

the immediate end set before them was, to the majority, alike unattainable and valueless. What wonder is it that so many of them have grown up to despise culture, and to disbelieve in the necessity for any kind of intellectual effort?

On the very day on which I am writing these words, it has been my fortune to meet in succession three old Public School boys, two of whom had been pupils of my own. Nothing could be more widely diverse than the general character of their lives; yet each of them possessed different ability, and each of them had worked with special diligence. One of them, formerly a lieutenant in the army, had emigrated to South America, and had just returned from his home on one of the central Pampas of the Argentine Confederation. The second was a young Oxonian of private fortune, and distinguished talents, who, after winning the highest honours of his University, was devoting himself to the careful cultivation of his intellectual gifts. The third was a writer of rank and reputation, a poet, a critic, and a man of many accomplishments, familiar with every phase of English and continental thought. One and all they lamented the hours fruitlessly squandered over Latin verse. The young sheep-farmer of the Pampas groaned with good-humoured despair over the continuous misery they had caused him. The Oxford First Classman, though he had cultivated composition with taste and success, declared, after deliberate thought, that he could not attribute to the time spent over it, a single intellectual advantage. The man of letters expressed himself in language so forcible and decided, that I thought it worth while to quote his testimony *verbatim*:—"I was," he says, "at three private schools before going to—, where I had the advantage of the private tuition of an able, accomplished, and most assiduous teacher, besides all the other appliances and means, to boot, of the school, at a time when it was generally regarded as a model Public School. And yet, through all those years, I learnt nothing whatever but a general disinclination to learn anything, and a special loathing for Latin verse. Nothing of the simplest elements of a single science,—nothing of my own language—nothing even which tended to facilitate the subsequent learning of what was not learnt then,—nothing which has been of the slightest use to me in after life—no accomplishment which added to the enjoyment, and no knowledge which has enlarged the utility or diminished the difficulties of life by so much as one inch. But the new-comers will be better off than their predecessors. I hear that something of music, something of botany, and of other sciences, is now taught at— I am sincerely thankful for this for my boy's sake, but it is all too late for me."

Familiar with such testimonies from constant experience, is it surprising that I have used my best efforts, (and mean to use them still), to shake to the ground the whole system of universal and compulsory verse manufacture; or that I regard the results which it produces with a sorrow which is not unmingled with disgust? One school at least, (1) has had the courage to be the first in rejecting for ever this pernicious absurdity; and I believe that thereby it has earned the gratitude of the present generation, and will deserve the yet warmer admiration of the future. But let me entreat the powerful aid of the Universities to help us in thus infusing fresh truth and vigour and reality into the education of England. Much they have already done; but they are liable to be misled by seeing the ships which reach the port, and forgetting the numberless and melancholy wrecks which strew the shore. They cannot however any longer plead ignorance of the effect produced by their extravagant patronage of verse-composition upon thousands of youths who are never destined to enter their walls. Let them by all means retain prizes to reward the ingenuity of a few advanced scholars; but, until they have ceased to render verses an essential requisite, either for entrance-scholarships or for their classical examinations,—until they at least counterbalance, by alternative papers, the immense preponderance which they have hitherto given to what

has often been mere correct nullity, or imitative knack,—they are doing much to injure, in the opinion of many, (and those not the least entitled to be heard), that proud and legitimate position to which they should ever aspire of leading and moulding with a farsighted wisdom the higher education of that country to which they owe their splendid revenues and their elevated rank.

Let the Colleges, then, boldly loosen these gilded and fantastic chains which were forged in an age of logomachy, and tightened in an age of artificiality and retrogression. Let them determine more decidedly, and avow more distinctly, that verses are not essential for scholarships or for honours. When they have done so, we shall no longer hear of classical teaching degraded into recommendations to treasure up particular words and phrases "with a view to using them in your composition." Youths of robust minds will no longer be alienated from classical study, or diverted from good reading to bad writing; nor will they be forced to waste over Tibullus and Ovid the time which might have been devoted to Plato and Thucydides. I have even heard of Cambridge scholars who toiled through Ausonius, Silius Italicus, *et tous ces garçons-là*, in the hope of picking up here and there some gaudy epithet, some sonorous combination some rhetorical figure which might "pay" in a set of verses for the Tripos or for a Prize. I have known even boys who thought it necessary to bathe themselves, by daily repetition, with the soft atmosphere of the "Amores" in order to improve their Latin verse, even if it were at the expense of all simplicity and ingenuousness of mind. Some of them reaped their reward in University applause, and afterwards in the wanderings of an enervated imagination and in the over-refinement of an intellect at once fastidious and weak.

Could it be otherwise? I have been censured for saying that, in this elegant trifling, success was often more deplorable than failure; but what was derided as an epigram I most deliberately and determinedly repeat as a truth of experience. I have known cases in which a fair intellect was visibly weakened and demoralised,—rendering visibly smaller and shallower,—by an excessive admiration for classical composition. But, as one may not quote individual cases, let us take *instantiæ ostensiva* of the fact as illustrated by the tendency of three distinct periods of human history. For there *have* been periods ere now, in which verse-writing and style-polishing have formed the main part of youthful education, and by glancing at these periods we can see in large the natural effects which such an education is calculated to produce.

Take for instance the age of Nero, during which, in the countless schools of rhetoricians, Grammar and Philology were everything, Philosophy nothing. What was the result? Never since the world began was there less invention or more men who taught the art of inventing. Never was the style of even those writers who had the gift of genius more pedantic or more obscure. Never was the degradation of the literary character more pitiable or more complete. Occupied from childhood in the art of writing verses, in which they were found to express emotions which they did not feel, and sentiments which they could not understand, what wonder that the poets ended by going off into emulous raptures at the beauty of lap-dogs, and invocations of all the gods and goddesses to take charge of a minion's hair? What wonder that they hid the sterility of their ideas under the exuberance of their words, and misook literary contortions for original achievements? When merely secondary and external facts of form and metre were thought to constitute the essence of verse, no wonder that "receipts for making poetry were given like receipts for making *Eau de Cologne*." (1) The thoughts of the rising generation resolved themselves into a flux of words; and who shall tell us what single benefit the world has gained from whole ages of such empty talk,—from the "*calamistris*" of Mæcenæ and the "*timidus*" of Gallio, down to the florid and tasteless declamations of a Libanius and a Julian?

(1) Harrow.

(1) This whole subject has been admirably treated by M. Nisard, in his *Poètes de la Décadence*, from whom I have here borrowed a phrase.