

QUO VADIMUS R.B. Appleton

These notes are intended for those who agree that the goal we have before us in teaching Latin on the Direct Method is to make it possible for our pupils to read the literature with facility. Our method of teaching that must be such as will not kill all enjoyment of the language before the literature is reached. If we lead a boy (the word here includes *girl*) still fresh and alive, with a soul untouched by that atrophy which results from feeding him for years on nothing but grammatical sawdust, up to the literature itself, and have succeeded in giving him the ability to read it, then he will enjoy and appreciate it sure enough. Hence if the Direct Method makes Latin more interesting and so more enjoyable to the boy during the process of learning, it is, immediately, a good method. But our object is not to make the Latin lessons more enjoyable than they used to be. Our goal is facility of reading; our method one which will not kill appreciation; but that method is only *ultimately* good in so far as it leads speedily to that goal. In our enthusiasm for the method we must take care that we do not lose sight of the goal.

The teaching of Latin in schools used to be defended on the ground that it provided a good training for the mind. There is still something to be said for this, now much derided, apologia; but it is hardly likely to be a weapon in the armoury of supporters of the Direct Method. Not that they can change the nature of the Latin language; it still remains a highly inflected language, and those who learn it must give a good deal of attention to the *form* of thought. But this is not done so consciously as it is upon non-direct methods, and I imagine that much of that “valuable training of the mind” consists in the attention paid to *the form as distinct from the matter* of thought – an idea which is certainly confirmed by the kind of thought-matter contained in the usual Latin manual. In the end, of course, a boy trained on the Direct Method will, if we have succeeded in avoiding the dangers to which our method is peculiarly exposed, have acquired just as much “training of the mind” as the boy brought up on other methods. To take an analogy from the body; the one has taken his exercise unconsciously by running and leaping in the fields, the other has been “doing exercises” in his room. Both have been through “good training,” the first, perhaps, with better results. But we are not disposed to make this “training” our defence for teaching Latin. One only

does that if one has nothing else to show; but at the same time we must not neglect that “training”.

We have said that “in the end” the Direct Method boy gets the training all right. But is the case equally favourable for the Direct Method when we consider those boys who don’t get to the end? – We must not, of course, determine our method by the consideration of such boys alone; but they do constitute a factor of the case which must not be neglected. Take the boy who leaves school after two years of Latin. That he will be more capable of reading Latin, if trained on the Direct Method, than he would otherwise have been is not now relevant. For the boy who leaves at this stage and goes on to read Latin for himself is, to say the least, the exception. Some sort of *formal training* is for the average boy who leaves at this stage almost the only profit to be derived from having studied Latin. We must see then that this benefit is as great as possible.

Our goal is the reading of the literature, not the communication of thought in Latin. But the boy himself, in the early stages at any rate, unconsciously assumes that his aim is to express himself in Latin, and it is this unconscious assumption on the boy’s part that explains much of the difficulty encountered at this stage. *Teacher and taught are really at cross purposes*; and the fact that this is not at first obvious only makes the difficulty the greater. But surely if the boy’s aim is to communicate his thought to me, then *he is right to throw a good deal of Latin grammar and syntax to the winds*.

(I am indebted for this remark to Mr W.H.S. Jones, who once pointed out to me how many of the endings of words in a Latin sentence could be omitted without destroying the thought.)

I understand “Liber teneo” and “Rogavit me quid quid agebam” just as well as I understand the correct forms. What then is to be done? I can only suggest that it should be our effort to inculcate from the beginning a respect for the forms of the language; we must try to make boys regard words as sacred things, and special attention must be drawn to the endings. To achieve this it is a good idea to have exercises in which the endings of words have been omitted – the exercise being to supply them. Of course some boys pick all this up intuitively; but there are others, boys with no intuition at all (their existence constitutes perhaps the biggest problem which the Direct Method teacher has to consider) for whom it is essential that this formal aspect of the language should be *deliberately* emphasized. The

need then for greater attention to form than some of us have perhaps been giving in the past is once more brought home to us by these considerations.

Now let us suppose that the boy has reached the stage of being able to read and speak simple Latin correctly. We have successfully avoided the dangers mentioned above and, in high hopes, set him to some actual Latin author. What is the result? – almost inevitably a certain sense of disappointment. The ability to speak correct Latin ought not to be expected to provide greater help towards the reading of Latin literature, than the ability to speak correct English does towards reading English literature. English schoolboys often enough find Shakespeare difficult to understand. It is simply because they are now dealing with a literary, and not a spoken, language. We must therefore expect the same difficulty when our *Latin-talking* schoolboy comes to *read* his Vergil and Horace. And again, boys trained on the Direct Method often start the more difficult Latin authors at an earlier age than we who were trained on other methods did. When therefore we feel that our boys seem to be finding Horace, for example, more difficult than we can recollect having done, we must remember that they are on average about two years younger than we were when we first started similar work.

So much by way of explaining this difficulty; but it does not explain it away. Still care can do a great deal. First of all let us take our own speaking, the model which the boys follow. To speak Latin is at best an artificial acquirement. Practice brings a certain amount of fluency; we must be careful that this does not become a cheap facility. As a remedy one might consciously attempt to make one's Latin more artificial. It is, of course, impossible to speak Ciceronian Latin, but is it impossible (I for one don't pretend to have done it) to cultivate in one's speech a Latin style which will be an *approach* to literary Latin? Let no one object that the Romans themselves did not speak Ciceronian or any other literary Latin. The Romans used the language to communicate their thought, but we have decided that such is not our chief aim. Whether anything can be done on these lines or not, we can at any rate, just as in the earlier stages we paid special attention to the order and forms of words, now give just as much attention to sentence-structure. If this were carefully done it would, I believe, lessen that difficulty which a boy finds when he first comes to a Latin author. Perhaps too it is a good thing to give the boys as much simple *real Latin*, even in the earliest stages, as is possible. There are several simple things of Catullus and Martial, and even of

Cicero, which can be used in this way. The simple Latin of our reformed text-books, written by ourselves, is very necessary during the first year, and very helpful, if not entirely relied upon, even in the second and third years. But a snare does lie here. We shall avoid falling into it only if we are aware of it. (In this connection I am very diffident about the advisability of *simplified texts*.)

Finally I have found it a good thing to give from time to time what used to be called *Unseens*. Personally I feel that I have in past years neglected this far too much, and am convinced that all third-year boys should regularly be given a piece of fresh Latin to puzzle out for themselves.

R. B. Appleton

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