

difficulties, reduced for the most part to the stony path of mere intuitive perception, often to no path at all—with nothing, as we say, to go upon—nevertheless shall we see the sturdy British youth overcoming all obstacles, evolving from somewhere or other a plausible working hypothesis, and ultimately producing in triumph to his question (no matter how ignorant of the subject he may be) an answer of some sort or other. Truly the boy who can accomplish this may be said to display, if not genius, at least ingenuity. Certain sterling qualities are his—self-confidence, pluck, readiness, and a sanguine love of attempting the apparently impossible. Such a boy is not likely to fall behind in the race for wealth and honours; and yet, so singular are the ways of men, we find him often receiving kicks rather than halfpence, a dose of sarcasm (good-humoured at the best) instead of hearty praise. “Hamlet,” we remember hearing a boy say on one occasion, “is the leg of a small pig.” Observe the simplicity, the neatness of this reply, betraying also a reasonable share of knowledge. No boy who could make that answer could be altogether a fool. He possessed the information, not universally known, that the suffix “let” betokened a diminutive. In fact, a reasonable degree of literature is indispensable for most of the blunders at which we are asked to mock. Old heads cannot be looked for on young shoulders, nor can we reasonably expect our pupils to become perfectly wise at one plunge into the educational bath. Imperfect information is not a crime. “The Nile,” another boy has said, “is the only remarkable river in the world. It was discovered by Dr. Livingstone, and rises in Mungo Park. The mistake is natural enough; the information displayed is unusual, yet some such slight confusion is enough to set our wiseacres laughing

with complacent contempt. Again, “bungalow” is not a word one often meets with at a tender age. To confuse it with “punkah,” is not only natural, it is even creditable; yet the boy who defined it as “a machine for pumping air into a house at night,” was not improbably punished for his attempt at translation. So, too, a “gudgeon” might very well be a “policeman’s staff,” or a “quarantine” a four-masted ship” in the eyes of boys whose acquaintance with bludgeons and brigantines had, fortunately for themselves, been limited. We might instance scores of similar definitions, the only fault of which lay in a knowledge not yet made perfect; but we have mentioned sufficient, we fancy, to make out our contention. It is not our wish to enter into competition with the common run of jest collectors, though it is true—and sad—that such miscellanea of mistranslations and misunderstandings are popular with the reading public of the day. That this should be the case is surely something of a reflection on the morals of magazine consumers, for it is obvious that the sole reason of this popularity is pride. To be able to assume an attitude of mental superiority, to chuckle softly to oneself at the extraordinary mistakes these half-educated boys can make, this seems to us to be the chief cause of the public’s delectation. It may be thought, perhaps, that with the rapid spread of our modern system of free education we shall hear less of these unfortunate mistakes. Surely, with all our new apparatus for cramming the youth of the country with science as they cram chickens for the table, with our codes and timetables, and ceaseless schedules, and much-harassed inspectors, our boys will soon be too well informed to perpetrate such remarkable errors as we have noticed. This would be a sorry summation to the noble project of a