

untrue, but the chances are greatly against it. At any rate it can hardly fail to be narrow and illiberal. Ask a disciple of Porson whether it is really the case that the chief object of examining the language of the classical writers is that one may know what the writers have got to say, and he will admit the proposition with so many limitations and modifications as to make it obvious that he hardly admits it at all.

It is quite certain, indeed, that the object which is now intended in the teaching of Latin and Greek must be different from what it was in the days of Queen Elizabeth. At that time, schools and universities made boys learn those languages in order that they might have some acquaintance with the authors who wrote in them. No sane man can assert that the same object is pursued at present, unless he is prepared to allow that it is sought at the avowed cost of sacrificing the many to the few. It is the evident failure to carry out the original intention of classical studies, which has made it necessary to bring more prominently forward the supposed advantages of grammar. If boys, it is felt, cannot in general be brought to get any good from the thoughts of Plato and Homer by their study of the tongue in which they wrote, at all events they will have the advantage of studying the words and constructions which they used. Without altogether denying the truth of this assertion, it is well to remember the position which it takes in the argument. No pleas are more open to suspicion than those which are urged in support of a failing cause. When we have to invent some new doctrine to prop up an institution which originally existed in virtue of a doctrine wholly different, we feel that we are treading at once on treacherous ground. The view that is promulgated may have its merits, but they are not generally found to be the precise merits which suffice to bear up the fabric. When paganism was seen to be untrue, it was said that at all events it was useful. When rotten boroughs were found to interfere with the representation of the country, it was pleaded that at any rate they produced Lord Macaulay. As regards the teaching of Grammar, it sometimes seems as if it would be a good thing to attempt to express distinctly, after the manner of Mr. Charles Buxton in his "Ideas of the Day," the grounds upon which it is based in the minds of those who assert its importance. They seem to fall under three heads: there is the idea that Grammar is useful for the sake of teaching the language; the idea that its difficulties are useful as a moral training; and the idea that it is a desirable object of study for its own sake. We may consider these as being the only ideas generally entertained; for the view, which was expressed last year in a pamphlet by an eminent composer of a School Grammar, to the effect that Grammar and Religion are so closely connected that uniformity in the one is the first step to uniformity in the other, has not been accepted so widely that we need stop to discuss it here. The ideas just mentioned we may proceed to consider in detail.

The first of them we will meet with a direct negative. My Grammar is, of course, meant a formal analysis of usage, in respect of inflexion and syntax. Can it be said that this system of teaching by means of Grammar is the most successful now? It will be remembered that the only question for the moment is how a language may be most quickly learnt. The problem is solved every day by grown up men and women. There is not an Englishman in the country who, if he wanted to learn French, would begin by committing to memory a whole volume of rules and formulæ. By doing so, he would certainly succeed in the end; but he would know that it would be a waste of time and labour. What does the captain of a boat-club at the Universities do, if we want to teach a man to row? Does he keep him practising, on dry land, the motions which he will have to perform, and fixing in his memory the laws which are to guide him when he enters upon work at last? Nothing of the kind. If you wish to make a man row, you will give him an oar and show him how. You will make him feel what it is like; you will make him sit behind a good pattern of the art; you will give him the advice, just as you see that he needs it. There is

nothing in the whole world which is not learnt best by trying, "*Per parlare bene.*" says the old Italian proverb, "*disogno parlare male.*" No doubt, there is necessity for all to practise some rudimentary conception of what the work is likely to be. A man must know which end of the oar he is to hold in his hand, and which to dip in the water. A child cannot do much in the classics till a few simple declensions have been taught him. But the sooner he can begin to "pick up" the language the better. Let him get familiar with the commonest words, and know what they mean in English. Let him translate and retranslate the easiest possible sentences with no grammatical analysis in his head, let certain words in Latin correspond to certain others in English. He will see, as a matter of course, that a nominative comes, syntactically, before a verb; and he will see it far more clearly and truly than if he knew the fact from having learnt it in the form of a rule. If we have once made sure that a boy considers the expression "us are going out," as absurd and grotesque, he not only knows, with regard to the subject of a simple sentence, enough to enable him to learn Latin and Greek without any further teaching on this head; but it may be a question whether he does not know all that there is to be said on the subject. The study of language is, at the present day, the only kind of study which deliberately professes to advance in a direction exactly the reverse of every other branch of human progress. In every other fruitful inquiry, we ascend from phenomena to principles. In classical study alone, we profess to learn principles first, and then advance to facts.

It will be remembered that we are not undervaluing the benefit that the mind may receive from understanding grammatical principles. The question is temporarily narrowed; we are asking only how a language may be most quickly learnt: and we are insisting in reply that it is by cultivating, as soon as possible, a familiarity with its words and sentences, rather than with the principles upon which these are framed and joined. It is a truly painful sight to see a boy sit down to master a set of clumsy rules, of which he will never use half, and never understand the quarter. He is, as almost all boys are, willing to be taught. He is, as very many are, prepared to submit to a reasonable amount of drudgery. He is, we will say, of average ability and endurance. Of such a boy, we will confidently assert that, for the purpose of learning the language to the extent to which he will probably be able to carry it at school and college, the greater part of what he has to learn in most grammars is wholly useless. His time, his temper, his docility, his confidence in his teachers, his desire to improve—all these are sacrificed in order that some analyst, for whose peculiar powers of mind the compilation of his grammar may have been a charming exercise, may not have written in vain. Pedantry gains, and English education suffers.

How then ought a set of boys to be trained, supposing that our immediate object is to make them understand a Latin writer? Plunge them, we answer, at once into the delectus. Let them begin the translation of easy sentences even before they know the declensions by heart. Never give a rule of any kind unless it is one which is clearly and obviously founded upon a collection of instances. Get the meaning accurately, and the grammar may follow as its handmaid. Never let time be wasted at a difficulty. If, when fairly coped with, it is insuperable, give quick and willing help. Be ready to tell liberally, aim at quantity as well as quality; treat inflexions invariably in connection with their meanings. Make your accidence and syntax a result instead of a basis. So far from believing that "*nil desperandum*," be ready to despair very often—give up, that is, an attempt to force intelligence beyond its natural limits. The construction of relatives, for example, is a difficult subject to very young boys. If so, let it wait till they have read more, and added some hundred or so of examples to their store. In short, working always by means of reference to English, advancing regularly from known to unknown, never once allowing a statement to be taken on trust, or an abstract principle to precede its concrete illustration, train boys to know many things