

**PRACTICAL LESSONS IN GERMAN
CONVERSATION: A COMPANION TO
ALL GERMAN GRAMMARS
AND A MANUAL FOR CANDIDATES FOR
THE CIVIL AND MILITARY SERVICE
EXAMINATIONS**

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Practical Lessons in German Conversation: A Companion to All German Grammars and a Manual for Candidates for the Civil and Military Service Examinations by A. L. Meissner

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IN
GERMAN CONVERSATION

A COMPANION TO ALL GERMAN GRAMMARS
And a Manual for Candidates for the Civil and Military
Service Examinations

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Seinem Freunde

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Der Verfasser.

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 accidence, including, of course, the strong verbs and the most elementary rules of syntax, say, after the 28th lesson of my PUBLIC SCHOOL GERMAN GRAMMAR, to which this publication forms a supplement.

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