

II.—THE STUDY OF THE CLASSICS BY MINISTERS.

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FEW graduates of our colleges, it is said, make any pretence of keeping up their classical studies after graduation. This was to be expected from those students who could with difficulty translate their own diplomas, granted perhaps as in the case of Dean Swift, *speciali gratia*. But it is difficult to assign any reason for the neglect of the classics by others and especially by clergymen. It cannot be that the subject was exhausted at college, for at the best, the college course includes but a small portion of the great field. It cannot be that the subject itself, like the primer or the arithmetic, belongs in its nature only to the primary stages of culture, for as *literature* they fascinate and instruct our best and amplest scholars. It may be in part from disgust at the way in which they were taught, disgust at the barren grammatical drill which usurped the place of some high, inspiring interpretation of a great author's thought and style. But in life we often have to learn to conquer our disgusts. If they conquer us we may often miss securing very valuable things. To leave Homer unread because we were once wearied with dry questions about his prosody or his dialects is surely a lame and impotent conclusion. It may be in part also that the classics are dropped because the difficulty of reading them in the original is so much greater than of reading the same amount of poetry or philosophy or history in English. But in these days of "reading at sight," which is cultivated in all our colleges, this difficulty ought to be vanishing, and at any rate, as we shall see, it may be readily overcome by a little patience and more method.

It is indeed urged by some high authorities in literature, notably Mr. Emerson, that they are better read in translations; that thus at any rate we can catch some idea of what the classics are and at an immense saving of time. That we have some fine translations of classic authors, such works as the Virgil of Covington, the Iliad and Odyssey of Worsley or the Horace of Theodore Martin cannot be denied. Better by all means read them in *such* translations than not at all. But the ordinary *hack* translations which are cheaply furnished in our Bohn's edition, are simply the ponies on which our boys ride to the diploma. Even of the best translations the truth in a modern poet's lines holds abundantly good:

"I thought the sparrow's note from heaven
Singing at dawn on the elder bough
I brought him home, in his nest, at even;
He sings the song, but it pleases not now,
For I did not bring home the river and sky,—
He sang to my ear,—they sang to my eye.
The delicate shells lay on the shore;