REASONABLE AIMS AND POSSIBLE ATTAINMENTS IN MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING

WORK in modern languages is offered in American schools and colleges with two sorts of aims in view, one specific: ability to use the language orally and ability to read; the other general: developing some intelligent conception of language as an accurate medium of expression, acquaintance with another literature, understanding another civilization. Probably most language teachers will average substantially these ideas and about this order of emphasis.

First of all comes "speaking knowledge": that is our goal, of course. The common experience that four whole years of French or German in school does not impart the ability to make practical use of the idiom in actual conversation has become a stock joke on our school system. The better informed among non-professional critics to whom this point strongly appeals make comparisons with French and German schools, where, undeniably, far greater progress is made toward really speaking English, for instance. One of two things must be the reason: either the American schoolboy is less clever or the American system is wrong. Since the former proposition is unacceptable, the latter is assumed to be the fact.

Now the American schoolboy—or girl—can, and does, learn anything he takes a notion to learn. Put him by himself in a French or German school, at almost any age up to maturity, and in six months you can not tell that he is talking a foreign language. He will have acquired perfect fluency and probably perfect accent as well. It is advantageous, if not indispensable to do this, and he does it. He makes more progress in six months than he would in more than as many years in schools at home.

Of course, he has been hearing, and, to some extent, using the language at least twelve hours a day, 360 hours a month, 2,160 hours in six months; whereas he would have only five hours a week thirty-six weeks a year in a school at home, and at that rate it would take him twelve years to amass the linguistic experience of six months abroad. Even the best teacher with the most scientific method possible to devise, could not do better than halve the time.

But even so, there remains the vast difference that in the foreign environment the boy has a compelling practical necessity which does not exist at home. No teacher and no method can overcome that handicap. Instinct tells the boy "this is of no use to me," and there is an end to "speaking knowledge."

Now the instinct is right, ninety-nine times in a hundred. Not one American in a hundred ever, in all his life, has a good chance to really speak a foreign language, unless he lives in a foreign community, in which case he has been bilingual from childhood, probably speaking neither language with true precision. The occasions on which ability to converse in a foreign language would be a real advantage practically never come to the average American. Our soldiers got along well enough without it in France. A handful learned a little French; the others taught American to more than willing pupils who saw a chance to capitalize all they could get. The American was not less astute: he simply realized that there was no particular use in exerting himself.

"Speaking knowledge" is a specifically practical thing, requiring long and arduous labor. It would be well to admit this, and to postpone serious attempts at handling the conversational idiom until the majority of students, of whom so-and-so many language credits are "required," have dropped out and only the small specially interested group is left to continue the study beyond this point.

Meantime we have an important duty—it may be the most important—to the others. If foreign language study is to continue as an essential element in our curriculum, it must make its appeal to a much larger group than one composed only of persons who contemplate some practical application of it to their own lives.

The case is somewhat different for "reading knowledge," because this can be acquired in a single year without great difficulty. We have insisted for centuries that a really educated person, whatever his mother tongue, should have such a smattering of at least three languages, English, French, German, as not to be entirely helpless when confronted with a page in one of them. No scientist,

for instance, can take the time and pains to hunt for a translation, or, in the absence of one, can afford to ignore an important document, or wait until someone with the proper equipment has done a translation for him. Many find some occasion to use such knowledge. But here again is a specifically practical thing. Its undeniable utility is not a conclusive argument for its presence in a curriculum designed for general education; else we might with more justification require a couple of years of law or medicine in high school or college.

The modern language problem interests both high school and college. The average course prescribes two years in school and one in college, or two years in college. Those who fulfill this customary requirement may be presumed to have learned how, perhaps with the aid of a dictionary, to get the sense out of a passage in the language they have been studying. They have read several hundred pages of, usually, quite insignificant stuff; at any rate, they have no background against which to see its significance. They have had plenty of grammar. They are now "prepared"—to drop it forthwith, as nine-tenths do, and forget every word of it almost immediately, because they have nothing that ties up with their lives and their thinking.

It is hoped then that the general results, at least, will be more permanent. Training in accurate expression is the first of these. But by no means every elementary course in a modern language gives this training. It must be carefully and wisely directed to this end. "Translation English," mongrel litter out of Dulness, sired by a Handy Dictionary, hurts the perception of ideas and the faculty of expression in both the foreign language and the mother tongue. There is only one excuse for translating: that the sense is not obvious; in which case the sense should be rendered exactly into as flawless English as the translator can contrive. The ideas are before him; he must express them properly. Thus translation is an exercise, not in the foreign language, but in English composition, and as such has great and permanent value.

Acquaintance with another literature is a general aim of foreign language study. But for the ninety percent who pursue it through three years at most, this is practically unattainable without the most skilful planning. There must be no time wasted on worthless reading matter, beyond the barest minimum at the start, for of course something less difficult must precede Moliere or Balzac or Grillparzer, and this in turn must be led up to by a little rather predigested prose. But if the student is to have something of literary experience worth keeping from his two or three year course, he must be crowded into worth-while reading almost immediately. In French the one thing he must know, or he may as well know nothing, is the last half of the seventeenth century; in German, the fifty years ending with the death of Goethe. Representative things from these periods are not beyond the scope of the second semester in college or the second year in high school. They are, however, lost on readers who have no idea of the history as a whole, and the relation between various periods. At this time, therefore, a broad, general survey of historical developments is demanded. This should emphatically not be the sort of dry specialized literary history that might be pieced together from the introductions to most classroom texts. It should above all be interesting, as it will be if it is broad enough; it should show the convergence of political and economic as well as purely intellectual forces upon certain focal points—just a few of the most important, to serve as beacons afterwards. Long dissertations on "Storm and Stress," elaborate definitions of classicism, the unities, the Alexandrine, kill the student's interest and dull his understanding at this stage. Not all in the first three years are future literary historians; we are dealing with a largely indifferent group whose interest might possibly be roused, and is certainly worth rousing. Reference must be made constantly to something familiar: proceed from the known to the unknown; and the cheap magazine story or movie thriller are by no means to be despised as stepping-stones in teaching literature to a young class. To read worth-while stuff with real enjoyment, it is first necessary to *read something* with enjoyment. Almost anything will do for a start, if the student's interest be not killed in the most delicate process of cultivating his taste and his critical faculty.

The more one considers this matter of familiarity with another literature as an aim in a foreign language course, limited in prac-

tice to two or, at most, three years, the more skeptical must he become. There is very little encouragement in announcements of college courses at that stage of the work, and his recollections of his own course are not likely to be brighter. The alluring subjects offered farther on are invariably barricaded with prerequisites which will only be taken by the specially interested group.

Understanding another civilization, and thereby better understanding our own, would seem to be the most generally desirable and most permanent thing to be got from a course in a modern language. This is necessarily one of the last attainments, a sort of culmination, impossible without some fair grasp of language and of literary, political and economic history. It is coming to be increasingly desirable to us in America, not merely as a drawing-room ornament, for which it has always been sought. We are beginning to need it seriously wherever votes are cast for international policies. Can the two or three year modern language course make this its business?

The thing has been done for years, as everybody knows, in an improper way, by propaganda pro-this or anti-that dictated by partisan passion, not interested in training judgment but only in establishing, by any and all means, certain prejudices.

It is entirely possible, however, to plan a two year college course in a modern language so as to have the class read its greatest masterpieces and really know the most important lessons relative to intellectual development and racial characteristics which may be drawn from a comparative study of literatures and peoples. There is one important proviso: we must not stop to try for speaking knowledge, nor allow the acquisition of reading knowledge to become an end; it is only the means to something of which we ought to give our students a glimpse before they fulfil their formal requirement. After that we can specialize, and classes will be the larger for it.

The matter of method is of course vital in any such scheme. Although we are not attempting to teach conversational command of the language, the quickest, soundest, most interesting way to impart the rudiments is by a tremendous amount of oral sentence construction in imitation of a connected passage, and not patched together from a vocabulary plus a couple of paradigms: in other words, by something approaching the so-called "direct method." It does not seem possible to apply the direct method as strictly in French as in German, for several reasons, above all because of the enormous phonetic difficulties for the beginner in French. It is pedantic and a waste of valuable time to insist that details such as grammatical explanation be done in the foreign language: effort should be concentrated on the expression of really useful ideas and the fluent mastery of really common difficulties in construction. In this way a foundation may be laid that will prove serviceable if the student later on has occasion to learn to speak.

Oral expression in the foreign language is so much more difficult than translation into one's own that after a very short time spent on the former, the latter seems to come almost by magic: the passive vocabulary is so much larger and easier of acquisition than the active one. Worth-while reading should be possible after a semester of college work or a year in high school planned according to some such scheme.

The easiest of the classics should be read at this stage and just enough broad literary history should be introduced from time to time to let the class understand the plan that is being followed and the meaning of essential terms such as epic, lyric, drama, classicism, romanticism, realism. Constant comparisons must be made drawing together and shaping into a unit conception every available bit of literary knowledge, every bit of reading, and all experience of the sort that the class may have.

In the second year, as the reading advances in difficulty, the relationships studied may become more complex and the first broad lines of literary history may be filled in and illustrated. The most careful selection of the texts to be read is imperative if all this is to be accomplished, but it is feasible. If it were done, and well done, not, as now, by the end of a specialized four-year course taken by a very few, but in the two or three-year course required of all, the result would probably stand out as the most conspicuous part of the liberal arts training.

An educational system that may be excellent for European schools must, if it is

to be adapted to American conditions, be modified in points where the conditions differ. The majority of continental Europeans actually need to know the practical use of two languages besides their own; the majority of Americans do not. European children, from the nature of their environment, can and do spend much more time on their studies; hence greater condensation and more careful selection of material are required in America, and still we cannot expect to create the same intellectual attitude. Perhaps after all there are genuine compensations. But in civilization there are certain things so essential and so universal that no race, no mind deprived of them can be productive, can contribute anything worth while. It is a lofty function of education in America to break up the sterilizing intellectual isolation into which we are prone to settle after the truant officer has let us go. The time may yet come when we can match our intellectual with our material citizenship in the larger world.

HENRY DEXTER LEARNED

EDUCATION OF MOTHERS AND HOME MAKERS

The Virginia Home Economics Association composed of all of the workers in the Home Economics field, Home Demonstration Agents, and home makers who are interested in the improvement of all of the homes of Virginia have effected an affiliation with the National Home Economics Association of the United States. This association, the first and the largest of all of the organizations for home economics teachers, has affiliated units in practically every state of the Union. Through this organization the cause of home economics has been greatly promoted throughout the nation. The Virginia Association of which Miss Lula B. Walker of Blacksburg, Va., is president, is trying to interest the schools, women's clubs, and home makers in the cause of Home Economics Education. In view of the fact that practically 85% of the women of Virginia become home makers at some time in their life and that only a very few are being reached by definite home making training it shows the necessity for a greater state-wide effort to educate the mothers and home makers of tomorrow while they are in the schools of the state.

PUBLISHERS ARE WARNED AGAINST THE USE OF BAD TYPE

A WARNING that the extensive use of printing type of smaller dimensions than 10-point is becoming a serious factor among the contributory causes of eye-fatigue and impairment of vision is contained in a communication from The National Committee for the Prevention of Blindness to the various associations of book and periodical publishers, advertisers, printers, school boards, libraries and other large users or producers of printed matter.

The statement calls attention to the fact that "the use of type smaller than 10-point not only has a harmful effect on the eyesight of the reader, but often defeats its own purpose by repelling the potential reader who realizes that the reading of such type hurts or tires his eyes." The amount of money lost by advertisers and publishers through the waste circulation that results from the use of type faces difficult to read because of smallness or design, says the National Committee for the Prevention of Blindness, is probably greater than the cost of the extra space and paper stock necessary if larger type is used.

Particularly in the case of school books and other publications read by children is the use of small type harmful, the committee says. Reading matter intended for children of any age should never be printed in type smaller than 10-point. The type sizes recommended for children by the National Committee for the Prevention of Blindness follows:

For children 12 years of age—10-point
For children between 9 and 12 years—12-point
For children between 8 and 9 years—14-point
For children between 7 and 8 years—18-point
For children under 7 years—24 to 30-point

The publishers of geography and history maps are among the most flagrant offenders in this respect, the committee reports. A special effort to induce publishers of school maps to use larger type will be made.

A research recently conducted by the Department of Education of the State of Ohio showed that certain styles of 24-point type were more easily read by young children than other styles of 36-point type. The ultimate abolition of the use of all 6-point and smaller