

## ON THE STUDY OF MODERN LANGUAGES.

A person may learn a modern language in two ways; he may reside among the people who speak the language and almost insensibly acquire a practical knowledge of it, or he may, by a course of grammar, composition, and reading, obtain a thorough acquaintance with its literature.

But the results accomplished in each case will differ as widely as the means employed. The man who by residing in a country has obtained a practical knowledge of the language, undoubtedly possesses a showy and useful accomplishment, but it is not likely that he has grasped the spirit and meaning of its literature; while the person who can read and write a foreign language must have thoroughly studied its best authors, and thereby gained a host of new ideas and new food for thought.

His grammatical studies and his practice in composition furnish him with a mental training which can never be obtained by merely learning to speak the language. Mr. Marsh, quoted by Matthew Arnold, says that the accomplishment of speaking languages tends to strain the mind and to make it superficial and averse to going deeply into anything.

Probably the best way is to *combine* to a certain extent both methods and thus combine their results.

After a student has mastered the grammar of the language he proposes to learn and read a few books in it, he should board with a family who speak it, and, in addition to reading the authors prescribed on the curriculum, he should read as many easy *works* as possible, for it is only by an extensive course of easy reading that a person can ever acquire a practical knowledge of a language. Much may be gained from a careful perusal of historical and philosophical works that will render further reading easier, but it is only in plays, short stories and novels that expressions are found which can be easily remembered and used in conversation, for languages are learned by expressions, not by words.

Usually a beginner experiences considerable trouble in distinguishing the words in conversation; but a little practice and strict attention will soon obviate this difficulty. Even after he can readily understand the language when spoken he can by no means converse in it. His sentences may be strictly grammatical, but they will be clumsy and unnatural and will lack that grace and ease which characterize the conversation of a man speaking his mother-tongue. Only constant practice will give him command of those charming little words and phrases that make conversation a continuous flow rather than a chain of detached sentences.

It is not well to converse always with the same person, as the voice, style of speaking and modes of thought soon become familiar, and when a stranger comes upon the scene he can scarcely be understood.

Though this may to a certain extent be due to his using different words and conversing on different topics, yet it is almost wholly owing to the unfamiliarity of his voice. Much also may be learned from talking with children. Reasons for this are not far to seek. In the first place, one is free from that fear of making mistakes and appearing ridiculous in consequence, which usually hampers students and very often prevents them from ever speaking a language fluently. And, secondly, though children are not particular about grammatical correctness, they will have exactness in expression and their replies are simple. Dr. Hart says that more can be learned from talking with ladies than with men, and we are inclined to believe this statement, particularly as he elsewhere notes that in the study of language, more than in any other study, the tone-giving element is *quantity*.

When talking the rules of grammar should be discarded; let errors in syntax and collocation be detected by the ear alone. In other words, speak French and German correctly for the same reason that the Frenchman or German does, who speaks correctly because bad grammar and clumsy arrangement offend his ear, not because they violate rules of which he may have scarcely any knowledge. It is useless to commence to master the genders of German and Italian nouns by committing long lists to memory. As each word is met in reading it should be pronounced with its proper article, and thus, instead of referring to long and laboriously acquired lists of exceptions, one may, by simply pronouncing a word, and the different articles, almost invariably determine its proper gender.

The order of words is one of the greatest difficulties with which the student of German has to contend. After the rules of order have been mastered, numbers of short sentences illustrating the different rules should be learned. This may be supplemented by reading aloud whatever authors are being studied. Soon in writing and speaking all rules may be dispensed with, as the ear will readily and accurately detect any errors.

The vocabulary for conversation should be enlarged, not by learning the foreign equivalent of English words, but by learning the English equivalent of foreign words. It is much better to enlarge one's vocabulary by learning the significance of foreign words only after they have been heard several times.

For a word thus heard fixes itself in mind from one's trying to discover its meaning from the different contexts, and when the explanation comes it takes root in soil well prepared. A profitable and interesting way for a student to increase his knowledge of a language is to translate his thoughts into short and simple sentences during the walks and hours of relaxation and afterwards to refer them to a competent person for correction.

The novelty of the exercise and the effort of retaining the sentences in the mind until they are corrected serves to impress them deeply on the mind. More can be learned from a person who knows little or nothing about English. You are then forced to say everything in the foreign language and if you do not know the exact word you wish to use you will try to get at it by telling him everything that it is not. Moreover, a person who has a fair knowledge of English is apt to exercise it at the expense of your French or German, as the case may be.

But however much progress a student may make by reading and speaking when opportunities present themselves, only years of residence in a country and a thorough knowledge of its best authors will give him the feeling when he is reading or listening to a public speaker that all the idioms and forms of thought are familiar to him and that he himself might have handled the subject in much the same way.

R. J. BONNER.

## LETTER LEGACIES.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Sorry you couldn't fall in with my plan, but since you have found a spot to your liking, I suppose it's all right and I hope your health will improve, without further victimizing by the disciples of Æsculapius. You know my antipathy to doctors. I firmly believe that from Galen and Hippocrates down to Pasteur and Morell Mackenzie, they have mostly made their art of healing very secondary to that of becoming well heeled themselves. Not that I have any particular grudge against any of them. Since I passed safely through the infantile ordeals of mumps and whooping-cough I have entirely dispensed with their services. And perhaps I do wrong to blame them. If the universality of a fault may excuse it, then the doctors stand excused. For few indeed are they who follow science or art with singleness of high purpose.

Though this is not termed a golden age, gold is the idol of its generations. Especially is it so in this young country. Men are too eager in the search for it, and when you add to this that we have little or no national history to excite to emulation of high deeds and rouse the refining influence of romance, I think you have the reasons why Canadian Literature is a meaningless term, or at most, speaking figuratively, representative of a dim sphere, or outline, only a very small portion of which is filled in, like the moon in her first quarter.

The land that is to produce poets distinctively its own must have associations of romance. Here, everything is commonplace and prosy. The marriages are *mariages de convenance*, and love, erstwhile a god, is degraded to the station of a slave. But in Italy, for example, after nightfall beneath many casements stand loyal lovers serenading their *inamorate*, and in many a balcony amid the odour of roses not sweeter than the murmured words of passion may be seen two forms that blend as one in the divine thrill of clinging close caresses in which the very soul seems to rise up and embrace its mate. Can you wonder that even the common people there are poets