

**NEW FRENCH COURSE FOR SCHOOLS,
BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF THE DIRECT
METHOD COMBINING
THE PRACTICAL USE OF THE LIVING
LANGUAGE WITH A SYSTEMATIC STUDY
OF GRAMMAR. PART 1**

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New French course for schools, based on the principle of the direct method combining the practical use of the living language with a systematic study of grammar. Part 1 by Charles Copland Perry & Albrecht Reum

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CHARLES COPLAND PERRY & ALBRECHT REUM

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NEW FRENCH COURSE FOR SCHOOLS

BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF THE
DIRECT METHOD

COMBINING THE PRACTICAL USE OF THE LIVING LANGUAGE
WITH A SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF GRAMMAR

BY

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PART I

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER ON FRENCH
PRONUNCIATION

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PREFACE

1. **LIVING LANGUAGE.**—To say that speech constitutes the primary function of living languages is, no doubt, a truism, but it is one which, while theoretically admitted, has been practically ignored throughout their history as subjects of scholastic instruction. To a large extent this has been due to the inherent difficulty of the task itself. Not only in our own country, where comparatively little interest has been taken in the subject, but in countries like Germany and Switzerland, where practical as well as educational motives have operated, the efforts made at various times to teach foreign languages as living instruments have met with very little success. Generations of teachers have, in spite of the most palpable proofs to the contrary, still been content to believe that to read a foreign language, to compare it with your own, and to subject its structure to a microscopic examination must, in the course of time, lead not only to a grammatical, but to an oral command over it. It is only in recent times, when a *practical* command of foreign languages has been recognised as a real factor in the commercial, and even the political rivalry of nations, that a fresh and exhaustive inquiry into the whole question of modern language teaching has revealed a more excellent way. This inquiry

has proved not only of practical, but of the greatest educational advantage, for it has led us back to first principles—to the nature and laws, not of this or that language only, but of language itself. It is in our misconceptions as to these laws that the reason of past failure is to be found. These misconceptions are undoubtedly due, first and foremost, to the paramount influence exerted since the revival of letters by the great classical languages, which have not only for centuries monopolised our educational system, but, by altering the very definition of language, have determined the methods by which everything called by that name shall be taught. The result of these methods has been speechlessness, which has gradually come to be regarded as part of the scholastic creed, and even as a mark of superiority distinguishing the ancient from the modern. And this would not be unnatural, if it were fair to contrast the silent dignity of the classics with the "parlottage" or chatter with which certain methods of teaching have accustomed us to associate the study of modern languages, but such a comparison would of course be absurd. Beyond such superficialities lie realms and faculties as yet undeveloped. In all languages speech is an essential element; in dead languages speechlessness is a loss none the less great, because irreparable—in the living it is unjustifiable and wanton.

2. **THE DIRECT METHOD.**—The direct method includes in its operation the various elements which go to constitute a living language.

(a) *Oral Teaching.*—The direct method is an oral method. A clear conception of the meaning of this term

is important, for it is not unfrequently applied to practices which have little claim to the name, and might almost be called *pseudo-oral*. An essential condition of oral teaching is that it should be based, from the very commencement, on the principle of language itself, namely a direct and habitual association of words and things, an association in which the initiation and creative power of the speaker have played some definite part, both as regards the matter and the form of speech. Radically distinct from such conditions are those under which matter and form are ready made, where words are secondary, not original products, where some passage of French or German already viewed through the medium of English is made the subject of a "conversation" with pupils whose language faculty, command of words and pronunciation, is still entirely undeveloped. Such work, however specious in appearance and oral in name, must necessarily be largely mechanical and artificial.

(b) *Pronunciation*.—A system which regards living speech as an essential element of language must necessarily attach great importance to correct pronunciation, without which, indeed, speech itself, however intelligible, hardly deserves the name of language. The absence of all real experience and training in pronunciation, and the consequent diffidence which teachers have naturally felt in this particular, has been, and still is, one of the chief bars to a reform of language teaching, and one of the chief inducements to the retention of a system which treats modern languages as dead. The introduction of a method which considers an, at any rate, passable pronunciation as a *sine qua non* represents in itself a

revolution. Inexperience has inclined us to regard bad pronunciation as a natural incurable defect, a thing born not made. The same erroneous belief is apparent with regard to a defective English pronunciation, which is accepted with resignation as more or less irremediable. This belief may perhaps be said to be specially prevalent in a country like our own, in which clear intonation and voice culture have been so much neglected. If wider views as to the possibilities which a systematic training in pronunciation can provide are beginning to prevail, this is largely due to the science of phonetics which has reduced sounds to a system, and has tabulated them in such a way as to make them perfectly comprehensible even to young children, to whom indeed distinctions of sound cause the least difficulty. The correct sound of a word should, from the very first, form part of the conception of the word itself. On the other hand, the exact part which the science of phonetics ought to play requires definition, for it may be easily exaggerated by a teacher who, with more zeal than discretion, comes to regard phonetics not as a means, but as an end in itself. Broadly it may be said that, when the principle of pronunciation has once been grasped, phonetics are for the teacher, pronunciation for the pupil. In the earliest stage of teaching it is, no doubt, desirable that phonetic notation, as the most definite and intelligible means to correct pronunciation, should for a time supersede the ordinary spelling. But this initial stage should not be unduly prolonged. The basis of pronunciation should, as soon as possible, be the written word, not the phonetic transcript, except so far as the reading

and the writing of symbols may be necessary to recall or confirm the pronunciation of the written word. It cannot be regarded as desirable that boys and girls should be called upon to read or still less to write pages of phonetic transliteration; on the other hand, it is very desirable that they should be perfectly familiar with sounds as represented by a table of phonetic symbols which may act as a constant support and check in case of mispronunciation. Nor should that element in pronunciation be forgotten which no phonetic system, however perfect, can either give or replace—the living colour and atmosphere of the human voice. While fully recognising the usefulness of the science of phonetics, we should still regard the pure and cultivated accent of the native teacher as the highest and most valuable source of good pronunciation.

In the endeavour to explain the pronunciation of individual words it has been considered advisable not entirely to discard a more popular phonetic notation, such as is to be found in the best French dictionaries. At the present time, when there are still a very large number of teachers who have had neither the opportunity nor the inclination to study scientific methods, a new system, too rigorously imposed, is more likely to prove a stumbling-block than a help. Moreover, a comparison of the old and the new is, in itself, a gain.

(c) *Spelling, Writing, and Dictation.*—Both spelling and writing of words are exercises which, from an early stage onwards, should be regarded as essential elements of a sound method, though it may be legitimate to hold the view that some short preliminary period should be

spent in purely oral exercises. The theory that attention should, for a considerable space of time, be devoted exclusively to the training of the ear, and that writing interferes with this object, is a mistaken one. The faculties of the ear and eye should, as soon as possible, be cultivated together, and, as already said, despite the fact that the usual orthography of words is a conventional, not a phonetic one, such orthography should be directly associated in the pupil's mind with particular sounds. It is forgotten by those teachers who are content to let beginners spend as much as a year in hearing sounds without seeing their written equivalents, that the eye, though excluded, is nevertheless, so to speak, mentally active, and that a pupil inevitably, even if unconsciously, forms an idea how particular words are spelled. This idea is, in most cases, quite an erroneous one, which has subsequently to be eradicated, with the loss of much valuable time. In the ready writing of words delivered by word of mouth lies the proper training for what, in higher forms, is usually known as *dictation*, a practice the proper uses of which, as an element of method, are still much misunderstood. The aim of dictation should not be the writing of difficult or unusual words, or of passages which, after previous preparation, are by force of memory retained, as it were, in the retina of the mind. The proper object of dictation, which, in its varying degrees, should be practised in every class throughout a school, is simply practise in expressing in written characters that which a learner can speak; that which he writes being neither more nor less difficult than that which he speaks.