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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.

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

The belief in a system of education exclusively classical is an "idol of the theatre," which will not easily be obliterated from the enchanted glass of the public judgment. Its defenders have been numerous and energetic; nor have they been slow to retaliate upon their opponents the language of criticism. For many years, they have spoken of educational reformers as "mechanical" and "utilitarian;"—in fact, as mere "Philistines," incapable of forming any high conception of the ends and aim of intellectual culture. All such compliments may be accepted at present with that good-humoured indifference which naturally results from the consciousness of a victorious cause. The roots of the fabled mandrake were said to shriek when it was pulled up from the ground, and the inveterate prejudices of many classical teachers will do the same. There are, however, some stock objections against all criticism of our existing system which will not be applicable to the present Essay. It has been asserted that the critics of "classical education" have generally been men without that experience which is deemed essential to a true insight into the nature of teaching; that they have been cautious enough to refrain from any attempt at reconstructing the edifice which they tried to destroy; and that their complaints

have been of so vague and general a nature as to deprive them of all practical importance. Now, although it will not be my present business to attempt any redistribution of those hours which I consider to be wasted—and often worse than wasted—in the ordinary course of a Public School education, the other objections, at any rate, must be laid aside in any attempt to refute what is here advanced. Although I cannot, indeed, pretend to re-echo the exultant cry of the mystæ, yet, I have been duly initiated into the mysteries. In other words, I speak of things which I know; I come forward with a precise object and a definitive proposition; that proposition is one of an eminently practical character; and it is one to which, in spite of powerful tradition and natural prejudice, I have been gradually driven by long years of laborious experience. I am so desirous to speak on this subject with perfect candour and unreserve that, at the risk of startling on the threshold those readers whom it is my earnest desire to convince, I will say at once that the reform which will here be advocated is the immediate and total abandonment of Greek and Latin verse-writing as a *necessary or general* element in a liberal education, and the large diminution of the extravagant estimation in which this accomplishment has hitherto been held.

It is, of course, an obvious corollary to my proposition that the hours now devoted to "composition" should be assigned to other studies of the highest value, which have hitherto been very partially recognised or very openly ignored. Among these studies are Comparative Philology, History, Modern languages, the Hebrew language, and the language and literature of our own country; but foremost in the weight of its claims is the study of Science—a study so invaluable as a means of intellectual training, and so infinitely important in the result at which it arrives, that the long neglect and strange suspicion with which it has hitherto been treated can only be regarded as a fatal error and a national misfortune.

It is not, however, my present purpose to add anything to the arguments which have been urged elsewhere, respecting the irrefragable claims of some of these studies to demand a place in our curriculum. The question of what ought to be introduced as an essential element in every liberal education is indeed closely connected with the question of what ought to be abandoned. But the labours and reasonings of the last few years have