



THE
JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

Devoted to Education, Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Volume XV.

Quebec, Province of Quebec, November, 1871.

No. 11.

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Of Greek and Latin Verse-Composition As a General Branch of Education.

BY THE REV. F. W. FARRAR, M.A., F.R.S.

(Continued from last.)

“..... le triste rôle d'imitateurs, et celui non moins triste de créateurs de choses parfaitement inutiles.”—NISARD, *Poètes de la Décadence*, i. 334.

And what is the daily spectacle presented by the system?—hours upon hours spent by many boys in the moiling evolution of one or two wintry and wooden elegiacs, consisting of halting hexameters and hypermetric pentameters; boys whose utter inability might have been predicted at thirteen, kept at the same galley-work up to eighteen and nineteen, as unprogressive as the seamen who plied the oar on land; and a multitude of Englishmen bitterly regretful, or good-humouredly contemptuous, at the unpractical and fantastic character of their youthful instruction. When we consider how little, at the end, our schoolboys know, and how vast are the regions of science with which they are wholly unacquainted; how valueless is much of their little knowledge, how dangerous is the nature of their ignorance; and,

above all, how rich in fruit might have been those many barren hours which have been lavished on the impotent effort to acquire a merely elegant accomplishment,—then I confess that my regret deepens into sorrow, indignation, and shame. Is it pleasant to know that they first thing of which an old pupil may think, when he meets us in after life, is the little intellectual cause he has for gratitude towards men who occupied his boyhood by teaching him that which he has not only long forgotten, but to reach which he would not now take the trouble to raise his little finger? (1) Knowing this, I cannot but disregard the charges of injustice and exaggeration which have been brought against my exposure of such a system, and I rejoice that a serious effort is now being made to emancipate English boys from a yoke whose “cruel absurdity” (2) neither they nor their fathers have been able to bear. I feel sure that the whole nugatory system will soon totter to its fall. Our sons will know nothing of compulsory verse-making; they will smile at our disproportionate admiration of a petty knack; they will satirize a curriculum of education which proudly vaunted its stigma of inutility, and which frequently produced a profound self-confidence in combination with a very empty mind. In the next generation, at any rate, tutors will not be degraded from powerful intellectual guides into the mechanical encouragers of mere imitation; forced to pay far more attention to words, and phrases, and turns of expression, and tricks of rhetoric, than to solid information and manly thought. Nor will a deadly discouragement be dealt to our faith in boys, and (which is worse) to their own confidence in themselves, by a study in which the powers requisite for success are neither the noblest nor the best powers, so that those who succeed are, in not a few instances, incomparably inferior in all true ability to those who fail.

And even now the English nation has surely a right to demand, that in sending its sons to Public Schools it shall not necessarily be dooming them to seven or eight years of this weary mill-wheel. At least, let them ask those headmasters who still believe that

(1) See Inaugural Address at St. Andrews, by M. E. Grant-Duff Esq. M.P.

(2) Bishop Thirlwall.