

## THOUGHTS ON LEARNING LANGUAGES.\*

Hänschen's father sat on the deck of an excursion-steamer with little Hänschen on his knee. Hänschen was a bright, little roly-poly German boy. He had never heard of "methods in language," but he was learning German. So was I; so I sat near the happy father and son, and made a study of Hänschen's masterly method of getting hold of his subject.

"What's that, papa?" pointing with the plump little index to the rapidly-passing shore. "That's a castle." Hänschen repeats the word after him quick as thought. He meditates a minute. Being a lover of truth, he will repeat the question to be sure of the correctness of the statement. "Papa is that a castle?" "Yes; that's a castle." Hänschen feels assured. "Another castle?" Again the noble fat finger does good service. The big brother comes to his assistance. "O, see the castle, Hänschen?" The eyes of the baby-buy glisten with interest and his curly pate bobs about. No castle is to be seen. He frowns; he has been deceived. He knows a castle now. No one can deceive him on that subject.

Hänschen is a social being. He is getting his education by intercourse with other minds. Moreover he is busied about the most important branch of education. He is learning to enter into the thoughts, feelings, and motives of his fellow-men. What are the principal features of Hänschen's method?

*First* : He learns one thing at a time.

*Second* : He repeats it again and again. When he gets home, he will tell mamma about the castle, and there will be a review-lesson on the subject. To-morrow he will find a castle in his picture-book.

*Third* : He busies himself with a *how* it, not a word; just as when he takes his luncheon, he thinks about the bread, not about the fat little hand that holds it.

Is Hänschen amused by the castle? More than that: he is intensely interested. Is it tiresome to him to talk about the castle? Is his brain wearied by this new thought?

That night, while Hänschen eats his bread, his big brother tells him about a castle ten times as large as the one he saw to-day. A dreadful ogre lived in it who ate up little boys. Hänschen's imagination begins to run riot. He dreams of a sugar castle, which he will eat all himself. His lips suck it gently in his dreams. He will never forget the word "Schloss." Neither shall I.

By a daily repetition of this process our babies, all over the land, learn that absolutely perfect imitation of the speech of their elders which, is the wonder, admiration, and envy of any adult who attempts to accomplish the same thing. No idiom or pronunciation is too difficult for them to attain. The vocabulary of the small child may be limited, yet the real difficulties of the language have all been mastered long before he is five years old.

In learning foreign languages can we make any improvement on this method? The study of language, when properly undertaken, is a delightful recreation. It deals with that most charming of all subjects,—human nature. The bright eye, the glowing cheek, the youthful enthusiasm, are its attendants. In this, as in all other branches of study, the teacher must learn to know his place, to be a learner with his pupils. Let him sit at the feet of the infant babblers and learn perfection in method.

In so far as he can learn to develop the personality of his students, to arouse in them a love of thoroughness and appreciation of the beauties of language, in so far does he show himself a humble, conscientious, and worthy follower of the method of a little child.

## SCHOOL-ROOM SKETCHES.

BY JOHN R. DENNIS.

In the Bailey school-house a new teacher had been obtained. He was a tall, lank fellow; a high brow and compressed lips showed he was narrow in ideas and determined of will. The pupils were from the farm houses and the little hamlet near the mill and wool-len factory. They were not a bad set of boys and girls; their fathers and mothers were steady church goers and a prayer meeting was held in the school-house each Sunday afternoon. Yet it was deemed necessary that very strict discipline should prevail, at least what was called discipline.

On opening the school Mr. Allen told the boys and girls that "he should expect good order; that no whispering would be allowed; that no one could swear or call names on the school ground, or on the way to and from school." He held in his hand a stout ruler and waved it about in an energetic manner while speaking and finally laid it on the desk. "Boys," he said in conclusion, if I have occasion to use that ruler it will be your fault; and mark me, if I use it I shall use it with a heavy hand."

This was a common enough peroration twenty five and thirty years ago; but light was beginning to dawn on the boys in the Bailey district. Some had been to an academy in a village about ten miles distant and returned with the information that no one was flogged there. The determination was deep and strong among the older boys that they would not be flogged at school. "If I can get along at the academy without flogging, I can at a district school, I guess," said Julius Cone.

The parents sided with the ideas of the teacher, because in all times past children had been whipped at school. The advice they often repeated to the boys, was "only bad boys are whipped; and if you are good you are safe enough." The preceding winter a boy had been tied to a post and whipped very severely, because he made a picture of the teacher sitting on a barrel and smoking a pipe. As this was what he had been seen to do at a small grocery, near the mill, the castigation was deemed by the boys to be a great injustice. Deacon Cook represented the other side of the case. "He mustn't disrespect the teacher; besides he mustn't make pictures on his slate, that's for cipherin' on."

So that, unknown to the parents a revolution had begun in the district. At the close of the first day, the subject was pretty thoroughly discussed, and the older boys determined, "not to be put upon; if Mr. Allen treats us well, we'll treat him well." The second day brought in an addition to the pupils for the farm work was nearly completed. After cautions as to whispering the teacher had the pupils "read round in the testament"; this was the first thing done in all country schools years ago; the old and the young all read a verse. Mr. Allen watched the boys, for he meant to strike terror at the outset. He foolishly thought that flogging was part of his duty as a teacher, and that it must be done in order to secure order.

"You are whispering: come out on the floor." The unfortunate boy was Peter Cowles, a good natured, but obstinate hoy of seven-teen or eighteen years of age. Peter obeyed.

"What was you saying?"

"I said, I wish I was to hum."

"What did you say that for?"

To this no reply was made, for Peter would rather be whipped than tell the school that he had come from home without any breakfast. Mr. Allen conceived that Peter intended to compare the school with his home and to assert that his education would be

\* By Maud Bell, Teacher of French and German, Potsdam (N.Y.) State Normal School.