

this is a good way to learn Greek and Latin, to demonstrate its usefulness by themselves acquiring some other language—say Persian or Sanskrit—in the same way. When they know a dozen Persian and Sanskrit words, and have laboriously toiled through, say a hundred lines of Firdausi or the Hitopadésa, let them be set down for five or six hours every week for some years to produce epic lines in the style of the Sháh-námah, or love poems, in the S'loka or Indra-vajrá metres. Probably, before their demonstration is complete, this astonishing theory of education will have perished in the unspeakable weariness which will be caused by its practical application.

But as there are men who find *something* to urge on behalf of everything which exists, let us now proceed to consider the argument put forward in defence of these "habits of composition" into which we have supinely drifted. Let people judge of the system from the calibre of the only arguments adduced in its favour. For myself, I can only say that, after years of familiarity with the subject, I have been unable to get straightforward answers even to questions so simple as these:—Are Greek and Latin verses taught in order that they may be learnt, or that something else may be learnt by their means? Is the end in view in any way homologous to the process adopted? And if so, is that end produced in the many who, being taught verses, never learn them, or in the very few who do?

I. First, it is argued, that the Schools must follow the direction of the Universities, and that they must continue to teach Latin verse so long as the Universities reward, with their most splendid and considerable prizes, the accomplishment of producing them.

This may be regarded as the strongest temporary argument in favour of retaining verses,—and astonishingly weak it is. In the first place, the rapid changes which are going on have rendered it but partially true. In the second place, it simply amounts to a reciprocal abnegation of responsibility, since the University professes to reward because the Schools teach, and the Schools to teach because the University rewards. And, thirdly, three-fifths of our boys no longer proceed to the university at all; of the remaining two-fifths not one half ever think of touching verses again; of the small remainder but few gain any university distinction by their means; and even out of the last insignificant residuum, some, as I shall prove hereafter, are rather injured than aided by the entire process. Our plan, therefore, has been justly compared to that of the ostrich, which is said to assist the incubation of the few eggs which it intends to hatch, by heaping up around them a larger number which it intends to addle. How long are we to suffer nine-tenths of our boys to be addled, because it is thought necessary to put them all through a process which shall hatch out of their entire number a few Senior Classics or Craven scholars?

II. But next it is asserted, and I suppose in all seriousness, that verse writing is a good way of learning Greek and Latin! If so, why is it that no one, either in or out of his senses, ever thinks of learning any other language by a similar process? Even to Greek the practice is applied with a timidity which shows the incipient triumph of common sense; for Greek verses, though begun far too early, are still postponed to a much later period than Latin, and yet our Greek scholarship is beyond all comparison superior to anything which we have attained in the sister tongue. And a method so entirely unique ought at least to produce the evidence of magical success, yet, it is admitted on all hands to end, as regards the mass, in signal failure. Certain it is that in continental schools, where verses are either very slightly practised, or not at all, I have not only heard boys converse in Latin with perfect fluency—an accomplishment in which even our best scholars are needlessly deficient—but even turn into good classical Latin long German sentences, which would have surpassed the powers of English boys far older than themselves. I shall not readily forget the quickness and accuracy with which the boys at the Schulpforta—the Eton of Prussia—rendered in Latin, *vivâ voce*, involved periods with which I should never have dreamt of testing the attainments of English

boys in a corresponding division of the school. In short, that Latin verse writing is a valuable or expeditious method of teaching Latin to miscellaneous groups of boys, is a fallacy which ought long to have been exploded from the minds of all observant and unprejudiced men.

III. But composition teaches the quantity of words, and furnishes the best means of acquiring taste and style.

Of *quantity* I need hardly speak. It can be *amply* taught by reading aloud. That years or drill in verses should be deemed necessary to teach it, only proves the extent to which an unreasoning pedantry—a pedantry of the worst and most objectionable kind—has affected our entire conception of the relative proportion of things. I cannot pretend to share in the traditional horror of a false quantity. I have long sincerely repented for having despised a dissenting minister who talked to me as a boy about the "gravâmen" of an offence. It is deplorable to hear a petty scholar triumphing with all the airs of conscious superiority over some great man who has substituted a long for a short, or a short for a long. I cannot affect to think one atom the worse of Burke's imperial genius, because he said "rectigal" in the House of Commons; or of the Duke of Wellington's intellect because he turned round, when reading his Chancellor's address at Oxford, to whisper, "I say, is it Jacobus or Jacobus?" I was taught as a schoolboy that a false quantity makes a man ridiculous, and sticks to him for life; and the dictum reminds me of St. Augustine's disdainful remark that the Sophists of *his* time thought it as disgraceful to drop the aspirate in *homo* as to hate a man. Considering that our entire method of pronouncing Greek and Latin is radically wrong, I cannot pretend to regard a false quantity in some rare word as otherwise than an entirely venial error, and one of infinitely less consequence than a mis-translation in the rendering of a passage. Those people may hold the reverse who think it worth while to learn Classics in order to understand "graceful quotations from Virgil and Horace" in a House where it would be considered "very bad taste" to quote St. Paul! The death-knell of all such fastidious littleness will be the birth-peal of a nobler and manlier tone of thought.

But into the subject of taste and style it is necessary to enter more at length, because I believe that the fallacy of supposing that they are cultivated by "composition" lies at the root of half the countenance which that practice still receives. Even if the assumption were true, I should say that "taste" is a kind of sensibility which is purchased at a fearful cost if long time and labour be spent in its acquisition. If by "taste" be meant a fine sense of beauty and propriety, *that* is only attainable by moral culture, and by a constant familiarity with what is great in conduct and pure in thought. It is a gift partly due to a certain natural and inborn nobility, and partly to be evolved and fostered by familiarising the mind with all that is lofty and of good report. *This* kind of taste, these fine harmonies in the music of the mind and soul, are certainly not to be won—although I believe that they may be irremediably lost—by grinding boys into a laborious imitation of Propertian prettinesses and Ovidian conceits. But by "taste" something widely different from this is generally implied; viz., a certain delicate fastidiousness, a finical fine-ladyism of the intellect, which I hold to be essentially pernicious. It is an exotic which flourishes most luxuriantly in the thin artificial soil of vain and second-rate minds. It cannot co-exist with robust manliness of conviction or of utterance. It is the disproportionate intellectualism which rejoices in paltry accuracies, while it can condone mighty wrongs. It prizes rhetoric above eloquence; it values manner more than matter. It can pore over an intaglio, but has no eye for a Gothic cathedral. It is the shrinking enemy of all untutored force and irresistible enthusiasm. It is the enthronement of conventionality, the apotheosis of self-satisfaction. "I want you to see," says Felix Holt, "that the creature who has the sensibilities which you call taste, and not the sensibilities which you call opinions, is simply a lower, pettier, sort of being—an insect that notices the shaking of the table, but never notices