

METHODS AND AIM OF GRECIAN UNIVERSITIES.



WHILE so many are commenting upon the question of education and are clamoring for an improved system in our schools and colleges

and such conflicting opinions are expressed on this subject, would it not be well to give some consideration to the manners and the modes of instruction which were in vogue in Grecian universities? For, though they had none of those inventions such as electricity and steam which ought to prove of inestimable aid to modern society, yet history clearly demonstrates that the general public of Greece was far better educated than the common people of the present day. The manner in which the Grecian youth was educated ought also to be more interesting because of the proud position which Greece held among ancient nations in everything that was noble; all species of literary composition were there brought to a wonderful degree of perfection; there, eloquence received its first stimulus from Pisistratus and in Demosthenes reached a height equalled neither before nor since. That architecture, now so much admired for its simplicity and beauty, originated in the Grecian mind; the other arts also were nursed and cultivated by the Greeks, and, encouraged by a favorable form of government, made rapid strides till suddenly brought to a standstill by the hand of a foreign tyrant.

In Athens especially did the question of education early excite interest and receive a liberal portion of attention, but it was not until after the classic period that higher education received any consideration from the Greeks. In Sparta the Lyncurgan constitution had for some time watched over educational interests and the Spartans failed to gain that pre-eminence in learning for which the Athenians became renowned. The character of the Spartans, as well as the constitution by which they were governed, was less suit-

ed to the obtaining of scholastic distinction. The Athenians were a people of high intelligence and of keener perception and consequently received an education with greater facility. Lyncurgus, in his constitution, considered education as an inferior attainment and aimed only at the physical development of the Spartans, designing thereby to prepare them primarily for war. Thus he subordinated everything to that object and gave but little attention to mental development. Much more favorable also was the democratic government of Athens than the aristocracy of Sparta; for where an aristocracy reigns freedom is checked and with it progress in any of the arts.

It is to the Sophists that Athens owes the origin of her higher institutions of learning and though the more noted philosophers such as Socrates and Plato made them the object of their severest invectives, it does not follow that on that account they should be entirely condemned. Many of them, among whom were Gorgias and Hippias, were men of great ability and held in high public esteem. Though they falsely professed to teach in a short time everything that was necessary, and, contrary to the custom of the time, received money from their students, their efforts were not void of good results. They travelled from city to city accompanying their instructions with public displays, and it is noteworthy that many of the leading politicians of Greece, at that time, were men who had formerly attended their schools. It cannot be denied, however, that the Sophists allowed their desire for riches and public esteem to influence their actions so much that in some ways they proved an evil. Upon oratory, for instance, by striving to invent means whereby they could support either side of a question, they had a most degenerating effect.

To assist those of the poor who were desirous of obtaining an education, rich students often gave their masters large sums of money. This naturally induced