

## INSTRUCTION IN DERIVATION.

(Read at the meeting of the High School Association, by M. G. DANIEL, of Boston.)

**TO what extent, and in what way, ought instruction in derivation in languages to be given?**

I propose to discuss this question briefly in its relations to the study of French.

At the outset I will say that, in my opinion, any systematic study of derivation, except in so far as it may be made to assist the pupil in his every-day labor, ought to be deferred till a late period of the High School course, or perhaps even till the pupil is in college.

One of the most essential pre-requisites for the profitable study of any language historically, or comparatively with other languages, seems to me to be a large and extensive acquaintance with the literature of the language or languages in question. It will not be disputed here that the only true method of studying derivation is the historical method. Before asserting that a Latin word is derived from, or cognate with, a certain Greek word, it is necessary to show by actual examples taken from Latin and Greek authors that the supposed resemblance is a real and not a fancied one. To establish it as a fact that the French *ame* is derived from the Latin *anima*, it is necessary to show, as has been clearly shown, that in the thirteenth century the word was written *ame*, in the eleventh *amene*, and in the tenth, *anime*, whence the step to *anima* is a short and sure one.

It is clear that anything like original research in this field of study is not to be expected of any scholars with whom we have to deal. The early years of their study are spent largely in acquiring vocabularies and idioms. Whatever they learn of derivation they must learn incidentally, and must of course learn at second hand, although in this incidental study they may be laying a foundation which will be of great advantage to them, if ever they come to the scientific study of the subject. If the teacher has his mind well stored with the facts and illustrations and laws of derivation, not a single lesson in any language need pass without opportunities for employing some of this knowledge to the great benefit of his pupils.

In no language that is taught in our schools can this incidental instruction in derivation be given more freely, or to better advantage, than in the French, it being taken for granted, what may, I suppose, be assumed for the majority of our High Schools, that French is preceded by more or less of Latin. At least, I will take the liberty of assuming that French ought to be preceded by Latin.

The pupil should at the outset be informed that Latin is the mother of French, that a large proportion of the words he will meet with in French, are directly descended from the Latin, and that many peculiarities of the Latin idiom that have challenged his attention are reproduced in the French. Indeed it seems to me that, as a matter of practical utility, the teacher may give many a short lecture upon the history of the French language, thereby increasing the interest of the study, and awakening the attention and observation of the pupil. For example, the text of such a lecture may be given when the pupil learns that the French for horse is *cheval*, for fire, *feu*, while in Latin he has been accustomed to *equus* and *ignis*. You would call his attention to the fact that, when books were scarce, and the majority of the people ignorant, there was a wide difference between the language of the learned and that of the common people. You would then tell him that the French language sprang from the language of the common people—the Roman soldiers and colonists who were sent from Italy to hold in subjection the Gaul that Cæsar conquered, and to people its waste places,—and that while Cæsar wrote *equus*, the soldier of the tenth legion said *caballus*, whence *cheval*, and that the common people at some time or other came to use *focus* for *fire*, whence comes *feu*. Further illustrations might be given to an indefinite extent. The French word for battle is *bataille*: learned or literary Latin, *pugna* or *prelium*; popular Latin, *battalia*, which the common people got from the fencing exercises of soldiers and gladiators. *Chat*, cat, comes from *catus*, and not from *felis*.

Another lecture will be useful (may I not say necessary?) on the subject of declension and conjugation, in which you would call the pupil's attention to the wide difference between French and Latin in this particular. You would tell them of the tendency of words to wear away by attrition in the course of time, that "the rough barbarians of Gaul could not grasp the more delicate shades of meaning expressed by case terminations," and that, as early as the fifth century, the Gauls used but two case-endings, nominative and accusative, instead of six or more used by the Romans, and that these two cases were used for eight or ten centuries, till at last the distinction between these two was lost, and thenceforth French, like English, was destitute of case-endings, except in a few exceptional forms.

You would compare *amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant*, with *j'aime, tu aimes, il aime, nous aimons, vous aimez, ils aiment*, pointing out the resemblances in the terminations of the written words, and the differences in pronunciation,—that while the Latin has a different sound for each form, the French sounds four of the forms exactly alike.

But it may be said that this kind of lecturing, though useful

to a certain extent, does not practically aid the student in his acquisition of French. Let us see, then, if we cannot come to something that will be immediately practical and useful as an aid to the memory through the power of association. By associating the meaning of a word previously unknown, with that of a word already known, it cannot be denied that Latin may be made to assist the French to a very great extent. *Jeune, young*, is more easily remembered if associated with *juvenis, bon with bonus; bien with bene, seul with solus, combien with quantum, fils with filius, pere and mere with pater and mater*, than without such help. The boy who has toiled over *sum, es, est, sumus, estis, sunt*, will have little difficulty in conquering *je suis, tu, es, il est, nous sommes, vous êtes, ils sont*, if his attention is called at the right time to the points of resemblance and difference between the corresponding forms.

Again, the subject of gender is a great stumbling block to the student of French. How will his Latin help him here? The general rule for the gender of French nouns is easily enough learned, but how about the almost innumerable exceptions? First, he may be supposed to know that "abstract and collective nouns in *to* are feminine" in Latin; the same rule will apply to several hundred words in French,—the immediate derivatives of the Latin words,—*profession, action, ambition*, and the like. Secondly, it is a fact that all Latin masculines in *o* become feminine in French. This fact will account for the exceptional feminines in *eur*,—*labor, labeur, erreur, crueur, calor, chaleur*, also *amor, amour*. It might interest your class to tell them that, at a time when Latin was quite fashionable in France (after the revival of learning in the sixteenth century) an attempt was made to make all these words masculine again, and that this attempt was successful with only two words, *honneur* and *labour*, which remain masculine to this day. Thirdly, if the pupil is taught to associate *cau* with *equa*, he will not be likely to forget the gender. In the same way associate *coude*, elbow, with *cubitus*; *main*, hand, with *manus* (exceptional in both languages.) *La cour*, court, is the Latin *cohors*, feminine. *Le monde* is the Latin *mundus*, masculine. *La loi* is the Latin *lex*, feminine. Substantives ending in *te* are generally feminine. They are mostly derived from Latin nouns in *tas*, a feminine ending; e. g., *societe, societas, liberte, libertas*, a feminine ending i. e. g., *societe, societas, liberte, libertas, necessite, necessitas*; while those not so derived are masculine, I believe all of them. Fourthly, a large number of Latin neuter words were changed to masculines in French. This fact accounts for such exceptions as those in *ice, as service, vice, justice*, from *servitium, vitium, iustitium*. So, also, *exemple* from *exemplum, doute*, from *dubium*, and the like.

Again, a frequent comparison of idioms may be made useful. *S'il vous plait* is the direct ascendant of *si vobis placet*. To say that *on dit* is simply *homo dicit* goes far towards explaining the meaning of that expression.

*A son insu*, "without his knowledge," an expression to which, I believe, there is nothing analogous in English, is strictly analogous to *ejus injussu*, "without his command."

The dative after certain verbs in Latin is similarly used in French, except that in French the preposition *a* is used instead of the case-ending. *Persuadere alicui*, "to persuade one of a thing," is or may be *persuader quelque chose a quelqu'un*.

"Children, obey your parents," reads, in the Latin Testament, "*Nati, obedite parentibus vestris*"; in the French, "*Enfants, obeissez a vos peres et a vos meres*."

A boy asked me yesterday how *aujourd'hui* came to mean *to-day*. "What is the meaning," said he, "of the 'hui'?" He seemed interested and pleased when I gave the explanation of the form, which I began by asking him if he remembered a certain tautological expression of Cæsar's for "on the following day." He at once recalled "*pastridie ejus dici*." I then told him that the "hui" of *aujourd'hui* was originally *hodie*, and that the whole expression literally rendered would be "at the day of to-day,"—quite similar in form to Cæsar's phrase just quoted.

Allow me to suggest one other resemblance in idioms. I refer to the use of the present tense to express with certain adverbs a continued past action which still continues in the present, where the present is to be rendered by the English present—perfect in the progressive form, as when Cicero says, "*Siu tu, quod tu jam dudum hortor, exieris*," "as I have for a long time been urging you." The same idiom reappears in French where the present is similarly used with *depuis, longtemps*, and other adverbs. "We have known each other for a long time" is "*Nous nous connaissons des longtemps*."

Furthermore, it will gratify something more than mere curiosity to explain the derivation of a multitude of isolated words that are continually occurring in every page of French. Suppose, for example, the pupil is learning the names of the days of the week. Ought he not to learn something more than the mere names?—*Dimanche* is *dies dominica*, the Lord's day; *Lundi* is *luna dies*, moonday or Monday; *marçi* is *Martis dies*, the day of Mars, just as Tuesday is *Tues-day*, the exact Saxon equivalent; *Mercredi* is *Mercurii dies*, as Wednesday is the day of Woden, the Saxon God corresponding to Mercury; *jeudi* is *Jovis dies*, as Thursday is Thor's day, *Thor* being the principal northern deity; *vendredi* is *Veneris dies* as Friday is Freya's day, Freya being the northern Venus; *samedi* is *Sabbati dies*, the day of rest, and sounds not wholly unlike "Sabbath-day," which some of us have heard.

Lastly, it may fairly be considered as germane to this subject to