

English word last session; he did not understand when an allusion was made to Patroclus; to save his life he could not cap a line in the second book of the *Æneid*.

“ Et les moindres défauts de ce grossier génie
Sont ou le pléonasmé, ou la cacophonie.”

How much better to be able to set a common room right upon some mystic conceit of *Æschylus*, or correct a class of boys (out of their Primer) on the gender of *clunis* and *splen*.

It is not, however, the object of this Essay to disparage the knowledge of Latin and Greek. They may be purchased, and often are, at too high a price; but those who have gained them most easily will be least likely to hold them too dear. Montaigne was not a man disposed to shut his eyes to the world around him, because he had learnt to speak Latin before he was able to write French. The advocates of a natural and easy method of classical teaching are sometimes challenged to give instances of the success of their system. It is certainly not easy to do so, for of late years, the grammar writers have had it all their own way, and the one German apostle of a natural mode of teaching finished his career in prison; but the results of the teaching of Jacotot in France and Belgium are such as have never been surpassed, and it will be time enough to pronounce a system impossible, when in learning any modern language we cease to practise it ourselves. At any rate, there is good enough authority for learning Latin in this way. Milton distinctly urges it, and Locke in substance; but it is older than either. “Our most noble Queen Elizabeth,” says Roger Ascham, “never yet took Greek nor Latin grammar in her hand after the first declining of a noun and a verb.” In a year or two, by copious translation and retranslation, she learnt both languages well. It was with Lilly’s Grammar that the more pedantic system came in; and that grammar, as its preface shows, was never originally intended to be learnt consecutively or by rote.

It has been said, with some degree of truth, that learning by heart is the great intellectual vice of boys. Perhaps it would be fairer to say that the tendency is so strong that it is almost certain to be misapplied. With boys of good or average memory—and none others ought to learn classics—the tendency will be directed rightly if they are made to learn examples of construction by heart, and carefully prevented from embodying the doctrines taught them in any set form of words. In the Primer which has lately been put into the hands of the boys at most of the public schools, the first two pages of syntax consist of words of an average length of about three syllables each. Now there is no doubt that a boy of good memory will learn these, in time, to whatever degree of perfection his masters care to enforce; and if they were written backwards he would learn them almost as easily. But the idea that a young boy will ever *think* in polysyllables is almost humorous. The better he knows the words, indeed, the less will be, in many cases, his attempt to attach a meaning to them. The parrot does not only not think, but it even prevents itself from thinking. The pupil who is reading his Euclid will know it less well, for purposes of culture, if he attempts to commit it to memory. What is the reason that we have given up the notion of enforcing the duties of morality upon the rising generation by means of memorial precepts in English or Latin prose? It is not that the ideas of duty which they would convey are less likely than in former times to meet with illustrations in common life. It is simply because the duty is in most cases not a matter of formula; and even when it is so, the words of a formula have a tendency to remain in the corner of the memory where they have been placed. The same is true of Latin composition. A very few memorial rules are useful in cases where usage alone is a guide to what is correct; but even these have no educational value whatever, and any other than these absolutely interfere with the right understanding of a principle.

There has been some discussion during the past year with regard to the introduction into the chief public schools of Dr.

Kennedy’s Public School Primer. Into the merits of the book itself it is not necessary now to enter, because, in the first place, it is irrevocably accepted at the nine public schools; and, in the second place, the general opinion of persons of education has already condemned the work. But, independently of its merits or demerits, the introduction of a universal text-book is distinctly a retrograde step in education. It was clearly felt to be so not long ago in Germany; and the idea, which had been mooted a few years back, was dropped by general consent. It is with us much as if the study of Aristotle were imposed once more by the authority of the Church, or an adherence to the unities by that of the managers of the London theatres. It implies the belief, which will at once be recognised as heresy, that there are such things as eternal and immutable rules of language; that a Latin grammar is to be considered not as an interpreter of Latin, but as it were its authorized legislator. What is meant by a declension? Is it a division which the language consciously employed? Is it one which is certain, and beyond the domain of controversy? Has it any claim to be regarded as the embodiment of a law in the sense in which the word is used in science? Not at all. Distributing words into declensions is simply the best means that we can contrive for organizing them in a way which shall appear to the memory as symmetrical. The analysis of words was pushed very far among the Romans, and yet Quintilian wrote a chapter on grammar without ever mentioning the classes of declensions at all. What is to be inferred is, not that declensions are not useful, but that the division is an arbitrary one; and that any plan of education can have but little confidence in its teaching which will bind itself for the next twenty or thirty years to believe in five declensions rather than in eight or ten. No reason can be given for the compulsory uniformity of English Schools in their method of teaching the analysis of the Latin language, which would not equally tend to show that the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge are bound to adopt the same text-book of algebra for continuous use. This might easily be done, and an inferior book be stereotyped for a long time to come. As it is, fresh books supersede one another as the methods of algebraical working improve, and the reign of a single author at Cambridge lasts sometimes two years, sometimes twenty. In the teaching of languages, as a matter of fact, one good teacher will have one way of instructing, and another another. Common sense points out that if a boy only learns a thing well, it matters little in what way he has reached his knowledge. As for bad teachers, they will simply save their credit and their labour by teaching the primer straight through by heart.

One is driven, sometimes, in thinking of these and similar mistakes, to the verge of asserting that books are the great obstacle to education. Whether this be too audacious a paradox or not, our teaching wants sadly to be humanised. There will be some gain, no doubt, when it is once clearly understood that there is no absolute connexion between riches and the dead languages, and that a boy need not in every case be set down to a course of study for which he may be wholly unfit, just because his parents or guardians happen to be able to pay for it. But is it too much to hope that the classical teaching itself may some day cease to be the dull routine which it now so often is? It may have been remarked that in considering the reasons for which grammar may be taught, we have omitted the second of our three ideas—the one which considers that the difficulties of a course of study ought to be left there as introducing a moral education in the struggle which is necessary for overcoming them. A person who will assert this is beyond the pale of argument. It is not worth while to discuss whether a method ought to be easy or hard. But we should even go on to say that it is the duty of a teacher not to rest as long as any difficulty exists which by any change of method can be removed. Involuntary learning is of as little use to the mind as involuntary exercise to the body.

Now it is certain that a large proportion of boys dislike the work which they have to do. Some like it; some are indifferent;