

not been fruitless, and it may now be definitely assumed that our course *must* henceforth be a broader one, and indeed so much broader that many teachers will assert that it must also, as a necessary consequence, be discursive and superficial. I do not here mean to refute this assertion, but I should be sorry even for a moment to seem to give it my assent. For if, without entering on argument, I may venture to assume that *some* value, however slight, will be attached to an opinion founded upon experience, I will beg leave to declare my profound and earnest conviction that, by the frank adoption of wiser and better methods than those which we now employ, we shall be able to teach much more in other subjects without teaching one whit less in those with which we have hitherto been exclusively occupied. At present we send forth a few fine scholars and a multitude of ignorant men: I am convinced we might send forth the same number of scholars, and a large number of men who, while they would know as much or *more* Latin and Greek than the paltry minimum to which they now attain, should not at the same time startle and shock the world by the unnatural profundity of their ignorance respecting all other subjects in heaven and earth. Such a result is neither "Utopian" nor "Quixotic," although, indeed, the first lesson which every reformer should learn is to feel perfectly invulnerable to the censure of those miserable words. But to produce such a result does not rest with schoolmasters alone; it demands the cordial cooperation of parents, and it demands a modification of our present methods and traditions, more sweeping and more unselfish than is immediately probable or perhaps even attainable. Assuming, however, that the hour is ripe for *some* economy of time and method in learning the two ancient languages, it is obvious that one very facile and important means of economy presents itself by the curtailment in some cases,—the total abandonment in a vastly greater number,—of the hours at present squandered over Greek and Latin verse.

The desirability then, nay the imperative necessity, of such a change, is the narrow limit of the question immediately before us; and it is a change which the most enthusiastic advocates of classical education may well dispassionately consider. For composition is a branch of "classics" in which many scholars, otherwise eminent, have but very partially succeeded; to which of all civilized nations England alone attaches any extraordinary importance; which, if it be a very showy, is also a very fallacious test of solid scholarship; which is capable of co-existing with a complete absence of all that makes classical training most valuable; and, lastly, which has tended more than any single cause, perhaps more than all other causes put together to create that profound public dissatisfaction which has brought our entire system into discredit and contempt. It is certain that classical education will soon wither away under the dislike, or be torn up root and branch by the zeal of its opponents, unless our Public School authorities are content to lop off with their own hands the diseased branches which only injure and disfigure a noble tree.

If prejudice were less tenacious, and habit less invincible,—if it were not a common experience that the members of a profession are always the last to welcome necessary innovations,—one would feel amazed that there are learned and able men who still cling to a system of verse-teaching which bears to so many minds the stamp of demonstrable absurdity. Verse-making has been adopted as the best method of teaching Greek and Latin, and has never been systematically applied to the teaching of any other language under the sun. Regarded as an end it is confessedly insignificant; regarded as a means it is notoriously unsuccessful. (1) It has been condemned alike by the learned and by the ignorant, by men of letters and by men of science, by poets and by dullards, by the grave decision of philosophers and by the general voice of the public. Names of the most splendid eminence over a space of two centuries can be quoted

in its condemnation; barely one single poor authority can be adduced in its favour. Cowley, Milton, Bacon, Locke, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Macaulay, Thirlwall, Ruskin, Mill, some of our most learned poets, some of our deepest metaphysicians, some of our most classical historians, some of our most brilliant scholars, are unanimous in speaking of it with indifference or with contempt. Few even of second-rate or mere professional eminence have ventured to uphold it. To this day many bewail the time they frittered away over it, while scarcely any one is found to express the faintest gratitude for any supposed benefit which he has acquired from its compulsory practice.

It is not, however, by the overwhelming force of *à priori* considerations, or external testimonies, that I have long been led to desire the annihilation of verse-composition as a general or necessary element in the teaching of our schools. The force of habit, the natural reluctance to be convinced of the futility of an accomplishment, to the acquisition of which so large a part of my own time had been sacrificed, long enabled me to fight against the weight of condemnatory evidence. It was simple experience, it was constant observation of the system in its actual working, backed by the astounding revelations of the Public School Commissioners, which first revolutionised my own feelings respecting it, and forced me to denounce it before the British Association as a huge gilt wooden idol for whose overthrow I longed. This fact will prove, I trust, that there is nothing rash or unreasonable in my present opposition, and will exonerate me from all appearance of wishing to throw blame or ridicule on those who still hold an opinion which for many years I held myself. If in any part of this Essay I appear to use strong language, let me frankly ask pardon for it beforehand, as having sprung from the pent-up bitterness of twelve years' experience. Those who know what leisure is, and who can afford to while it away in writing Latin Verse, are apt in the beauty of the exotic to forget its costliness. They forget that they are admiring the flowers—and after all they are but fruitless flowers!—of the one productive seed which has here and there survived its countless abortive brethren. The aspect of Latin Verse to the classical scholar who recurs to it as the light amusement of his manhood, is very different from that which it wears to the weary teacher, who has wasted so many of his own and his pupils' precious hours in the hopeless task of attempting to make poets of the many.

Let me premise that I have in view the case, not of the brilliant few, but of the mediocre multitude; and then I will proceed to describe the system as I have seen it actually worked by eminent masters, and as I know it to be still worked in a very large majority of English Public and Private Schools. The system which I choose for description is the one most commonly in use, but by far the larger part of what I have to say will apply equally well to any system whatever.

A parent, applying to enter his son at a Public School, is informed, with much *empressment*, that one of the chief and most important subjects of the entrance examination is LATIN VERSE, both ELEGIACS and LYRICS, and that some knowledge of at least the former is essential to the boy's attaining any but the very lowest position. The same information is duly reverberated on all the teachers of preparatory schools; and they, knowing the difficulty of the accomplishment—an accomplishment which in many cases they themselves have wholly failed to achieve—are driven by necessity to initiate their young recruits as early as possible into the mysteries of the dreadful drill. About the dreary iteration of those preliminary years, I only know by dim report,—by the groans of "grinders" during the period of their labour, and their exclamations of unfeigned delight when the era of their emancipation appeared to be approaching. But at the age of thirteen or fourteen the little victims, duly instructed in LATIN VERSE, make their appearance. The large majority of them—and with them at present it is my sole object to deal—know as well as we know, that they *have* not succeeded, and never, by any possibility, *can* succeed in acquiring the mysterious art. Without a conception of

1 Vide the Report of the Public School Commission.