CLASSICS IN MODERN EDUCATION

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER is to indicate various contributions which the study of Classics can make to education. These are so many reasons why the study of Classics should have a place (an important place) in the educational system of to-day and to-morrow. They may also serve, I hope, as navigation lights for those who sail in Classical waters, whether as teachers or as taught. For in education why should determine how. The teaching and learning of a subject should be shaped by a clear recognition of the reasons for teaching or learning that subject.

* * *

It is a little ironical that one should now be seeking a modest place in education for a subject of study which, until comparatively recently, was education. For until little more than a hundred years ago, higher education and the study of Classics were, to all intents and purposes, one and the same thing.

Let us listen for a few moments to two schoolmasters of Shakespeare's time, as they discuss the theory and practice of education in their day. (Their discussion is recorded in a book published in 1612, four years before the death of Shakespeare, by John Brinsley, and bearing the engaging title Ludus Literarius or The Grammar School; shewing how to procede from the first entrance into learning, to the highest perfection required in the Grammar Schooles, with ease, certainty and delight both to Masters and Schollers etc. etc.)

When we catch up with them, Spoudeus, a zealous but momentarily disheartened novice in the field of education, is saying plaintively:—

. . . . There is another matter that comes unto my remembrance, about which I have taken no small griefe and discouragement many a time. . . . The trouble is this: That when as my children doe first enter into Latine, many of them will forget to reade English, and some of them bee worse two or three yeeres after that they have been in construction, than when they began it. Now if you could teach me how to helpe this likewise,-that they might as well goe forward still in reading English as in Latine, I should account this a very great benefit. For some of their Parents who use me the kindliest, will bee at me, that their children may every day reade some Chapters of the Bible, to helpe their reading of English. Now this I cannot possibly doe, but they must needs bee hindered in their Latine, in some lessons or necessarie exercises; and either be behind their fellowes, or else trouble all their fellowes very much, that they cannot goe so fast forward as they should, but stay for these readers. Others being more ignorant or malicious, upon every light occasion, are readie to rage & raile at me, for that their children, as they say, doe get no good under me, but are worse and worse. For, whereas they could have read English perfectly (it may be) when they came to me, now they have forgotten to doe it. Thus am I grieved on every side and vexed daily, let me labour never so much, and spend my heart amongst them for to doe them good.

To this Philoponus, a hard-working, successful teacher of long experience, replies:—

Sir, herein I can say, as she in the Poet—

haud ignara mali miseris succurrere disco. (1)

For I have tasted deepely of the same griefe untill verie lately, within this yeere or two. Yet now I seeme to my selfe, to find as sensible and continuall a growth amongst all my Schollers, in their English tongue as in the Latine.

(1) "non ignara mali miseris succurrere disco"—"My own knowledge of adversity teaches me to succour the unfortunate" (Vergil, Aeneid 1.632, where Dido is bidding Aeneas welcome to her kingdom).
Philopoenus then proceeds to show how Classics can be taught so that, far from forgetting the English they had assimilated at their mother's knee, pupils would learn, through their study of Classics, to use it as Shakespeare did. (2)

Few round remarks have rolled so wide of their mark as Ben Jonson's statement that Shakespeare had "small Latin and less Greek". It is frequently forgotten that this pronouncement came from the rarefied height of one of the most learned men of the day, and perhaps the most opinionated. That great Hellenist of the last generation, John Burnet, used to maintain, basing his opinion on internal evidence previously unnoticed, that Shakespeare's knowledge of Latin and Greek, while dwarfed by Ben Jonson's (3), was comparable with that of an Honours graduate from a 20th-century university. (4)

But the important thing to bear in mind is that for Shakespeare, as for all pupils of his day, secondary education meant the study of Classics. Such other things as Shakespeare and his fellows learned (English included), they learned through and by means of the study of Classics. And all in all, they seem to have made out fairly well.

From there to the year 1794. A letter survives, written in that year by John Hallet, formerly a midshipman on His Majesty's ship the Bounty, and one of Bligh's loyal companions in the Bounty's launch. Hallet draws a comparison between the two principal actors in what I feel sure Hollywood would describe (if it has not already done so) as "that sensational drama of the high seas". He writes:

As to Mr. Christian's ability, as an artist or a seaman. I never considered them to bear any competition with those of Captain Bligh; and he certainly could not be called a fine scholar, as he did not appear to have received any portion of classical education, and was ignorant of all but his native language. (5)

These two quotations will perhaps suffice to illustrate the extent to which, until comparatively recent times, higher education was equated with the study of Classics.

* * *

Appropriately, it was two Classical scholars, Samuel Butler of Shrewsbury and Thomas Arnold of Rugby, who in the early part of last century took a leading part in the movement which finally resulted in the recognition of English, Mathematics, History and Modern Languages as separate subjects in the secondary school curriculum. (6)

The last hundred years have seen a wide extension of that movement. More and more new subjects have been introduced into the schools and universities. Where in

(2) John Brinsley's "Ludus Literarius" ed. E. T. Campagnac, pp. 20 sqq.
(3) The extent of Ben Jonson's Classical scholarship, as less than his gift of poetry, may be gauged from his transmission of the turgid Greek of the comparatively obscure Philostratus into that levellest and best-known of English lyrics, "Drink to me only with thine eyes...".
(4) Gilbert Highet ('The Classical Tradition', Oxford 1949, p. 218) says of Shakespeare: "He had a fair introduction to the Latin language, not enough to make him a scholar, not enough to allow him to read it fluently, but enough to lead him (like Chaucer and Keats) to love Greek and Roman myth, poetry, and history. He lived among men who knew and admired classical literature, and he learnt from them..."; Greek and Roman literature provided not only the rhetorical and dramatic patterns which he and the other Renaissance poets used, not only rich material to feed his imagination, but the challenge of noble humanity and of consummate art. To that challenge many great souls in the Renaissance responded, none more greatly than the man who had small Latin and less Greek."
the 18th century the curriculum of an English secondary school consisted of Classics, to-day it includes, as well, English, French, German, History, Geography, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and the rest. And the ground which these other subjects have gained, has been gained at the expense of Classics.

This multiplication of the subjects of study and the resultant retrenchment of Classical studies are natural consequences of the democratic spread of education, the enlarged interests, the scientific development and, I would add, the more materialistic outlook of the past hundred years. To a large extent, that is to say, the change has been for the better. But in considerable part it has been for the worse.

One cannot but approve the way in which the larger interests, the wider sympathies and the scientific advances of recent times have found expression in the modern school's curriculum. But one regrets the introduction of "freak" subjects with little or no educational value, which has been made under cover of genuine reform and at the cost of worthier subjects—particularly Classics. One deplores the topsy-turvydom which sacrifices the abler pupil to the less able. (7) And one condemns that worst consequence of present-day materialism, the confusion of true education with merely vocational training.

The sole concern of schools and universities should be true education. They should teach, that is to say, not how to make a livelihood, but how to live.

No sane person would suggest that we return to the position of the 18th century. No sane person would suggest that Classics should again constitute the whole of higher education. But I do suggest that the process of educational reformation which began a hundred years ago has in some respects been carried too far.

It is high time that we review our position and arrest reform where it has passed into prejudice and eccentricity. The value of Classical studies should be re-assessed. And if, as I think can be shown, Classical studies properly pursued have, not one, but several important contributions to make to liberal education, then we may fairly ask that the fact be recognised, and that Classics be restored to a larger and more important place in our schools. (8)

(7) "Forty years ago the admirable education provided for children whose natural gifts seemed to qualify them for a place among the leaders of their generation was certainly sometimes given at the expense of the less able, who were apt to be left to get what they could from an intellectual discipline more severe than they could profitably sustain; and nothing has been more salutary in the spread of secondary education than the attention it has focussed on the needs of the ordinary child. But one cannot help being struck at times by a suspicion that the abler are now being sacrificed to the more ordinary. Whereas formerly boys and girls of high intellectual promise had their minds trained to accuracy at school by the work needed to give them a mastery of some subject which calls for precision, nowadays the demand for a general education from schools seems to require that so much of their time shall be spent in gaining a superficial acquaintance with so many matters that they do not become masters of any"—Dr. Hugh M. Last, Principal of Brasenose College, Oxford, in his presidential address to the British Classical Association, April 13th, 1950. Dr. Last's address (on "Ancient History and Modern Education") is published in the Proceedings of the Classical Association, 1950, vol. XLVI, pp. 7-20.

(8) Matthew Arnold's prophetic words are worth recalling ("Discourses in America" (Macmillan 1885) No. II. "Literature and Science" pp. 136-137): "Humane letters: . . . will some day come, we may hope, to be studied more rationally, but they will not lose their place. What will happen will rather be that there will be crowded into education other matters besides, far too many; there will be, perhaps, a period of unsettlement and confusion and false tendency; but letters will not in the end lose their leading place. If they lose it for a time, they will get it back again. We shall be brought back to them by our wants and aspirations. . . While we shall all have to acquaint ourselves with the great results reached by modern science, and to give ourselves as much training in its disciplines as we can conveniently carry, yet the majority of men will always require humane letters; and so much the more, as they have the more and the greater results of science to relate to the need in man for conduct, and to the need in him for beauty."
Before going further, let me clear up a frequent misconception.

The study of Classics is NOT the study of two dead languages.

In the first place, Latin and Greek are not dead languages. Ancient, certainly. But they live on in the fullest vigour and usefulness, and will continue so to do, for as long as we ourselves will suffer them to live and by their life to contribute to our progress. Primitive man had a way of killing off the aged, as merely useless encumbrances. One of the criteria of a civilised community is that it cherishes the old, recognising that they are not the least valuable contributors to the general well-being.

Again, the study of Classics is much more than the study of the Greek and Latin languages. As well as the study of those languages and the unrivalled literature which they express, Classics is concerned with all the civilisation of Greece and Rome. And from that are derived nine tenths of our own civilisation. (9)

From Greece and Rome we derive most of our literary forms, most of our practice and appreciation of architecture and sculpture, much of our philosophy, more of our medicine and other sciences than is perhaps realised, and not a little of our religion. But also—and this seems to me no less important—it is from Greece and Rome that we derive our ideas of law and order, of government, of citizenship and of freedom; our sense of proportion (which is to say our sense of beauty) and our sense of disproportion (which, in one manifestation, is our sense of humour).

A glance at our new University buildings here at St. Lucia will illustrate something of what I mean. As a whole, the buildings owe practically everything to the inspiration of Greece and Rome. But if you will look more particularly, you will see, engraved over the entrance to the Arts building, six words from an ancient Greek historian. These we have adopted as the charter of our Faculty of Arts because we knew no clearer perception and no finer expression of the ideals of liberal education—

ΦΙΛΟΚΑΛΟΥΜΕΝ ΜΕΤΑ ΕΥΤΕΛΕΙΑΣ
ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΟΥΜΕΝ ΑΝΕΥ ΜΑΛΑΚΙΑΣ (10)

“We seek beauty in a spirit of moderation,
and wisdom without forfeit of manliness.”

Similarly, over the entrance to the Faculty of Law are the words in which a Roman summed up, for all time, the three cardinal principles of justice:—

IVRIS PRAECEPTA SVNT HAEC:
HONESTE VIVERE
ALTERVM NON LAEDERE
SVVM CVIQVE TRIBVERE (11)

(9) "When I speak of knowing Greek and Roman antiquity as a help to knowing ourselves and the world, I mean more than a knowledge of so much vocabulary, so much grammar, so many portions of authors in the Greek and Latin languages. I mean knowing the Greeks and Romans, and their life and genius, and what they were and did in the world; what we get from them, and what is its value" (Matthew Arnold, op. cit., p. 88).

(10) Thucydides II.40.1.

(11) The Institutes of Justinian 1.1.3.
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"These are the precepts of justice:

to live honourably

to do no harm to one's neighbour

and to give every man his due."

A man who tries to arrive at a true understanding of modern civilisation without knowledge of the civilisation of Greece and Rome is in the sad case of a victim of amnesia. He is trying to make sense of to-day without the memory of yesterday. He is attempting the impossible.

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The study of Classics then is important because it deals with the origins of our own civilisation. But there is still more to it than that.

The history of Greece and Rome is the history of the political, economic and social life of a great civilisation through all its many vicissitudes, from the day of its beginning to the day of its final decline. And let us be clear about this: although the civilisation of Greece and Rome is separated from us by many hundreds of years, there is scarcely one respect in which we can afford to patronise it. It is a matter for debate whether in our artistic, political and social life we have made any real advance upon Greece and Rome. Even in material progress—the thing about which to-day we are vainest—we are, on the whole, only a very little way ahead of the early Roman Empire. To us, the forty-hour week is still a novelty: the Roman Empire had experience (significant experience) of something like a thirty-hour week. (12) If to-day we do things in a bigger way, it remains questionable whether, on the whole, we do them better.

In the history of Greece and Rome may be seen the same causes at work and the same results produced, the same tendencies, the same experiments and the same problems as we see to-day in our 20th-century world. Two thousand years ago men experimented in government, testing the rival claims of monarchy and democracy, dictatorship and communism. Two thousand years ago they knew the twin tragedies of over-production and under-production, and they tried, as we try to-day, to control the world's markets. Two thousand years ago men were faced by the difficulties of over-population and under-population, and all the problems of race. Two thousand years ago they underwent the same attraction to war and the same revulsion. There was the same conflict between militarism and pacifism, between capitalism and the masses, between the claims of the totalitarian state and the individual's right to freedom.

Cast your mind back to the days of Munich, and let me recall a few words uttered by one of the statesmen of democracy.

If our country may be at peace, if it depends on us (to begin with this), I say we ought to maintain peace. . . . But if another, having arms in his hand and a large force around him, amuses you with the name of peace while he carries on the operations of war, what is left but to defend yourselves? You may profess to be at peace if you like, as he does; I quarrel not with that. But if any man supposes this to be a peace, which will enable him to master all else and attack you last, he is a madman, or he talks of a-peace observed towards him by you, not towards you by him. . . . If we really wait until he avows that he is at war with us, we are the simplest of mortals; for he would not declare that, though he marched even against our country and chief port; at least if we may judge from his conduct to others. . . . People who never would have harmed him, though they might have adopted measures of defence, he

chose to deceive rather than warn them of his attack; and think ye he would declare war against you before he began it, and that while you are willing to be deceived? Impossible. (13)

No. That was not Winston Churchill speaking of Adolf Hitler. That was the Greek Demosthenes opposing the Lebensraum machinations of Philip of Macedon in the year 341 B.C.

This is only one slight instance of the many parallels that might be drawn between the history of our own times and the history of Greece and Rome. All the fundamental problems that confront us to-day presented themselves, in simpler form and on a smaller scale, to ancient Greece and Rome. And by studying the history of Greece and Rome one can see, not only how these problems arose, but also what attempts were made to solve them, and with what success. The priceless thing about ancient history is that there we know the end of the story. To study the history of Greece and Rome, as one does by reading Classics, is like being allowed to recall a previous existence, and to profit by the successes and the mistakes of that earlier life.

* * *

At this point I fancy someone may be tempted to say: “Of course we admit the importance of ancient history. But why all the bother of learning Greek and Latin? Can’t ancient history be studied through the medium of translations?”

Wisely used, translations are better than nothing. If we cannot actually visit a country, it is certainly better than nothing that we should see photographs and films of it. So too with translations. Translations are like travel-films. Some are good: some are bad: much depends on their quality: even more depends on the circumstance with which they are used. But the understanding that comes from the use of translations is necessarily second-hand and remote: it is subject to all manner of deficiencies and distortions.

On the other hand, to study the past by reading the contemporary documents in the original Greek or Latin is to come as close as one can to actually visiting the past, talking with the dead, and seeing, not what others wish us to see, but all there is to be seen. The opinions one so forms are, as near as can be, first-hand and authentic.

* * *

I propose now to limit my terms of reference and summarise the various arguments, as I see them, for the teaching of Latin in our schools and universities. Much of what is said will, of course, apply, with the necessary changes, to Greek. (14)

It is, I think, generally agreed that an essential part of a liberal education is a knowledge of some language other than one’s own. One may fairly misquote and ask: “What know they of English who only English know?” (15)

All appreciation is by comparison. To appreciate our home or our native land at its true worth, we must sometimes leave it and live in other houses or other lands. Similarly, to arrive at a true appreciation of our native language, literature, way of thought and mode of expression, we must from time to time leave these and see some-

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(13) Demosthenes, Third Philippic 112.8-114.14, tr. C. R. Kennedy.

(14) For an eloquent statement of the case for Greek, see “The Classics and National Life” by Sir Richard Livingstone (Presidential Address delivered to the British Classical Association on April 22nd, 1941, and published in pamphlet form by the Oxford University Press, 1941).

(15) What is present position is I do not know: but a few years ago a list was made of all the professors of English serving in British universities: out of the scores there were, only two, if I remember rightly, had degrees in English: all the others had been trained in Classics.
thing of the language, literature, way of thought and mode of expression used by other people.

To study a foreign language is to make an intellectual voyage which opens the traveller’s eyes to the merits and demerits of his own language, literature and life. It is also a voyage from which he returns with a heightened sense of our common humanity, and a more sympathetic understanding of the many differences that disguise it. One need scarcely add that this international-mindedness to which the study of foreign languages conduces was never more desirable than it is in the rapidly contracting world of to-day.

* * *

Now there are special reasons why the intellectual traveller about to set off on the Grand Tour of a liberal education should make Latin his first port of call.

FIRSTLY, Latin is the most important key to our own language. More than half the words we use incline to belittle the importance of Latin, and let me quote from this book, omitting “something” or “somebody”.

The title of the book is:—

SOMETHING: ITS PLACE AND SOMETHING IN SOMETHING.

The author of the book is C. W. SOMEBODY (how unfortunate that his name happens to be of Latin origin!), and he is described as being:—

Something Something (Something), Something Something (Something Andrews)

Something of Something in the Something of Birmingham.

The first page of the text is headed SOMETHING, and the first paragraph, if I may coin a phrase, is a little thing that goes something like this:—

This book is the something of a something to something something the something of the something of Something by the something of something something somebodies who something no farther than, and often not as far as, a Something Something something. The something of such short somethings is something something by some, but something something by others, with the something something of something. All are something on the great something of something something somethings for those of marked something and something for the something. And few, I take it, would something that the something world, both of somethings and somethings, is still in need of those who draw their something from the somethings of Something and Something. In something, Something may something be something-garded as something something something somethings. (16)

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(16) "LATIN: ITS PLACE AND VALUE IN EDUCATION" by C. W. VALENTINE M.A. (Cantab.), D. Phil. (St. Andrews) Professor of Education in the University of Birmingham (University of London Press, 1935)

"PREFACE"

"This book is the result of an attempt to estimate impartially the value of the study of Latin by the majority of secondary-school pupils who proceed no farther than, and often not as far as, a School Certificate standard. The value of such short courses is seriously questioned by some, but strenuously asserted by others, with the added force of tradition. All are agreed on the great value of advanced classical studies for those of marked ability and taste for the subject. And few, I take it, would deny that the modern world, both of affairs and letters, is still in need of those who draw their inspiration directly from the literatures of Greece and Rome. In addition, Latin may reasonably be regarded as an important preliminary to certain university studies..."

In awakening parents and pupils to the extent and importance of the Latin element in English, teachers will find useful a pamphlet "The Latin You Speak To-Day!", published in 1948 by the Committee on Educational Policies of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, U.S.A.
SECONDLY, it is a common experience of teachers that English grammar is best taught and learned by the comparative method in association with the study of Latin grammar.

A few days ago I received the following letter from the Principal of one of our Queensland secondary schools for girls:—

Dear Professor Cooper,

Could something more be done to co-ordinate the teaching of English parsing? I quite agree with your policy of insisting on the girls' being able to parse their words in Latin, but two great difficulties arise in these schools—the Scholarship pupils have done very little parsing when they arrive, and the new generation of Staff has rarely done any parsing.

At the beginning of this year I appointed to the Staff an Honours graduate in English from the University of Queensland. Last night, she came to me to say that she could not manage the teaching of Sub-Junior parsing as she had never done any parsing in her life.

Could the University not arrange to have Honours graduates, or any graduates in English, instructed in the teaching of parsing? I know you insist on it in Latin. This lady tells me she had to do parsing in Latin for your lectures—and I have pointed out that I cannot see much difference between English and Latin parsing. However, it is a practical difficulty, and perhaps you might be able to do something about it. The "Old Brigade" have all been brought up on (in my opinion!) sound lines. Young ones are now saying that at no period of their career have they had to do parsing "except for Professor Cooper's lectures".

Yours etc.

It is a sad commentary on present-day education that one should find it necessary to teach at a university an elementary but essential practice that ought to have been learnt at school at the age of eleven or twelve.

A tremendous lot of rubbish has been talked and written about grammar (principally, so far as my observation goes, by those who stand most in its need). The truth is simple. Grammar, as every genuine student of language must know, is a collection of facts arranged and classified for his guidance. It is not an end in itself. It is a means, a very necessary means, to an end. It is a convenience evolved by the painful experience of centuries, enabling the student to proceed, as quickly and as easily as may be, to an accurate enjoyment of language both as a medium of understanding and as a vehicle of expression. It is a labour-saving device of which the fullest advantage should be taken. And the proper place for teaching grammar (and teaching it thoroughly) is in the junior forms, at a time when the pupil's memory is most vigorous and when he is as yet unfitted for work of a more critical sort.

There is no use bringing up the old and silly argument that grammar is sometimes abused. So are aeroplanes, motor-cars, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners and every other convenience we know. It is, of course, foolish to abuse such things. It is infinitely more foolish to propose, therefore, that their proper use should be forbidden. Yet that back-to-the-broom-and-buggy attitude is the one adopted by many present-day educationists towards the teaching of English. In consequence it is all the more desirable that pupils, being denied the convenience of grammar in their study of English, should be allowed to repair the deficiency in the more modern atmosphere of the Latin class-room.

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THIRDLY, the study of Latin is the gateway to one of the greatest, and perhaps the most influential, of all the world's literatures.

This is a matter on which I think I need say no more—except to recall that "classical" means "of the first class, of allowed excellence". Our application of the term "Classics" to the literatures of Greece and Rome is our acknowledgement of the pre-eminence of those two literatures.

* * *

FOURTHLY, Latin is, as I have already suggested, the key to the literature and civilisation from which our own are derived, and from which we still have much to learn. To quote from a leaflet issued by the Council of the British Classical Association:—

The Latin language has been the main vehicle of Western culture. To a first-hand knowledge of the creeds, codes, laws, literature, philosophy, and science of Western Europe, considered in their historical development, it remains an indispensable key. At the present time, when great social changes are impending, it is more than ever necessary that men and women should have a clear understanding of the path by which they have already come. This is impossible without Latin. Latin literature is not an obstacle to modern knowledge, but a necessary element in it. Our civilisation will lose in breadth and depth, in stability and richness, if it is severed from its Latin roots. (17)

* * *

FIFTHLY, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Rumanian and the 'other Romance languages are, ultimately, no more than dialects of Latin. To the study of any of these, a knowledge of Latin is, in the schools, a desirable basis: in the university, I should think it might be regarded as an essential basis.

* * *

SIXTHLY, and again to quote from the leaflet issued by the Classical Association:—

Not only is a knowledge of Latin indispensable as a scientific basis of European language studies, but we believe the training that it involves to be of unrivalled assistance towards the subsequent study of almost any new subject.

I need only add that this belief, supported as it is by the experience both of teachers and of pupils, does not repose on any naive assumption of (horresco referens!) "the automaticity of transfer of training". (18)

* * *

SEVENTHLY—and I come now to what is, I think, for the majority of pupils the principal value inherent in the study of Latin—the study of Latin is a unique discipline in observation, attention to detail, analysis of words, deduction of ideas, and expression of ideas.

I suppose there has been no other time when words have been used as freely, and treated as cheaply, as they are to-day. To many of us, the words we use are merely labels that have come unstuck from reality, and much of our discussion is a

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(17) "The Value of Latin" (n.d.) issued by the Council of the Classical Association, c/o Westfield College, University of London.

(18) For a discussion of the way in which this transfer of training takes place and how it may be facilitated, see H. K. Hunt's "Training through Latin" (Melbourne University Press, 1948), pp. 58-75.
childish bartering of these dog's-eared labels, with little or no reference to the reality from which they were once abstracted (rather like the exchanging of cigarette-cards that took place amongst boys in the unbelievable days of plenty). You know the sort of words I have in mind—such splendid rotundities as "nationalism", "bourgeois ideology", "class-consciousness", "social significance", "the complete integration of an author", and (last but not least) "the Australian way of life".

Some years ago Aldous Huxley wrote:—

The first thing that educators must do is to analyse the words currently used in newspapers, on platforms, by preachers and broadcasters. What, for example, does the word "nation" mean? To what extent are speakers and writers justified in talking of a nation as a person? Who precisely is the "she", of whom people speak when discussing a nation's foreign politics? ("Britain is an imperial power. She must defend her Empire.") In what sense can a nation be described as having a will or national interests? Are these interests and will of the entire population? or of a majority? or of a ruling caste and a few professional politicians? In what way, if any, does "the state" differ from Messrs. Smith, Brown, Jones and the other gentlemen who happen for the moment to have secured political power? Given the character of Brown, Jones, etc., why should "the state" be regarded as an institution worthy of almost religious respect? Where does national honour reside? Why would the loss of Hong-Kong, for example, be a mortal blow to Britain's honour, while its seizure after a war in which Britain attempted to force the Chinese to buy opium was in no way a stain upon the same honour? And so on. "Nation" is only one of several dozens of rich and resonant words which are ordinarily accepted without a thought, but which it is essential, if we would think clearly, that we should subject to the most searching analysis.

It is no less important that children should be taught to examine all personifications, all metaphors and all abstractions occurring in the articles they read, the speeches they listen to. They must learn to translate these empty words into terms of concrete contemporary reality. When an Asquith says, "we shall not sheathe the sword which we have not lightly drawn", when an Archbishop of Canterbury affirms "that force, the sword, is the instrument of God for the protection of the people", they must learn to translate this noble verbiage into the language of the present. Swords have played no appreciable part in war for the last two hundred years. In 1914 Asquith's sword was high explosives and shrapnel, machine-guns, battleships, submarines. In 1937 the "instrument of God for the protection of the people" was all the armaments existing in 1914 plus tanks, plus aeroplanes, plus thermite, plus phosphogene, plus arsenic smokes, plus Lewisite and many other instruments of murder, more efficient and more indiscriminate than anything known in the past. It is frequently in the interest of the rulers of a country to disguise the true facts of contemporary reality under thick veils of misleading verbiage. It is the business of educators to teach their pupils to translate these picturesque or empty phrases into the language of contemporary reality. (19)

You may be like me. You may not share, you may violently oppose, the viewpoint from which Huxley at that time made his criticism. But I think you must admit the force of his argument for greater definiteness and more precision in thought, word and understanding. It is an argument for the study of Latin.

In January of this year, a distinguished speaker commented, over the Australian Broadcasting Commission network, on the recent Archibald Prize competition. (20) He concluded, if I remember rightly, with these portentous words:—

The average Australian artist finds portraiture too factual to give him an outlet for his ideas.

The majority of listeners, I have no doubt, accepted this (without understanding)


(20) The Archibald Prize is a sum of approximately £500 awarded annually in Sydney for a portrait-painting.
as the last word in art criticism. But put it to the test. Try translating it into Latin. And what do you find? So much bad English wrapped round an arrant petitio principii.

Or again, consider the picture of diplomatic procedure which the average man must form from his reading of newspapers. Elder statesmen—all of them no doubt looking like George Arliss in the title role of “Disraeli”—elder statesmen apparently spend a large part of their time in the intrepid exploration of all possible avenues. Why, is never quite clear. An equal mystery surrounds the fact that they are quite uninterested in streets, drives, parades, alleys, wynds and lanes. From time to time our statesmen interrupt their exploration to make gestures. Again, the precise nature of the gesture is never specified, but one likes to hope that not all of them are polite. Once in a while a shout of joy goes up. In some uncharted avenue a formula has been found. Joy however is short-lived, for on closer examination the formula is found to bear the notice NOT EFFECTIVE UNTIL DULY IMPLEMENTED. And in tiny print at the bottom of the package are the words “while every care is taken in the preparation of this product, the manufacturers can accept no responsibility ‘should it be subjected to unilateral violence’.

To leave these misty uplands and descend to firmer earth, when a boy starts Latin, he has already learned to read English with some fluency. That is to say he has already acquired the habit which most of us acquire, if only in self-defence) of skimming the pages, snatching at the beginning of words, and being content with a general impression of what is meant. This is natural enough, for English is in general garrulous and diffuse, and much of what is written to-day holds no more meaning than can be gathered at a cursory glance.

The boy’s first lesson in the Latin class is that here, at all events, he must not gobble. Here he must look at words with new eyes, scrutinise their endings quite as carefully as their beginnings, and weigh every syllable; for in Latin every syllable is significant.

Next he is disabused of the idea that, in translating from English into Latin or from Latin into English, one merely looks up a convenient dictionary and substitutes word for word. The ideas which Latin words convey are of quite different sorts and sizes to those which English words convey. What Latin expresses in one word (pietas, for example) may in English require fifteen or more; and conversely, what English expresses in one word (e.g. “politician”) may in Latin require five or six. It is also impressed upon the student of Latin that words are fickle. A word that means one thing in one context, may in another context mean something very different. And this applies not least to such open-seeming intimates as “may”, “might”, “could”, “should” and “would”.

The boy is then taught to extract from context, word and syllable every particle of evidence which they hold or imply, and to deduce from this evidence by rational methods what precisely is meant.

Finally, having determined the precise meaning of his original, the boy is called upon to express that meaning in the other language, with accuracy, economy and taste. (21)

(21) A mistake which non-Latinists frequently make is to think that Latin is studied in isolation. It is not. Latin is studied in close relation to English. The study of Latin is as at least equal part, the study of English. So much so, that many are prepared to state the paradox that the best way to study English is to study Latin.
The approach which I have indicated is the only one to which Latin will yield its full meaning. There must be meticulous observation and unremitting attention to detail: there must be the careful analysis of words, the logical deduction of ideas, and the scrupulous choice of words for their reinvestment. These are the demands which Latin makes upon the student; and it is because it makes these demands and so richly repays them, that Latin claims a place of importance in secondary education.

Nothing else can give the same discipline in the analysis and expression of thought. No amount of précis writing or paraphrasing in our own language can have the same effect; for there we are still using the same intellectual currency: at the best we are merely changing the sovereigns of thought into shillings and pence. Nor yet can the same discipline be found in modern languages: for in spite of minor differences, the pattern of French ideas, or German, or Italian, is essentially the same as our own.

Let me quote a few sentences from the admirable report (published in 1921) of the Committee appointed by the British Prime Minister to inquire into the position of Classics in the educational system of the United Kingdom (22):—

As contrasted with the languages of modern Europe, the Classical languages are severe trainers of the observation, since both are highly inflectional and express differences of meaning by minute variations in the forms of words. Both can attain extraordinary flexibility and delicacy of expression by varying the position of words in a sentence, a power which modern languages have largely lost.

Both again are reflections of a world very different from our own, in which comparatively few of the concrete objects exactly correspond with ours and still fewer of the abstract terms. Consequently translation to or from the Classical languages requires to an uncommon degree that process of analysing words and phrases into their lowest terms, which is one of the clearest tests of a penetrating mind. ...

There are few ideas in modern political life which could not have been expressed by Thucydidcs or Demosthenes, Cicero or Tacitus. It is a well-known exercise to translate the terms denoting such ideas into Latin or Greek. And we venture to think that the modern terms would be far less apt to degenerate into catch-words, if more people had had to consider how, on different occasions and in different contexts, they would have been expressed in Latin or Greek. Modern languages can provide no similar test; even in a Classical language it can only be applied by one who, whatever the extent of his learning, has at least acquired it in a scholarly way. To this extent the ancient languages serve, we consider, as a standard which nothing else can provide.

The better Classical scholars our writers are, the more precise should be their statements and the more lucid their thought; the better scholars their readers are, the more they will look for precision and be repelled by the lack of it. (23)

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If I have succeeded, it will have been recognised that Classical studies proceed by the scientific method, and the study of Classics is a training in scientific method.

(22) Published as "The Classics in Education" (H.M. Stationery Office, London, 1921). The quotation is from pp. 8 and 12-13.

(23) This conviction is being increasingly advanced in recent times. Thus W. S. Fowler, writing in "Latin Teaching" Vol. XXVII No. 7, February, 1951, p. 184:—"Indeed, one of the main values in the study of Latin lies in a field where we need to postulate a moderate conscious transfer—namely as a valuable guide to clear thinking. We are all philosophers—only some of us are less bad at the game than others—and the positivists have clearly demonstrated how many of our endemic muddles in thinking are due to incapacity or unwillingness to cast our concepts, to think clearly and precisely what any given sentence really means. Now one of the pre-requisites of the production of good Latin prose is the ability to get down to the rock bottom of the English sentence, to analyse it and find out what it is trying to say. It is this habit which we gain from the study of Latin and can consciously transfer to the analysis and rejection of humbug and false doctrine, whether it be inculcated by press, pride, or prejudice. I consider this to be one of the foremost reasons for the maintenance of Latin in the school curriculum and incidentally an argument for the logic-linguistic approach to Latin through English, as against the modern tendency to concentrate on an approach via the Latin language."
What would be truer to say is that the scientific method is the Classical method. For science is one of the many children of Classics, and the method which science uses is the one she learned from her mother, Classics. (There are times when one could wish—as when one reads some of the articles published in medical journals—that science had been an apter pupil.)

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Teachers of Classics frequently meet with the criticism that they expect too much of their pupils. Our courses are said to be too hard, our standards too high. We are called finicky, sticklers for detail, perfectionists, martinets—and many worse things.

The root of the trouble lies, I think, in the spirit of the age. Ours is the Age of Slovenliness, a slovenliness that disfigures every part of our lives, from plumbing to politeness. Pride of workmanship has practically vanished. The watch-word of the age is (with a glance at the clock) "That's good enough. That'll do."

These remarks arise out of present experience in Queensland. But the trouble appears to be widespread. I see (24) that the Scottish Education Department in its report on "Education in Scotland in 1950" (H.M. Stationery Office, Edinburgh) has this to say:

Pupils to-day show less concentration than previously. In consequence, attainments in such subjects as require drill and revision if real proficiency is to be achieved are not so good as they ought to be. There is also a tendency to looseness of thought and expression and a prevalent feeling that one need not trouble to be accurate; anything that is near enough will do. It might well be to the advantage of education if more emphasis were laid on the necessity for hard work, a term not at all synonymous with drudgery, and less on the immediately pleasurable activities of schooling.

Whether we like it or not (and I'm sure we don't), we Classicists find ourselves to-day cast in the role of gadflies. We are the thorn in the too, too solid flesh of present complacency.

For our motto we go back to Homer—"Only the best is good enough." Our faith is that what is done should in the first place be worth doing; and, being worth doing, it should, when done, be done as well as can be. (25)

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(24) Times Educational Supplement, April 27th, 1951, p. 328.

(25) "The Classical Spirit" was excellently defined by J. R. Strangeways in 1920 (reprinted in the Commemoration Number of "Latin Teaching", June, 1936, p. 37):—"The qualities that we specially look for in Classical art or literature are clear and definite form, precise and accurate thought, an avoidance of all that is vague or misty, a love for the normal, moderation and sanity in thought, in diction restraint, and under - rather than over-statement, the absence of excitement and conscious deliberate art, selecting what is to be said or portrayed: acquiescence in what is rather than search for another world than this in which we live. Classic art differs then from Romantic in its avoidance of the strange, the mysterious, the vague and incomplete; it does not look for "magic casements opening on the foam of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn". Nor does it by a premature synthesis seek to portray a world in which virtue is triumphant and they all live happily ever-after; it recognizes the tragedy of things as they are: yet though thus acquiescent Classic art is not without wonder, but the wonder it looks for is the wonder of the ordinary everyday things, the houses that keep out cold and wet, the ships that float on even keel, the quiet landscape, the labouring beasts and the homely plough. Yet though simple and dealing with ordinary things and common emotions, Classic art is not necessarily trivial or commonplace. The great Greek and Latin writers excel in the art of uttering in the simplest forms the profoundest thoughts and the most poignant emotions, as in Simounis' euthanassa, the Spartans at Thermopylae. Sophocles and Horace, in their way, are typical of Classical literature at its best, in their finished form, their sober and yet not shallow thought; the finality with which they give expression to the wisdom garnered by a steady eye. Classical art differs again from Realism in that it does not aim at exact portraiture in every detail, but selects the essential, the characteristic and the typical. Hence it is sometimes charged with generalising; but the ideal types of Classic art are not abstractions obtained by stripping off more and more from real things, but rather ruling or formative types which give their reality to concrete or individual things."
To conclude, a democracy is not a community in which all men are regarded as equals. Nor yet is it, as its detractors assert, a community in which each man regards himself as better than his fellow. But a democracy is a community in which all members have an important part to play. As Laski used to say, “It is the faith of a democracy that everyone has something to contribute to the stock of social experience.”

More than that. It is the practice of a democracy that every member of it, not only should, but does contribute to the stock of social experience. Whether we like it or not, it is a fact that every member of our democracy, without exception, does by his life and opinions exercise a considerable influence on the rest of the community.

A totalitarian state may administer local anaesthetics; it may disfranchise and render impotent this or that section of its community. But the essence of a democracy is that each of its members is accredited with a more or less equal responsibility. In a democracy, education is not a preserve of this class or that: it is, or it should be, a matter of vital importance to every member of the community. For education, and education alone, can ensure that the responsibility which attaches to every member of the community is discharged as best it may.

If the values of a Classical training are as I have said, then a Classical training ought to be a central feature of democratic education. I do not suggest that every member of our democracy should become a Classical scholar. But I do urge that the education of all the more intelligent members of our democracy should consist in part of a training in Classics. And I urge that because I believe that the intelligent members of our democracy will best discharge their responsibilities to themselves and to the community, if they have acquired a reasonable understanding of the Greek and Roman civilisation from which our own civilisation is derived, and from which we have still much to learn, and if they have been taught, as only a Classical training can teach them, to be critical of words and ideas, to spare no trouble and to seek the best.