

**THE CHILD'S FIRST
LATIN BOOK**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649445226

The Child's First Latin Book by W. Fenton

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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W. FENTON

**THE CHILD'S FIRST
LATIN BOOK**

THE
CHILD'S FIRST LATIN BOOK,
BEING A SELECTION OF
EASY PROGRESSIVE LATIN LESSONS,
With a Literal Interlineary Translation,
AND HELPS TO PARSING.

BY W. FENTON.

SIMPKIN AND MARSHALL, LONDON;
F. E. BINGLEY AND J. HEATON, LEEDS;
AND J. STANFIELD, WAKEFIELD.

MDCCCXCVII.

PREFACE.

THAT the present system of Classical Instruction is radically bad, to this, it is presumed, in this age of intelligence, will deny. The Grammar and Dictionary method of the old school has so long been denounced as "irrational in principle, and inefficient in operation," that to multiply proofs would be a mere "beating of the air." The great desideratum now seems to be the introduction and adoption of some system which may be the means of obviating that disgust so universally experienced by those who are compelled to the drudgery of learning languages as they are at present taught, and of facilitating their acquirement. *Orthodox* teachers have long been, and still are crying out *heresy!* against the advocates of this intellectual emancipation; and strenuously oppose any thing like innovation upon what they term the "hallowed institutions of our ancestors." But if the great body of the people could once be impressed with a sense of the gross absurdity to which children are consigned during their progress through the English schools:—if they could once be convinced that not one half of that time is necessary for the attainment

of Latin and Greek, which is usually devoted to them in those "hallowed institutions" so loudly insisted on by the enemies of scholastic reform:—if they could be induced to believe, that, owing to the tyrannous and vexatious modes of tuition, two-thirds of the students who devote a whole school-life to those two languages, never reap any practical benefit from them:—surely they would be no longer silent on a subject of such paramount importance:—importance not only as regards the languages themselves, but as regards the loss of other knowledge, which must necessarily follow from such an unreasonable portion being devoted to what might, on a more rational plan, be obtained so much sooner.

But prejudice presents a stubborn barrier to scholastic reform. The "still small voice" of reason has hitherto been drowned by the noisy sophistry of those whose interest it is to oppose any change in schools, which would expose the "nakedness of the land," or interfere with their worldly ease; and thus a tyrannous bondage is entailed upon generation after generation, which is a disgrace and a curse to a civilized country. But we trust the time is fast approaching when the abominations of those "time-hallowed institutions" will be brought to light, and that all prejudices in favour of ancient usage will vanish.—Those prejudices are naturally retained by all who have been educated at schools of early foundation; but they must give way with the progress of intelligence, as a very little investigation will prove that the consecrated system of Grammar and

Dictionary is "refutable to a much less respectable origin than primitive enactment, and would shew that from its first stages of corruption, to its present deplorable consummation, its validity has been not only questioned, but denied by the highest authorities in literature and science which this country can boast. It ought to be more generally known, that Locke, Milton, Aescham, and many other enlightened scholars, long since protested against the tyrannous mode of education prevailing in their times. Each and all perceived the unreasonable difficulties by which an acquaintance with the learned languages was delayed: we might almost say debarred; and all proposed to abridge the labour of the student, by affording more effectual assistance in elementary learning.

What then was the great principle of change which they recommended? *Literal interlineary translations.* As to the views of these eminent men, on minor points, though they were taken at different periods, and therefore might scarcely be expected to embrace the same objects,—nevertheless, they generally coincide, and may always be easily reconciled. But with regard to the efficacy of *literal interlineary translations*, they are all agreed; and this is the principle which we take as the basis of the system of instruction which we recommend as the easiest, shortest, and surest guide to the critical attainment of all languages. This, we are aware, is contested ground, but we have experience on our side, which is worth all the theoretical speculations that the enemies of scholastic reform can adduce against

us: and we have abundant *data* for asserting, that for the attainment of any language not one half the time is necessary, which is now generally devoted to it. Formerly, boys were taught by the *oral interpretation* of the master; but when Grammars and Dictionaries were introduced, the *onus* was thrown upon the shoulders of the pupil, and to this day he is compelled to learn, by his own solitary application, what his master is paid for teaching him. *Oral instruction*, on this plan, is absolutely necessary, but without *literal interlinear translations* it would lose half its effect. "It is quite impossible," says a writer on this subject,* "that the oral instruction of the master to a numerous class of pupils should be equally adapted to the faculties of all. One boy may require the lesson to be construed to him twice as often as another of quicker apprehension; and consequently, any given number of repetitions must either be insufficient for one part of the class, or more than sufficient for another. There must be either a loss of learning or a loss of time. Whereas, when the English interpretation is printed, and allowed to be studied by every member of the class, each may bestow just so much time as is necessary for a perfect understanding of the lesson. Besides, the book is always in good humour with its reader, and is never tired of answering enquiries, or correcting errors: so that it is accommodated to the tempers as well as the capacities of all:—neither disgusting the quick scholar by tedious

* See "Essay on Locke's System of Classical Instruction."

repetition, nor discouraging the more backward by impatient reproof. Not that it tends to induce negligence on the part of the learner: on the contrary, the greater the facility of learning correctly, the greater should be the accuracy required by the master at the time of examination. Neither does it preclude any exertion on the part of the master himself, which he may be desirous to bestow from his own resources. A competent teacher will always find sufficient occasion for his observations, according to the different capacities and dispositions of boys, which come with far more effect, when the lesson is in some degree familiar to all: and he will gain a vast deal of time for the communication of useful knowledge, by being thus relieved from the mechanical drudgery of working upon each boy's memory. A purely literal translation may safely be put into a boy's hands without a good master; and a good master will still find proper place for "searching questions," when the time for its analysis arrives."

The grand argument of our opponents, that "the more difficult you make the attainment of any language, the more deeply it will be impressed on the memory," is logically absurd; else why not make it ten times more difficult than it is already? Exertion, we own, is absolutely necessary on the pupil's part, as no valuable information can be gained without. But we have no scruple in asserting, that "the turning over of the leaves of a dictionary is not the species of exertion which will help a boy to remember his lesson. Such an exercise can only impress upon his memory the

trouble he has taken to learn it. The tedious labour of the search engrosses his whole attention,⁶ and the boy, when called for examination, very often recollects nothing more than the simple fact, that he *did look out* the word."

"Contrasting this method with that of *Interlineary Translation*, we find, on the contrary, that the time bestowed on comparing the original text, *word by word*, with a good literal version, is entirely devoted to the acquirement of the language. No tedious process of mechanical labour diverts the attention from the real object of intellectual pursuit: nor is a single idea presented to the mind, which is irrelevant to the purpose of mental acquisition. It is an acknowledged fact, that memory is chiefly aided by the association of ideas, and the more exclusive or definite the real or fancied relation between those ideas, the deeper and clearer will be the consequent impression. It is surely then less likely that a boy will remember the meaning of a word sought in a dictionary, where his judgment is divided between twenty different interpretations, than when the precise meaning of the word is expressly defined in a translation, and nothing else imposed on his attention. We might also mention the numerous artificial helps to memory afforded by this plan, which are of more importance to early accuracy, than is generally acknowledged;" but our space admonishes us to be brief, and we must conclude by a hasty reference to the use of this little work.

Before entering on its study, the pupil must *learn his declensions*: more of Grammar, in this stage, is quite