

In growing old one grows less fanatically punctual in the practice of those austerities of taste which make too constant demands on our self-denial. The ages have made up their minds about the ancients. While they are doing it about the moderns (and they are sometimes a little long about it, having the whole of time before them), may we not allow ourselves to take an honest pleasure in literature far from the highest, if you will, in point of form, not so far in point of substance, if it comply more kindly with our mood or quicken it with oppugnancy according to our need?

There are books in all modern languages which fulfil these conditions as perfectly as any, however sacred by their antiquity, can do. Were the men of the middle ages so altogether wrong in preferring Ovid because his sentiment was more in touch with their own, so that he seemed more neighborly? Or the earlier dramatists in overestimating Seneca for the same reason?

Whether it be from natural predisposition or from some occult influence of the time, there are men who find in the literature of modern Europe a stimulus and a satisfaction which Athens and Rome deny them. If these books do not give so keen an intellectual delight as the more consummate art and more musical voice of Athens enabled her to give, yet they establish and maintain, I am more than half willing to believe, more intimate and confiding relations with us.

They open new views, they liberalize us as only an acquaintance with the infinite diversity of men's minds and judgments can do, they stimulate to thought or teaze the fancy with suggestion, and in short do fairly well whatever a good book is expected to do, what ancient literature did at the Revival of Learning with an effect like that which the reading of Chapman's Homer had upon Keats. And we

must not forget that the best result of this study of the ancients was the begetting of the moderns, though Dante somehow contrived to get born with no help from the Greek Hera and little more from the Roman Lucina.

As implements of education the modern books have some advantages of their own. I am told and I believe that there is a considerable number of not uningenuous youths, who, whether from natural inaptitude or want of hereditary predisposition, are honestly bored by Greek and Latin, and who yet would take a wholesome and vivifying interest in what was nearer to their habitual modes of thought and association. I would not take this for granted, I would give the horse a chance at the ancient springs before I came to the conclusion that he would not drink. No doubt, the greater difficulty of the ancient languages is believed by many to be a prime recommendation of them as challenging the more strenuous qualities of the mind.

I think there are grounds for this belief, and was accordingly pleased to learn the other day that my eldest grandson was taking kindly to his Homer. I had rather he should choose Greek than any modern tongue, and I say this as a hint that I am making allowance for the personal equation. The wise gods have put difficulty between man and everything that is worth having. But where the mind is of softer fibre and less eager of emprise, may it not be prudent to open and make easy every avenue that leads to literature, even though it may not directly lead to those summits that tax the mind and muscle only to reward the climber at last with the repose of a more ethereal air?

May we not conclude that modern literature and the modern languages as the way to it should have a more important place assigned to them in our courses of instruction,

assigned to them moreover as equals in dignity, except so far as age may justly add to it, and no longer to be made to feel themselves inferior by being put below the salt?

That must depend on the way they are taught, and this on the competence and conscience of those who teach them. Already a very great advance has been made. The modern languages have nothing more of which to complain. There are nearly as many professors and assistants employed in teaching them at Harvard now as there were students of them when I was in college.

Students did I say? I meant boys who consented to spend an hour with the professor three times a week for the express purpose of evading study. Some of us learned so much that we could say "How do you do?" in several languages, and we learned little more. The real impediment was that we were kept forever in the elementary stage, that we had and could look forward to no literature that would have given significance to the languages and made them beneficent. It is very different now, and with the number of teachers the number of students has more than proportionally increased. And the reason is not far to seek. The study has been made more serious, more thorough, and therefore more inspiring.

And it is getting to be understood that as a training of the faculties, the comparative philology, at least, of the modern languages may be made as serviceable as that of the ancient. The classical superstition of the English race made them especially behindhand in this direction, and it was long our shame that we must go to the Germans to be taught the rudiments of our mother tongue.

This is no longer true. Anglo-Saxon, Gothic, Old High, and Middle High German and Icelandic are all taught not

only here, but in all our chief centres of learning. When I first became interested in Old French I made a surprising discovery. If the books which I took from the college library had been bound with gilt or yellow edges, those edges stuck together, as when so ornamented they are wont to do till the leaves have been turned. No one had ever opened those books before.

"I was the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea."

Old French is now one of regular courses of instruction, and not only is the language taught but its literature as well.

Remembering what I remember, it seems to me a wonderful thing that I should have lived to see a poem in Old French edited by a young American scholar (present here this evening) and printed in the journal of this Society, a journal in every way creditable to the scholarship of the country. Nor as an illustration of the same advance in another language, should we forget Dr. Fay's admirable concordance of the "Divina Commedia."

But a more gratifying illustration than any is the existence and fruitful activity of this Association itself, and this select concourse before me which brings scholars together from all parts of the land, to stimulate them by personal commerce with men of kindred pursuits and to unite so many scattered energies in a single force controlled by a common and invigorated purpose.

We have every reason to congratulate ourselves on the progress the modern languages have made as well in academic as in popular consideration. They are not taught (as they could not formerly be taught) in a way that demands toil and thought of the student, as Greek and Latin, and they only, used to be taught; and they also open the way to higher

intellectual joys, to pastures new and not the worse for being so, as Greek and Latin, and they only, used to do.

Surely mansidedness is the very essence of culture, and it matters less what a man learns than how he learns it. The day will come, nay, it is dawning already, when it will be understood that the masterpieces of whatever language are not to be classed by an arbitrary standard, but stand on the same level in virtue of being masterpieces; that thought, imagination, and fancy may make even a *patois* acceptable to scholars; that the poets of all climes and of all ages "sing to one clear harp in divers tones," and that the masters of prose and the masters of verse in all tongues teach the same lesson and exact the same fee.

I began by saying that I had no wish to renew the Battle of the Books. I cannot bring myself to look upon the literatures of the ancient and modern worlds as antagonists, but rather as friendly rivals in the effort to tear as many as may be from the barbarizing ploutolatri which seems to be so rapidly supplanting the worship of what alone is lovely and enduring. No, they are not antagonists, but by their points of disparity, of likeness, or contrast, they can be best understood, perhaps understood only through each other. The scholar must have them both, but may not he who has not leisure to be a scholar, find profit even in the lesser of the two if that only be attainable? Have I admitted that one is the lesser? "*O matre pulchra filia pulchrior*"¹ is perhaps what I should say here.

If I did not rejoice in the wonderful advance made in the comparative philology of the modern languages, I should not have the face to be standing here. But neither should I if I shrank from saying what I believed to be the truth, whether

¹ "More beautiful daughter of a beautiful mother."

here or elsewhere. I think that the purely linguistic side in the teaching of them seems in the way to get more than its fitting share. I insist only that in our college courses this should be a separate study, and that, good as it is in itself, it should, in the scheme of general instruction, be restrained to its own function as the guide to something better.

And that something better is literature. The blossoms of language have certainly as much value as its roots, for if the roots secrete food and thereby transmit life to the plant, yet the joyous consummation of that life is in the blossoms, which alone bear the seeds that distribute and renew it in other growths. Exercise is good for the muscles of mind and to keep it well in hand for work, but the true end of culture is to give it clay, a thing quite as needful.

What I would urge therefore is that no invidious distinction should be made between the old learning and the new, but that students, due regard being had to their temperaments and faculties, should be encouraged to take the course in modern languages as being quite as good in point of mental discipline as any other if pursued with the same thoroughness and to the same end. And that end is literature, for there language first attains to a full consciousness of its powers and to the delighted exercise of them.

Literature has escaped that doom of Shinar which made our Association possible, and still everywhere speaks in the universal tongue of civilized man. And it is only through this record of man's joys and sorrows, of his aspirations and failures, of his thought, his speculation and his dreams, that we can become complete men, and learn both what he is and what he may be, for it is the unconscious autobiography of mankind. And has no page been added to it since the last ancient classic author laid down his pen?