, and then you claim the whole merit. “*Sic vos non vobis.*”

Thus you lay great stress on your success at Amherst, and on a partial (I mean incomplete) indorsement from Harvard College. Now, at Amherst, during their summer vacations, your pupils may have only one object in their minds, and can devote all their time and attention to one study; and most of them are teachers with well-disciplined minds, not beginners with untrained minds.

As to Harvard College, is not French required for admission? Where, then, are the beginners?

So, —

Variance among your very supporters, some of whom do not follow your programme, though they hoist your colors:

Four text-books and one grammar published, and forced on the pupils, by a teacher who started his popularity by condemning the use of text-books and grammars:

Very few real beginners in your classes:

A very large amount of time required of the pupils:

Many failures when laboring under ordinary conditions:

This is your method.

Is it a wonder that the great majority of schools and

private teachers refuse to adopt it? Why should they adopt it?

You seem, dear Sir, to be laboring under a false impression. It may be you suppose that, before you adopted Mr. Heness's method, nobody spoke French in the United States. Allow me to rectify this misapprehension.

Fifty years ago there were, perhaps, teachers who taught nothing but grammar, and whose pupils, after ten years of hard labor, could not speak a word of the language studied. I remember having seen such a teacher in my boyhood. At that remote date, this good old man was considered a fossil. Whether there are any such teachers nowadays, I do not know, but I am positive that they must be very rare.

Most teachers of languages, here in Boston, could boast excellent pupils who speak German or French quite fluently, besides having a thorough knowledge of the language.

These teachers do their work modestly, quietly; they trust for their reward in public good sense; they do not think it behooves them to blow the trumpet of self-praise.

For several years they have witnessed, without a word, your hyperbolic statements; but now that you march on to the conquest of the ancient languages, brandishing a banner on which you have inscribed an imaginary victory over the modern languages, a longer silence would be guilty, as it might be taken for acquiescence.

"Qui ne dit mot, consent."

Therefore, although my influence and qualifications be very limited, I have decided to break "golden silence," and make publicly the following plea.

THOROUGH METHOD *v.* NATURAL METHOD.

Every once in a while the public is favored with the introduction of a new method for the study of modern lan-

guages. Invariably, books are proscribed and regular teachers abused by the new-comers. Let it be said, however, that generally these star teachers are candid: they are in a great hurry to get popularity, and tickle people's dislike for study; but they readily forego any claim to thoroughness.

The last starry method, introduced in Boston, began in the same manner. The first year it was termed "*the method without grammar or dictionary.*" Yet every subsequent year a new text-book was published. Why?

It is no flattery to say that Boston is a studious city, and that no shallow teaching will ever get a firm foothold among its people.

The new star teachers found that out very soon. Hence text-books, even a grammar. This is the cause of all the quibbling of which many people complain.

At first popularity was courted with the words, *without grammar or dictionary*; now these words weigh heavily on you. You have tried to explain them away; still they come back home. Their mark is indelible. They are your original sin; to smother them, you fill pages with quotations from great thinkers; you heap Littré on John Stuart Mill, Pelion on Ossa; you try to scale thoroughness: superficiality confronts you on every round of the ladder.

"There is no royal road to knowledge."

Ease and thoroughness are adverse, you try in vain to yoke them together; you obtain nothing but a hybrid union, which can produce no sound result.

In one of your publications we read, "There is no good thing in the old systems which it [the "Natural Method"] does not embrace, if brought in at the proper time."

If you take what is good in the old systems when you

think it advisable, the new system ceases, from that very moment, to be a *distinct* one.

Two men start on a journey, one in a carriage, the other on foot. After they have gone a certain number of miles, the pedestrian enters the carriage for the rest of the trip. Can that man claim that he has walked the whole distance? Did he not cease to walk the moment he began to ride? Has he a right to call himself "The Champion Walker of the World"?

Your method ceases to be itself as soon as it becomes another. Such is your fate. You are (unconsciously, no doubt) bound to quibble all along.

Are you not aware that, in almost every private school in Boston, the intermediate and advanced classes in German and French are conducted entirely in those languages? That teachers who have private classes, do exactly the same?

Just as I am writing this, a lady tells me that, several years ago, she was a member of a German class taught by one of the leading German teachers of Boston. This teacher is certainly not one of your adherents, yet the class was absolutely conducted in German.

Say all you please, you cannot escape logic: your method is genuine with beginners only,¹—genuine because superficial. As soon as it aims at thoroughness, it ceases to be a distinct method; it is the method that every teacher in Boston uses. And you call this a revolution!

Very likely you have visited some schools or private classes, and I understand your delusion when you say that your method is adopted. Hearing so many pupils speak French or German, you *naturally* thought they were taught after the *Natural Method*; you cherished the sweet illusion

¹ And there are few beginners in your classes.

that all the teachers followed you. The truth is, *you* walk in *their* footsteps.

The self-styled "Natural Method" is based on two points : —

1. Grammar is used only at the proper time. This point I have just examined.

2. The language to be acquired is the only one used in the lesson ; not a single word of English is allowed.

You call this naturalness ; you speak of the enthusiasm which this method kindles in the pupils. I am pleased to acknowledge frankly that not a few of your pupils have really been carried away by your teaching. I say this the more readily that, so far, I have been obliged to use rather sharp words, and that I feel happy to tread upon a firm ground, where I am able to cope with you *à armes courtoises*. Perhaps as you read this, you smile and murmur, "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*." Well, if you do, you are right after all ; for, though your individual success be incontestable, it is due, not to the superiority of your method, but to your unquestionable personal ability ; and this explains the many failures of your followers under ordinary circumstances.

There is another good point for which credit ought to be given to the "Natural Method." Since its introduction the interest in the study of languages has increased, and teachers of languages have been profitably stimulated. Competition is generally an excellent thing ; in education, however, there is one danger : emulation might degenerate into racing.

Perhaps you made a great error in changing the name of your method. The "Heness-Sauveur Method" presented to the mind a lucid idea. Immediately, at the other pole, we found the "Robertsonian Method." The alternative was simple : Learn the languages *thoroughly* or *superficially*. Whereas, "Natural Method" is a vague expression

which seems to have been fatally chosen to complete the vagueness which characterizes the whole system,—vagueness which puzzles many people, and which would be more fitly styled the “Protean Method.” But you have adopted the name “Natural Method.” Let us see, then, whether it is more natural than the “Thorough Method.”

In most schools, here in Boston and vicinity, principals or assistants, often principals *and* assistants, are excellent German and French scholars. In many cases their pronunciation may be called perfect ; yet they prefer not to teach themselves the spoken language. This is modest, honest, and *natural*. As they know that it is the intelligence, not the memory alone, which should be developed, they gradually give their pupils a sound instruction in the theoretical part of the foreign language to be studied ; read with the pupils, which stocks the minds with a good vocabulary ; and make together a critical comparison of the two languages (the foreign and the English), which gives a deeper insight into the vernacular. I should call this *natural* also.

While the American teachers perform thus their part, the foreign teachers, working hand in hand with them, teach a good pronunciation and the practical use of the language, called *conversation*.

Thus, every pupil, whatever his or her receptiveness may be, receives the same amount of attention ; the slow ones have, from the very first lesson, a staff to support them from one lesson to the next ;¹ this, no oral system can

¹ Several months ago, discussing this point with a supporter of the so-called “Sauveur’s method,” I made the proposition which will be found on page 18. “Oh,” said my opponent, “your pupils would have the advantage ; they would be able to study between the lessons.” Is not this *naïve* confession the most telling argument against the “Natural Method” ?

give. There is no temptation to drift into a *forcing* process, which consists in pushing the bright pupils ahead, allowing the others to linger behind. The whole class advances as evenly as possible. Is not this *natural*?

In our schools, in our private lessons, English is used whenever it is necessary ; and I think it is more *natural* to do so, than to check poor pupils who wish to learn something foreign to the lesson, and gratify them with the following damper : "*Vous êtes bien curieux.*" (*Vide* your own lessons. I am not sure that these are the very words, but I vouch for the sense.)

We use English whenever it is necessary. We encourage our pupils to express ideas of their own in the foreign language, which is *natural*.

The pupils of the "Natural Method" express suggested ideas, which is *not natural*.

An example : A pupil is talking German or French ; he comes to that frequent and fatal barrier where words fail : what happens? Sometimes the idea is so clear that the teacher can at once suggest the required word ; but at other times, nothing will do ; the conversation comes to a standstill. In such a case the "thorough" teacher is able to make with his pupil a *natural* exchange ; he receives the English word, and reciprocates with the German or French one, on the business-like principle, give and take.

The "natural" teacher does not mean to trifle ; if the thought to be expressed be "coaxing," the pupil must get up, approach his teacher with a winning smile, and pat him under the chin. If the thought "up side down" blocks the conversation, the pupil is expected to stand on his head. Now, the chin patting may be *natural*, but the reversed position is not.

I have it from a very trustworthy authority that, in some New England town, which I would rather not name, a

teacher of the "Natural Method" gambols around the room, to express the idea "to run."

If this be the general case, school committees will no longer be called upon to deliver certificates of proficiency to teachers of languages; this duty will devolve upon P. T. Barnum.

And, then, there is much room for improvement in the "Natural Method." Mr. Squeers's system is vastly superior, if we are to judge from the original way in which he teaches the words "*winder*" and "*bottinney*."

I should like to say something about public schools. A few lines ought to be sufficient, as the question was argued a few weeks ago by persons more competent than myself, — argued, but not exhausted.

The Institute of Technology, the public schools, and some private schools for boys will be considered together.

Let it be distinctly understood that this is not a suggested plea. I take the full responsibility of my opinions; if there is any misstatement in my assertions, the blame shall be mine.

The Institute of Technology does not propose to teach "Conversation"; the classes are too large.

The public schools do not propose to teach "Conversation"; the classes are too large.

The private schools for boys teach "Conversation," *as far as possible*; they have so many things to teach to the boys whom they prepare for college, that the time devoted to the study of German or French does not warrant a complete conversational education. But I most emphatically claim that no revolution is necessary in this branch of education. In their recitations, translations, written exercises, etc., the pupils acquire a large vocabulary and a good spelling; they generally learn a fair pronunciation; they do not

converse, but they possess all the necessary materials to do it. In short, the power of speaking the foreign language they have studied, is in them *in a latent state*, and the least effort will open the flood-gate.

This is so true that it is to this *natural* consequence that the "Natural Method" owes its first success in Boston and, probably, elsewhere. All the prodigy it ever accomplished was to reap what others had sown.

In public and private schools, in private classes, pupils are sometimes compelled to discontinue their studies, for reasons too many to enumerate. If, after a few months of the "Natural Method," *under ordinary conditions*, a pupil is obliged to stop, how long will the few sentences he has learned by ear only remain fresh in his memory?

Under the same circumstances, a pupil of the "Thorough Method" will have learned to read and pronounce somewhat.

Suppose the two resume their study, one, two, three years after; the "natural" results have completely vanished, whilst the "thorough" results are there, almost ready for immediate use.

In the first case, there has been an absolute loss of time and money. In the second, a summary review will bring back the former acquirements.

There is another question, a very delicate one, and which must be handled with gloves. I would rather leave it alone; but I must not let a single point remain in the dark, and cannot demur. I shall try to tread gently.

If the spoken language is the pinnacle which must be reached at the very first lesson, regardless of all the considerations I have tried to elucidate, who shall teach the spoken languages?

Foreign teachers only? Then several thousands must be imported; and the tax-payers and the parents must be ready

to keep their purses wide open, for good foreign teachers will not come for a meagre salary, if they come at all.

Will American teachers do it? No doubt there are many fully qualified for such a work, but their number is not sufficient. What will the others do; those who render now such effective services in the theoretical part of the study of modern languages? Will they teach the spoken language? No slight is meant by this remark; it is a suggestion honestly made, which, I am sure, will be honestly accepted.

For ten years I have lived among teachers. I have had the honor to teach French to a great many of them. I hope they have all remained my friends. I esteem and respect them, and I ask them frankly:—

If this letter is not wrong from beginning to end, if the tenth part only of its assertions can be proved, would it not be better to let well alone?

The only cause of the temporary success of the new method has been *that pupils have been persuaded to devote more time to it than is generally given to the other*. With even chances, the "Thorough Method" would undoubtedly obtain results much superior to those so loudly claimed.

Convinced of this, I make the following proposition:—

Let the two methods have a full, fair, public trial under exactly similar conditions.

1. Suppose a certain number of adults of both sexes, *having never studied French before*, should be brought together next October, 1878, and impartially divided into two classes.

2. The larger the classes, the more conclusive the test would be, since the new method claims that *it can be carried out even in the largest classes*.

3. Class number one would be taught according to the

“Natural Method”; class number two according to the “Thorough Method.”

4. The number of lessons to be given every week would be fixed by a committee. In order to have really a conclusive test, this number ought to correspond to the average time devoted to the study of modern languages, in schools both public and private.

5. Each class should strictly abide by its method, a clear definition of which should be published before the beginning of the trial.

6. No pupil could be dismissed by the teachers. In case a member of one of the classes should leave voluntarily, he would be requested to explain his motives to the committee.

7. The trial should last the whole school year.

8. The “Thorough Class” would be taught free of charge. It is hoped the “Natural Class” would find a teacher equally ready to show his faith in his works.

9. The expenses of advertisements, etc., would be covered in some way to be proposed at the proper time.

10. All persons connected with the teaching of languages, both modern and ancient, should have the privilege to visit the classes.

11. A public exhibition would take place whenever the committee should think it advisable.

12. The committee should be formed on the same principles that a jury is empanelled, *i. e.*, composed of persons of intelligence, having no settled opinion on either method.

These articles are mere suggestions; of course amendments would have to be made.

Though you do not live in Boston, dear Sir, I think this plan may be carried out. Some of your *numerous* Boston adherents will no doubt take up the gauntlet. Who knows? You might, now and then, come and give a few

lessons to the "Natural Method" class. Do you not think it would be worth your while?

Were my proposition sure to be accepted, I should stop now, leaving to tangible results the rest of the demonstration. But some persons tell me that the gauntlet runs great risk of remaining on the floor, so I am obliged to try your patience with some more pages.

I do not propose to take part in the controversy which is now being agitated, about the Heness-Sauveur method, as applied to the study of ancient languages. I do not think myself competent, as I am not a classical teacher.

All I should like to advocate is the selection of a sure ground for the discussion of such a momentous question; and I would say to all teachers of languages, ancient and modern, "Before you allow yourselves to be tempted by the 'Natural Method,' be sure that every success it claims be substantiated by actual, unmistakable facts; and, to neglect no clew, however humble, read attentively the following review of some points of the 'Introduction to the Teaching of Ancient Languages.'"

I have already examined two of the statements of this "Introduction." I shall rapidly sum up what I have said before on this subject.

Teachers of ancient languages are advised to follow the example of the teachers of modern languages. I give them the same advice; for, I repeat it, hardly any schools and few teachers have adopted the "Natural Method," and the assertion that they have is unwarranted. If I am mistaken, it can be easily proved.

On page 8 of the "Introduction" we read this question, "Where is our Darwin?" He is found. The "Natural Method" is an ingenious application of the theory of evolution to education.

At first it was "The No Grammar or Dictionary

Method"; then, "The Heness-Sauveur Method"; now, "The Jacotot Method," rejuvenated by the "Robertsonian Method."

All these evolutions prove that the "Natural Method" does not rest upon a firm basis, this basis is as yet in an alluvial state. Teachers ought to wait till it has solidified into a cohesive stratum.

And, then, teachers of the "Old System" have a right to complain of this unstable character of the "Protean Method." They make very little noise; they cultivate quietly their humble garden; the present paper is very likely the first appeal ever made in their behalf; but their neighbors are devoured by an insatiable spirit of conquest, so that, in public talk, the "Old System," like the poor Indian, is driven from reservation to reservation, till it is obliged to make a stand.

The system proposed for the teaching of ancient languages is an imitation of the "Robertsonian Method." Soon a teacher, who has always followed this method for the teaching of living languages, will be considered by you as a disciple of a method he opposes.

On page 14 of the "Introduction" we read, "A Latin teacher would in that case carry his pupils at once into the Latin language, never speaking a word of English during the lessons."

On page 15, "In the same manner Greek would be taught by an Athenian professor."

This would happen if Latin and Greek were "*still living languages.*" Native Greeks and Latins would teach them.

German and French *are* living languages, yet the "Natural Method" expects American teachers to teach German and French conversation.

"Le sage dit, selon les gens :

Vive le roi ! vive la ligue !"

LA FONTAINE, Book II, Fable V.

Page 20: "Once the sentence is understood, he [the pupil] will look only at the Latin text, he will hear only the words of Cæsar, and he must put those words in his memory firmly, perfectly, *there to keep them during all his studies and all his life, until they become a part of his mind, always, everywhere with him, when he walks, when he is alone, or when he is idle, or even when he is dreaming at night.*"

Page 45: "If there are five lessons a week, at the end of those three months the scholar knows by heart, and has recited in the class-room the first thirty chapters of 'De Bello Gallico,' some seventy or seventy-five times; *at home, when walking, when going to sleep at night,* he has said them over a hundred times."

The italicized passages of these two extraordinary paragraphs are worthy a moment's attention. It is no longer study, it is fanaticism, absorption of a mind by one subject. What will become of the other studies? Can schools afford to have one branch engross so completely the attention of the pupils? Is it not plain now, that the "Natural Method," to obtain brilliant results, is bound to elbow its way, jostling everything it finds on its passage? Is not this why the "Natural Method" has not tried to obtain some of its *remarkable achievements under ordinary circumstances?*

Page 29: "I am sure that if a class beginning Latin were to receive one lesson from the *best* teacher of the old system, and another from a *good* teacher of the 'Natural Method,' and were then allowed to choose their teacher, they would reject the first and accept the second."

Here we have the whole affair in a nutshell. L'avocat Patelin would say, "*Habemus confitentem reum.*"

It is in the same spirit that several *public test lessons* have been given in Boston, everybody knows with what questionable success. Of course a first lesson is always pleasing, especially by a method which promises to require no study.

"Mais attendons la fin."

Is it preposterous to suppose that this is the very cause why the "New Method" has been unable to penetrate into the Boston schools?

In several places great stress is laid on the "Entretiens sur la Grammaire." This book is given as the paragon of grammars. I should prefer not to speak of it; but I read on page 49 of the "Introduction" which I am reviewing now, "The following year we can *easily arrange* our grammar"; and I cannot resist the desire to show teachers of languages, both ancient and modern, how *easily* indeed the "Entretiens" has been *arranged*.

1. It is claimed that the book is an original one. "That grammar¹ is so different from others, so important an element of the reform." (Introduction, etc., page 10.) It is but a pale imitation of "La Grammaire Nationale de Bescherelle,"² at the very first page of which one reads, "C'est une vérité maintenant incontestable que la véritable grammaire est dans les écrits des bons auteurs." This grammar was published from 1834 to 1838; it drowns the "Entretiens" in its immensity.

2. The "Entretiens" has as epigraph these words, "Etudiez le code de la langue dans les maîtres de la langue."

Soon after uttering this fine motto, rules are given for the use of some tenses, and with these very rules the "maîtres de la langue" are knocked down whenever they dare to contradict the author, just as idols are burnt when they do not hearken to the prayers of their worshippers.

For instance, Racine is quoted; and, as his instrument

¹ Entretiens sur la Grammaire, par Lambert Sauveur.

² Grammaire Nationale, ou Grammaire de Voltaire, de Racine, de Bossuet, de Fénelon, de J. J. Rousseau, de Buffon, de Bernardin de Saint Pierre, de Chateaubriand, de Casimir Delavigne, et de tous les écrivains les plus distingués de la France, etc. . . . par M. Bescherelle aîné.

is too near perfection to chime in with the superficial precepts, *easily arranged* no doubt, down he goes.

If Racine, than whom there is no purer French writer, is not a safe guide, whom shall we take? This question can be easily answered. The good writers are superior to the grammars; the "Entretiens sur la Grammaire" is superior to the good writers: take the "Entretiens sur la Grammaire."

"But if the 'Entretiens' gives incorrect rules?"

"The 'Entretiens' gives no incorrect rules."

"Who says so?"

"The author."

I must give one instance of the superficiality of the "Entretiens sur la Grammaire."

On page 15, Racine chimes in; everything goes on smoothly; but soon after there is a jar, and we read (page 27), "*Lisez les tragédies de Racine, et vous trouverez sur toutes les pages* [*"à toutes les pages"* would be better] *presque des emplois de temps aussi malheureux que ceux que je vais vous présenter. Ecoutez.*" The admirable "Songe d'Athalie" is quoted, and Racine is doomed. Then the author of the "Entretiens" gives — aggravation of penalty — a version of his own, a perfect version.

Alas, poor Racine! as long as he bears up superficial rules, he is a great writer; but when the sounding-line is too short to fathom his depth, he is told, as on page 28, "*Ce vous avez vu est injustifiable.*"

It is the remark which is "*injustifiable.*"

3. M. Girault-Duvivier's "Grammaire des Grammaires" is treated with wanton severity. Expressions are used which cannot be blamed too severely. "*C'est la meilleure grammaire, quoiqu'elle soit pleine d'erreurs. Ne vous y fiez entièrement sur aucune question.*"

And again : “ *La Grammaire des grammaires, par Girault-Duvivier, est pleine de mensonges grammaticaux.*”

Such uncalled-for attacks justify the present answer. It is deserved retaliation.

The “Grammaire des Grammaires” is an honestly written book ; it could bear on its first page the inscription which Montaigne chiselled on the frontispiece of his monumental work, “*C'est icy un livre de bonne foy, lecteur.*” This cannot be said of every grammatical compilation. Girault-Duvivier's book contains errors, it is true, but not so many as is pretended. When criticism forgets itself, we have a right to say, “*Ne, sutor, ultra crepidam.*”

4. While no opportunity is lost to pour sharp criticisms on some books, others are ignored.

“La Grammaire Nationale de Bescherelle” and several others are not mentioned. Lafaye's “Dictionnaire des synonymes,” although spoken of twice, is forgotten in most important places. For instance, nobody can fail to notice the striking resemblance between Lafaye's passage on the “*Synonymie des substantifs qui diffèrent uniquement par le genre,*” and Chapter V of “Entretiens sur la Grammaire” ; yet Lafaye is named *incidentally* only.

These remarks are only a small part of all that could be said about the “Entretiens sur la Grammaire,” that crowning piece of the “Natural Method,” that work which is heralded as “*so important an element of the reform.*”

I stop here, but shall be pleased if an opportunity be given me to continue this review at another time.

And now, before I close this too long letter, I must say a last word.

I fully realize the unpleasantness of the task I have undertaken. A teacher who attacks a fellow-teacher, may be charged with secret and mean motives ; yet have I overlooked this consideration, and it is with a firm hand and a

calm conscience that I fire this shot at you. I do not think you have a right to complain, for I have shown how sharply you have attacked people who could not answer. On this occasion, it is you who have opened the fire. Indeed, for seven years, if our poor "thorough teaching" has not been riddled through and through, it is because, unconsciously, you used blank cartridges.

But, while I attack the exaggerated claims of the *method*, allow me, dear Sir, to render justice to the *man*, who is, beyond a doubt, a remarkable scholar, an indefatigable worker, an enthusiastic teacher.

With many regrets for what unpleasant truths I have had to tell in this letter,

I remain,

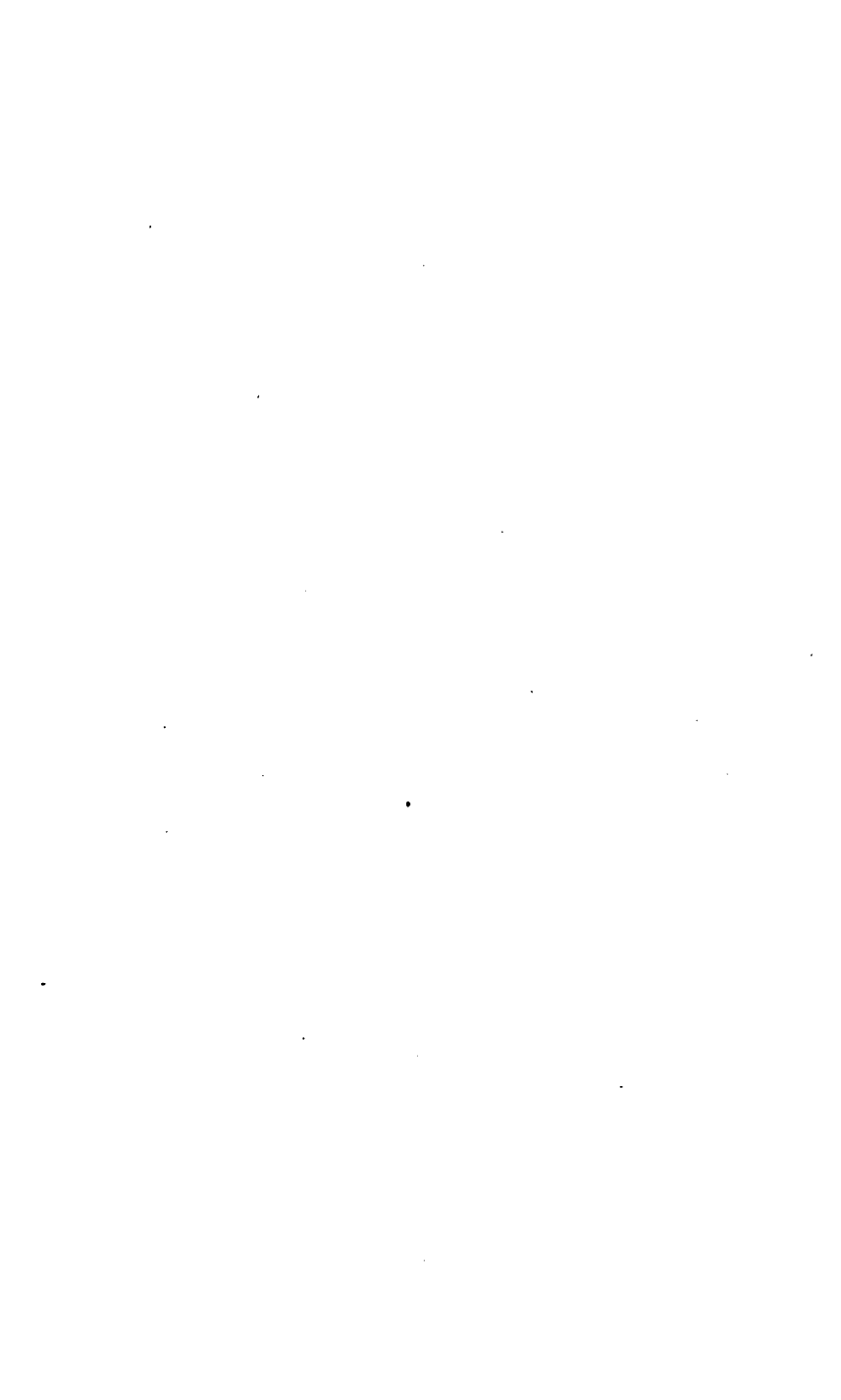
Yours respectfully,

J. LÉVY.

Boston, May, 1878.











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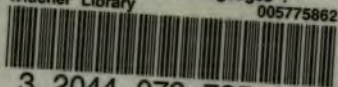
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