

**HEATH'S MODERN LANGUAGE
SERIES. PRACTICAL LESSONS IN
GERMAN CONVERSATION. A
COMPANION TO ALL GERMAN
GRAMMARS**

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Heath's Modern Language Series. Practical Lessons in German Conversation. A Companion to All German Grammars by A. L. Meissner

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PRACTICAL LESSONS
IN
GERMAN CONVERSATION

A Companion to all German Grammars

BY

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PREFACE.

The ultimate object of learning a living language is to be able to speak it. In this all are agreed. But how to attain so desirable an object, is to many people as yet a much debated question. There are still many people who fancy that a knowledge of a modern language is most easily "picked up" by a short residence abroad. This is a strange delusion. Surely, it is easier to get your grammar ready-made than to construct it for yourself out of a mass of heterogeneous material, regular and irregular, correct and incorrect, presented all at the same time. For my own part, I have never known a person who, in this manner, had acquired a correct knowledge of any modern language. But I have known many who had acquired a slovenly manner of thinking and speaking, and who had become utterly indifferent to grammatical correctness.

A residence abroad is, no doubt, desirable, but requires, at all times, to be supplemented by careful and unremitting study. First, there is the great difficulty of understanding the words spoken by others, and then the difficulty of expressing one's own thoughts and feelings in the same way as foreigners do. In learning our native language we learn first the spoken language, and then the written language. But both must be learned. The order is inverted when we learn a foreign language. Those who fancy that either process may be avoided by either going abroad for some time, or by an exclusive study of the grammar and the written language, are

equally mistaken, and propose to do a thing which nobody would think of doing in the teaching and learning of his mother-tongue. It is true, the systematic teaching of the spoken language has been greatly neglected of late years. This has been an unavoidable result of the manner of conducting examinations in modern languages, which has been done exclusively by papers, and consisting, in most cases, of little more than a translation from a prescribed book. But this kind of examining has been found to be a delusion, and now several of the English Examining Boards not only require a proficiency in the use of the spoken language, but even refuse to give credit for the written examination when the candidate fails to satisfy the examiners in the oral examination.

Conversation has, therefore, to be studied as much as any other subject of examination. The word "study" implies a graduated and systematic progress from the easier to the more difficult. In the present book I have endeavoured to construct a series of lessons on this plan.

These lessons ought to be begun as soon as the pupil has mastered the ordinary accidents, including, of course, the strong verbs and the most elementary rules of syntax.

My thanks are due to several friends who have kindly assisted me in the revision of the proof-sheets, and especially to Mr. Robert Dods, B.A., of the Royal Academic Institution, Belfast.

A. L. MEISSNER.

QUEEN'S COLLEGE, BELFAST,
June, 1888.

DIRECTIONS TO THE TEACHER.

Each Lesson is to be gone through at least three times.

The first time each sentence is read, translated, and parsed, until the teacher is satisfied that the pupils have fully mastered the vocabulary and grammar of the lesson, and are able to pronounce every word correctly.

The second time the pupils shut their books. The teacher puts the questions in the first part of the lesson, and the pupils answer in turn. The teacher should *not read the questions from the book*, but, having read them to himself, should put the questions looking straight at his pupils. And this for a very good reason. There is a wide difference between the intonation of a reader and of a speaker, and the pupil is to get accustomed to the sound of the language as it is heard in conversation.

The teacher should beware of uttering his questions in separate words. He should remember that we speak in *breath-groups*, and that this is the cause why we find such difficulty in catching a sentence uttered in a foreign tongue. The student is in the habit of breaking up a sentence into the various grammatical parts of speech, just as he puts it laboriously together out of the several parts of speech. A breath-group consists of all the words

we utter with one expiration. The breath-groups of a good speaker will group together all the words logically connected, so that they will sound like one word. This produces on the ear of a foreigner the impression of rapidity of utterance. Thus an Englishman imagines that a Frenchman speaks faster and clips his words more than an Englishman, whilst the Frenchman believes the same of an Englishman.

Mistakes in grammar or pronunciation should be corrected by the teacher, and the pupil should be made to repeat the sentence in the corrected form. But all grammatical discussions and explanations should be avoided in the conversation lesson.

The third time the pupil puts the questions, and the teacher answers. The answers will be this time in a great many instances very different from what they were, when the questions were addressed by the teacher to the pupil. Not only all questions of a personal nature, relating to name, country, age, past life, studies, amusements, &c., will be different, but a good many others. So that here a beginning is made in real conversation.

The second part of the lesson contains a few sentences, which the teacher *may* read, if he likes, but it will be better if he delivers them in the same manner in which he has uttered the questions and answers of the first part. He next puts the subjoined questions, and the pupils give the answers in German; the whole process being reversed subsequently, *i.e.*, the pupils will read (or speak) the sentence and ask the questions, and the master will answer them.

The third part of the lesson contains a connected narrative. This having been read, parsed, and translated on a previous day, the teacher repeats it in his own words, all books being shut. The teacher may put questions, if he thinks proper, as in the previous part of the lesson. But the proper object of this part of the lesson is to accustom the ear of the pupil to hear a connected narrative of some length, and to give him afterwards an opportunity of making a lengthened statement, all the facts, words, and phrases required being known to him.

Further practice in conversation may be had by the pupils putting the questions of Parts 1 and 2 to each other, and answering them under the superintendence of the teacher.

The three different parts of each lesson should be introduced and connected by the teacher in some such manner as I have indicated. Questions as to time and other arrangements will arise at the end of every lesson, and should be made the subject of conversation.

It is of the utmost importance that in every instance the pupil should be made to give a complete answer.

Thus, when the question is: "Who discovered America?" the answer is not: "Columbus;" but "Columbus discovered America." Or: "What is the colour of grass?" the answer is not: "Green;" but "Grass is green," or "The colour of grass is green."

