

## TO ANCIENT GREEK THROUGH MODERN? NO!

It is difficult not to sympathize with the feeling of an educated Greek who sees the language of his forefathers laboriously and ineffectually taught by aliens whose pronunciation falls upon his ears as a strange and barbarous dissonance. One readily comprehends, too, the naïf enthusiasm of the elderly traveller whose own Greek is oxidized an inch thick, and who is awe-struck to find children and cabmen familiarly speaking what he innocently fancies is the mysterious idiom which he failed to master by years of painful drill.

These respectable feelings of the English traveller in Greece and of the Greek traveller in England or America have frequently found expression during the last few years in appeals to the educational public to adopt the modern pronunciation and the teaching of Greek as a living language by natives of Greece. The national susceptibilities involved and the genuine enthusiasm for the best things of the mind that pervade these pleas make it an ungrateful task to combat them, especially when they are so temperate in spirit and dignified in form as the paper on teaching Greek as a living language in the October number of *THE FORUM*. But the uncontradicted propagation of erroneous opinion in matters of education is never safe in a country governed in the last resort by public opinion. If the teachers of Greek remain silent, there is danger that the zeal of some sudden convert among our trustees or college presidents may insist on introducing disorganizing experiments into the already sufficiently confused Greek departments of our schools and colleges. It is fitting, then, that some one who is familiar with both sides of the question should make a plain statement of the facts as to the relation between ancient and modern Greek and the educational value of the latter.

And first let me dispose of an *argumentum ad hominem* with which the discussion of the question is frequently embarrassed. It is claimed that the opposition to the reform is due to the habits and interests of the teachers of Greek who are unacquainted with the modern pronunciation and are committed to a mistaken tradition.

But the fact is that a respectable and increasing number of Ameri-

can professors of Greek have studied at Athens and reject the so-called reform, if they do reject it, *en connaissance de cause*. At one time I spoke modern Greek, and am still able to follow a lecture in that language, and my unwillingness to see the modern pronunciation introduced into our class-rooms is due simply to the conviction that it is unscientific and displeasing to the ear, and that the association of the study of classical Greek with the modern form of the language offers no compensating gain for these disadvantages.

The matter of pronunciation is really of comparatively slight moment, though it is always put in the forefront of this debate and cannot therefore be passed over in silence. The philological question need not be examined here. It is admitted that we do not know exactly how Sophocles or Demosthenes pronounced. And there is some room for difference of opinion as to the precise dates at which the vowel-sounds characteristic of the modern pronunciation came in. But there is substantial agreement among philologists that the pronunciation described in the introduction to Professor Goodwin's Greek grammar is far nearer the utterance of the ancients than that heard at Athens to-day. The assertion that this pronunciation is more agreeable to the ear will probably be thought a mere subjective prejudice of habit. I have heard lectures on the Greek tragedians at the University of Athens, and have associated freely with students of philology there. In no single instance did I find a modern Greek student who had any appreciation of the verbal melody of Greek poetry, or who was able to read Pindar and Æschylus metrically. And it can hardly be denied that the monotony of the modern Greek vowel-system would sadly impair, if it did not utterly destroy, the music of the vowelled undersong of fluent Greek. Pronunciation, however, as I have said, is a minor matter. If modern Greek is of really great intrinsic educational value, or a considerable aid in the acquisition of the older language, we should probably consent to suppress our prejudices and to reconcile our ears to the sacrifice of something of the rich vowel harmonies of Homer, Pindar, and Æschylus. The value of modern Greek, then, is the real issue.

The continuity and persistent vitality of the Greek language through a period of twenty-eight recorded centuries is an imposing historical phenomenon, and has called forth eloquent utterances from Gibbon, Mrs. Browning, Professors Jebb, Blackie, and Freeman, and from many others who have been or might be quoted in this controversy. To the mature student of universal history it is an inspiring

and significant fact. What a fascination one felt in reading one's first Greek newspaper at Athens and noting that perhaps five-sixths of the words as they stood on the printed page in accent and spelling were possible ancient Greek! But the guardians of higher education are obliged to make distinctions and reservations that would be discourteous in the passing tourist and are perhaps pedantic in the magazine writer. And the essence of the distinctions relevant here is that we do not require our youth to study Greek because it is "a living language spoken all through the Levant, possessing a contemporaneous and daily increasing literature and an ably conducted newspaper press." There is no lack of languages possessing an ably conducted newspaper press and spoken over wide empires, which it is convenient for tourists and commercial gentlemen to know, but which we cannot study in the few brief years allotted to disinterested culture. If we select Greek rather than Russian or Japanese, it is because it is the noblest language that ever lived on the lips of men and the vehicle of the most original, stimulating, and artistically perfect literature of which history holds record.

Now the language and literature of modern Greece, however estimable the place they hold among the minor languages of southeastern Europe, have nothing of this distinctive nobility and beauty, and their study tends only to confuse the student's perception of these supreme qualities in the ancient tongue. The resemblance of modern to ancient Greek has been much exaggerated. It lies wholly on the surface. And the statement that the difference is far less than that between Chaucerian and modern English, while partially true to the letter, is wholly misleading in spirit. Indeed, there are two modern Greek languages: the rude dialect of the people, which is too remote from ancient Greek to be of any service, and the conventional language of the newspaper and public school, which is an artificial restoration, very convenient for practical purposes, but anathema to the philologist and an abomination to the man of delicate literary sense. Plato could not read a paragraph of a modern Athenian newspaper. If the professor of ancient Greek is able to read the modern Greek newspaper at sight, it is because he translates English, German, and French idioms into Greek vocables of the insipid dialect of the post-classical age as he reads. For the delicate and precise mechanism of the ancient syntax is substituted a clumsy, imperfectly developed, analytic structure; the pure native classical idiom is replaced by a grotesque mixture of all the idioms and worn-out news-

paper metaphors of Europe; and the meanings of all higher spiritual words are confused by associations with the translator's equivalents in French or German: *κόσμος*, for example,—shades of Pythagoras!—meaning *peuple*, or company, by contamination with the French *monde*. To fix the associations of this hybrid jargon in the mind of the young student is to bar access forever to the perfect purity and propriety of the older tongue.

And for what educational end is this injury to be inflicted? To facilitate the acquisition of a few vocables which with proper training the student can learn easily enough in the class-room. For this and this only it is that lends plausibility to the contention that Greek should be taught as a living language by natives of Greece. The claims put forward for modern Greek in its own name are urged only *pro forma*, or are due to an amiable but indiscriminating patriotism. The number of those who really need to speak modern Greek or find occasion to read a modern Greek book is insignificant. All educated Greeks speak French or English. But it is felt that practically effective command of Greek is not obtained by the systems of teaching now in vogue, and it is vaguely hoped that, approached by the familiar methods employed in the study of modern languages, the college Fetich would lose some of its terrors.

Professor Blackie is quoted as saying that by these methods more of the language can be learned in five months than is now acquired by the assiduous labor of many years. Of course, this could be even approximately true only if knowledge of the language was measured solely by fluent command of the few hundred words employed in the simplest conversation. Absurdly exaggerated as the statement is, however, it contains a challenge that must be answered. And the answer involves the explanation of some misconceptions that attach to the study of Latin as well as Greek. Something of the charges must be frankly admitted. There is much inefficient teaching of this as of other subjects, and much wasteful pre-occupation with abstract grammatical futilities usurping the place of direct study of the concrete facts of the language. But in abatement of this we must remember that our students of Latin and Greek are not mature men. They are boys, learning to use their minds, and their positive achievement is at first necessarily slight in any study that demands more than simple memory. The more rapid progress that sometimes seems to be effected by the employment of so-called natural methods must be attributed to the longer hours demanded by these methods, or to the

limitation of the study to the simpler aspects of the subject, or in some cases to the contagious enthusiasm of the teachers.

There is much exaggeration as well as misconception in the charge that the faithful labor of years fails to give the American student the power of reading ordinary Greek and Latin. The young Greeks themselves, it appears, require six or seven years of training in order to read intelligently authors like Sophocles and Thucydides, and my recollection is that the men at the University of Athens did not interpret *Æschylus* any better than some college juniors whom I have known. Where the results of eight or nine years of study prove nugatory, it will be generally found on inquiry that the study had not been continuous, or that the student's interest in the substance and thought of the authors read has not been properly aroused. The importance of this last point can hardly be over-estimated. Any bright boy can learn to read ordinary narrative Greek and Latin—fables, *Cæsar*, or *Xenophon*—as readily as he learns to read German. If he fails, it is because amid the tempting solicitations of the various studies on the modern side he is not properly stimulated to make the effort. But a large part of classical Greek and Latin literature is not ordinary narrative. It is the loftiest epic, lyric, or drama, the most impassioned and thoughtful oratory, the subtlest philosophy. It is literature of a type that students who prattle very prettily boarding-school French or German, and read light comedies or novelettes, would not think of attempting in French or German, or even in English, for that matter. And the problem of the Greek teacher is first to teach the boy rapidly to read easy prose like *Xenophon*,—which is, after all, no great trick, if the student can be induced to try; and secondly, to lead him gradually to the intelligent enjoyment of the higher forms of literature with their involved and subtle modes of expression. It is here that the real difficulty and the real educational rewards are found. And to this end natural methods, conversational exercises and modern Greek contribute nothing. They at the best would somewhat shorten the process of gaining familiarity with the commoner words and idioms that occur in the simplest narrative prose.

The advocates of modern Greek, like the advocates of natural methods, begin by loudly proclaiming incontrovertible facts which unfortunately have no relevancy to their particular demands. They rightly insist that in the study of language the ear must be trained as well as the eye, but they are oblivious to the fact that the student's ear may be accustomed to the sound of Greek as well by reading the

Anabasis aloud and hearing his teacher quote Homer, as by chattering guide-book phrases about the weather in modern Greek. They urge that the language should be made of living interest to the student, but they fail to see that the real life of Greek is in the masterpieces of the literature, and that it is through the intelligent interpretation of these that the student's dormant enthusiasm must be awakened. Vigorous teaching of conversational trivialities in modern Greek is perhaps better than inert and mummified teaching of Sophocles. But the power to read and appreciate Sophocles is what we want, and there is really no serious reason why we should not have it.

The obstacles to the ready reading of Greek, assuming the indispensable drill in the elements, are mainly two: lack of vocabulary, and insensibility to the complicated evolution of the thought and the subtle forms of expression that characterize much of the world's higher artistic literature in all languages. The first difficulty can be overcome by any intelligent student who reads faithfully under good guidance for two or three years. The few hundred words that on the most favorable assumption would be used in conversational exercises are insignificant in comparison with the far larger number that must in the nature of things be learned in a purely literary way. A conscious effort to master the vocabulary by frequent reviews, judicious etymologizing, reading aloud, apt citation of parallel passages, and other devices that will suggest themselves to the practised teacher is all that is needed. The other difficulty can be met, in the case of young and immature students, only by gradually initiating them into the appreciation of the elaboration of the expression and the imaginative coloring of the thought that mark high poetic and reflective literature. And this education, one of the best fruits of classical culture, is just what is evaded or postponed by natural methods or by the substitution of the analytic and trivial modern Greek for its nobler ancestor. The student fails—when he fails—from want of appreciation of delicate literary art, or inability to apprehend the peculiar and subtle logic of the higher rhetoric of poetic expression. I have not infrequently known a young student who missed the meaning of a passage of Æschylus or Pindar which he has construed with literal accuracy, to receive immediate illumination from a pertinent parallel from Milton or Shelley. But instead of patiently initiating the student into this difficult and noble *lingua franca* of genius by faithful and sympathetic teaching, we are asked to substitute for it a courier's parrot-like familiarity with a commonplace modern newspaper dialect.

There is indeed a sense in which Greek should be taught as a living language—a sense indicated in the words of Lowell, which are irrelevant to Mr. Gennadius's contention, though relevant to mine:

"If the classic languages are dead, they yet speak to us with a clearer voice than any living tongue. If their language is dead, yet the literature it enshrines is crammed with life as perhaps no other writing, except Shakespeare's, ever was or will be."

It is of this life that the Greek teacher should make himself the interpreter, rather than waste his limited opportunity on the futile endeavor to galvanize a few commonplace phrases of the language into a jerky conversational resurrection. And this the English teacher of Greek can best do by interpreting his authors in their relation to our own national tradition of culture and our own rich poetic inheritance. Greek literature touches our modern life in two chief ways: first, through its universal liberating human quality, whereby it has always appealed to ages of awakened spiritual life like the Renaissance and our own; and secondly, through the historic influence that it has exercised on the finest English poetry and the profoundest English ethical and philosophic thought. In these facts the teacher who has himself entered into the glorious literary heritage that is the birth-right of every Englishman will find the suggestions of a natural method of making Greek a living tongue in the only sense possible or desirable for American students.

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## MOTHERHOOD AND CITIZENSHIP: WOMAN'S WISEST POLICY.

"MEN are not wise enough, nor generous enough, nor pure enough to legislate fairly for women. The laws of the most civilized nation depress and degrade women."

In the heat of the debate on the subject of woman suffrage, these words of George William Curtis were flung broadcast in the campaign documents. Now that the debate has been silenced, for the time, they are used less aggressively, perhaps, but fully as persistently, by those who feel that they are suffering from the injustice of denial of a legitimate claim; even if not used, they are harbored in the thought of the disappointed woman suffragist as a conclusion proved by the issue of the New York Constitutional Convention.

Alas! that women do not realize that by this arraignment of men they condemn themselves. Is their vision too limited to discern that the more proofs they bring forward of the folly, selfishness, and impurity of men, the more conclusively they are proving, at the same time, that women are not wise enough, as yet, to legislate for themselves?

Every man who legislates has been conceived of woman, has been influenced by her life, her thoughts, her spirit, during his pre-natal existence; has had her impress on his dawning soul; has been led and guided through the first unfolding of his life by her hand; has had his susceptible young heart first in her keeping, his awakening thought first beneath her sway. And if, at last, he grows up to make laws which depress and degrade her, there must be some lack of grace or wisdom, some error of nature or of life in woman, which had better be met and overcome as the first step toward her emancipation; that when it comes it may stand upon a firm foundation, upon the impregnable rock of her own fitness and character.

Evolution is better than revolution; and if the women who lavished their enthusiasm and their activity to secure the right of suffrage be wise, they will now turn their splendid energies into the channel of their opportunity. They will so educate the sons of the present