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The First Steps in Teaching a Language.

(Concluded).

Let us think first of Mastery. By Mastery Mr. Prendergast understands repeating a foreign sentence till one can at last give it with as much ease as its English equivalent; *e. g.*, most English school-boys have mastered in this sense a certain portion of the French language—*viz.*, *Comment vous portez vous?* But they have not mastered that expression in the same way in which a French school-boy has mastered it. To the English boy it is a mere hocus-pocus, to which a particular meaning is attached quite arbitrarily. To the French boy it is the natural expression of thought. The words live to the French boy; but to the English boy they are mere jargon. And, unfortunately, mere jargon is frightfully hard to remember. But on Prendergast's plan the pupil must not advance till he has "mastered" the first lesson. This requirement hardly seems to me wise, for two reasons—first, because, as I have pointed out, real mastery is at this stage impossible; secondly, because beginners—*young beginners especially*—are anxious to get on; and if they make no visible progress, their mental activity is checked. This last is, to my mind, a fatal objection to the methods which require everything to be retained from the very beginning. The Christian is to avoid the appearance of evil, and the teacher should avoid even the appearance of stagnation. As a rule, I believe we do not think half enough of what our pupils think. We

sometimes seem to regard them as the Strasburg people regard their geese. I am told that they deprive these geese of all liberty, and stuff food down their throats till they consider them fit for examination. The crammer who has the credit of passing a great number of geese, and the owner of the goose, who gets the pie, think this a most satisfactory system; but we have never heard the opinion of the goose. Perhaps the opinion of the goose may be neglected, but the opinion of the boy most assuredly may not. After all, when you think of it he is himself concerned to some extent in the result of your teaching; and he is perfectly well aware of this, so you cannot calculate on driving him, as a stoker drives his engine. It is not enough that he ought to learn on your system; he must feel that he is learning.

So here I find myself obliged to differ from the rapid-impressionists on the one hand, and from the total-retainers on the other. What, then, do I propose? I propose to find out where the vital organs of the language lie, and to seek to give the learner power over that part of it. My rule would be: Teach only what the beginner wants—just the essentials of the language, and do all you can to familiarize him with these essentials by presenting them to him in a variety of forms and teaching him to use them himself. But the learner is powerless in the language, until he is familiar with its main inflections. I would therefore, from the first, set about teaching him these inflections.

Here I am afraid that I shall shock many advanced innovators. What can be more absurd, they will say, than the orthodox plan of grinding pupils in the grammar before they know anything of the language referred to? But let us not be deceived by the various meanings we give to the word *grammar*. That a good deal of the grammar we were taught as boys was absurd—monstrously absurd—is so obvious that one wonders it could have been taught out of Bedlam. Things really valuable were mixed up with a number of things which were then valueless. As much time was spent upon the declension of *domus* as of *dominus*. When, as a boy of eight, I began Latin, I had first of all to learn about the letters; that, *l, m, n, r* were liquids, whatever they might mean, and that some other letters were mutes; I forget