

may be pointed out in the most vigorous language, and with the most conclusive reasoning, and yet remain utterly unheeded for;—

Since man from beastly 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,  
As fancy opens the quick springs of sense,  
We ply the memory, we load the brain,  
Bind rebel wit, and double chain on chain,  
Confine the thought, to exercise the breath  
And keep them in the pale of words till death.

(Applause.) Well then, gentlemen, I think it is quite evident that it is a poor and imperfect conception of education that should limit it to the learning of any language whatsoever. But, surely, if we are to make the acquisition of languages a part of education, it should be the language we are most concerned with, and I must be permitted to say that under my science of ponderation which I propose to establish, I think English has a prior claim to Latin. I do not disparage Latin and Greek; but I speak of what is most important and what ought to be taken first, and I think it is most melancholy the ignorance of their own literature and language in which our best educated of young men are brought up. Latin, of course, is of very great use. It is the only means of obtaining a considerable amount of information which is to be found in that language, and is not to be found elsewhere. It has also a noble literature of its own, and is a key to the knowledge of many of the modern languages. Therefore, it is undoubtedly a study of very high importance, and we must always remember that those persons who have been the models of all ages for knowledge of language, and for force, and vigour, and felicity of expression—the Greeks, I mean—knew no language but their own. (Applause) The Romans learned two languages—Latin and Greek—and they learned just enough Greek to make them neglect their Latin; and the consequence was, that their literature is inexpressibly inferior to that of the race that came before them who knew but one language. Well, but, gentlemen, allow that we are to teach Latin and Greek, only see how we set about it! It is no joke to learn Latin and Greek; but it is a joke compared to learning Greek and Latin grammar, as it is called. The grammar is one thing, the language is another; and it is so infinitely more difficult to learn the grammar than the language, than I quite agree with Heine, the German witt—"How fortunate the Romans were that they did not learn the Latin grammar, because if they had done so, they never could have had time to conquer the world." (Laughter and applause) Montaigne, three hundred years ago, saw this, and exposed it most forcibly, pointing out how easy it was to learn Latin colloquially, with very little grammar, and how he, without the lash, and by merely being taught and answering in it, became able in a few years to speak as good and pure Latin as any schoolmaster. But, then, that would not answer the purpose, because it is said you must discipline the mind; and therefore the boy is put through the torture of the grammar, which he is supposed to learn by heart, and every word and syllable of which he forgets before he is twenty years of age. There is a sort of worship inutility in this matter. It seems as if it was thought something very fine to learn something that cannot by any possibility do a man any good—(laughter)

"The languages, especially the dead—  
All sciences, especially the abstruse—  
The arts, at least all such as could be said  
To be the most remote from common use."

(Laughter.) It is, I think, the idea of the pedantic mind that a thing cannot be good for education, cannot be a good discipline of the mind, unless it is something that will be utterly useless in future life. Now, I do not think so. I take a familiar instance. There is no doubt that Greek is a language of wonderful felicity of expression. But what can be more beautiful, what more refined, what would more exercise the tastes or the faculties of a person than the study of French prose, carried to the perfection to which it is carried by Prevost Paradol, Sainte Beuve, and the great masters of the language? We have nothing that can approach to it in England; we have nothing of the exquisite finish and polish; and if a man wants to exercise his mind in such things, he cannot find a better thing to exercise it in than French prose, only he would have this disadvantage, that when he goes to Paris he would be able to order his dinner at the *café* without squabbling over his bill, and without making himself the laughing-stock of everybody who is there; and therefore he must be put through some discipline in the Greek language, every character of which he is sure to forget before he is thirty years of age. Now, gentlemen, it depends upon what you want to make. If you think the great object of the education of mankind is to make them sophists and poetasters and schoolmasters, no doubt we are going the right way to work: but if you think it is to train them for the business of life, I submit to you, in the words of Sydney Smith, whether we have not had a little too much Latin and Greek. If we are to have them, they ought to be taught on a very different system. There is nothing more absurd than the attempt to untie knots that have never been tied. If language had been constructed on general rules—if it had been made in this way, that a number of wise men met and laid down a quantity of rules, such as, for instance, that the nominative case should always agree with the verb, and the verb govern the accusative—and if language had been made and modelled on the principles of

Euclid—then what had been tied we could have untied, and language having been put together in that way, we should have analysed it into the rules which had been laid down. But language was not made in that way. Language grew, we know not how, like a tree or a plant; and, therefore, when you are trying to resolve that into general rules which never was framed on general rules, you are sowing the sand, you can never hope to do it, and the result is that after one's years have been made miserable by being crammed with these enormous rules of grammar, the exceptions are always as numerous as the rule, and you never know whether the rule applies or not. Well, gentlemen, there is another thing I enter my protest against—and that is, Latin verses. I do not think the history of poets is so prosperous that the end and object of mankind are to be the making of as many young people as possible poets and poetasters. (Laughter.) Probably the worst of all the little follies of society a man can have is that of scribbling verses. And yet, years of our lives are taken up in the attempt to teach us to write Latin verses, which after all, are generally a cento of expressions stolen out of different authors—the very meaning of which one does not understand. I am quite sure I have been highly commended for verses I could not construe myself. (Laughter) And this, of course, gives a most unfair predominance to boys who have been taught that, because it is an act so absurd and so repulsive that I believe no one was ever known to acquire it late in life. It is an accomplishment that must be obtained early, if it is to be obtained at all, and I know young men who have been prevented gaining honour for great classical ability because they had never possessed the knack of stringing words together which are called Latin verses. I hope there is a movement going on against it; I do hope, at any rate, that we shall get rid of it. There is another thing almost equally absurd, and that is in learning the language. I consider a man understands a language when he can read with fluency and with ease a good, plain, straightforward author who writes grammatically and sensibly. Well, that is comparatively soon done in Latin and Greek, if that is all that is wanted; but that is not half enough. There is not enough torture in that. It is very simple. But what you must do is this—you must take a passage which is hopelessly corrupt, where the amanuensis has gone to sleep or been tipsy, or dropped a line, or something or other; and you must read two or three pages of notes of all the wisest men that have read this passage, written in bad Latin, with their idea of how it ought to be reformed, and then you must give your opinion on it. I feel certain that if Æschylus should come to life again he would be easily plucked at any Oxford examination in one of his own tragedies; and as for Homer, I am not quite sure if he knew the difference between the nominative and accusative case, or had ever heard of a verb. Indeed, the past years of our life are spent in a profitless analysis of those works that were produced by men utterly unconscious of the rules we are endeavouring to elicit from them. Well, gentlemen, I have nothing more to say on that point, and I proceed to another thing which has always struck me very forcibly, and that is the immense period of time given to ancient history. Do not misunderstand me. Ancient history is a very important matter and a very beautiful study, but it is not so important as modern history, and it does not bear so much on our transactions. Consider what it is. Ancient history has two phases—the one is a monarchy, the other is a municipality. The notion of a large community existing by virtue of a popular Government extending beyond the bonds of a single town never entered into the mind of the ancients, so that the best years of our lives are spent in studying history in which that which makes the difference between modern and ancient society—the leading characteristic of our society—that principle of representation which has made it possible in some degree to unite the existence of a large country with the existence of a certain amount of freedom—that principle is utterly unknown in the history that we study. The Roman empire was established from the necessity of the case; because, when Rome became too great to be a municipality, the ancients knew of no other means than to place the Caesar, a tyrant, over the whole body. The idea of doing as we do, of sending representatives from different provinces to meet in Rome, and consult for the general welfare, never occurred to them. It was a discovery of later times, and yet it is to these histories, which want the very essential of modern history, that one thing which is its leading characteristic, that the best years of our life are devoted. I do not say time is thrown away, but it is melancholy to reflect that this history is not taught as an adjunct to, but a substitute for the knowledge of modern history. If a man has obtained a knowledge of modern and mediæval history, it is most valuable, no doubt, that he should have a knowledge of those communities with which to compare it, but if he has not a knowledge of modern history, what avails all this? He has not the means of comparison, and the study becomes profitless and useless. Even that state has utterly passed away. It perished, never to return, with the fall of the Roman empire, and on its ruins sprang up a new state of things—the feudal system, and the politics of the middle ages, which have ripened in the present state of things, as we have it now. Of all that our youth know nothing. They are taught nothing whatever of it. The subject is never brought before them, and their attention is confined to the squabbles, and wars, and intrigues of petty republics, the whole number of which would hardly amount to as many people as this great city. There is a well-known passage in a letter from one of his friends to Cicero, in which he endeavours to console him for the death of his daughter Tullia—"Behind me