

LATIN OR ESPERANTO ?

SPEECHES AT EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE.

At the Conference of Educational Authorities held at the University College, London, a meeting was held on Wednesday, 5th January, 1927, under the auspices of the British Esperanto Association, the subject for discussion being "Esperanto in the World To-day." The Chair was occupied by J. J. Boutwood, Esq., J.P.

Dr. T. GRAHAME BAILEY, B.D., D.Litt., said: The particular side of this question which has fallen to me to deal with is the simplicity of Esperanto and the ease with which one can learn it. When we say that languages are difficult or easy we might say they are difficult or easy in four directions, namely, in regard to (1) pronunciation, (2) vocabulary, (3) accidence (or grammatical forms), and (4) syntax (or construction).

In a language like Sanscrit there are a bewildering number of forms; but if you once master the accidence and the vocabulary, the construction of the language is quite easy. On the other hand, in a language like English or Persian, while there are no doubt many forms, it does not take long to learn them, but when they are learnt there is still a very great difficulty in construction. English syntax is extremely difficult, so it is difficult in a different way from Sanscrit. Latin and Greek are difficult in both respects; their accidence is difficult and their syntax is very difficult.

Now let us take these four points in greater detail and apply them to Esperanto. Take first, pronunciation. Esperanto pronunciation is extremely easy. Its vowels and consonants are easy, as small differences are unimportant and may be disregarded without fear of not being understood. Esperanto is used by natives of all parts of the world, who can understand each other perfectly well.

In regard to vocabulary, there are two reasons why Esperanto is very easy. The first is that it uses words which are common to other languages, especially English, French and German; and of course French carries with it other Romance languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Rumanian, while German carries with it other allied tongues, such as Flemish, Dutch and to some extent Scandinavian. Thus many Esperanto words are already very widely known, and this tends to make the vocabulary easy.

With regard to the third point, accidence, Esperanto is absolutely as simple as it could

possibly be, with perhaps one exception. That is the accusative ending. This is not the place to enter into a long discussion concerning the accusative ending; but when it is remembered that the accusative ending of Esperanto consists of only one letter, which is not a tax on the memory, and when one considers the advantages, which are so great that they many times outweigh the negligible difficulty of learning one termination, I have not the least hesitation in saying that the accusative ending is of distinct value.

Lastly, we come to syntax. Esperanto always uses the most simple form. Even a beautiful language like French can be clumsy. In English we say "What is that"—three words. In French you use the phrase: "Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça"—eight words. Esperanto naturally chooses the simple form and uses three words. Taking another example, in French you say: "I break to me the leg"; it is obvious that what is meant is "my leg," and Esperanto accordingly adopts that form; in fact, in every case the very simplest method of expression is employed.

It has been decided by Esperantists in conference that Esperanto has reached such a stage of development and accuracy that it is not wise to tamper with its fundamentals, and that the essentials of its construction should now be left alone—not perhaps forever, but certainly until Governments adopt the language, when it would be possible to have a final decision on certain points, which then would rest in the hands of the Governments which had adopted the language. This decision adopted by Esperantists is not a refusal to improve it, but is based on the conviction that frequent changes would lead to schism.

The question is often put: how easy is Esperanto compared with national languages? In my own work I examine or teach for various examinations, from the Matriculation up to the higher degrees, such as Ph. D. and D. Litt., so I have an opportunity of making a comparison. If a person having no knowledge of

French or German wished to learn one of those languages to pass the Matriculation he would require to give some hundreds of hours to studying for it; and even then he would not, if he studied in England, be able to speak the language. Now, how long would it take to learn Esperanto? Meillet, possibly the ablest philologist living, says that anyone who knows English or a Romance language would understand Esperanto in a few days and would be able to practise it in a few weeks. My personal experience is that, having taught myself the language while in India, without a teacher, I was able, on a leisurely journey home, to converse easily with Esperantists in Athens, Bologna, Buda-Pest, Prague, Dresden, Berlin, Amsterdam and England.

Mr. GASPARD MARIN said: The development of psychological science which has taken place within our own generation has compelled the educationist to alter his point of view in many respects. The old aims of education were to train the memory and to impart dogmatic knowledge; to achieve this the teacher relied very largely on authority and punishments. To-day we know that the memory cannot be trained and that fear has the most baneful effect upon the mental and moral development of the child; and our object is chiefly to encourage observation, the reasoning faculty, self-expression and creative activities; moreover, we understand that only those things are of real use to the child's development which have been able to arouse its interest.

I should like, this evening, to point out what bearing this has on the teaching of languages. As long as one important aim of education was the training of the memory, Latin and Greek were good subjects to be taken up in the schools, and since a genuine interest was not deemed to be essential, but threats of punishment could take its place, there was no great difficulty in its way. These conceptions being now found to be wrong, it follows that the teaching of Latin and Greek is only loading the memory. On the other hand there is nothing in these languages to stimulate the child's creative activity or his critical faculties: on the contrary the pupil is simply expected to remember and to conform to a rule or exception, however illogical it may be.

The plea for the educational value of Latin, as Norman Angell has recently pointed out in *International Language*, is a mere afterthought. It is simply "because every generation of teachers had a vested interest in proving the

value of the thing which it has taken them 10 or 15 years to acquire, that we still include in our curriculum a subject, the real reason for which disappeared 400 years ago."

The study of Esperanto is quite fascinating and it is unnecessary to use compulsion to induce children to take it up. This is largely because it is a scientifically constructed language and the number of rules and roots has been reduced to a minimum. Though Esperanto can express a larger number of ideas than any natural language, yet its demands upon the memory are trifling in comparison. All the rest of the work is creative; it consists in building up; and children revel in this intelligent and profitable kind of exercise. Esperanto, by reducing memorisation and by encouraging individual expression and creative activity on the one hand and analysis and logical thinking on the other, entirely meets the requirements of the modern educationist.

It has been stated that a knowledge of Latin and Greek roots is essential to a proper mastery of English. But Latin and Greek roots are in a minority in the constitution of the English language. Other languages have provided a quota of words which would surprise an enquirer; and it would hardly be suggested that children should learn the grammar and syntax of all these languages. Further, many of the roots borrowed by English from Latin and Greek have so altered their meaning, that the knowledge of their signification two thousand years ago would be more likely to mislead than to enlighten one as to their present value. Esperanto has not this disadvantage; in a great number of cases the Esperanto root will explain English forms.

Here again, one may safely say that Esperanto is an excellent substitute for Latin, of which it has not the disadvantages. In at least nine cases out of ten, the Esperanto root will explain English learned forms, e.g., "domestic" (Esperanto *domo*, "house"), "hepatic" (Esperanto *hepato*, "liver"), "election" (Esperanto *elekti*, "to choose"), and so forth. An African friend of mine has taken up the study of Esperanto in order to understand what he calls the difficult words of the English language.

Teachers from 28 countries, who met three years ago in Geneva at the International Conference on the Teaching of Esperanto in Schools, gave an unanimous testimony that the study of Esperanto helped children to write and speak their mother tongue more correctly.

Another argument is that Latin is useful as an introduction to the study of modern Romance languages such as French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. It seems, however, a poor introduction which is more difficult to learn than the subject it introduces! Esperanto in this respect has proved particularly valuable. As an instance may be mentioned the Bishop Auckland Secondary School for Girls, where Esperanto was taught for one year in one class, while French was taught in a parallel one. The next year, French was taught to all the pupils; then all the children were classed together, and it was found that those who had had only one year of French were far ahead of those who had had two.

The inclusion of Esperanto in the programme of schools offers certain great advantages. One is that it constitutes a first rate introduction to geography. The child's interest in geographical studies is greatly stimulated by international correspondence by means of illustrated postcards and by exchange of letters. These serve as centres of interest for excellent lessons. There is also what may be termed the moral value of Esperanto. It is both exciting and inspiring for children to exchange notes with their little brothers and sisters in far distant countries; and this practice not only widens the intellectual horizon of the child but also promotes friendliness between members of different nationalities.

From actual experience in several hundreds of schools in many parts of the world, including China, it has been shown that after two years of study, at the rate of two hours a week, the children know Esperanto well; some pupils know it after a year, at least well enough to read and correspond about matters which interest them. On the other hand, when Eton or some other college prints in its prospectus that it teaches certain languages, living or dead, it does *not* mean that the pupils to whom those languages are taught will actually know them at the termination of the course; we know quite well that they will not.

In conclusion, allow me to make a confession; for one can often speak from personal experience with better authority. I spent seven years of my youth learning Latin and Greek, one or two hours in school and a couple of hours almost every day; and I managed to get a fair average of marks each year. But had I met one of the ancient goddesses I should have been unable to express a decent platitude to her in her own tongue. Such knowledge as I acquired of Latin and Greek

has been of very little use to me. Whenever I have needed to refer to classical authors I have used translations. Soon after completing my studies I took a journey to Greece, and there at least I thought I should be able to derive some benefit from my classical erudition. But I failed to make myself understood and I soon discovered that the little I knew of ancient Greek would carry me about as far in that country as a knowledge of Latin would carry me through France.

Quite recently I took up the study of Esperanto as a kind of recreation in my leisure hours. To my surprise, after a few months I found that I knew it infinitely better than I ever knew Latin; I could read a book quite fluently and even converse. Esperanto has put me into touch with people in Iceland, Egypt, China, Japan and several other countries, who, with extraordinary goodwill, have helped me with my particular researches and have provided me with invaluable material which I should not otherwise have had. Last summer I had the joy of attending the Edinburgh Congress, where I conversed with people brought up in many kinds of geographical environment, and I certainly benefited by this interchange—shall I say, cross-fertilization—of ideas. There I have listened to lectures of University professors who gave us, in Esperanto, the latest contributions to knowledge which their various nations had to give in the realms of astronomy, bacteriology, psychology and education. There also I experienced that exuberant, exhilarating feeling of universal brotherhood, unrestricted by national or class prejudices, that feeling which all who have attended international Esperanto Congresses know well, but which can never be put into words. I may honestly say that Esperanto has added a ray of sunshine to my life; it has made me more optimistic; it has widened my horizon, which had been so cramped by my classical upbringing. And that is why I am here, talking to you now; because I should love to see these same possibilities opened to many others, and especially to children—to the coming generation.

Mr. M. C. BUTLER, Secretary of the British Esperanto Association, informed the meeting that the new edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica, recently published, contained a very appreciative article on Esperanto. He also mentioned that Esperanto classes were conducted in London by the London County Council, and that classes were also held throughout the country.