LOCKE'S IDEA OF TEACHING LANGUAGES

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John Locke (1632–1704) claims attention as a profound thinker of the age. He had the rare advantage of speaking on education from the double platform of psychological theory and personal experience. We cannot help thinking that his educational idea was suggested by Montaigne (1533–1592); but here it would be of little importance to dwell upon the comparison of the two.

On reading "Some Thoughts Concerning Education", we cannot fail to find that Locke not only was interested in teaching languages, but also had an idea productive of its more advantageous results and suggestive of its more remarkable improvement. As an accomplishment of a gentleman, he makes much of the acquisition of foreign languages. A gentleman, he thinks, should study his own language in the first instance; but if he has time to go further, he should by all means acquire a knowledge of French, Latin, and Greek. French, he thinks, should be taken first. It is one of the characteristics of the educational Reformation in the 17th century that the importance of the vernacular is emphasized as the common study of all pupils, without which anything like universal education is obviously impossible.

At the outset, the Reformers contended that the native tongue should be taught before the Latin or parallel with it, and that the learning of Latin should be easier by its aid; and some Latin School-books such as compiled by Comenius were intended to facilitate the acquisition of Latin together with all useful knowledge by the aid of the vernacular. But the literary growth of modern languages as well as the efforts of the Reformers has tended constantly to push the Latin tongue more and more into the background; until, from being supreme in the realms of learning, it has been reduced to play the wholly subordinate. So it is no wonder that the first language which Locke begins after his own should be French. "As soon as he can speak English, it is time for him to learn some other language. This nobody doubts of when French is proposed. And the reason is because people are accustomed to the right way of teaching that language, which is by talking it to children in constant conversation, and not by grammatical rules. The Latin tongue would easily be taught the same way, if his tutor,

being constantly with him, would talk nothing else to him, and make him answer still in the same language. But because French is a living language, and to be used in speaking, that should be first learned, that the yet pliant organs of speech might be accustomed to a due formation of those sounds, and he gets the habit of pronouncing French well, which is the harder to be done, the longer it is delayed. When he can speak and write French well, which in this method is usually in a year or two, he should proceed to Latin, which ought to be learned the same way, by talking and reading."

Locke then speaks of what should be done after they have finished the first stage of their learning. "The first season to get foreign languages, and from the tongue to their true accent, I should think should be from seven to fourteen or sixteen; and then a tutor with them is useful and necessary, who may with these languages teach them other things". Locke agrees with Montaigne that Latin is absolutely necessary to a gentleman, and in the method of learning which he recommends, he follows what Montaigne tells us of his own childhood. "When I was a child," says Montaigne," I began to learn Latin, not in the grammatical way, but by conversation and daily use. Foreign tongues in like manner should be gained by means of the intercourse of travel among the important nations who use them."

I

Locke made his opinion against the ordinary way of learning the language in a grammer-school of his age. ".....in short is this: to trouble the child with no grammar at all, but to have Latin, as English has been, without the perplexity of rules, talked to him; for, if you will consider it, Latin is no more unknown to a child, when he comes into the world, than English; and yet he learns English without master, rule, or grammar; and so might he Latin too, if he had somebody always to talk to him in this language. And when we so often see a French woman teach an English girl to speak and read French perfectly, in a year or two, without any rule of grammar or anything else, but prattling to her; I can not but wonder, how gentlemen have overseen this way for their sons, and thought them more dull or incapable than their daughters. If therefore a man could be got, who, himself speaking good Latin, could always be about your son, talk constantly to him, and suffer him to speak or read nothing else, this will be the true and genuine way, and that which I would propose, not only as the easiest and best, wherein a child might, without pains or chiding, get a language, which others are wont to be whipped for at school, six or seven years

together; but also as that, wherein at the same time he might have his mind and manners formed, ..."

The way of teaching languages thus recommended by Locke has been strictly followed by what is called the Natural Method. Unfortunately both in England and in America, few writers have ever made this fact known to us, while many of them do not hesitate to state that the suggestions made by Locks gave rise directly or indirectly to the advent of the Jacotot's methods or rather of the Hamiltonian system. This statement should, however, be applied to another section of his suggestions, which will be dealt with later. The passages quoted above imply, not the idea of Locke upon which the Jacotot's or the Hamilton's is based, but the very idea of his upon which Heness has established his "Natural Method" in the third quarter of the 19th century. This method was at one time much in vogue in America to teach foreign languages, and is still dominant in not a few schools. Indeed there are a number of teachers who will not call the method that they adopt the "Natural Method"; but they do virtually adopt the "Natural Method" in its wider sense. The reason is simply this. Since the method in question was brought into the world, several methods labeled with new names and with remarkable improvements which are in reality some slight modifications from the "Natural Method", have been proposed and adopted; but, so far as in teaching foreign languages the absolute exclusion of the mother tongue is carried on, they may generally fall within the realms of the "Natural Method". Taking this state of things into account, we should not be much mistaken to say that most schools in America take up this method for teaching foreign languages. In the beginning of the present century it was introduced into Japan by some American teachers of English. They taught English to Japanese students in accordance with this method until it was regarded as one of the best methods for teaching English; but it has never been favourably accepted by Japanese teachers of English, as some of them often find it difficult to speak in English all that is required for teaching it.

II

Locke next proceeds to speak of the case in which we cannot get such a man as can speak good Latin. It is this idea of his that was faithfully followed, more than a century afterwards, by Jacotot and Hamilton.

"But if such a man can not be got, who speaks good Latin, and, being able to instruct your son in all these parts of knowledge, will undertake it by this method; the next best is to have him taught as near this way as

may be, which is by taking some easy and pleasant book, such as Æsop's Fables, and writing the English translation, (made as literal as it can be), in one line, and the Latin words, which answer each of them, just over it in another. These let him read every day over and over again, till he perfectly understands Latin; and then go on to another fable, till he be also perfect in that, not omitting what he is already perfect in, but sometimes reviewing that, to keep it in his memory. And when he comes to write, let these be set him for copies; which, with the exercise of his hand, will also advance him in Latin. This being a more imperfect way than by talking Latin unto him, the formation of the verb first, and afterwards the declensions of the nouns and pronouns perfectly learnt by heart, may facilitate his aquaintance with the genius and manners of the Latin tongue, which varies the signification of verbs and nouns, not as the modern languages do, by particles prefixed, but by changing the last syllables."

The method of teaching Latin cited above is undoubtedly a modification of Ascham's plan of double translation. Roger Ascham (1515-1568) shows us in his "Schoolmaster" how to teach Latin to a child. The master is to explain the meaning of each of the Epistles of Cicero, "gathered together and chosen out by Sturmius for the capacity of children," to construe it to the child in English (vernacular), to parse it over perfectly. "First, let him construe it into English, so oft as the child may easily carry away the understanding of it; lastly, parse it over perfectly." This done, the child is to construe and parse it over again until he knows it. "This done thus, let the child, by and by, both costrue and parse it over again; so that it may appear that the child doubteth in nothing that his master taught him before." Then the child is to take a paper book and write out by himself the translation of the lesson in English; then, when this has been corrected by the master, he is after the interval of an hour to translate English into Latin back again. The translation is to be compared by the master with Cicero's original.

From the perusal of the passages in the Schoolmaster which have reference to teaching languages, we cannot but conclude that Locke held Ascham's method in high estimation and so largely adopted it in his own case.

III

Locke speaks of the benefit in reference to learning by rote. "Nor let the objection, that he will then know it only by rote, fright any one. This,

when well considered, is not of any moment against, but plainly for, this way of learning a language; for languages are only to be learned by rote; ....." "For languages being to be learned by rote, custom, and memory, are then spoken in greatest perfection, when all rules of grammar are utterly forgotten." Though Locke speaks well of learning a language by rote, Ascham says nothing of it in his Schoolmaster.

With regard to grammar, Ascham gives some simple rules to the pupil. "After the child hath learned perfectly the eight parts of speech, let him then learn the right joining together of substantives with adjectives, the noun with the verb, the relative with the antecedent." It is otherwise with Locke, especially in the case of young people for whom linguistic instruction is intended. His view is that the work should be pursued by talking and reading, but not by imparting grammatical rules to them. "And I would fain have any one name to me that tongue, that any one can learn or speak as he should do, by rules of grammar. Languages were made not by rules or art, but by accident, and the common use of the people. And he that will speak them well, has no other rule but that; nor anything to trust to but his memory, and the habit of speaking after the fashion learned from those that are allowed to speak properly, which, in other words, is only to speak by rote."

Further Locke discusses the position of grammar in the whole field of learning languages, which, as it is not to be overlooked, should be quoted at full length. "It will possibly be asked here. Is grammar then of no use? And have those who have taken so much pains in reducing several languages to rules and observations, who have writ so much about declensions and conjugations, about concords and syntaxis, lost their labour, and been learned to no purpose? I say not so; grammar has its place too. But this I think I may say, there is more stir a great deal made with it than their needs, and those are tormented about it, to whom it does not at all belong; I mean children, at the age wherein they are usually perplexed with it in grammar schools."

He has no favourable opinion of the manner of teaching Latin in grammar schools of his days in which teachers laid undue stress on grammar. "There is nothing more evident, than that languages learned by rote serve well enough for the common affairs of life, and ordinary commerce. Nay, persons of the softer sex, and such of them as have spent their time in wellbred company, show us, that this plain natural way, without the least study or knowledge of grammar, can carry them to a great degree of elegancy and

politeness in their language; and there are ladies who, without knowing what tenses and participles, adverbs and prepositions are, speak as properly, and as correctly, (they might take it for an ill compliment, if I said as any country school master), as most gentlemen who have been bred up in the ordinary methods of grammar schools. Grammar, therefore, we see may be spared in some cases.

"The question then will be, To whom should it be taught, and when? To this I answer,

"1. Men learn languages for the ordinary intercourse of society, and communication of thoughts in common life, without any farther design in their use of them. And for this purpose the ordinary way of learning a language by conversation not only serves well enough, but is to be preferred as expedite, proper and natural. Therefore, to this use of language one may answer, that grammar is not necessary. This so many of my readers must be forced to allow, as understand what I here say, and who conversing with others, understand them without having ever taught the grammar of the English tongue; of whom I have never yet known any one who learned his mother-tongue by rules.

"2. Others there are, the greatest part of whose business in this world is to be done with their tongues, and with their pens; and to those it is convenient, if not necessary, that they should speak properly and correctly, whereby they may let their thoughts into other men's minds the more easily, and with the greater impression. Upon this account it is, that any sort of speaking, so as will make him be understood, is not thought enough for a gentleman. He ought to study grammar, amongst the other helps of speaking well; but it must be the grammar of his own tongue, of the language he uses, that he may understand his own country speech nicely, and speak it properly, without shocking the ears of those it is addressed to with solecism and offensive irregularities. And to this purpose grammar is necessary; but it is the grammar only of their own proper tongue, and to those only who would take pains in cultivating their language, and in perfecting their styles. Whether all gentlemen should not do this, I leave to be considered, since the want of propriety, and grammatical exactness, is thought very mis-becoming one of that rank, and usually draws on one guilty of such faults the censure of having had a lower breeding, and worse company than suits with his quality. If this be so, (as I suppose it is,) it will be matter of wonder, why young gentlemen are forced to learn the grammars of foreign and dead languages, and are never once told of the grammar of

their own tongue; they do not so much as know there is any such thing, much less is it made their business to be instructed in it. Whereas the languages whose grammars they have been so much employed in, are such as probably they shall scarce ever speak or write; or, if upon occasion this should happen, they shall be excused for the mistakes and faults they make in it.

"3. There is a third sort of men, who apply themselves to two or three foreign, dead (and which amongst us are called the learned), languages, make them their study, and pride themselves upon their skill in them. No doubt those who propose to themselves the learning of any language with this view, and would be critically exact in it, ought carefully to study the grammar of it. I would not be mistaken here, as if this were to u der-value Greek and Latin. I grant these are languages of great use and excellency; and a man can have no place amongst the learned, in this part of the world, who is a stranger to them. But the knowledge a gentleman would ordinarily draw for his use, out of the Roman and Greek writers, I think he may attain without studying the grammars of those tongues, and, by bare reading, may come to understand them sufficiently for all his purposes. How much farther he shall at any time be concerned to look into the grammar and critical niceties of either of these tongues, he himself will be able to determine, when he comes to propose to himself the study of anything that shall require it."

This statement made by Locke clearly shows that in the schools of his age where classical languages were taught, they were taught through grammar to children, who could not read their mother-tongue. It was a corrective warning to such an unnatural and irrational procedure of teaching languages, which deserves our attention. The occasion of thus having the predominant place given to grammar in schools may be traced back to Melanchton (1497-1560) and his disciples. Philip Melanchton wrote grammars on Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; and his Latin Grammar ran through fifty editions. In his school plan the most noticeable feature is his strong insistence on the importance of grammar and the necessity for learning it carefully by heart—a view which has widely and disastrously influenced all language teaching ever since. Startling as it may appear, children who were ignorant of reading their own tongue are to be taught at first nothing but Latin. Greek and Hebrew are to be added at the university. The masters are strictly required to converse with their pupils in Latin only. "No greater harm," said he, "can be done to all arts than when the youth is not well practised in

grammar;" which had been thoroughly beaten into him. Through his pupils Tronzendorf and Sturm, Melanchton may be said to have founded the classical school-plan, which has lasted in Europe to this time on his lines. His motto is said to have been "The one thing to do at school is to learn Latin".

In contrast to Melanchton's idea of Latin and its being taught in schools, Locke insists that Latin is only of use to a special class of people, whom he calls the learned, and the method of teaching it should be, not by the rules of grammar, but by talking, reading, and by rote.

Is grammar, then, of no use with Locke? Yes, it is. "I grant the grammar of a language is sometimes very carefully to be studied; but it is only to be studied by a grown man, when he applies himself to the understanding of any language critically, which is seldom the business of any but professed scholars." When should it be taught? It should be taught to one who can speak the language already. "If grammar ought to be taught at any time, it must be one that can speak the language already; how else can he be taught the grammar of it? This, at least, is evident from the practice of the wise and learned nations amongst the ancients. They made it a part of education to cultivate their own, not foreign tongues." After referring to Greeks and Romans who made their own languages be the study of their youth. Locke proceeds to say, "But more particularly to determine the proper season for grammar; I do not see how it can reasonably be made any one's study, but as an introduction to rherotic; when it is thought time to put any one upon the care of polishing his tongue, and of speaking better than the illiterate, then it is the time for him to be instructed in the rules of grammar, and not before. For grammar being to teach men not to speak, but to speak correctly, and according to the exact rules of the tongue, which is one part of elegancy, there is little use of the one to him that has no need of the other; where rhetoric is not necessary, grammar may be spared."

Grammar is necessary in such a case as is mentioned below:

"When any one finds in himself a necessity or disposition to study any foreign language to the bottom, and to be nicely exact in the knowledge of it, it will be time enough to take a grammatical survey of it." According to his opinion, the knowledge of the grammar of a language is of great use when one is to read some books written in that language with a critical explanation, or when one is to write some important documents with an official responsibility.

He discountenances exclusive attention to the study of Latin, being con-

centrated in the grammar, as the means of disciplining the mind. If any one likes to cultivate himself in grammar, he does not forget to recommend him the grammar of his own tongue instead of that of Latin—a remarkable view in those days. Apart from the language problem, Locke's treatise is a wise and practical guidance in training of the bodies and minds of children. Its influence on education in England was direct and wholesome; and even to this day, among sensible and prudent opinions that help to the welfare of an English family, we can generally find some that may be traced back to the age when his treatise exerted a powerful influence over his contemporary readers.

IV

It was not until 150 years after the death of John Locke that a number of new systems of teaching foreign languages began to appear one after another in Europe and America, some of which have been introduced into Japan. They have their own characteristics in some respects or others; and, if we are allowed to do it, they may be divided into two classes: (1) a system which totally excludes the mother tongue, and (2) a system which takes in the mother-tongue as an aid. To mention some of the note-worthy systems, the Natural Method, the Berlitz Method, and the Direct Method belong to the former; and Jacotot's Method, the Hamiltonian Method, Ahn and Mager's System, Predergast's System, and the Look And Say Method to the latter. There is no means for us to know whether the originators of the systems constructed them by the direct influence of Locke; but we know one thing that is certain. It is on the same idea suggested by Locke that they established their systems. His idea was, it must be admitted, so much in advance of his age that it has lived at the bottom of the methods of teaching languages, hitherto put in practice by linguistic trainers both in Europe and in America; and it will still be living in new systems that will appear in ages to come.

Some of the originators of the new methods are credited with having done some more significant pieces of work than those which they professed to be able to do, so much so that they had done something above their systems. Here comes in what is called tact by some, or skill by others. A particular tact of each originator in teaching got him a particular credit and reputation. The study of the methods of teaching modern languages is quite of importance in its own way; especially, when the substance of what is taught is to be examined and when what has been taught is to be reflected

upon as to know whether it has been successfully taught. A few words may be added here. So long as we are able to avail ourselves wisely of the method, there is nothing to say against it; but we must take our utmost care lest we should be brought under its control. We should be the master, but not the servant of method,

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