

tional method. For one, I utterly disbelieve in it. It never did me anything but harm; and learning by heart the Greek grammar did me harm,—a great deal of harm. While I was doing it, the observing and reflective powers lay dormant; indeed, they were systematically suppressed. Their exercise was resented as a sort of impertinence. We boys stood up and repeated long rules, and yet longer lists of exceptions to them, and it was drilled into us that we were not there to reason, but to rattle off something written on the blackboard of our minds.

The faculties we had in common with the raven were thus cultivated at the expense of that apprehension and reason which, Shakespeare tells us, makes man like the angels and God. I infer this memory-culture is yet in vogue; for only yesterday, as I sat at the Commencement table with one of the younger and more active of the professors of the college, he told me that he had no difficulty with his students in making them commit to memory; they were well trained in that. But when he called on them to observe and infer, then his troubles began. They had never been led in such a path. It was the old, old story,—a lamentation and an ancient tale of wrong. There are very few of us who were educated a generation ago who cannot now stand up and glibly recite long extracts from the Greek grammar; sorry am I to say it, but these extracts are with most of us all we have left pertaining to that language.

But, as not many of us followed the stage as a calling, this power of rapidly learning a part has proved but of questionable value. It is true, the habit of correct verbal memorizing will probably enable its fortunate possessor to get off many an apt quotation at the dinner-table, and far be it from me to detract from that much-longed-for accomplishment;

but, after all, the college professes to fit its students for life rather than for its dinner-tables, and in life a happy knack at quotations is in the long run an indifferent substitute for the power of close observation and correct inference from it. To be able to follow out a line of exact, sustained thought to a given result is invaluable. It is a weapon which all who would engage successfully in the struggle of modern life must sooner or later acquire; and they are apt to succeed just in the degree they acquire it.

It my youth we were supposed to acquire it through the blundering application of rules of grammar in a language we did not understand. The training which ought to have been obtained in physics and mathematics was thus sought for long, and in vain, in Greek. That it was not found is small cause for wonder now. And so, looking back from this standpoint of thirty years later, and thinking of the game which has now been lost or won, I silently listen to that talk about "the severe intellectual training" in which a parrot-like memorizing did its best to degrade boys to the level of learned dogs.

Finally, I come to the great impalpable-essence-and-precious-residuum theory,—the theory that a knowledge of Greek grammar, and the having puzzled through the Anabasis and three books of the Iliad, infuses into the boy's nature the imperceptible spirit of Greek literature which will appear in the results of his subsequent work just as manure spread upon a field appears in the crop which that field bears. But, to produce results on a field, manure must be laboriously worked into its soil and made a part of it; and only when it is so worked in and does become a part of it will it produce its result. You cannot haul manure up and down and across a field, cutting the ground into deep ruts with the wheels of

your cart, while the soil just gets a smell of what is in the cart, and then expect to get a crop.

Yet even that is more than we did, and are doing, with Greek. We trundle a single wheelbarrow-load of Greek up and down and across the boy's mind; and then we clasp our hands and cant about a subtile fineness and impalpable but very precious residuum! All we have in fact done is to teach the boy to mistake means for ends and to make a system of superficiality.

Nor in this matter am I speaking unadvisedly or thoughtlessly. My own experience I have given. For want of a rational training in youth I cannot do my chosen work in life thoroughly. The necessary tools are not at my command; it is too late for me to acquire them or to learn familiarly to handle them; the mischief is done.

I have also referred to my family experience. Just as the wrestler in the gymnasium, after describing how he had himself fared in the games, might, in support of his conclusions, refer to his father and grandfather, who, likewise trained in the gymnasium, had been noted athletes in their days, so I, coming here and speaking from practical experience,—and practical experience alone,—must cite that experience where I best can find it. I can find it best at home. So I appeal to a family experience which extends through nearly a century and a half. It is worth giving and very much to the point.

I do not think I exceed proper limits when I say that the family of which I am a member has for more than a hundred years held its own with the average of Harvard graduates. Indeed, those representing it through three consecutive generations were rather looked upon as typical scholars in politics. They all studied Greek as a requirement to admission

to college. In their subsequent lives they were busy men. Without being purely literary men, they wrote a great deal; indeed, the pen was rarely out of their hands. They all occupied high public position. They mixed much with the world. Now let us see what their actual experience in life was: how far did their college requirements fit them for it? Did they fit them any better than they have fitted me? I begin with John Adams.

John Adams graduated in the class of 1755,—a hundred and twenty-eight years ago. We have his own testimony on the practical value to him of his Greek learning, expressed in an unguarded moment and in a rather comical way. I shall give it presently. Meanwhile, after graduation John Adams was a busy man as a school-teacher, a lawyer, and a patriot, until at the age of forty-two he suddenly found himself on the Atlantic, accredited to France as the representative of the struggling American colonies.

French was not a requirement in the Harvard College of the last century, even to the modest extent in which it is a requirement now. Greek was. But they did not talk Greek in the diplomatic circles of Europe then any more than they now talk it in the Harvard recitation-rooms; and in advising John Adams of his appointment James Lovell had expressed the hope that his correspondent would not allow his "partial defect in the language" to stand in the way of his acceptance. He did not; but at forty-two, with his country's destiny on his shoulders, John Adams stoutly took his grammar and phrase-book in hand and set himself to master the rudiments of that living tongue which was the first and most necessary tool for use in the work before him. What he afterward went through—the anxiety, the humiliation, the nervous wear and tear, the disadvantage under which he struggled

and bore up—might best be appreciated by some one who had fought for his life with one arm disabled. I shall not attempt to describe it.

But in the eighteenth century the ordinary educated man set a higher value on dead learning than even our college professors do now; and, in spite of his experience, no one thought more of it than did John Adams. So when, in his closing years, he founded an academy, he especially provided—bowing low before the fetich that—

—“a schoolmaster should be procured, learned in the Greek and Roman languages, and, if thought advisable, the Hebrew; not to make learned Hebricians, but to teach such young men as choose to learn it the Hebrew alphabet, the rudiments of the Hebrew grammar, and the use of the Hebrew grammar and lexicon, that in after-life they may pursue the study to what extent they please.”

Instead of taking a step forward the old man actually took one backward, and he went on to develop the following happy educational theory, which, if properly considered in the light of the systematic superficiality of thirty years ago, to which I have already alluded, shows how our methods had then deteriorated. What was taught was at least to be taught thoroughly; and, as I have confessed, I have forgotten the Greek letters. He wrote:

“I hope the future masters will not think me too presumptuous if I advise them to begin their lessons in Greek and Hebrew by compelling their pupils to write over and over again copies of the Greek and Hebrew alphabets, in all their variety of characters, until they are perfect masters of those alphabets and characters. This will be as good an exercise in chirography as any they can use, and will stamp those alphabets and characters upon their tender minds and vigorous memories so deeply that the impression will never wear

out, and will enable them at any period of their future lives to study those languages to any extent with great ease.”

This was fetich-worship, pure and simple. It was written in the year 1822. But practice is sometimes better than theory, and so I turn back a little to see how John Adams's practice squared with his theory. In his own case, did the stamping of those Greek characters upon his tender mind and vigorous memory enable him at a later period “to study that language to any extent with great ease?” Let us see. On the 9th of July, 1813, the hard political wrangles of their two lives being over, and in the midst of the second war with Great Britain, I find John Adams thus writing to Thomas Jefferson,—and I must confess to very much preferring John Adams in his easy letter-writing undress to John Adams on his dead-learning stilts; he seems a wiser, a more genuine man. He is answering a letter from Jefferson, who had in the shades of Monticello been reviving his Greek:

“Lord! Lord! what can I do with so much Greek? When I was of your age, young man, that is, seven or eight years ago [he was then nearly seventy-nine, and his correspondent a little over seventy], I felt a kind of pang of affection for one of the flames of my youth, and again paid my addresses to Isocrates and Dionysius Halicarnassensis, etc. I collected all my lexicons and grammars, and sat down to *Περὶ συνθέσεως ὀνομάτων*. In this way I amused myself for some time, but I found that if I looked a word to-day, in less than a week I had to look it again. It was to little better purpose than writing letters on a pail of water.”

This certainly is not much like studying Greek “to any extent with great ease.” But I have not done with John Adams yet. A year and one week later I find him again writing to Jefferson. In the interval Jefferson seems to have read Plato, sending at last to John Adams his final im-

pressions of that philosopher. To this letter, on the 16th of July, 1814, his correspondent replies as follows:

"I am very glad you have seriously read Plato, and still more rejoiced to find that your reflections upon him so perfectly harmonize with mine. Some thirty years ago I took upon me the severe task of going through all his works. With the help of two Latin translations, and one English and one French translation, and comparing some of the most remarkable passages with the Greek, I labored through the tedious toil. My disappointment was very great, my astonishment was greater, and my disgust was shocking. Two things only did I learn from him. First, that Franklin's ideas of exempting husbandmen and mariners, etc., from the depredations of war were borrowed from him; and, second, that sneezing is a cure for the hiccough. Accordingly, I have cured myself and all my friends of that provoking disorder, for thirty years, with a pinch of snuff."¹

As a sufficiently cross-examined witness on the subject of Greek literature I think that John Adams may now quit the stand.

More fortunate than his father, John Quincy Adams passed a large part of his youth in Europe. There, in the easy way a boy does, he picked up those living languages so inestimably valuable to him in that diplomatic career which subsequently was no less useful to his country than it was honorable to himself.

Presently he came home, and, acquiring his modicum of Greek, graduated at Harvard in the class of 1788. Then followed his long public life, stretching through more than half a century. I would, for the sake of my argument, give much could I correctly weigh what he owed during that public life to the living languages he had picked up in Europe, against what he owed to the requirements of Harvard College.

¹ John Adams's Works, vol. x, pp. 49, 102.

Minister at the Hague, at Berlin, and at St. Petersburg, negotiator at Ghent, his knowledge of living tongues enabled him to initiate the diplomatic movement which restored peace to his country.

At St. Petersburg he at least was not tongue-tied. Returning to America, for eight years he was the head of the State Department, and probably the single member of the government who, without the assistance of an interpreter, could hold ready intercourse with the representatives of other lands. Meanwhile, so far as Greek was concerned, I know he never read it; and I suspect that, labor-loving as he was, he never could read it. He could with the aid of a lexicon puzzle out a phrase when it came in his way, but from original sources he knew little or nothing of Greek literature.

It would have been better for him if he had also dropped his Latin. I have already said that the display of cheap learning made the American oration of fifty years ago a national humiliation; it was bedizened with classic tinsel. In this respect John Quincy Adams shared to the full in the affectation of his time. Ready, terse, quick at parry and thrust in his native tongue, speaking plainly and directly to the point, with all his resources at his immediate command,—I think I may say he never met his equal in debate.

Yet when, in lectures and formal orations, he mounted the classic high-horse and modelled himself on Demosthenes and Cicero, he became a poor imitator. As an imitator he was as bad as Chatham. More could not be said. That much he owed to Harvard College and its little Latin and less Greek.

But I must pass on to the third generation. Fortunate like his father, Charles Francis Adams spent some years of his boyhood in Europe, and in many countries of Europe; so that at six years old he could talk, as a child talks, in no less than

six different tongues. Greek was not among them. Returning to America, he, too, fitted for Harvard, and in so doing made a bad exchange; for he easily got rid forever of the German speech, and with much labor acquired in place thereof the regulation allowance of Greek. He was graduated in the class of 1825.

After graduation, having more leisure than his father or grandfather,—that is, not being compelled to devote himself to an exacting profession,—he, as the phrase goes, “kept up his Greek.” That is, he occupied himself daily, for an hour or so, with the Greek masterpieces, puzzling them laboriously out with the aid of grammar and lexicon. He never acquired any real familiarity with the tongue; for I well remember that when my turn at the treadmill came, and he undertook to aid me at my lessons, we were very much in the case of a boy who was nearly blind being led by a man who could only very indistinctly see. Still he for years “kept up his Greek,” and was on the examining-committee of the College.

And now, looking back, I realize at what a sad cost to himself he did this; for in doing it he lost the step of his own time. Had he passed the same morning hours in keeping himself abreast with modern thought in those living tongues he had acquired in his infancy, and allowed his classics to rest undisturbed on his library shelves, he would have been a wiser, a happier, and a far more useful man. But modern thought (apart from politics), modern science, modern romance, and modern poetry soon ceased to have any charm for him.

Nevertheless he did not wholly lose the more useful lessons of his infancy. For years, as I have said, he officiated on the Greek examining-committee of the College; but at last the time came when his country needed a representative on a

board of international arbitration. Then he laid his lexicon and grammar aside forever, and the almost forgotten French of his boyhood was worth more—a thousandfold more—to him and his country than all the concentrated results of the wasted leisure hours of his maturer life.

I come now to the fourth generation, cutting deep into the second century. My father had four sons. We were all brought up on strict traditional principles, the special family experience being carefully ignored. We went to the Latin schools, and there wasted the best hours of our youth over the Greek grammar,—hours during which we might have been talking French and German,—and presently we went to Harvard. When we got there we dropped Greek, and with one voice we have all deplored the irreparable loss we sustained in being forced to devote to it that time and labor which, otherwise applied, would have produced results now invaluable.

One brother, since a professor at Harvard, whose work here was not without results, wiser than the rest, went abroad after graduation, and devoted two years to there supplying, imperfectly and with great labor, the more glaring deficiencies of his college training. Since then the post-graduate knowledge thus acquired has been to him an indispensable tool of his trade. Sharing in the modern contempt for a superficial learning, he has not wasted his time over dead languages which he could not hope thoroughly to master. Another of the four, now a Fellow of the University, has certainly made no effort to keep up his Greek.

When, however, his sons came forward, a fifth generation to fit for college, looking back over his own experience as he watched them at their studies, his eyes were opened. Then in language certainly not lacking in picturesque vigor, but rather profane than either classical or sacred, he expressed to

me his mature judgment. While he looked with inexpressible self-contempt on that worthless smatter of the classics which gave him the title of an educated man, he declared that his inability to follow modern thought in other tongues, or to meet strangers on the neutral ground of speech, had been and was to him a source of life-long regret and the keenest mortification. In obedience to the stern behests of his Alma Mater he then proceeded to sacrifice his children to the fetich.

My own experience I have partly given. It is unnecessary for me to repeat it. Speaking in all moderation, I will merely say that, so far as I am able to judge, the large amount of my youthful time devoted to the study of Greek, both in my school and college life, was time as nearly as possible thrown away.

I suppose I did get some discipline out of that boyish martyrdom. I should have got some discipline out of an equal number of hours spent on a treadmill. But the discipline I got for the mind out of the study of Greek, so far as it was carried and in the way in which it was pursued in my case, was very much such discipline as would be acquired on the treadmill for the body. I do not think it was any higher or any more intelligent. Yet I studied Greek with patient fidelity; and there are not many modern graduates who can say, as I can, that they have, not without enjoyment, read the Iliad through in the original from its first line to its last.

But I read it exactly as some German student, toiling at English, might read Shakespeare or Milton. As he slowly puzzled them out, an hundred lines in an hour, what insight would he get into the pathos, the music, and the majesty of "Lear" or of the "Paradise Lost?" What insight did I get into Homer? And then they actually tell me to my face

that unconsciously, through the medium of a grammar, a lexicon, and Felton's "Greek Reader," the subtle spirit of a dead literature was and is infused into a parcel of boys!

So much for what my Alma Mater gave me. In these days of repeating-rifles, she sent me and my classmates out into the strife equipped with shields and swords and javelins. We were to grapple with living questions through the medium of dead languages. . . .

I submit that it is high time this superstition should come to an end. I do not profess to speak with authority, but I have certainly mixed somewhat with the world, its labors and its literatures, in several countries, through a third of a century; and I am free to say that, whether viewed as a thing of use, as an accomplishment, as a source of pleasure, or as a mental training, I would rather myself be familiar with the German tongue and its literature than be equally familiar with the Greek. I would unhesitatingly make the same choice for my child.

What I have said of German as compared with Greek, I will also say of French as compared with Latin. On this last point I have no question. Authority and superstition apart, I am indeed unable to see how an intelligent man, having any considerable acquaintance with the two literatures, can, as respects either richness or beauty, compare the Latin with the French; while as a worldly accomplishment, were it not for fetich-worship, in these days of universal travel the man would be properly regarded as out of his mind who preferred to be able to read the Odes of Horace rather than to feel at home in the accepted neutral language of all refined society. This view of the case is not yet taken by the colleges.

"The slaves of custom and established mode,
With pack-horse constancy, we keep the road,
Crooked or straight, through quags or thorny dells,
True to the jingling of our leader's bells."

And yet I am practical and of this world enough to believe that in a utilitarian and scientific age the living will not forever be sacrificed to the dead. The worship even of the classical fetich draweth to a close; and I shall hold that I was not myself sacrificed wholly in vain if what I have said here may contribute to so shaping the policy of Harvard that it will not much longer use its prodigious influence toward indirectly closing for its students, as it closed for me, the avenues to modern life and the fountains of living thought.