

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE ADVANTAGES OF A CLASSICAL TRAINING AS A PREPARATION FOR THE MINISTRY

THERE are probably many people who will consider the subject of this paper as too impractical and even too absurd to deserve discussion. They think, and rightly think, that the essential qualifications for a Christian minister are that he should be called of God, that he should be a man of prayer and that he should be well acquainted with the contents and meaning of the Bible. Most Christian Churches, however, require certain other qualifications besides these, but are by no means agreed as to what these qualifications should be, or what amount of time should be devoted to the acquisition of them. At present there is a general demand that a minister should be well versed in Modern Thought. To some the essential part of Modern Thought is to be found in a knowledge of the physical sciences, or, at least, in a knowledge of their methods. Others insist that a minister should have a profound knowledge of human nature, and therefore advocate a training in psychology, ethics and sociology and even in economics. No one will deny that all these branches of study have their use and that they may well have their place in the training of a man who has the capacity for "taking all learning as his province". But such men are few in number, and well able to look after themselves.

None of these subjects, with the exception of the rudiments of the physical sciences, is suitable for the training of youth. At the basis of them all should lie a sound training in the meaning and use of language and such a consequent training of the mind as will prevent it from being led astray by hearing ambiguous words or tendentious slogans. Some such education is necessary in order that the meaning of even the English translation of the Bible may be understood, and a good deal more in order that the legitimate terminology of theology may not be misinterpreted, not to mention the jargon which is more and more being foisted on it.

This terminology and most of this jargon is derived from Greek and Latin words, as is only natural when the history of the Church is taken into account. Therefore most examining bodies who deal with candidates for the ministry expect some

small knowledge of Latin and generally also of New Testament Greek.

The most convenient method of satisfying this demand under present conditions is to expect such candidates to have passed the School Certificate, with Latin as one of its subjects, and then to pass through a theological college, if circumstances make it impossible for a degree (preferably in Arts or Theology) to be previously obtained. Degrees in Physical or Moral Science or Economics are not repudiated, but it is generally considered necessary that they should be supplemented by some further training in the "Humanities" as well as in Theology.

In theological colleges some knowledge of New Testament Greek is almost always required, but the standard is low: the position of Latin is uncertain and precarious. Some of these preliminary studies suit one type of mind and some another. We are not here concerned to estimate their comparative advantages, but only to insist once more that for the understanding of any or all of them an appreciation of the true meaning of words is necessary, and that this is particularly necessary for a man whose office it is to teach by word of mouth and not by experiment or physical demonstration. Our purpose is to consider what advantage is to be gained by such a man from a study of the Classical languages and of Classical history and antiquity which is not merely superficial, but which will take up a great part of his time during his early training.

This topic may be divided into three heads: firstly, the advantages to be gained from the study of Classical Greek and Latin as languages; secondly, the advantages to be gained by a *first-hand* acquaintance with the works of the authors who wrote in these languages; thirdly, the advantages to be gained by understanding the background both of events and thoughts against which they wrote. We are, in fact, discussing the advantages of a course of study which, in its main outlines, if not in its extent, follows that course of study to which the name *Litterae Humaniores* is given at the University of Oxford. The distinctions gained by men who have taken this course during a period of more than one hundred years should be enough to prove to all who are not blinded by ignorance or prejudice that there must be something of value in it. It must, however, be clearly understood that we are only speaking of a course of study which follows the general lines of the Oxford course and which does not

aspire to equal it either in extent or in the high standard which it exacts.

I

The first head of our subject must again be divided into two parts which are not inseparable: firstly, the advantages to be gained by a study of *Classical* Greek; and secondly, the advantages to be gained by a reasonably competent knowledge of Latin. It is generally admitted that a knowledge of *New Testament* Greek is an advantage to the Minister of the Word.

Often the circumstances in which he is placed are such that this is all that he can be reasonably asked to acquire, and, provided that he follows up the knowledge which he has obtained at a theological college during the rest of his life, there can be no question of the value of this study. We are, however, here enquiring into the ideal training for a minister, and not into one which circumstances inevitably render incomplete. Experience shows that unless a boy has learnt some Greek at school, and that almost necessarily means Classical Greek, he does not get enough knowledge of New Testament Greek at a theological college or by taking a theological degree to make its subsequent study easy, although to a persevering man it may be possible. It lacks foundation. Such a book as Cremer's *Biblico-theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek* shows to what an extent a true appreciation of the meaning of the words used in the New Testament depends on a knowledge of their usage in "profane" authors, and even on the knowledge of the period at which these authors lived and of their comparative value as stylists.

All the writers of the great commentaries on the books of the New Testament which are original works, and not a *catena aurea* of "critical" opinions, were Classical scholars and show their knowledge freely in their notes. This is not mere pedantry, but a necessary preliminary to a proper understanding of the texts on which they are commenting. Apart from all this, the Greek language was the instrument of thought of the people whose thought still forms the basis of Western civilisation. The words which they coined and used and the distinctions and definitions which these words embody have not passed out of use among educated people, and are not likely to pass out of use, even when the thoughts of men are wholly centred on atomic energy, both of which words with the concepts which they convey are of Greek origin.

Unfortunately it must be admitted that Greek is a very difficult language, and that a long time must be devoted to its study before any lasting benefit can be obtained from it. Greek to School Certificate standard is of little use, and one cannot say much more for Greek to a Higher School Certificate standard. Moreover, many minds are unfitted to cope with it at all. Dr. Johnson never said a wiser thing than when he said: "Greek, sir, is like gold lace. A man gets as much of it as he can".

The position with regard to Latin is quite different. The Latin language was the schoolmaster or the medium by means of which Greek thought was made intelligible and handed on to Western Europe and America. Moreover Latin never ceased to be a general means of communication between scholars until quite recently, while Greek decayed away into an obscure dialect under the influence of Byzantine imperialism and Turkish oppression.

The actual words of Latin form the greater part of the Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian languages and no small part of our own, and, what is more, they form that part of the English language which is least understood, but which most needs to be understood by a teacher, and especially by a teacher of Theology. If Latin is properly taught, only a modest amount of it is required to form a foundation for the understanding of the more obscure part of the English vocabulary. Latin learnt to a good School Certificate standard may also teach a pupil to understand that thoughts are expressed in sentences rather than in words, and that words can have different meanings when used in different contexts, lessons which have a far greater value than is obvious to those who have never learnt them. All this, however, depends on the way in which Latin is taught. If it is taught as it generally is, as far as the writer's experience goes, it seldom has these advantages. It may, moreover, teach a pupil to suspend his judgment before he decides on the exact meaning of a word which he is about to translate. Latin is a highly inflected language, but many of its inflections, although the same in form, are by no means the same in meaning. Suspense of judgment, until all the factors in a given situation have been examined, is a mode of thought which is not natural to man, least of all to young and half-educated people. A single word or phrase such as "Capitalism", "Imperialism", "Democracy"

or "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat" is often enough to set their minds in violent commotion, often with disastrous results.

The lessons mentioned above may be learnt to some extent from French or from New Testament Greek, but not so thoroughly. It is not long before anyone who applies his mind to the study of these languages can make out the drift of a sentence with reasonable exactness, though he may not understand the exact signification of some of the words used and may also make some bad grammatical mistakes. But Latin will only yield its meaning to a careful and methodical explorer, and it is not uncommon to find that beginners cannot be induced to see that it makes any sense at all, and consequently are content to write down complete nonsense in the pious hope that they have discovered the meaning of what they are translating. It may be freely granted that Latin, when badly taught, and consequently only partly understood, can be a useless subject. The same remark applies to other subjects, but not to the same extent.

A knowledge of Latin which goes beyond the School Certificate standard opens the door to a great literature which has been the inspiration and background of nearly all great English and still more French and Italian authors. This brings us to the second part of our subject, namely how far it is advantageous to come into immediate contact with the great writers of Greece and Rome.

II

It is often said that a good translation should be quite sufficient to inform us of what they thought, and that this is all that we need get from them. There is some truth in this opinion, if the translation is very good both from the point of view of accuracy and from that of literary style. Such translations are rare, and, in the case of some authors, almost impossible. If what is aimed at in the reading of an author is aesthetic pleasure as well as instruction, there can be no question that a translation is never equal to conveying the impression which may be gained by reading the original, sometimes not even to that which may be gained by a slow and halting reading of the original. This is especially true of the Homeric poems and the *Divina Commedia*.

Whether a person who is being trained for the ministry should devote much time to the cultivation of aesthetic tastes is a question on which opinions naturally and legitimately vary. The study of the Homeric poems involves the study of a special

dialect and of a large vocabulary which is not of much use elsewhere, but they are the foundations on which Greek literature and indeed all Western literature rest, and formed the school book of every educated Greek boy and of many Roman boys.

If the reading of Chapman's translation of Homer could produce the effect that it did on the mind of Keats, the reading of the original Greek may well produce a greater effect on those likely to profit by it. To have read Homer in the original is an experience which any one who has had the time and opportunity to indulge in would certainly not have missed. But it is not a fit subject for the School Certificate into which, for some unaccountable reason, it is generally introduced as an alternative subject.

The Greek tragedians are undoubtedly difficult reading. Their message is not easy to come by, but that they were men desperately in earnest can hardly be doubted. From Aeschylus we may learn that the ideas that wisdom comes by suffering and that divine punishment falls surely upon crime, even if it follows it but slowly, were not only to be found in the writings of the Hebrew prophets, but also among the Gentiles "who, being without Law, did naturally the things contained in the Law, and who, having not the Law, were a law unto themselves". At the same time we see in him the tension that we see in all the serious writers of Classical antiquity when they try to reconcile the affirmation of the better side of their nature that the power behind the universe is on the whole favourable to good and hostile to evil with the popular belief in capricious and cruel gods. Zeus in the *Prometheus Vincit* punishes Prometheus simply because he pitied and helped mankind. The Zeus of the great *Oresteia* trilogy is an upholder and vindicator of the moral law. It is a poor explanation to say that the Zeus of the earlier tragedy was a tyrant because he was new to rule and that he grew mature with the passing of the years. Whatever difficulties the Hebrew prophets had to face, they never had to face this difficulty.

In the opinion of the present writer nothing can make us understand better the peculiar position of Israel and the character of its religion, or the truth of St. Paul's description of the better side of the religious development of those who were not Israelites, than a study of the progress of Greek thought from the crude morality of the Homeric poems to the more positive assertions of Aeschylus, and through the doubts which beset the mind of Sophocles and still more of Euripides to the

confidence with which Plato proclaimed that it was well with the good man both now and in the life to come, whatever pain or persecution he might suffer here. In this matter the question of aesthetic pleasure is not to the fore, though it is present. We may be under a delusion, but we can only say, speaking from our own experience, that we could not have gained the vivid impression that we have gained of the meaning of this period of human development, unless we had read the Greek tragedians in the original. We can only say that the effect left on our minds by the reading of the *Agamemnon* was different in kind from that left by the reading of any other tragedy.

Sophocles was a poet who "saw life steadily and saw it whole", so far as it was to be seen in his time. Although he lived through the most glorious period of the history of Greece, he was no optimist. The most that he can put into the mouth of one of his characters about the divine power that overrules the life of men is:

θεοὶ γὰρ εἶ μὲν ὄψῃ δ' εἰσορῶσ' ὄταν
τὰ θεῖ' ἀφείξῃ τις ἐς τὸ μάλισθαι τράπη.¹

In the *Antigone* he shows us that there is a glory in upholding the moral law in opposition to the arbitrary decrees of a tyrant which not even death can quench. In the *Philoctetes* he describes the conflict and final victory of a young and generous mind against the lure of selfish advantage to be gained by craft and guile, although he has to resort to the clumsy device of the *Deus ex Machina* to end his hero's sufferings, without in any way accounting for them or justifying them. He, like Aeschylus, is an untranslatable poet. As Meillet says: "The great Athenian writers have a universal value, but they are pure Athenians and not intelligible without long study. No writer is more charming than Plato, but he is difficult to read. There is no more solid and vigorous orator than Demosthenes, but, even in his own time, he needed a specially educated public to appreciate him, and the subjects which he treats are purely Athenian and unintelligible to any one who is not acquainted with the history of the time." This caution is certainly necessary for anyone who desires to embark seriously on a study of the golden period of Classical Greek, but if the labour involved is great, the reward to be gained is proportioned to it.

¹ "For the gods give good heed, though it be long delayed, when any lay aside righteousness and turn to madness."

Euripides, is on the surface, far more intelligible. At first sight he appears to be a dramatist who determined to tell the stories long familiar to tragedy in a novel and familiar way and in a rhetorical and comparatively easy style. Some critics, and especially Dr. Verrall, have seen in him a thorough-going rationalist who used the stage to mock and discredit the gods whom the people worshipped, and that at a festival which was ostensibly held in honour of one of them. This he did so cleverly, that even Aristophanes only saw the outside of his meaning—his heroes in rags and his ranting and effeminate style.

His popular treatment of his subject and the rhetorical and gnomic character of his writings made him a stage favourite for centuries after his death, and recently, largely owing to the translations of Dr. Gilbert Murray, the subject matter, at least, of his plays, his showing up of the hatefulness and futility of war and of the wrongs of women have given him some vogue in the modern theatre. He is certainly the most cosmopolitan and "modern" of the Greek poets of the golden age.

He is inevitably the dramatist most commonly read by beginners. If the play to be read is wisely chosen and if it is presented in some such abbreviated version as those produced by the late Arthur Sidgwick and now unfortunately out of print, he may be read with both pleasure and profit by those whose knowledge of Greek is elementary and likely to remain at this standard. His rhetoric may not appeal to every one, but his cleverness can escape no one who has wit enough to understand Greek at all. His deeper meaning probably escapes most of his readers.

In him, even more than in Aeschylus, we see the real misery of the pre-Christian world facing the insoluble problems of human life with nothing to see beyond it but an uncertain future and nothing to see above it but the unworthy and immoral gods which Sophocles depicts with so little restraint in the *Ajax* and which Euripides holds up to scorn and reprobation in the *Ion* and the *Hercules Furens*.

One cannot help feeling that Euripides, like his fellow-dramatists, had a sense that there was something more behind and beyond human life than equally purposeless pleasure and pain. It was probably more dim to him than to them, but none of them puts into the mouth of any of his characters the sentiment which is found in a fragment of one of his lost plays:

τίς οἶδεν εἰ τὸ ζῆν μὲν ἔστι κατθανεῖν
τὸ κατθανεῖν δὲ ζῆν;¹

How far he himself shared this feeling is his secret, as it is the secret of most of the great dramatists.

But on the whole the spirit of Greek tragedy is summed up in the words of Sophocles:

μὴ φῶναι τὸν ἅπαντα νικᾷ λόγον
τὸ δ' ἐπεὶ φανῆ βῆραι κείθεν θθενπερ
ἦκει πολὺ δεύτερον ὡς τάχιστα,²

and in the words of Euripides:

ἐχρῆν γὰρ ἡμᾶς σύλλογον ποιουμένους
τὸν φόντα θρηνεῖν εἰς ὅσ' ἔρχεται κακὰ
τὸν δ' αὖ θανόντα καὶ πόνων πεπανμένον
χαίροντας εὐφημοῦντας ἐκπέμπειν δόμων.³

We read in St. Paul of those who were without hope and without God in the world. What this means is never brought home to us with such force as it is when we read such passages as those quoted above. Socrates and his followers did something to lighten the gloom, but a future life still remained a matter to be spoken of as a possible alternative, as it is in the *Apology of Socrates*, or as suitable only for treatment in myth and as part of an ancient tradition, as it is in the last book of Plato's *Republic*.

Still these writers retained and fostered a belief in the dignity and value of the individual man as such, even in the face of the state and of the gods. The earlier of them may have confined this value to members of their own race and even to members of their own class, but man did not count as a mere number, as he did under oriental despotisms. He was free, and his opinion counted for something. They also had definite standards of right and wrong which they felt that even the gods ought to respect. We were recently told that these two beliefs are characteristic of what we have been accustomed to call Western Civilisation. If St. Paul could say that men who had even an uncertain hold on such principles were without hope and without God, what would he have said about the present trend of our "civilisation"?

¹"Who knows whether life is death and death is life?"

²"Not to be born at all is past all prizing best and next best it is when one is born to go thither whence one came as soon as may be."

³"For we ought to assemble together and to mourn for him that is born for that he has come to great ills. But we ought to bear him that has departed hence and ceased from woe from his home with rejoicing and words of good omen."

Plato is one of those authors from whom every man must get as much as he is capable of getting. It is a great experience to read him in the original, and those who have the opportunity should certainly read the *Apology*, the *Crito* and parts of the *Phaedo* and possibly the *Gorgias*, the *Protagoras* and part of the *Republic*. These writings show how the belief that morality has no sanction from outside man, but is merely a form of refined self-interest and owes its origin to an attempt on the part of the weak to protect themselves from the strong, was first propounded in the West and first refuted.

Thucydides is generally regarded as the father of philosophical and to some extent of scientific history. Demosthenes is admitted to have been one of the greatest of orators, but the remarks quoted above from M. Meillet apply particularly to them. They are essentially Athenian authors and wrote for a specially trained public. Thucydides is studiously difficult in his speeches. The theme that he treats has some importance in the history of mankind, and he treats it in a way that makes it often of universal application. The period with which Demosthenes deals is of less importance, and some of his speeches deal only with private matters. It requires a very thorough knowledge of Greek to appreciate him at all.

Aristotle was educated at Athens, but he was not an Athenian. His influence has been worldwide and long-lasting. To Dante and to the Middle Ages in general he was "the master of those that know". The content of his *Politics*, *Ethics* and *Rhetoric* is certainly worth study as being the basis on which so much subsequent thought and practice has been built. Whether it is worth while to master his obscure and crabbed style for the sake of this matter is a question which can only be decided by the capacity of the student and the time at his disposal. It is certainly a very strenuous mental exercise.

Xenophon is the only Greek author except Lucian who can fairly be called easy. He is an agreeable if somewhat long-winded story-teller, and is read as a matter of course by all beginners.

If we may be allowed to indicate what we think is the best course for those who wish to learn Classical Greek, but who have not much time to devote to the study we may say that experience has shown that there is no better reading book for the beginner than Arthur Sidgwick's *First Greek Reading Book*. The pieces

in this book are not taken from Greek authors, and it is advisable to go on soon as possible to Freeman and Lowe's *Greek Reader for Schools* (Oxford Press). This is an admirable book in which the authors have selected and adapted with great skill passages from Lucian, Xenophon, Theophrastus and Herodotus and even from Thucydides and Plato for the use of beginners. Any one who has been carefully through this book¹ is fit to read more Xenophon and even to tackle Euripides under careful guidance.

If Classical Greek studies are to survive, it is very important that some competent teacher should edit shortened editions of some of the plays of Euripides with more notes than Sidgwick gave in his editions. The same should also be done for a few plays of Aristophanes. The author of this paper was fortunate enough in his youth to be introduced to Plato in Sidgwick's selections from that author. He has never seen these selections since. Something of the same kind is badly needed. No one who is likely to get any good at all out of Classical Greek can resist the charm of such extracts from Plato as he is fitted to understand. Therefore the authors whom we recommend for those who have only a little time to spend on Classical Greek are Xenophon, perhaps a little Lucian, Euripides and a little Aristophanes, in shortened versions, and Plato. If the student has the time and the courage to learn a Greek dialect, Homer, and especially part of the *Odyssey*, is also recommended for study, and some stories from Herodotus. Thucydides, Demosthenes and Aristotle are not authors who can be recommended to any except those who intend to master the language. The same is true to some extent of Sophocles, but an attempt to read the *Philoctetes* will bring its own reward.

It may well be objected that we have only sketched a course of study and not made out any case for the reading of these authors in the original rather than in translations. Perhaps the most any man can do who has been through this training is to assert the benefit which he knows that he has derived from it. Most people may be willing to grant that if there is anything essentially and exceptionally valuable in the content of literature, this is more likely to be impressed on the mind by the slow and laborious reading necessary for translation than by the hurried reading of a translation in one's own language.

It may be unreasonable for any one to expect other people

¹Especially with the aid of Mr. Nunn's *Short Syntax of Attic Greek* (see p. 80). F.F.B.

to admit that what seems valuable to him is necessarily valuable in an abstract sense, but he may be allowed to point to the men who were trained in this way and ask that they may be compared with the men who have not received this training. It is reasonably certain that men like Erasmus, Hooker, Bishop Joseph Butler, Bishops Lightfoot and Westcott, Archbishops Trench and William Temple, not to mention men like William Pitt and Gladstone, would never have been what they were without a Classical training. These were nearly all men of affairs and not cloistered scholars. They made their mark in the world either by their actions or by their writings and without them the world would be on a lower level than it actually is.

On the other hand, if Augustine had not been driven to hate the study of Greek through fear of the schoolmaster's rod, he might have been saved from many errors and exaggerations into which he was led by his ardent temperament and his narrow rhetorical training. It is a serious matter when a man of commanding personality and great literary power is only half-educated, and to be without a sound knowledge of Greek was, even in Augustine's day, to be only half-educated. His influence on the Western Church has been incalculable, and he was unwittingly responsible for misleading it in more than one direction.

If Jerome, who knew Greek, had had more of the serenity of Sophocles and less of the scurrility of his favourite Plautus, his writings would have been more worthy of his position and talents.

We must not be blind, it is true, to the danger which he felt so acutely of being *Ciceronianus* rather than *Christianus*. But we have the highest warrant for "using" the world, so long as we do not "abuse" it, that is to say we must keep our secular knowledge in its place, as our servant and not as our master: as our relaxation and not as our real work.

If Latin is read, it is inevitable that the works of Caesar, Cicero and Vergil should be read, if nothing else. Caesar may well be read with both pleasure and profit for the perfection of his style and for the information which he gives us about our ancestors in Britain and the ancestors of our neighbours the French, who, in spite of all racial additions to their number, still remain essentially Gauls. Caesar was not only a great general, but also a profound judge of men and of national character. He has produced the greatest book of propaganda

ever written in which the art which conceals art is seen in its highest perfection.

Cicero's style is also inimitable in quite a different way. No man ever left a more vivid picture both of himself and of his times, or made them live for such a distant posterity. His philosophical works passed on the more intelligible parts of Greek philosophy to the Middle Ages and to our own. When St. Ambrose wished to write a book on ethics for the use of his clergy, he could find nothing better to do than to adapt Cicero's *De Officiis*. A man who could write a book, the *Hortensius*, which deeply influenced the mind of St. Augustine for good, is not a negligible author. To translate Cicero is a task within the compass of any intelligent student: to translate him well is not only a valuable mental discipline, but insures that he who can do it has a large vocabulary of English words ready at command, as Lord Chatham proved when he educated his son William.

Vergil presents a difficult problem to the theological student who wishes to gain an Arts degree. He is generally obliged to read some of his works if he is to study Latin at all. Much depends on the book which is chosen as his introduction to this author. Still, the study of a writer who has remained a favourite means of instruction for so long and who made such an impression on Augustine and Dante cannot be without interest to those whose business it is to understand the working of the human mind. There can be no question as to the distinction of Vergil's style, even if it falls off in the later books of the *Aeneid*, as he himself was well aware. He, like Euripides, is "majestic in his sadness at the doubtful lot of human kind", but in a subtly different way. He was far from regarding it as his mission to discredit the popular religion, but in his efforts "to justify the ways of God to man" he probably did as much to make the official gods of the Graeco-Roman world odious as Euripides himself did, without intending to do so.

Horace troubles himself little about religion. Personally he is *parcus deorum cultor et infrequens*. He professes to have been converted to some respect for the gods by thunder in a clear sky, but there is little doubt that this is not meant seriously. If he was serious about anything, it was about the future of Rome and his own consequent literary immortality. We must also give him credit for his noble tribute to his father and for his independence of the patrons who expected more from him than he

was willing to give. For all the centuries that have elapsed since his death he has remained the favourite poet of the better sort of "man of the world" and a skilful iconoclast of shams whether they are social or literary, *callidus excusso populum suspendere naso*. He is chiefly valuable to the theological student as one who holds the mirror up to nature. As a poet his best work is inimitable. We could wish that we had a poet capable of commemorating the battle of El Alamein as he commemorated the battle of the Metaurus or the crowning mercy of Actium.

In spite of the curious and unaccountable admiration that Jerome felt for Plautus, we do not feel that the Roman comic dramatists need detain us, still less their tragedians. Livy and Tacitus are the only other prose authors that are now commonly read. They are both difficult authors. Unfortunately the parts of Livy's history which might have been of most interest to use under our present conditions have been lost, but his account of the struggle of Rome with Hannibal is worthy both of the fame of its author and of his state.

Tacitus contains much that is of interest to the student of the history of the first century of this era. He is one of those authors from whom students get as much as they are capable of getting.

It only remains to discuss Lucretius and Juvenal. Lucretius by the nature of his subject is not an easy author, but to appreciate his spirit and his power as a poet it is not absolutely necessary to be an expert in Epicurean or any other physical theories of the origin of the universe. The passages which introduce each of his books, his long dissertation on the evolution of man and his attempt to console those who are unwilling to receive his teaching that death is the end of all things are pure poetry of the highest order which are as well calculated to purge the mind by pity and terror as anything in Greek tragedy.

The coarseness of many lines in Juvenal has deservedly got him a bad name, but these are curiously set off by some of the noblest and most memorable lines in Latin poetry. Certainly no other writer is so forcible as he is when at his best. Dr. Johnson's imitation of the tenth satire, good as it is, is but a feeble reflection of the original. Few who have read him can forget his description of the servility into which a savage dictatorship degraded the once proud nobility of Rome, or how the people which once could give away great military or civil offices came to desire nothing but free food and amusement.

With regard to all this it is difficult when one looks at the present condition of the world to avoid saying with Horace:

Mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur.

Juvenal could describe in unforgettable lines the fall of the would-be dictator Sejanus in terms which would be applicable to that of Mussolini or Hitler; and the utter futility of a war of conquest as shown by the end of Alexander and Hannibal:

Unus Pellaeo iuveni non sufficit orbis;
Aestuat infelix angusto limite mundi.
Cum tamen a figulis munitam intraverit urbem,
Sarcophago contentus erit. Mors sola fatetur
Quantula sunt hominum corpuscula.

He could also write such words as *maxima debetur puero reverentia*, and severely censure those fathers who corrupted their sons by their bad example, while they devoted infinite care to the upkeep and cleanliness of their houses. He is also the only Roman poet who plainly says that a daughter is dearer than a son. One can hardly resist the inference that the leaven of Christianity was working in Rome in quarters that were certainly not professedly Christian.

The last twenty-one lines of the tenth satire are certainly among the noblest legacies of the ancient world. Even now, if we are to pray for temporal benefits, we can hardly find more impressive words in which to express our wishes than:

Orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano.
Fortem posce animum mortis terrore carentem,
Qui spatium vitae extremum inter munera ponat
Naturae, qui ferre queat quoscumque labores,
Nesciat irasci, cupiat nihil, et potiores
Herculis aerumnas credit saevosque labores
Et Venere, et cenis et pluma Sardanapali.

What is even more remarkable, considering the times when these words were written, is that Juvenal counsels his readers to let the divine powers give us what is suitable to us on the ground that "man is dearer to the gods than he is to himself". This recalls the Greek prayer μή μοι γένοιθ' ἄ βούλομ' ἄλλ' ἄ συμφέροι. In taking account of the development of human thought, the existence of such feelings as these in the period that elapsed between the tyranny of Nero and Domitian and the beginning of the final break up of the Roman Empire is surely significant.

We make no apology for recommending the study of Latin

or of the greater Latin authors as a necessary part of a liberal education. Only those who are so ignorant as not to understand the origin of the English language or so stupid as not to see the value of translation from and into another language both for increasing our vocabulary of our own language and for making our use of it more accurate deny the value of this training, at least for those whose business it is to influence other men by speech and writing and who do not wish consciously to mislead them. Helps to the study of Latin are far more numerous than helps to the study of Greek. After the stage of reading made-up easy pieces is past, which unfortunately now means after one is a little above the standard of the average School Certificate, a beginning may be made with Caesar, with extracts from Cicero judiciously chosen, and with Vergil, who is really an easier author than is commonly supposed, if a start is made with the second book of the *Aeneid*. Livy is a decidedly difficult author owing to the frequent intrusion of poetical turns of expression into his style. Ovid is easy in a sense. Most of his poems in the elegiac rhythm are too full of tricks of style to be readily intelligible and parts of them are intolerably dull. Selections from the *Metamorphoses* are often a useful and agreeable change from Vergil. Horace is best read in selections. The practice of grinding through a book of the *Odes* and taking all his work, good, bad and indifferent, as it comes is not the best way to appreciate him. No one understands Horace who has not read at least the ninth satire of the first book and part of the sixth, which is one of the few revelations of his real character which any Roman poet gives us. It may also be said that no one understands Vergil who has not read those parts of the second *Georgic* which deal with the glories of Italy and the happiness of country life. These authors, with perhaps some fuller acquaintance with the easier philosophic writings of Cicero such as the *De Senectute*, the *De Amicitia* and some extracts from the third book of the *De Officiis* and even from the *De Natura Deorum*, will amply suffice the ordinary student. It is unfortunate for theological students that the reading of the Vulgate cannot be recommended as an exercise in translation. It is valuable, especially if read parallel with the Greek, in explaining the origin of many words used in theology, but it is too slavish a translation of the Greek, to have any literary value of its own. Such students should, however, not neglect the *Cathemerinon* of Prudentius or

the Latin Hymns of the Middle Ages in which the wonderful brevity of the Latin language is shown not to be necessarily linked with obscurity, as Horace thought it was. We do not know what he would have thought of the *Veni Creator Spiritus* or the *Dies Irae*, but even he could not have packed so much into so few words; and the unknown authors of these hymns and many more like them succeeded in conveying the deepest thoughts in the simplest words in a manner which no Classical author was capable of.

III

We pass on to our third head, the importance of knowing something of the background of events and thoughts which the Classical authors presuppose. It should be obvious that it is impossible to study the great authors of any period of history without some knowledge of the conditions under which they wrote and of the views prevalent among their contemporaries about the constitution and course of nature and of the origin of the universe.

Yet the syllabus of work now exacted in schools shows little consciousness of this. We feel that in discussing an ideal curriculum for a man of moderate education in which the study of the Classics is to take a considerable part, we must go beyond this. It has often been remarked that the history of the city-states of Greece and that of the middle and later period of the republic of Rome presents on a small scale, suitable for the comprehension of young people, all the main outline of politics and sociology with which we have to deal on a nation-wide, and indeed a world-wide scale to-day.¹ The Greek state passed rapidly from a paternal kingship through various experiments which generally ended in a military pronunciamiento and the rule of a single man or "tyrant", supported sometimes by foreign mercenaries. In nearly all cases this was succeeded by an oligarchical or democratic government produced by revolution and often by assassination. The significance of these events for the modern world is shown by our inability to do without the words tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy and democracy, however little we may understand them.

In spite of their literary maxim "nothing in excess" and

¹The best book that we know on this subject for the class of student which we have in mind is *The Story of Greece and Rome* by Messrs. J. C. and H. G. Robertson, published by Dent. It is of moderate size, well written and well printed and containing just the information required.

the doctrine of the mean in ethics developed by Aristotle, the Greeks did nothing by halves in politics. They had no idea of representative government or of a government where one section acted as a check on the others, such as the Romans had. Consequently we see all the evils of tyranny, oligarchy and democracy carried by them to their logical end and to their worst excesses.

We also see from the history of Greece the peril which threatens a number of detached states with different systems of government, one sacrificing everything to the attainment of military strength on land because of the weakness of its frontiers, another relying on its fleet to supply it with food and others inclining now to this side, now to that, as racial feeling or political expediency dictates. The Greeks had one advantage over modern Europe: they all spoke the same language with dialectical differences, and they all attended the same religious and athletic festivals. But they were always in danger, because there was a great eastern empire on the frontier of their Asiatic colonies, an empire ruled by one man with the help of powerful chieftains in which the ordinary man counted for little more than a slave. It was also an empire in which there was not that freedom of thought which made first the Asiatic Greeks and afterwards the metropolitan Greeks and those of Italy the pioneers in natural science and philosophy, from whose work almost all further developments had their origin and whose thought was hardly amplified or changed at all, except in so far as it was applied to the elucidation of the problems set to it by Christianity, until the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The Greeks were probably the first to feel the importance of the individual, though they may have regarded the members of their own race as the only people that mattered. Alexander, who was a Macedonian taught by a Greek, tried to apply this doctrine to all the members of the varied races that made up his empire, but as far as concerns the east, this idea did not take firm root. The Stoics, however, tended to be cosmopolitan in their thinking. Rome under their influence produced the conception of the Law of Nations and the Law of Nature which fostered the idea that the distinction between right and wrong was in the nature of things. They even coined the word "conscience" and gave it some of the meaning that it has in Christian thought. Cicero freely used the word *humanitas*, and a conception grew up that

men were in some sense the children of God and that the moral law was His will.

When Christianity burst the bonds of Judaism it naturally flowed into the mould prepared for it by the later Greek philosophers, which had already been accepted in Rome and commended in the writings of Cicero and later of Marcus Aurelius. When the Renaissance broke up the old form of the Christian faith, those who repudiated it, wholly or in part, had the better side of this moral tradition to fall back on. Hence the worship of virtue among such people as the Deists and even the followers of Rousseau, however little the lives of some of them corresponded with their profession. The teaching of Hegel and its fruit in the Marxian or totalitarian state, of whatever complexion, represented man as a cog in a machine with no moral nature and no rights as against the state. This condition of mind is due not only to the repudiation of Christianity, but also to the lack of Classical education. It is better to say that man is the measure of all things, or even that he is the master of all things, than to regard him as a trifling part of a mechanism which is quite justified in grinding him to powder if its efficient functioning makes this inevitable. In a word, the paganism of Swinburne or Henley is better than the determinism of Marx, Mussolini or Hitler.

It is true that the Greek democracies and especially that of Athens went too far in encouraging equality and individualism. They gave every free man the right to vote personally on all laws passed by the assembly and in the election of all magistrates, and they even compelled him to plead his own cause in the law-courts while other citizens chosen by lot sat as judges. It was a court of this kind that condemned Socrates, and it was a polity of this kind that disgusted Plato and Aristotle and finally brought Athens into subjection to Sparta and in the end put the whole of Greece under the heel of Macedon and Rome.

The Romans adopted a middle course which was arrived at after centuries of experiment and whose principal feature was an elaborate system of checks which limited the powers of individual magistrates. Like the English, they did not follow abstract principles in framing their constitution. They worked on conservative lines, mending from time to time what seemed to be wrong, but not before the wrong became almost unbearable. In the end their constitution was swept by corrupt officials and

hasty demagogues into a long period of civil war which culminated in the rule of one man, decently disguised by republican forms. But if the Roman Empire was at times a despotism, it was for a long time a despotism which respected local government, and which was always tempered by assassination.

The founders of the British Empire learnt much from the Romans, but they did not learn, until it was too late to prevent the breaking away of their North American colonies, that it is expedient to grant freedom to communities that are ripe for it, and they never learnt till quite lately a lesson which the Romans learnt early, the expediency of employing men of all races included in their empire in positions of trust and importance.

Unfortunately the Church only learnt part of the lesson which the Roman Empire might have taught her. She saw the importance of strong control from a centre, but as time went on she tended to concentrate this control more and more in the hands of Italians. She learnt little from the Greek conception of the importance of freedom of thought in the pursuit of truth. Hence the power which was concentrated in Rome often fell into bad hands and always tended to stifle initiative in the mission field or in lands nominally converted to Christianity, in which the character of the people differed greatly from that of Italians brought up under the influence of the "ghost of the Roman Empire, sitting crowned on the grave thereof".

As for the background of Greek thought and the Latin interpretation of it which made it intelligible even to the Germanic peoples who overthrew the Roman Empire, it is the foundation on which nearly all western civilisation has been built. There is scarcely a problem which perplexes us which was not first raised by the Greeks, if we except the problems raised in some of the Psalms and in the book of Job. We may perhaps also except from this statement the problems raised by the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope, those raised with regard to ethics by a whole-hearted and logical acceptance of the doctrine of biological evolution through chance variations, and those raised by the Hegelian theory of thesis, antithesis and solution as interpreted by Marx and applied by Lenin.

If the doctrine of Evolution has taught us anything of value, it is surely this, that we cannot understand anything that exists, unless we understand how it came to be what it is. A review of the rise and development of Greek physical theory and moral

philosophy and of its interpretation by Rome will lead us far along this path.

It is something also to discover that we are not the first men to be faced with the problems that seem so new and baffling to those of us who know little of history. We may well be surprised to find that Cicero wrote towards the close of his life in the middle of those civil wars which brought the Roman republic down in ruin:

But if, on the other hand, the gods neither can nor will help us, and do not care for us at all, or take any notice of what we do, if they can exert no influence on human life, what sense is there in worshipping them or praying to them? Piety, however, like the rest of the virtues cannot consist in outward show and pretence: with piety moral sanctions and religion will also disappear, and, when these are gone, great confusion and disturbance of the orderly course of life must necessarily follow. I am almost inclined to think that if the idea that man has any duty to God disappears, trustworthiness and social union among men and justice itself, the most excellent of all virtues, will disappear with it (*De Natura Deorum*, I. i, 4).

We have only to remember what Germany was and what the Near East is now to see the truth of these words written two thousand years ago under conditions which, when looked at superficially, appear very different from conditions prevailing now.

This opinion can hardly be classed even by the most advanced admirer of Modern Thought as the utterance of a clerical bigot who is paid to hold certain opinions and who is quite unacquainted with the facts of life. Many warnings of the same kind could be quoted from all the great writers of Greece and Rome. For example, Thucydides says that when the Athenians woke up from their dream of conquering Sicily after the annihilation of their army before Syracuse, "in the panic of the moment they were ready, as is the way of a democracy, to observe discipline in everything" (viii. 1); but he does not fail to note how this mood passed away when it was believed that the crisis was past.

Such is the field of history and philosophy which awaits investigation by any student of human nature and which will so well repay investigation, because it shows men living in simpler conditions than ours and yet facing the same problems. Moreover these men were masters of the two greatest forms of human speech which ever existed, one remarkable for subtlety, and the other for conciseness. The power that they have so long exercised over the world by their writings, which perplexes and even infuriates some of the choice products of our present civilisation,

needs some better explanation than a dismissal as a typical product of stupid conservatism. It is certainly remarkable that English Biblical scholars of a former generation and some few of this generation who were or are trained on a basis of a study of the Classics were far less easily led away by wild theories of Biblical criticism than German or American scholars whose Classical attainments were necessarily small, because of the system of early specialisation prevalent in Germany or in countries too much exposed to German influence.

When Professor Blass, who was for most of his life a Classical scholar, turned his attention in his old age to New Testament criticism, he saw clearly through many of the extravagances of contemporary "experts" in theology in his own country.

It is true that the Greeks always desired to hear or to see some new thing, but they expected an explanation to be given of it which was neither paradoxical nor absurd. The greatest of the Greeks let no word pass his lips, or those of his companions, without trying to define its meaning accurately. It is much to be regretted that we have no man like him now to question our slipshod use of language in politics, ethics or theology. The day is fast passing away when his influence will be directly felt in general education. As Mr. Gladstone pointed out with regard to Bishop Butler, a man's method may be of more importance than the conclusions which he reaches by it. Now theological students have lost the benefit of studying the characteristically English method of Bishop Butler with its caution, its moderation and its desire to assume nothing more than is reasonably probable.

It is still possible for those who have the diligence and initiative to go outside the accepted curriculum to study the method of Butler in his writings, because he wrote in English, but it will not be long before the method of Socrates will pass out of their ken because they will be ignorant not only of the language in which he spoke, but also of the conditions under which he lived which made his method and his thought such a vital factor in human progress.

H. P. V. NUNN.

*Stockport,
Cheshire.*