

PART ONE

LATIN

I am always sorry when any language is lost, for languages are the pedigrees of nations.

SAMUEL JOHNSON, *Boswell's 'Tour to the Hebrides.'*

CHAPTER I. LATIN & LEARNING

MOST PEOPLE who learn Latin at all start it when they are quite young and go on with it at least till they are sixteen. For about seven hours a week, and for thirty-six weeks in every one of these many years, they work at a subject which is never easy and not, in its early stages, particularly attractive. Even then they will have mastered little more than the elements of the language. Why do they do it? 'Because they are made to' is not a sufficient answer. This chapter, and indeed the whole book, will try to find a better one.

For the moment, let us ask another question: Why, if it comes to that, are people educated at all? It is in order that they may be helped by their education to put the best they have into life and to get the best they can out of it. In other words, in order that they may be happy.

Some of the subjects which they learn at school are obviously useful for this purpose. Everybody wants to know, and can see the point of trying to learn, something about the world of men and things in which he lives and among which he will have to play a man's part. Every master who teaches, say, General Science, Geography or History, can count at the start on two advantages: his pupils understand both why they are learning these subjects and what connexion each has with the other two. The connexion between these three subjects and the rest of the curriculum may not be so obvious, but it is there. Science has been built up by applying the principles of Mathematics; His-

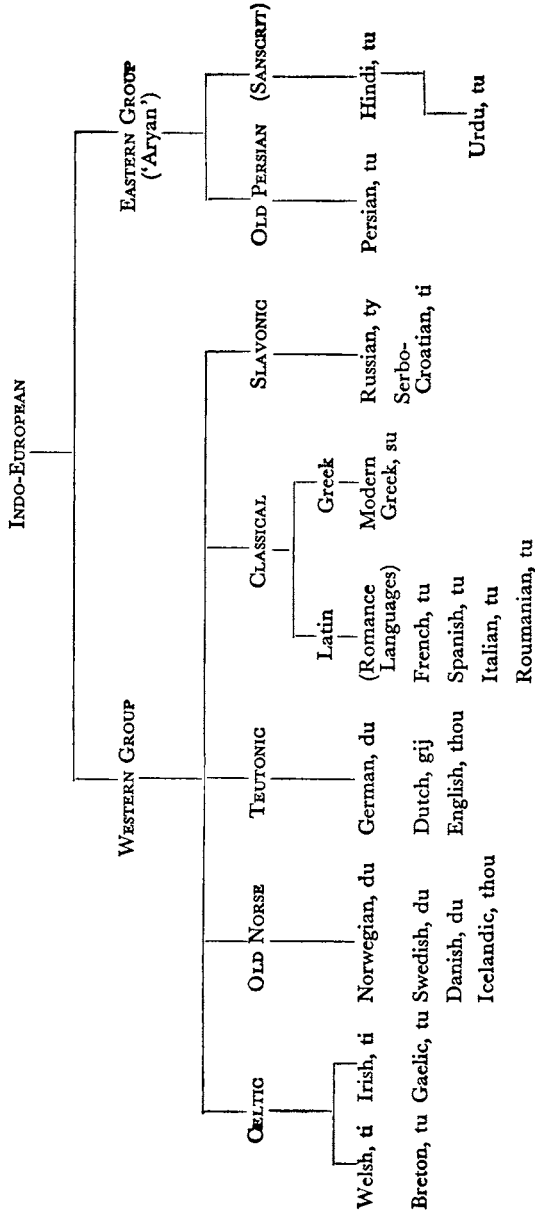
tory, the story of men and nations, leads to the study of the languages which they speak; and the study of languages involves that of literature, in which language finds its highest expression. And so we come at last to the study of Latin, a 'dead' language, for no one speaks it now; but one which is included in our curriculum for the same reason as the other subjects, that without it we cannot really understand the living world of to-day.

What then is the thread which binds together all the subjects in a normal school curriculum, whether modern or classical, literary or scientific? It is this: they are all parts of one single subject, the study of Man himself—the universe in which he lives, his achievements in the past, his ideas and the words in which he clothes them. More and more subjects force their way into the school time-table; increasing specialization tends to isolate them more and more from one another. But in fact they are all means to one end, Education, and variations on the same theme, Man. To put it another way, every separate subject is merely an aspect of Truth; and Truth is one and indivisible.

We have found, then, part of our answer to the question, why learn Latin? Because without it we cannot understand some important aspects of the living world of to-day. But why, to understand a living world, learn a dead language? English, French, German, yes; and as many other modern languages as we have time for, but why Latin? To answer this very natural question, we shall have to look at the place occupied by Latin among all those languages, our own included, which are descended from a remote common ancestor, the Indo-European language. This would be an obvious thing to do if we were studying a human being; we could understand him best by studying, not only the man himself, but his ancestors and, if he had any, his children. Languages too are living things. They come into being with an inheritance from the past. They have their infancy, their prime and their period of decay. They die, and still through their descendants exercise a vital influence on modern speech. The inheritance bequeathed by Latin and its influence to-day is so great that its family tree is worth a little study. Here it is:

'FAMILY TREE' OF INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

N.B. The name of each language is followed by the word for 'you' or 'thou' in that language.



A glance will show that Latin is descended from the same ancestors as most European and some Eastern languages. For some of the former we shall look in vain. Finnish and Hungarian, for instance, belong to a different family altogether; they are members of the same group as Turkish and very distantly connected with Chinese.

The map of Europe showing the countries where the languages on the bottom line are spoken will suggest the idea that they were brought there by successive immigrations of people descended from the original 'Indo-European' stock, who left their homes and wandered east and south and west, becoming divided and subdivided as they went. This is probably true. There must have been, before the great migrations took place, an Indo-European race. Incidentally, the word 'Aryan' is properly used to describe a language, *not* a race, belonging to the Eastern branch of the Indo-European family of languages. We must guard against the temptation to label as 'Aryans' those who speak an Aryan language and to believe that people who speak the same language are descended from the same stock. That this is not so becomes obvious when it is remembered how many people speak English as their mother tongue who are not even white (there are Gaelic-speaking negroes in Nova Scotia!),* but it seems to have been forgotten of late years in Germany.

The test of relationship between languages is their structure, their grammar, the way they are put together. For instance, all the languages on this 'tree' are inflected, i.e. their nouns have cases, their verbs voices and moods, and their adjectives agree with their nouns, though these inflexions have now disappeared in many instances. Again, they have a small stock of words in common—not those that deal with difficult and abstract ideas, but elementary, primitive words, such as 'I' and 'thou', 'father', 'fire' and so on, together with the numerals up to 100 (which suggests that the first migration took place before people could count up to more than 100!).

* Descended from the slaves of early Scottish settlers.

	ARYAN		'CLASSICAL'		ROMANCE	TEUTONIC		CELTIC	SLAVONIC	SEMITIC	MONGOLIAN
	<i>Sanscrit</i>	<i>Persian</i>	<i>Greek</i>	<i>Latin</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>Irish</i>	<i>Russian</i>	<i>Arabic</i>	<i>Japanese</i>
1.	eka	yek	heis	unus	un	one	ein	ven	odin	wāhad	hito
2.	dvā	du	duo	duo	deux	two	zwei	dau	dva	ithnēn	futa
3.	trāyah	seh	treis	tres	trois	three	drei	tri	tri	thalātha	mi
4.	čatvārah	chahār	tessares	quattuor	quatre	four	vier	cethir	chetýrye	arba'a	yo
5.	pāuca	panj	pente	quinque	cinq	five	fünf	coic	pyat	k̄hamsah	itsu
6.	sāt	shesh	hex	sex	six	six	sechs	se	shest'	sittah	mu
7.	saptā	haft	hepta	septem	sept	seven	sieben	secht	syem	sab'ah	nana
8.	astāu	hasht	octo	octo	huit	eight	acht	ocht	vosyem	thamānyah ya	ya
9.	nāva	nuh	ennea	novem	neuf	nine	neun	noi	dyevyāt	tis'ah	hokono
10.	dāsa	dah	deka	decem	dix	ten	zehn	deich	dycsyāt	'asherah	to
100.	śatām	sad	hekaton	centum	cent	hundred	hundert	cet	sto	mīyah	momo

We have already had an example of this in the case of the pronoun of the second person singular, which is quoted in the family tree from twenty-one Indo-European languages. On page 5 is another example for interest's sake—the numerals from 1 to 10 and the word for 100, quoted from nine Indo-European languages, and from two others, representing the Semitic and the Mongolian families.

Anyone can see a family likeness between the first nine of these languages, and how close it is between Latin and French, which are, so to speak, mother and daughter. But the likeness is gone when we compare them with Arabic and Japanese, which belong to different families from the rest and from each other. These resemblances and differences would stand out even more clearly if we could apply the real test and examine the structure of these languages.

Latin, then, belongs to the great Indo-European family, and to the Western branch of it. It is a 'first cousin' of Greek and a more distant cousin of the original Celtic, Teutonic and Slavonic languages. So far from being descended from Sanscrit, as was once supposed, it is only a distant connexion.* The resemblances between the two come only from their common ancestor.

When we look at the direct descendants of Latin, or the Romance languages as they are called, we notice that English is not one of them. English is a sister language to German and Dutch, the niece, not the daughter, of Latin and only a cousin of French.† But we may say that having had her aunt to live with her for some time (A.D. 43–400) and, much more important, having always kept in touch with her French cousin, English has grown to *look* more like a genuine daughter language to Latin than, say, Roumanian does. But however many Latin words have been introduced into English from French or other sources (and the English dictionary contains twice as many

* First realized by Eugene Aram, hanged for murder 1759.

† We are conscious that our analogy has run away with us and that these 'relationships' are getting out of hand; but we are attempting an illustration, not a genealogy.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62710-9 - Roman Panorama: A Background for To-day

Humfrey Grose-Hodge

Excerpt

[More information](#)

LATIN AND LEARNING

7

words of Latin as of Anglo-Saxon origin) the structure of the language remains unalterably Teutonic.

Here then is another reason for learning Latin. A vast number of English words, a large proportion of our literary language, is derived from it—as are all the longer words in this sentence. Some Latin words, and even whole phrases, have become English without any change at all. Expressions like *bona-fide*, *post-mortem*, *viva voce*, etcetera are hardly recognized as Latin, so thoroughly acclimatized have they become; while others are so familiar as to be known by their initials only, like A.M. and P.M. (*ante* and *post meridiem*), £. s. d. (*librae, solidi, denarii*) and D.V. (*Deo volente*). So too English has ‘swallowed whole’ a multitude of such every-day nouns as *genius*, *index*, *omen*, *tribunal*; and such adjectives as *complex* or *senior*. In other words the change has been slight, a mere popular abbreviation. A *dirge* comes from *dirige* (direct us), a query from *quaere* (seek). Others have been lengthened: when a boy is told to parse a word, he is really being asked to say what *pars* (part) of speech it is. But some Latin words have become quite unrecognizable in their journey down the centuries through soldiers’ Latin and French. Who would suspect that a porpoise is really a pig-fish (*porcus-piscis*) or that a glamour-girl, if true to her name, must be a Latin scholar?

The fact is that an Englishman can hardly open his mouth without uttering Latin. Our language is steeped in it, and cannot be really understood, let alone mastered, by anyone who knows none. Whence this flood of Latin words? Not from the Roman occupation of Britain. The country was pretty thoroughly Romanized for 350 years—there is hardly a parish in which the spade has not unearthed some form of Roman remains. But when the legions were recalled to defend Rome, the invading barbarians swept over the Wall and the forts and the camps and the villas, like the incoming tide over children’s sand castles, and left about as much behind. Here and there a Latin word lived on, like *castra* which survives to-day as a ‘Roman remain’ in place-names such as Chester, Doncaster, Exeter or Caerleon (*castra legionis*). The invading Angles and Saxons, who had

already been in contact with Roman civilization, brought some Latin words with them to express the products of the Roman world, such as wine, silk and copper, or Roman measures, such as pound, inch and mile. The coming of Christianity from Rome in the sixth century added a few more, among which creed, font and priest are familiar to-day. But, in its general character, the language spoken by King Harold and his men was the same as that which St Augustine had heard when he came to Britain centuries before. The battle of Hastings decided whether our vocabulary should remain wholly Teutonic or become half Latin.

In France meanwhile, which had been longer and more thoroughly Romanized and where the language of the Roman camps had spread over the country, mingling with and supplanting that of the natives, the barbarian tide came in more gradually and more gently and was absorbed in the soil of the country. It is difficult to say at what point Latin became French. French in fact *is* Latin, though a 'vulgar' Latin; and was learned by the Gauls not as Cicero, or even as the characters in Plautus, spoke it but as they picked it up from the Roman soldiers, most of whom were foreigners and had had to learn it themselves. That is why the French for a horse does not come from *equus* but from *caballus*, a 'nag', or as the British soldier of 1914 would have said, a 'hairy'. But it was Latin words none the less which William the Conqueror brought from Normandy to mingle with the Anglo-Saxon, as his Norman stock did with theirs, till the people and the language became English.

We need not labour the point that Latin is almost an essential to anyone who would be a modern linguist. It is possible to become fluent in French, Italian or Spanish without it; but it is difficult and far from satisfactory. For Latin gives the key, not only to the structure and vocabulary of these languages, but to the mode of thought of those who use them. Without Latin it is possible to learn French, but it is not possible really to understand French—still less to appreciate French literature.

But what is the need of Latin to one who would understand English? Admittedly it is not so great; for English is a Teutonic, not a Romance, language; and its structure has only a distant connexion with that of Latin. But our vocabulary, the words which we use and especially those in which our literature is written, contains a high proportion of Latin and owes much of its usefulness and beauty to the way in which it combines the weight and dignity of its Latin element with the directness and flexibility of the Anglo-Saxon.

This Latin element has in fact tended to increase. When the Norman-French fused with the Anglo-Saxon to produce English, Latin was not yet a dead language, and continued to colour and to mould the English civilization which grew up in the centuries after the Conquest. At first the leading influence was that of the Church; and the Church spoke Latin. When the Renaissance brought the revival of learning, the learning that was revived was the Classical, and Latin remained the language of the learned for centuries still—of the lawyers, the doctors and the professors. To it constantly the poets turned when they needed to enlarge the sound or the scope of their own language. Education, from the days of the Norman Conquest almost until our own, was based on Latin. Fresh words borrowed from it have never ceased to make their way into English—and still they come. It is not claimed that this Latinization of English has been an unmixed blessing, but only that it is a fact. We may regret the extravagances of the Elizabethans or the more ponderous periods of Dr Johnson, and still more the widening gulf between cultured and every-day speech, between literature and journalism. But it remains a fact that he who is ignorant of Latin cannot really know the meaning of the words he uses himself nor appreciate the subtler beauties of our greatest writers.

If we cannot understand English and French without learning Latin, much less can we understand the Romans themselves. The very sentences, with their strength and order, their firm and regular beat, reflect the image of the minds who framed them and echo the measured tramp of the legions on the march.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-62710-9 - Roman Panorama: A Background for To-day

Humfrey Grose-Hodge

Excerpt

[More information](#)

But if Latin is a dead language, the Roman people have been dead still longer (though Fascist Italy did not like one saying so). Then why is it important that we should understand the Romans and spend years of our lives trying to learn their language with this as one of the ends in view? Because, while the Latin language is only a distant connexion of English, the Roman character, or the kind of character that the Romans admired, is the direct ancestor of our own. We learn Latin in order to understand not only our literature but ourselves. Our thinking owes more to the Greeks and to the Jews; but in action we are Romans, and the British are men of action rather than of conscious thought. We are like the Romans and they are (sometimes dreadfully) like us. When we look at them, we can as it were stand back and take a look at ourselves.

This is perhaps the chief justification for the remaining chapters of this book, and in the last chapter we shall return to it. Meanwhile let us think for a moment of the actual process of learning Latin as it confronts the average boy. It chiefly consists—and no ‘modern’ methods seem able substantially to alter the fact—in the learning of grammar and syntax and in translation and composition. The process, we have admitted, is dull in its earlier stages. What special advantages result from it?

To learn Latin grammar and syntax is to study the structure and nature not so much of one language but of all (Indo-European) languages, in fact of language itself. The stage of its development at which we study Latin is that of its maturity and prime. It has outgrown its early clumsiness and not yet become fluid and degenerate as did silver Latin and the Latin of the monks. Its grammatical forms are clear, logical and complete. Each separate form has its separate function, is exactly fitted to it and is clearly recognizable. English, by comparison, is formless and English grammar difficult to learn and even to recognize. Grammar is, so to speak, the dry bones of a language; but bones are the foundation on which the living structure is built, and in Latin they can be clearly seen, recognized and distinguished.