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978-1-108-06214-5 - The New Cratylus: Or, Contributions Towards a More Accurate
Knowledge of the Greek Language

John William Donaldson

Excerpt

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BOOK I.



GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

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THE
NEW CRATYLUS.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE UTILITY OF PHILOLOGICAL STUDIES.

IT may be stated as a fact worthy of observation in the literary history of modern Europe, that generally, when one of our countrymen has made the first advance in any branch of knowledge, we have acquiesced in what he has done, and have left the further improvement of the subject to our neighbours on the continent. The man of genius always finds an utterance, for he is urged on by an irresistible impulse—a conviction that it is his duty and his vocation to speak: but we too often want those who should follow in his steps, clear up what he has left obscure, and complete his unfinished labours. Nor is it difficult to show why this should be the case. The English mind, vigorous and healthy as it generally is, appears to be constitutionally averse from speculation; we have all of us a bias towards the practical and immediately profitable, generated by our mercantile pursuits, which make all of us, to a certain extent, utilitarians, and stifle the developement of a literary taste among us; or, if the voice of interest fails to controul the vanity of authorship, there is still another modification of self-love, a cold conventional reserve, induced by the fear of committing oneself, which imposes silence upon those who have truths to tell.

To this general fact, however, there is one very remarkable exception. The regulations of our grammar-schools, and, perhaps, somewhat of the old custom and antiquated prejudice, of

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which we hear so much, have made classical studies not only the basis but nearly the whole of a liberal education in this country, and circumstances, which we shall point out in the following chapter, have created for us a thriving philological literature. Although the rewards and encouragements held out by our great Universities have been considered by many as a sufficient justification of such studies, it is the spirit of the age to inquire, what advantage a young man derives from so protracted a study of Latin and Greek, in addition to and independent of the University distinctions and emoluments which he may have the good fortune to obtain. There is much of reason in this demand, and it is doubtless incumbent upon those who have devoted themselves to such pursuits to point out to others their importance and utility. Hitherto this has not been done in a satisfactory manner; and therefore, although our object is rather to add something to philological knowledge than to justify philological pursuits, we deem it a necessary preliminary that we should endeavour by some plain arguments to recommend to our readers the sort of learning which we wish to increase and the studies which we design to facilitate—that we should make known at the very outset the nature and value of the subject on which we write. And in doing this we disclaim any wish to perplex ourselves with the polemics of the question, as it has been treated by other writers. It is not our purpose to discuss the merits or demerits of our collegiate institutions, still less to impugn or exculpate, as the case may be, the conduct of those who are intrusted with the management of them: least of all would we assert that there is no room for improvement in the present method of our classical studies; on the contrary we hope and indeed expect that they will ere long be pursued in a healthier and a manlier spirit, that much that is superfluous will be retrenched, much that is useful added, so that even the educational theorist may at length admit that there is something more in nouns and verbs than was dreamt of in his philosophy. Our only aim in this place is to satisfy the practical sense of our countrymen with regard to the real uses of philology, properly pursued: how it is and has been prosecuted will appear in the next chapter.

We maintain, then, first that a certain amount of philology is necessary as the basis of a liberal education: and secondly,

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that cultivated to its fullest extent philological scholarship furnishes important contributions to general knowledge. Under the name philology we include the two great branches of a scientific inquiry into the principles of language;—the theory of the origin and formation of words, which is generally called the philosophy of language; and—the method of language, or, as it is more usually termed, logic or dialectic, which treats of the formation of sentences¹. Both these subjects are comprised in general grammar, which is therefore identical with philology, and have also their representatives in the etymology and syntax of every particular grammar. Although they are but component parts of one science it is of the utmost consequence that they should not be confused or interchanged: for we will venture to say that the most signal mistakes of philologists may be traced to the practice hitherto so common of supposing that the formation of words may be discussed on a logical basis. In endeavouring, then, to estimate the importance of philology we must consider as separate questions, what is the use of etymology or the doctrine of words, and of logic or the doctrine of sentences: including under the latter all that belongs to the method of language, and under the former whatever pertains to its origin and generation. And in the first place it is to be shown, that the rudiments of philology in both its branches are or ought to be the basis of the intellectual training of man, or of that education which is alone worthy of the name. As logic or the method of language, though properly secondary to etymology, is of more ancient discovery, we shall consider it first.

Education is of two kinds; it is either general or professional, it is either designed for the cultivation of the intellect and the development of the reasoning faculties, which all men have in common though not perhaps in the same degree, or it is

1. This appears to be the real extent of the term philology. W. von Humboldt, however, would confine it to that department which is conversant about the interpretation of the written monuments of a language, as distinguished from the analysis of its structure and comparison with other idioms, which he calls *Linguistik* (*über die Verschied. d. menschl. Sprachtaues*, p. 202); and an able writer in this country would confine the term philology to a part of the first of the two branches

into which we have divided it. "By philology," says he, "I understand that study which deals with words in reference to their meaning. It is in this respect the opposite of logic, which strictly speaking is not concerned with the meaning of words at all. The one uses human discourse as a mean of attaining to a knowledge of human thought and feeling; the other explains the conditions under which human discourse is possible" (*Subscription no Bondage*, p. 46).

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calculated to adapt him for some particular calling, which the laws of society, on the principle of the division of labour, have assigned to him as an individual member of the body politic. Now the education of the individual for this particular purpose is not an education of man as such; he might do his particular work as well or better if you deprived him of all his speculative faculties and converted him into an automaton; in short, the better a man is educated professionally the less is he a man, for, to use the words of an able American writer¹, “the planter who is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm. The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of a ship.” It was for this reason that the clear-headed Greeks denied the name of education (*παιδεία*) to that which is learned, not for its own sake, but for the sake of some extrinsic gain or for the sake of doing some work, and distinguished formally between those studies which they called liberal or worthy of a free man and those which were merely mechanical and professional². In the same way Cicero speaks of education properly so called, which he names humanity (*humanitas*)³, because its object is to give a full developement to those reasoning faculties which are the proper and distinctive attributes of man as such⁴. Now we do not pretend that philology is of any mechanical or professional use, for we do not call Theology a profession, it is merely a branch or application of philology: we do not say that philology will help a man to plough or to reap; but we do assert that it is of the highest use as a part of humanity, or of education properly so called.

1. See “An oration before the Phi-Beta-Kappa Society” by Ralph Waldo Emerson, p. 5.

2. See Plato *Legg.* i. p. 643 B. ταύτην τὴν τροφήν (τὴν πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἐκ παίδων παιδείαν) ἀφορισάμενος ὁ λόγος οὗτος, ὡς ἐμοὶ φαίνεται, νῦν βούλουτ' ἀν μύνην παιδείαν προσαγορεύειν, τὴν δὲ εἰς χρήματα τείνουσαν ἢ τινα πρὸς

ἴσχυρ καὶ πρὸς ἄλλην τιμὰ σοφίαν ἀνενοῦ καὶ δίκης βάνουσον εἶναι καὶ ἀνελεύθερον καὶ οὐκ ἀξίαν τὸ παράπαν παιδείαν καλεῖσθαι. Similarly Aristotle *Polit.* viii. c. 2.

3. *Pro Archia Poeta*, l. *De Oratore*, i. 9.

4. Aul. Gellius, xiii. 16.

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CHAP. I.] OF PHILOLOGICAL STUDIES.

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The test of a good education is the degree of mental culture which it imparts, for education, so far as its object is scientific, is the discipline of the mind. The reader must not overlook what is meant by the word mind when used in reference to education. That some dumb animals are possessed of a sort of understanding is admitted; but it has never been asserted that they enjoy the use of reason. Man, however, has the faculty called reason in addition to his understanding; he has a power of classifying or arranging, abstracting and generalizing, and so arriving at principles¹; in other words, his mind is capable of method: and thus it has been well said that we at once distinguish the man of education, or, among men of education, the man of superior mind, by the unpremeditated and evidently habitual *arrangement* of his words, grounded on the habit of foreseeing, in every sentence, the whole that he intends to communicate in the particular case, so that there is *method* in the fragments of his conversation even when most irregular and desultory². Accordingly, what we mean by saying that the object of education is the cultivation of our minds, or that the goodness of an education varies with the degree of mental culture, amounts simply to this, that we better perform our functions as rational creatures in proportion as we carry farther the distinction between ourselves and the brute creation, that is, in proportion as we are the better fitted for the discourse of reason.

There are two ways in which we carry on the process of reasoning, just as there are two relations out of which all method or science is made up. The relations are, that of Law, by which we lay down a rule of unconditional truth which we call an Idea, and that of Observation, by which we get to a distinct knowledge of facts. By the former we know that a thing must be; by the latter we see that it is. Now when we reason from the facts to the law, we call it analysis or

1. As the reader may not perhaps be familiar with the Kantian distinction of reason and understanding, it may be mentioned, that according to the critical philosophy understanding is the faculty of rules, derived from experience, and proverbially subject to exceptions, but reason the faculty of principles or laws, to which there

is no exception: the former is the faculty of the unity of phænomena by means of rules, the latter the faculty of the unity of the understanding—rules under principles (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. 258, 260. 7th edition).

2. Coleridge's *Friend*, Vol. III. p. 133, foll.

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induction, when we reason from law to law, when from a known truth we seek to establish an unknown truth, we call the process deduction or synthesis. As then all science is made up of Law and Observation, of the Idea and the Facts, so all scientific reasoning is either induction or deduction. It is not possible, however, to teach inductive reasoning or even to cultivate a habit of it directly; we all reason inductively every moment of our lives, but to reason inductively for the purposes of science belongs only to those whose minds are so constituted that they can see the resemblances in things which other men think unlike, in short, to those who have powers of original combination and whom we term men of genius. If, therefore, we can impart by teaching deductive habits, education will have done its utmost towards the discipline of the reasoning faculties. When we speak of laws and ideas we must not be misunderstood as wishing to imply any thing more than general terms arrived at by real classification. About these general terms and these alone is deductive reason conversant, so that the method of mind, which is the object of education, is nothing but the method of language, and this is the reason why, as we have said, the educated man is known by the arrangement of his words. Hence, if there is any way of imparting to the mind deductive habits, it must be by teaching the method of language, and this discipline has in fact been adopted in all the more enlightened periods of the existence of man. It will be remembered, that in this method of language it is not the words but the arrangement of them which is the object of study, and thus the method of language is independent of the conventional significations of particular words, it is of no country and of no age, but is as universal as the general mind of man. For these reasons we assert that the method of language, one of the branches of philology, must always be, as it has been, the basis of education or humanity as such, that is, of the discipline of the human mind.

With regard to the importance of etymology as a part of a liberal education very little need be said. It is just as necessary that the educated man should be able to select and discriminate the words which he employs as that he should be able to arrange them methodically. We acquire our mother-tongue insensibly and by instinct, and to the untrained mind

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CHAP. 1.] OF PHILOLOGICAL STUDIES.

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the words of it are identified with the thoughts to which they correspond in the mind of the individual, whereas he ought at least to be taught so much of their analysis as to know that they are but outward signs, the symbols of a *prima facie* classification, and to employ them accordingly. In this simplest form etymology is nothing but an intelligent spelling lesson, which the most violent utilitarian would hardly venture to discard.

But, though perhaps every one will at once allow that such a knowledge of language as we have described is an essential element of intellectual training, it may still be asked, what has this to do with the study of two dead languages? In the first place, then, to study one branch at least of philology, namely, Etymology, we must have some particular language in which to study it; and although the method of language is independent of any particular language, yet, like every other method or science, it must have its facts as well as its laws. It will be conceded that if we would go beyond the rudiments of spelling and speaking, if we would catch a glimpse of what speech is in itself and as detached from ourselves, it would be desirable to select some foreign language and if possible one no longer spoken or liable to change: languages still in use are so fluctuating and uncertain that an attempt to get fixed ideas of the general analogy of language from them is like trying to copy the fantastic pictures of an ever-revolving kaleidoscope. The classical languages lie before us in gigantic and well-preserved remains, and we can scrutinize, dissect, and compare them with as much certainty as we should feel in experimenting upon the objects of any branch of natural philosophy. They are, therefore, well adapted to supply us with the facts for our laws of speech or the general analogy of language, and we might make them the basis of our grammatical study even though they had nothing to recommend them but their permanence of form and perfection of grammatical structure.

This, however, is not all: it is indeed necessary to study some language, and that too a dead language in order to give the mind a full grammatical training; but the mere fact of learning another language, whether dead or living, is in the highest degree beneficial. We learn our own language from the lips of a mother or a nurse, it grows with our growth and

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strengthens with our strength, so as to become a sort of second self, and the words of the uneducated are household gods to him. This idolatry is shaken, the individual is brought away from his own associations to the higher truths which form the food of the general mind of man, whenever he has learned to express his thoughts in some other set of words. It was a great mistake of Ennius to say that he had three hearts because he understood three languages (Aulus Gellius, *noctes Atticæ* xvii. 17); the heart of a people is its mother tongue only (*Jean Paul*. XLVII. p. 179). The Emperor Charles the Vth was nearer the truth when he said—*autant de langues que l'homme sait parler, autant de fois est il homme*, for every language that a man learns he multiplies his individual nature and brings himself one step nearer to the general collective mind of Man. The effect of learning a language, then, consists in the contrast of the associations which it calls up to those trains of thought which our mother tongue awakens. In this again the dead languages possess a great advantage over every living one. It has been well remarked “that our modern education consists in a great measure in the contrast between ourselves and classical antiquity¹,” it is a contrast produced by a sleep of more than a thousand years between the last of the great men of old and the first of the great moderns when the reawakened world looked with instructive astonishment upon its former self.

In addition to the two reasons which we have stated as grounds for preferring the two classical languages as materials of grammatical study, there is a third reason which has generally been thought to be alone sufficient,—the value of the literature to which they are a key. On this particular subject we do not intend to dwell; books without number have been written upon it, and there does not seem to exist a doubt as to the paramount excellence of the Greek and Latin writers. To those who still argue the old question about the comparative merits of modern and ancient literature it is sufficient to answer that if the old classical literature were swept away the moderns whom they so admire would in many cases become unintelligible and in all lose most of their characteristic charms².

1. W. von Humboldt, *über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues*, p. 27.

2. See Sedgwick, *Discourse on the Stu-*

dies of the University, 4th edit. p. 36; and Whewell, *On the Principles of University Education*, p. 35.