

- How to learn a foreign language and what are the advantages of learning them is here discussed by a French scholar.

## LANGUAGE BROTHERHOOD

French schools have excellent professors of English, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian. Nevertheless, I have learned from experience that it is difficult to learn a language in a classroom well enough to master it for life. I studied German at the Lycee Corneille for ten years but have always been incapable of carrying on a conversation with a German. On the other hand, English, which I learned through living with the English and Americans and by reading good authors, has become for me a second language.

Why? Because the speed of comprehension and speech must be enforced with practice. During the world wars, if I did not understand an order given in English, my life was in danger. There is nothing like that to sharpen one's mind! You may reply that we cannot organize wars in order to teach languages.

Of course not, but it is indispensable to round out scholastic teaching with periods of residence abroad. Intelligent parents make an effort to do this, I know, and I am delighted. Such trips should be extended and made available to as many children as possible. The cost would not be great if done through exchanges, being limited thus to transportation. It would be desirable for air, rail and steamship companies to offer reduced rates to exchange students.

The effects of such visits are astounding. Suddenly, the child or adolescent discovers that the inhabitants of another country are human, pleasant and kind. Sometimes love, the best teacher, or tender friendship plays its role. A taste for reading develops with the desire to share the feelings of a friend. The foreigner becomes accustomed to the pronuncia-

tion of another language, which is always the weak point of the student who learns it in a classroom.

Such learning is mutual and reciprocal. How many times have I seen a young French girl become the center of life at an American university or in an English family, and a good reason to love our country. Because she speaks well and awakens the interest of her companions, because she suggests reading material or gives French lessons, she becomes France's best ambassadress. I repeat: these visits to other countries should be organized on a national scale.

A second problem, but no less important, is the maintenance of this acquired skill. How many students who have learned a language well in high school or college and thought they would know it for life, have lost it almost completely from lack of use. A vocabulary which is not kept up disintegrates with surprising speed. I shall

give, at my own expense, a personal example: I knew Greek at the age of sixteen as well as any man of my generation, having won first prize in the Greek Competitive Examinations. I have kept, alas, only scattered shreds of it, and can no longer read Homer and Plato in the original.

The remedy? Continue to read and speak. You have chosen a second language; it doesn't matter which one. Be faithful to it! Many countries have libraries where you can find foreign newspapers and books. Visit them often. In many cities there are foreigners living among themselves and not mixing in with the general population. They could all be, if they wished, professors, students and friends, at the same time. All that is needed is a little goodwill on both sides. It is important for peace that the sons of Adam take up again the building of the interrupted Tower. — *Andre Maurois, Sunday Times Magazine.*