

Greek. (*Laughter*) But I go a little further. I think where there is a question between the true and the false, it is more important that one should know what is true than what is false. (*Cheers.*) I'll illustrate again. I think it more important to know the history of England, than to know the mythology of Greece and Rome. (*Loud cheers.*) I think it more important that we should know those transactions out of which the present state of our political and social relations have arisen, than that we should know the lives and loves of all the gods and goddesses that are contained in the *Iliad*—(*laughter and cheers*)—and yet, gentlemen, according to my experience—I hope things are better managed now—we learnt a great deal more of the Pagan than of the Christian religion when I was at school. (*Great laughter and cheers.*) While the one was put off till the Sunday, and transacted in a very short time—(*laughter*)—the other was every-day work; and the manner in which it was followed out was by no means agreeable, for the slightest slip in the progeny of Jupiter or Mars, or anybody else, was followed by a degree of personal castigation—(*roars of laughter*)—which I never remembered bestowed on any one for a slip of divinity. (*Renewed laughter.*) Then, again, I venture to think that, as we cannot teach the people everything, it is more important we should teach them practical things than speculative things. (*Cheers.*) For instance, I think it more important that a man should be able to work out a sum in arithmetic than that he should be acquainted with the abstract conditions of argument in general, as detailed in Aristotle's logic—(*renewed cheers*)—that modes, figures, and syllogisms are not so important as the rule of three, or practice, or keeping accounts; and, therefore, if we must choose, I confess I should lean to the practical side. One more rule I venture to lay down—they make four altogether—that, as we must choose in these matters, the present is of more importance to us than the past.—(*Cheers.*) The institution of communities, kingdoms and countries that have existed 2000 years ago. (*Cheers.*) The right hon. gentlemen then took up the question of classics. He said—Language is a vehicle of thought; and where the thought and the knowledge are there it is most admirable as a means of communicating it, but it is not the substitute or equivalent for it. It does not do instead of it. It presupposes the knowledge of the thing, and it is only useful where that knowledge is obtained for the purpose of communicating it. I will venture to read a few lines, in which this is put with so much force that I should only weaken it by putting it in my own language. The quotation is from Pope, and was written 140 or 150 years ago, and it only shows how mistakes may be pointed out in the most vigorous language and in the most conclusive reasoning, and yet may remain utterly undressed and uncared for:

"Since man from beast by words is known,
Words are man's province—words we teach alone;
When reason doubtful, like the Samian letter,
Points him two ways, the narrower is the better;
Placed at the door of learning, youth to guide,
We never suffer it to stand too wide.
To ask, to guess, to know, as they commence,
A fancy opens quick the springs of sense,
We ply the memory, we load the brain,
Bind rebel wit, and double chain on chain,
Confining the thought, to exercise the breath,
And keep them in the pale of words till death."

Well, then; I think it is quite evident that it is a poor and imperfect conception that should limit it to the learning of any languages, whatsoever; but surely, if we are to begin and make language a part of education, it should be the language we are most concerned with; and I must be permitted to say that, in the science of ponderation I propose to establish, I think the English language has prior claims to Latin and Greek. (*Applause.*) I do not disparage Latin or Greek. Far from it; but I speak of what is most important to be taken first; and I think it is most melancholy to see the ignorance of the literature of our own language in which the great masses of our young men are brought up. But allowing that we are to teach Latin and Greek, only see how we set about it. It is no joke to learn Latin or Greek: but it is a joke compared with learning Greek and Latin grammar. Language is one thing, and grammar another; and I agree with the German wit, Helne, who said: "How fortunate the Romans were that they had not to learn Latin grammar, because if they had done so they never would have had time to conquer the world." (*Laughter and cheers.*) Montaigne, 300 years ago, saw this, and exposed it in most forcible terms. He pointed out how easy it was to learn Latin with very little grammar, to learn it colloquially; and he tells how without the lash and without a tear, he became able to speak, and in a short time as good and as pure Latin as the schoolmaster. But that is not what would answer the purpose. It is said, you should discipline the mind; and the boy is put through the torture of elaborate grammars which he is forced to learn by heart, but every word and syllable of which he forgets before he is twenty years of age. Their is no doubt that Greek is a language of wonderful felicity of expression; but what could be more beautiful, what more refined, what more calculated to exercise the taste and all the faculties of a person than the study of French prose, carried by M. Prevost Paradol, Saint Beuve, or the great masters of that language. We have nothing like it in English—nothing approaching that exquisite finish and polish; and if a man wishes to exercise his mind in these things, he could not have a better subject to exercise it upon than French prose. Only, the advantage of knowing French would be that when he goes to Paris, he would be able to order his dinner at the cafe, and to squabble over his bill without making himself a laughing stock to every one present. But all this must be put aside, and the youth must be put through the Greek languages, the very character of which he is almost sure to forget before he is thirty years of age. There is nothing more absurd than the attempt to untie things that have never been tied. If language had been constructed on general principles, if it was made this way, that a number of wise men met together had laid down a quantity of rules, such for instance, as that the verb should always agree with its nominative, and that the verb should govern the accusative, and so on, and then the whole thing had been made like Euclid, according to these rules, and moulded in that way, what had been tied we could untie—the language having been put together in that way we could analyze it back into the rules. But language was not made in that way. Language grew, we know not how,