

*THE STUDY OF CLASSICS AND MODERN
LIBERAL EDUCATION.*



It may seem strange that even at this advanced period of the nineteenth century, and that after hundreds of years during which classics have held such an important place in every curriculum of education, it should be necessary to vindicate the study of ancient literature, and to show that in spite of the immense progress which has been made in scientific discovery, these same classics should still be the object of the labor of students in schools, colleges and universities. But it is so; and a crisis seems to be approaching. On the one side we have the classicists, and on the other the modernists; the former proclaim the rights of Greek and Latin to still occupy the position, which, for so long a period, they have filled amid the applause of all, while the latter say that the time spent in the study of the classics is not in accordance with the spirit of the age, and should be devoted to modern languages, natural sciences, and in general to subjects more useful to a man of our days. That this is an error, I shall endeavor to show, and shall begin by stating clearly in what a liberal education consists, for, from an ignorance of its true nature, all this trouble and discussion between classicists and modernists seems to take its rise.

A liberal education has some bearing on the future and is intended to adapt the student to some office in the world. This education may be general or special. Now the point at issue is to find out whether the student is better fitted by the general training or by the special training or by whatever will be most called into use in his future career. By general education a general result is obtained; by it is produced a strengthening of fundamental qualities and a basis for future superstructure is established. All the powers of a boy's mind are called into play, while in the special training all the faculties of the mind are concentrated upon one or two objects and the result is a dwarfing of the mental potencies which should otherwise have been unfolded before they were brought to exert themselves upon a parti-

cular object. The modernists seem to forget that science is one grand whole, and that the more a man's knowledge is comprehensive the more he is really learned. They accuse the classicists of exclusiveness, while the latter could retort with more truth that this charge should be made against the modernists who aim at driving the Greek and Latin classics from every educational institution, while the classicists affirm that the natural sciences are fellow-labourers with the classics in the field of culture. The latter claim for classics the first place, and in this essay I shall endeavour to prove that they have reason on their side.

During five or six years in America and during as many as ten or eleven years in Europe especially in Germany, for several hours, every week students are busily engaged in passing over Greek and Latin, either prose or verse and yet this time is rightly considered well spent. If we just examine for a moment the work of a translator we shall see what are the powers of mind called into play, while trying to elucidate some difficult passage of the ancient writers. A paragraph, say from Tacitus, is presented to him. He first reads it through, tries to ascertain the general drift of the sense and then proceeds to take sentence by sentence, word by word, till the whole is as clear as the noon-day sun. Nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and verbs are all picked out; their relation to one another is discovered; clauses modifying the subject and the predicate are selected, cases and accidents are identified; combinations and divisions are made; the sentences that precede, and those that follow are examined and their relation with the one under consideration is noted; and then the translator begins to have a distinct knowledge of the writer's meaning. More yet has to be done. The sense is plain to the mind of the translator, but it has to be expressed in the vernacular. A judicious selection of words must be made; and hence a more correct and fuller knowledge of one's mother tongue is attained and a greater power of expression is acquired. If he translates Tacitus he must combine conciseness with