



VOL. I., No. 6.

TERMS: \$1.00 PER ANNUM, IN ADVANCE.

McGILL COLLEGE, MONTREAL, MARCH 1ST, 1874.

Classics in the Elective System.

The Republic of Letters which has for upwards of two centuries enjoyed unbroken peace, seems at last destined to submit to the agitation which revolutionary ideas on the subject of education are bringing about.

In the hands of a number of strenuous opponents to the present system of teaching, a new philosophy seems likely to supersede the theory that has hitherto recognized the efficacy of the classics as a main branch of liberal culture. It is to the mind that these reformers regard as a means of training the youthful student the foremost place; a study which is no longer to be done away with, at any rate to yield its prominence to a variety of subjects which are thought better adapted to the young philosopher, scientist, moralist, artist, or whatever other class may wish to obtain rudimentary ideas in its own especial branch.

Leaving for the present the question of the worthiness or unworthiness of the effete Latin Grammar to be distinguished by the side of the great modern improvements in elementary school teaching which the above titles imply, let us see in what direction the Commissioners for Education in the twentieth century will develop their new philosophy.

Every one has seen the shilling scientific manuals on physics, chemistry, physiology, etc., which are being daily published, and every one of course recognizes in these the instruments by which the "young idea" will be taught "to shoot;" the text books which are hereafter to take the place of the old grammars, geographies, and perhaps even spelling books. In case there should be found in the reformed school such a prodigy as a young linguist, provision will be made for such a one by the invention of improved Greek and Latin grammars (written in English) with which it will be his laborious task to form a close acquaintance, in spite of the difficulties which beset his path, for very little encouragement is given to such studies in these days.

Matriculated into a college where the elective system prevails, this unambitious youth will be found as at school a solitary exception among his fellow students, devoting his time to the classics with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow—joy at finding that there still exists a professor of what are no longer the *litteræ humaniores*; sorrow to think that his worthy instructor is soon to be dethroned, because it does not pay to support a chair for the benefit of one student per annum. Thus, after a three years' course, undistinguished by scholarships or honours (the only road to these now is through science and art), he will graduate and enter that band of pedants who, living the life of hermits as useless members of society, will do their best to secure the languages of Greece and Rome from perpetual oblivion.

But

"amato quæramus seria ludo."

for though it would seem as if we had already been taking a serious view of the case, yet the fate to which the gloomy picture above depicted would consign the writings of the ancients cannot be denied, (yet as we hope) as anything but mere *ludos*. It cannot would introduce into the schools by reducing the higher education to elementary teaching, will eventually lead to very little attention being devoted to the rudiments of classical learning. For it will be readily admitted that unless the Latin grammar is forced upon boys at school, such a dry subject would never be the natural choice of the youthful mind; and experience shows that such a study begun late in life avails very little in its perfection.

To how many of our undergraduates is it a source of regret that the little care bestowed upon the elements in early life has at a later stage left them at the mercy of the questionable English of Bohn's translations? And when we consider that to obtain a thorough knowledge of Latin and Greek implies ten years' constant application, it will appear that no one who has not carefully studied the classics at school (as of course no one would, under the new system) will continue them as a speciality at a college where these are not a compulsory branch of study. The consequence of which would be that soon the languages of Greece and Rome would cease to be studied at all, and dead would they become indeed.

If this consummation is desired, the new theorists on educational science are of course setting the right way to work, but if it is intended that the classics shall form part of the electives of, instead of being totally abolished from, a college curriculum, then let the Latin and Greek grammars form as much a portion of elementary teaching as ever they did when on them was built up the superstructure of mental culture which enabled men on passing out of their Universities to deal with the practical affairs of life.

But what are the advantages (the disadvantages more easily suggest themselves) of thus making the classics a subordinate instead of, as heretofore, a primary instrument in a liberal education? The process by which these advantages are sought is analogous to that of undermining a magnificent edifice which has withstood the storms of ages for the purpose of erecting on its site a less substantial, but perhaps a more useful building. It is precisely in this light that the plans of the present day look upon a University education, instead of making it subservient to some ulterior object, instead of making it, as it has hitherto been, an instrument of intellectual culture—a means of developing the faculties of the mind.

It is at the element of usefulness (other than that implied in the term liberal), combined with this culture, that they would aim, by giving the useless classics a secondary place in a system which shall be more practical in its tendency than the educational scheme of the past. Those are ready, no doubt, who would at once do away with classical learning; but all will not readily consent to the abolition, or even the partial neglect of the study