

Latin as an Aid to English

S. M. I. '43

Never before in the history of the world, has greater importance been attached to educational values, and perhaps no educational topic is being so much discussed as the study of Latin and its value relative to the other branches of learning.

Lovers of the classics have gone so far as to trace the influence of Latin not only to the various fields of learning but to almost every profession and phase of life. While such insistence on the importance of Latin may not be illogical, it must be admitted, nevertheless, that these contributions are remote and indirect. Strictly speaking it is only to the mother tongue that the contributions of Latin are direct and immediate. It is through the medium of the English language that they are passed on to the different branches of our school curricula and thence to the professional fields. For whatever contributes to one's grasp of the essential elements of structures and vocabulary adds correspondingly to one's power over language as an instrument of thought, and thereby to the effectiveness of the task one sets out to accomplish. Conversation is such a vital element in social life today that success in almost any field of endeavour is dependent, in large measure, on one's ability to speak with accuracy and a fair degree of elegance.

It is obvious that an understanding of the syntax of the Latin sentence helps greatly toward an appreciation of the structure of an English sentence. English grammar distinguishes seven parts of speech whose names are all taken from the Latin. The peculiar function of each part of speech is unmistakably clear from the real meaning of the Latin word from which it is derived. Thus: the noun is simply *nomen*, that is, the word expresses the name of something. The pronoun, *pro nomine*, is the word which is used in place of, or for, a noun. The adverb, *ad verbum*, the word near the verb, is the word which attends the verb. In the light of this interpretation the parts of speech are no longer vague and abstract terms, but clear working concepts which lay a solid foundation for intelligible language study, and which ultimately lead to a development in clearness and accuracy of thought prerequisite to the corresponding qualities of expression.

The syntactical relations of the parts of speech in the sentence, which in our mother tongue are obscured by the loss of inflections, stand out clearly in Latin. While the English has acquired highly conservative powers through its long period of development, it has, at the same time, forfeited many advantages which make for a clear understanding of the simplest rules of grammatical syntax. Latin, an ancient and static language, has retained its highly inflectional character. The teacher who has struggled to impart abstract principles of English grammar will not fail to appreciate these advantages in the Latin tongue. In the following sentences two simple rules of grammar are illustrated:

1. The subject of a sentence is in the nominative case.
2. The direct object of the verb in a sentence is in the objective case.

The father calls his son. *Pater filium vocat.*

The son loves his father. *Filius patrem amat.*

In the English sentences the subject does not differ from the object as far as form is concerned, making the rules generally abstract, while the Latin makes them concrete by using the forms *pater-patrem* and *filius-filium*, respectively. Thus abstract grammatical principles are rendered concrete by the Latin through its highly inflected forms and are thereby brought within the student's mental grasp.

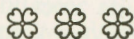
Just as the study of Latin contributes to a clearer understanding of the grammatical structure of the English language, so does it contribute to the student's command of English through the many possibilities of vocabulary which it affords. The English language is indebted in large measure to the Latin for its vocabulary. It has been estimated that no less than five-sevenths of the words in the English vocabulary are derived, directly or indirectly, from the Latin. Approximately five hundred words in the English language have their origin in the Latin root-word *verto*. Recognition of related English words is one of the first fruits of Latin study. Fluent speech presupposes an easy flow of words. The study of Latin offers this peculiar advantage by enlarging the vocabulary.

The study of Latin has the further advantage of enriching the student's vocabulary as well as enlarging it. It enables him to use simple words with aptness and a nice

appreciation of their finer shades of meaning, for the true meaning of many common English words is brought out clearly through their Latin derivation. It familiarizes him, too, with the principles of word formation. This creates interest in etymological studies which are a necessary step towards any mastery of our composite mother tongue.

The study of Latin and its literature gives the student of English an historical grasp of the tone and spirit of English literature which even the most intensive study of English literature cannot reach. The Latin element in the English language has its counterpart in English literature. Just as the English language grew from a provincial dialect to a world language under the influence of Latin, so did its literature under the same influence expand from an insular to a world literature. All the masterpieces of English literature, whether prose or poetry, have their prototypes in Latin literature. The representative English writers from earliest times down to our own were, almost without exception, lovers of the classics. They knew the Latin masterpieces and, perhaps unconsciously, have endowed English literature with a classical character as its distinctive trait. The background necessary for the interpretation and appreciation of the masterpieces of English literature obviously must be sought in a knowledge of the classics themselves.

The advantages, then, of the study of Latin to the student of English are threefold. By its logical precision and strict severity of form Latin makes clear the syntactical structure of the English language. It enlarges and enriches the student's vocabulary. Finally, the study of Latin and its literature affords an indispensable preparation for the interpretation and appreciation of the masterpieces of the English language.



Examinations are formidable even to the best prepared, for the greatest fool may ask more than the wisest man can answer.

He who can take advice is sometimes superior to him who can give it.

—Von Knebel.