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On Teaching by Means of Grammar.

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It may be useful to all persons who are disposed to take a conservative view of any disputed questions to point out that one of two charges may on all occasions be brought against an argument for reform. All topics, except metaphysical ones, have a theoretical and a practical side; and a writer cannot easily discuss both at one and the same time. Nothing then can be simpler than to urge in favour of an existing system, that the theoretical objections to it are not practical, and that the practical objections are not profound. But it is sometimes forgotten that a system may be bad both in theory and in practice at once; or, which is another way of stating the case, the way in which it is worked may be wrong and the reasons for establishing it at all may be wrong also. Those who desire in great measure to remodel English education have, for the most part, views not only as to the substance but as to the manner

of teaching; and these views are fairly separable. The present Essay will relate almost entirely to method. It will assume that other things have at least as much right as the classical languages, to form the basis of modern training, and that it is desirable, nevertheless, that at some age and to some persons classics should still be taught. The question which it will discuss is whether the mode of teaching classics by a laborious preliminary instruction in Grammar is the best mode possible.

Pedantry is not only the commonest vice, and the worst vice, of schoolmasters, but it is one towards which every one who has engaged in the work of teaching must have repeatedly been conscious of a tendency. The work of every profession no doubt takes an undue importance in the eyes of men who devote themselves to it laboriously: but that of a teacher is peculiarly favourable to the development of crotchets. Let a clever man study assiduously the properties of a Greek particle or the ramifications of a theorem in mathematics, and he will be sure to find out some things which have not been found out before, to trace connexions which no one has yet thought of tracing, to illuminate his subject by the relation which he will find it bear to other branches of knowledge. There may be much good in what he does: but he will be more than human if he can help regarding his work as exceptionally interesting and valuable. He will find it fill much of his mind, and thrust itself in front of other branches of study which in reality have equal value: he will give to it a natural emphasis in his own thoughts, and an artificial prominence in the culture which he urges upon others. A kind of paternal solicitude will at any rate add weight to his favourite topic, and personal vanity will not impossibly help it. Now in most other professions a man deals with his equals, sees things in constant varying lights, rubs off his intellectual as well as his social angles. But a teacher is without this advantage. He is not under immediate control; public opinion acts upon him only indirectly and at a long interval of time; he is not at the mercy of those with whom he is brought into contact, and his results are seldom so patent that the connexion of cause and effect can be traced with much precision. There arises as the consequence of this a fixed impression that his own work is the best possible, simply because it has been the most fruitful to himself; an impression not so much irrational as unreasoning. The belief is not necessarily