

# THE STUDY OF CLASSICS.

## AN ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE ITS TRUE EDUCATIONAL POSITION.

BY W. S. MILNER, ESQ., M.A., CLASSICAL MASTER, C. I., LINDSAY.

(Continued from December No.)

ONE might trace the English novel back in the same way, but after all the special students are the few, and the liberally educated the ideal many whom we wish to create. In reply to this argument from development, we feel like saying "Good sentences and well pronounced." But though it is mildly interesting to know that our coffee was picked in Java, shipped by the Suez Canal to Liverpool, and thence distributed to us, it might have come through fewer hands, by a shorter route, and been the better for it. And this reply would be based on a sound principle. For the aim we have in view is growth—self-development. Avarice of knowledge is not less dwarfing than avarice of riches. Down the main highway of letters, hastening past by-path meadows we seek the fellowship of the great of the earth, and the well-rounded life that can spring only from this wholesome, sweet and rich communion. It is in their own tongue that we must "question skillfully." "They talk according to the wit of their companions." He lives well who is much with his Homer, Æschylus, Sophocles, Plato, Milton and Shakespeare. Of these Shakespeare alone can we really know without Greek. If we add Dante he would himself plead for Virgil, his "faithful companion."

Before leaving this tempting subject let us look at our own modern poetry. The form of much of it is determined by Greek influence, but

much more the spirit of it. The influence of Greek upon pure literature has never been so really great and vital as to-day: and it is increasing. It may be that the great laws of the beautiful are more earnestly sought and more clearly apprehended than before, but explain it as we will, it is hard to conceive how, with a solely modern culture, one can enter into the spirit of Matthew Arnold, Swinburne, the Morriszes, Tennyson and Browning. In the highest modern poetry what subtle reminiscences of the classics everywhere abound! They come upon us often in out-of-the-way places when we least look for them, as, "Strong soul, By what shore tarriest thou now?" in "Rugby Chapel," or "the sense of tears in human things" (*sunt lacrimæ rerum*) in Matthew Arnold's poem to his dog. Mr. Stedman's admirable chapter on Tennyson's indebtedness to Theocritus is only a specimen of what could be done for many another Victorian poet. To take a liberty with George Eliot's metaphor, such passages as these are the mother tongue of the memory, and affect us strangely like old songs or sweet smells of earth.

That the English and classical literatures are the greatest of all literatures I believe we all admit, but that literature is the greatest of all human studies, men are not equally persuaded. Yet such it is. How deeply seated is the pernicious notion that literature means books! Literature is not books, but life—life and human culture—life in its richest and noblest