

overgrown hair and nails were as vital as its heart strings. A plain man might think that, as there are plenty of things which it is important for a beginner to learn, his attention had better be confined to these. The art student is not taught for some time about composition and chiaroscuro. The music-master does not in the first lesson practise the pupil in appoggiaturas. But the simple plan of confining oneself with beginners to what is essential for them—the *jam nunc debentia dici*—has been neglected by teachers of a later date than Comenius.

Comenius, like those methodizers who chose a classic of the language, wanted the substance of the model book to be valuable on its own account. Almost all the other constructors of their own book have considered linguistic teaching only. The existence of the clock, the possible—indeed probable—non-existence of your patience, prevents me from naming several of these, who should not be thus neglected. But I must hasten on to the two I think most important. They are Robertson and Prendergast.

The Robertsonian method is known chiefly in France, as a similar method, that of Langenscheidt, is in Germany. Robertson has framed his model book in such a way as to include all the main root words in the French language. When an author sets to work to employ a certain set of words rather than to convey any particular meaning, the composition can hardly turn out a great literary success. Robertson admits that, like Mr. Malaprop, he forces into the service many poor words that would get their *habeas corpus* from any court in Christendom. I observe that a disciple of his, Dr. Boltz, who published, two or three years ago, a Robertsonian Introduction in German, has simply taken a tale written in that language, so that he is Robertsonian only in his treatment of the "Stoff" selected. This treatment reminds one of Ascham's plan, but in some respects it is great advance upon it. The text is split up into lessons—the early ones consisting of only two or three short sentences. Of each lesson we have three translations—the first a literal interlinear translation, the next one in fair English, and the third a translation phrase by phrase, in parallel columns. This last is for practice in retranslation, and the pupil is required to study it till he can readily give the foreign equivalent for each phrase. Then the words of the lesson are used for what Mr. Prendergast would call *variations*—a very valuable feature in this system. Afterwards comes a lexicographical and grammatical commentary on the words of the lesson, about which a vast sea of information is given, altogether beyond the beginner's capacities and requirements. This part, says Robertson, may be omitted—must be, I should say; but some facts about the really important words of the lesson would no doubt be useful.

Last, not least, on our list, we have Mr. Prendergast, whose system deserves a much more lengthily exposition than I can now afford it.

Mr. Prendergast teaches the beginners, not separate words, but sentences. There are in every language a number of common sequences, which form its idiom. The learner must be habituated to these sequences, and must not be allowed to translate, word by word, from his own language; for so long as he does this he will group the words according to the English idiom. Mr. Prendergast, therefore, would put into the beginner's hand a book giving a number of idiomatic sentences in the foreign tongue, and the corresponding sentences in good English. The foreign sentences should be so framed as to include all the main constructions in the language. The language would thus be learnt "in miniature."

The learning by heart of sentences constructed for the purpose is the groundwork of the system. But a sentence

thus learned might remain in the pupil's mind without life, the equivalent for a particular English sentence, and nothing more. So the learning of a model sentence is quite insufficient by itself. Mr. Prendergast requires the learner to "master," not only the sentence, but also a number of variations of it, in which he finds all that he has learnt in the previous sentences worked up with what he has learnt in the last one. Of course the possible combinations, which may be thus formed when several sentences have been learnt, are inexhaustible; and by having the changes rung for him on the phrases he already knows, the pupil is to get his ear accustomed to the sequences of the language, until by mere imitation he can ring the changes for himself. Each sentence, and each group of variations, must be "mastered" before the learner may go further; i.e., they must be repeated again and again till the pupil can read off the foreign sentence from the English as quickly and with as little effort as if the words themselves were before him. This is an essential feature of the system, and Mr. Prendergast dreads nothing so much as a multiplicity of vague impressions. He therefore calls his plan the "Mastery System."

"Do the exact opposite to what is usual," says Rousseau, "and you will almost always do what is right." I am far, indeed, from adopting this cynical maxim generally; but in the matter of language-teaching, it may certainly, here and there, be applied with advantage. As I have said elsewhere, (2) the great difficulty is to get under weigh in the new language. The first stage—which with schoolboys is often the last also—is one of utter helplessness. In this stage the foreign words mostly remain mere units, without any tendency to cohere in the shortest places, much less to organize themselves into perfect sentences. Beginners (if I may take liberties with Tennyson)

"Cannot understand how language breeds,
Think it a dead thing."

How are we to breathe life into it? The very first requirement is more time than the regulation two hours a week. The unfortunate modern language master in our schools is sometimes blamed because his boys have not exactly a Parisian accent. Whoever cares to make the calculation will find, as M. Héron-Wall has pointed out, that, in a form of twenty boys, each boy speaks French, at the outside, four hours a year. Almost all our modern language learning is on this scale; and parents wonder that boys learn more French or German in three months abroad, than we teach them during their school course. The fact is, more time is given to learning the language during the three months, than all the time devoted to it at school put together. Then, again, we know that a thing is remembered in proportion to the interest it excites, the time it has the mind to itself, and the frequency of its renewal. When I think of the amount of interest, time, and attention bestowed upon French and German in some of our schools, I am astonished that anything is learnt at all; and, contrary to my wont, I look upon the schoolboy as possessed of remarkable powers of acquisition. The only way to give these languages a chance is to adopt what Mr. Wilson of Rugby calls stratification of studies, and, at the commencement of a language, to devote a good deal of time to it.

Supposing four hours a week, at the least, secured for the language, how should we set about teaching it? Here we find ourselves pulled in different directions by three classes of methodizers. The first would begin with the grammar. The second would have some small portion of the language thoroughly "mastered." The third would run the beginner straight through a book in the

(2) In the *Quarterly Journal of Education*, April, 1872.