

# THE ANTIDOTE

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## KEYS AGAIN.

In a recent article we dealt with the subject of keys tangibly; but there are various kinds of openers to which the term may be extended. Many of us are richer in such keys than we are aware. Fortune and education may have put keys into our hands, for which we have by oversight or forgetfulness or sheer stupidity, failed to find locks. It does not seem as if, especially in the matter of education, this were a frequent case. The office of education is not and cannot be to provide us with all the provender, all the working materials our intellects require. Its office is to forge for us the keys with which we can unlock the storehouses for ourselves; and man and boy, people spend ten or twelve years in obtaining such keys, then put them away, then wonder why they ever had them.

Nothing, for instance, is commoner than to hear a man of mature years who, having nothing special to do, has spent all the time since his college days in acquiring a boundless ignorance, wondering what was the good of his learning Latin and Greek, and talking of waste of time in unprofitable studies. He designs this for a proof of latent capacities for greater things than grammar, and it is often accepted as such a proof. It simply means that he cannot put the keys into the locks. Two notable storehouses of human fault to which access was allowed him, remained closed to him; that was not owing to his classical education. Another man whose early floggings had chiefly a mathematical tendency, and who, the moment he became intellectually his own master, said a long farewell to all his triangles and conic sections, demands aloud for what purpose his mind should ever have been oppressed by them, and talks also of

waste time in unprofitable studies. The unused key again. He did not unlock the gate and pass into the far reaching realm of science and discovery; that was not owing to his mathematical education.

There are men who complain of having had the wrong keys given them, but they are of another stamp: they are Apollo sent out to tend sheep, Hercules compelled to sew and spin, together with the hen's ducklings, and the useful camel forced to dance. In most cases it may seem to the discoverer a question whether they are not in fact the gainers by the cross-grained schooling. Just as the tree is the stronger and straighter for having, when a sapling, been propped towards the contrary side from that to which it swayed; but at all events they have other grounds for their complaint than those of the illiterate moralizers who ascribe their knowing nothing to their having been taught something; and if they have let the keys consigned to them by their Alma Maters, of whatever kind, become rusty, they have acquired others and opened doors into regions where their foot treads firmly and is quite at home.

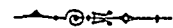
Perhaps the mental waste of keys is most to be seen in the case of modern languages; everybody who pays taxes in these days has a smattering of two two or three. We learn them for the purpose of conversing with the waiters at hotels, although it is well known that the waiters themselves insist upon speaking English; but these are keys to open worlds for us. In spite of the evident risk of harm to the mind, let alone the morals of a half-educated or less than half educated young man under the spell of a strange literature in which, because it is strange and not of the country and people he knows, he has no data wherewith to check the parts, the crude sayings or glowing unreason of his author.

Ladies, of all other sinners, commit the most waste in this direction. To be sure one reason is that they are taught more modern languages to waste than are their male relatives. The more productive cause, however, is the mistaken theory in their education, which counts the art of speech in for-

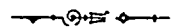
eign tongues as a chief and ultimate object, ignoring altogether the art of having anything worth saying in them. It is difficult to persuade women that knowing more or less several languages is not in itself either a consequence or a cause of superior capacity, except in the linguistic faculty, and that it is more desirable to think soundly in one language than to talk sillily in a dozen. But it would be hard to blame them for an exaggerated estimate of their relative value of linguistic accomplishments in their education, when it is one held by so many of those to whom they are taught to look for guidance, viz: their partners at balls, and their husbands.

Once a lady was being discussed; one gentleman was enthusiastic and rightly so, for the lady was pretty and pleasant. "And she is so clever, you know," he would up. "Is she clever?" dubiously replied a hearer who knew the lady, and who knew also that in the society she frequented, little anecdotes concerning her, founded on a somewhat excessive naivete, scarcely compatible with any form of cleverness, were apt to circulate. "Clever!" exclaimed the other in amazement at the doubt. "Clever! why, she can speak four languages!" And this carried the question. Everybody agreed that a woman who could speak four languages was clever. The lady could do this for she had lived much of her life in foreign countries—she had the keys; nobody asked what she did with them, but it so happened that there was not one language she could think in.

But when we have all learned, men and women, to keep and to use our real and our figurative keys, the golden age will have returned upon the earth, considerably improved, and we shall be a world of sages.



See Missing Word Offer, this issue



### PREPARATORY DISCIPLINE.

"No, I'll not marry. I think I'll become a Sister of Charity."

"You don't know what that means."

"Don't I? Haven't I sat up with you every night from 8 to 1 for three months?"