

lay Egina, before me Megara, on my right Piræus, on my left Corinth. These cities, once so flourishing, now lie prostrate and demolished before my eyes. I thought—Are we little mortals afflicted when one of us perishes, whose life must be brief, when in one place lie the corpses of so many towns? That is one way of looking at the question. I have been in the same place, and thought—How many irretrievable years of my life have I spent in reading the wars, and intrigues, and revolutions of those little towns, the whole of which may be taken in a single glance from the Acropolis of Athens, and which would not make a decently-sized English county. I think that reflection must force itself on the mind of any one who has gone to Greece and seen the wonderfully small scale on which these republics were laid out to which the best years of our life are almost exclusively devoted. Then, gentlemen, there is another great fault in the excessive portion of our youth which is devoted to the study of antiquity—and that is, that the very conception of knowledge wants entirely that which is our leading conception in the present day. I do not think you will find anywhere, in the study of antiquity, that which is now in everybody's mind—the idea of progress. The notion of the ancients was that knowledge was a sort of permanent fixed quantity, that it could not well be increased, that it was to be sought for; and if a man wanted to seek for knowledge, he did not sit down to interrogate nature, and study her phenomena, and analyse and inquire; but he put on his seven league boots and travelled off to Egypt or Persia, or some place at far as he possibly could, in the expectation of finding some wise man there to tell him all about it. That was the case with Thales, Plato himself, all the great men of antiquity. Now, it is no small fault in a system of education that it withholds from youth the conception which is the key of all modern society: that we are not to look at things as stationary, but to look at the human race as having flowed like a glacier perpetually in motion, always going on from good to better, or better to worse, as the case may be. This conception of progress, of change and development that never cease, although we may not be able to mark it day by day, is entirely wanting, as far as I am aware, in the antique world; and I think it is not too much to ask that the idea should, among others, be imparted to youth before they give so very much time to the study of a state of society in which it is wholly wanting. I won't detain you with any criticisms on the morals and metaphysics of the ancients. I suspect they know about as much about mental science as we do—neither much more nor much less; and, without speaking disrespectfully of them, all I would say is that among them—I won't say what it is among us—no two of them were of the same opinion. (Laughter.) We are dosed with antiquities. We are expected to know how many archons there were at Athens though we probably do not know how many Lords of the Treasury there are in London. The pupil must now all about their courts, though he hardly knows the names of his own. He must be dosed with the laws and institutions of the ancients, things exceedingly repulsive to the youthful minds, and things only valuable for comparison with our own institutions, of which institution he is kept in profound ignorance. Another thing not a little irritating is ancient geography. A large portion of time is spent in studying the divisions of countries that have long since ceased to exist, or to have a practical bearing on the affairs of the world. Of course, if you are to study ancient history minutely, these things must be learned; but it is melancholy to think how much modern geography is sacrificed to this. There is nothing which is more neglected than geography. I have been, as you are aware, in Australia; but it is very rarely, indeed, that I have found any one able to tell me what and where the colonies of Australia are, unless they have been there, or have some relations there. The island of Java is said to have been given up by Lord Castlereagh, at the Congress of Vienna to the Dutch, because he could not find it on the map, and he was ashamed to confess his ignorance. (Great laughter.) I remember hearing a very eminent member of the House of Commons indeed—I will not venture to mention his name—who made a speech in which it was quite manifest to me that he thought Upper Canada was the province nearest the mouth of the St. Lawrence, and that Lower Canada was a province higher up the river. (A laugh.) And if I were to tell you the name of that gentlemen you would be indeed astonished. Well, we are going to make an expedition to Abyssinia. The whole thing turns upon the nature of the country. What do we know about it? There is a great deal to be known about it. Many persons have visited it, and written upon it, but what are we taught about it? It is as much as a man can do to find where Abyssinia is on the map, let alone the finding of a single town in it. I have amused myself with trying to ascertain what people know on the subject, and I have hardly found any one who could point out Gondar, the capital of the country, on the map. Yet it is surely as important to know the place where our operations will soon be directed, as it is to know that Halicarnassus was the capital of Icaria, or that there were twenty-three cities of the Volscians in the Campagna of Rome. I will give you one more instance, and it is from the Bible, and in regard to which you might have supposed better things. (A laugh.) You are all aware that, in last session of Parliament, Mr. Bright very facetiously denominated certain gentlemen by a name derived from a cave. (Laughter and cheers.) Well, I assure you, gentlemen, there was not one person I met in twenty—and I speak of people of education—who knew anything about the cave of Adullam—(loud laughter)—and I was under the melancholy and degrading necessity of explaining

to them what it meant, and thus pointing the arrow that was aimed at my own breast. (Great laughter and cheers.) After all, gentlemen, education is a preparation for actual life, and there is no doubt the memory is exercised and the faculties sharpened by these studies to some degree. But, as I have said, there is nothing so valuable for a man as to avoid credulity in the transactions of the world. If he discounts a bill, he should make inquiry before he does so. But the danger of this kind of study is, that our attention being fixed so much on the words in those books, we are apt to take everything that is in these books for granted. We never were taught in my time to weigh two statements. We found one statement in Thucydides, a contemporary with the event, and a statement in Cornelius Nepos, who wrote 500 years after, but I never remember our being instructed or having it suggested to us that the statement of Cornelius Nepos was not quite as good as the statement of Thucydides. And so with other things. Taking the dead languages as a subject of study in this way precludes very much that habit of mind which consists in weighing probabilities, which is one of the most useful habits to which we can attain. Well, then, I will not urge this any further. I'll just take the liberty of giving you a short catalogue of the things which a very highly educated man—a man who has received the best education an Englishman can get—may be in total ignorance of. He probably will know nothing whatever of the anatomy of his own body; he will not have the slightest idea of the difference between his veins and his arteries, or whether the spleen is on the right side or the left. In the next place, he will have no such thing as education in the simplest truths of physics; he will not be able to explain the barometer or the thermometer; nothing of the simplest law of animal or vegetable life; he may know nothing whatever of arithmetic; and that defect sticks to him all through life. He knows nothing whatever of accounts, he knows not the meaning of book-keeping or double entry, or of a common debtor and creditor account—all that is absolutely unintelligible to him, and all through the want of early teaching that remains to him all through life. He writes an execrable hand; for perhaps the most important accomplishment a man can have is totally neglected. He may be very deficient in spelling. I know a most eminent man who took a first-class honour at Oxford, and one of the things by which he got it was an English essay, in which there were forty-six words misspelt. He need know nothing whatever at modern geography or that of his own country. He need not know anything whatever of the history of England. I knew an instance not long ago of a gentleman who obtained high honours of a university, and became a contributor to a periodical, and who, when it was suggested to him by the gentlemen who managed it that he should illustrate some fact by reference to Lord Melbourne's Ministry, said he had never heard of Lord Melbourne's Ministry. (Loud laughter and applause.) He need know nothing whatever of modern history or how the present polity of Europe came into effect; he need know nothing of mediæval history, and that has become a matter of most serious importance, because, as we all know the great schisms that have arisen in the Church of England have come from people forming most exaggerated and absurd ideas of the delightful perfection of everything in that dreadful period, the middle ages; and they have done so from sheer ignorance of that which they ought to know, and they have actually become persuaded that the best thing modern society, with all its appliances and improvements, could do, would be to return as far as possible to the state of things that existed when the first Crusade was undertaken. (Great laughter.) There is another most melancholy thing, and that is the utter ignorance of the antiquities and laws of England. He may know the antiquities and laws of Greece and Rome, but of the English antiquities and laws, which are bound up with our freedom and our everyday business, he knows nothing whatever. We have, I may say boldly, a literature unparalleled in the world. (Applause.) Which of our great classical authors is a young man required to read in order to obtain to the highest honours which our educational institutions can give him. He studies, in the most minute manner, the literature of Greece and Rome, but as for Chaucer, Spenser, or any of our earlier classics, or the great dramatists and writers of the reigns of Elizabeth and Charles I.; it never occurs to him to read; and the consequence is that the language is impoverished. The noble English of our forefathers drops out of use, and the minds of our young men are employed in stringing a few words out of the Latin poets into execrable hexameters. Then, as to modern languages, there is some feeble attempt being made to teach them now, but nothing effectual; and surely if the English language is to have a preference over modern languages, modern languages ought also to have a preference over the ancient. I have been abroad with a party of half a dozen first-class Oxford men, none of whom could speak a word of French or German to order anything we wanted; and if the waiter had not been better educated than we were—(loud laughter)—and known some other language than his own, we might all have starved. (Laughter.) I think, then, you will agree with me, that, as Dr. Johnson said of the provisions in the Highland inn, "The negative catalogue is very copious"—(Laughter)—I therefore sum up what I have to say on this point by this remark, that our education does not communicate knowledge; that it does not communicate to us the means of obtaining knowledge, and that it does not communicate to us the means of communicating knowledge. These three capital deficiencies are, I think, undoubted; and what makes this so painful to us is, when one thinks of the enormous quantity of things worth