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**SCIENCE AND ARTS AMONG THE ANCIENTS**

*(Opening of Session of the Faculties of Arts  
and Science in University College,  
London, October 1899)*

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*Science and Arts among the Ancients*

IN addressing the Faculties of arts and sciences a person who is not even supposed to know anything but Greek cannot, as it seems to me, do much better than by giving a sketch of the relative position of arts and sciences among the Greeks, as regards their education. To discuss that question at all completely would be a matter of much time and would require an immense amount of explanation. A mere definition of the words arts and sciences as understood by the Greeks would occupy all the time available to-day. Still one may contemplate the lines of a mountain from a distance, and draw the simple outline on a sheet of paper with some profit, though knowing that on a nearer view those lines would assume different forms, be broken up into ravines and projections, and sometimes even run into one another without the sharp boundaries which appear from afar off. All sorts of qualifications and innumerable links of transition must be simply omitted by me.

Some years ago the representatives of science, waking up after a long period during which they had been ignored in education altogether, made very startling demands. They said that science was the one thing needful, that arts had had an unconscionably long innings and it was time they declared<sup>1</sup>, that everybody ought in childhood to learn exactly what happens when a wax candle is burnt, because it was more useful than learning the accentuation of the genitive plural of *παῖς*. The representatives of arts and what

<sup>1</sup> Terms borrowed from the game of cricket.

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is called a liberal education were equally fierce on their side—they said they had no notion of declaring before they were all given out, and in particular Matthew Arnold said that the chemistry of a candle and the accentuation of *παίδων* were both facts of equal value for education, but he would like to know what science could put in the place of literature. The noise of that controversy has, I think, pretty well died away—both parties have cooled down—Science in particular has largely withdrawn her claims to anything like an exclusive education—and the teaching thereof in public schools remains a farce—both sides recognise that they have no business to dictate to everybody, that what is one man's meat is another man's poison, and on the whole you *must* let people follow their own bent. In fact the question is really between two types of mind, into which the human race naturally divides itself—the artistic and imaginative and poetic which wants to enjoy, the scientific and analytic which wants to know. It is easy to call both bad names, but it is better not. In this College at any rate they dwell in perfect peace, and their language is unimpeachable.

The conflict, as I have said, is really one between two types of mind—only secondarily between different subjects. If we all had the same type of mind, the conflict of subjects would vanish. The history therefore of the conflict in ancient times is concerned *apparently*, but only *apparently*, with different matter from that with which it has been concerned in recent times. It assumes at first the form of a battle between poetry and philosophy. Later on philosophy splits into two main parts, science and what we now call philosophy in a more restricted sense, or mental and

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moral science and logic. This latter branch, what we now call philosophy, has got ranged on the side of arts somehow—and indeed philosophy proper is a somewhat ambiguous kind of creature, a species of *Volvox*, and stands somewhat between the two, the prey of both. As for mathematics, though they may now be included in an arts course, they are obviously purely scientific in reality, but as Aristotle has invented logic as an alternative for them we may look upon them from a distance with great respect and say no more about them.

Faculties can exist only in Universities, Colleges or some bodies of that kind which undertake to educate people, not Correspondence Colleges nor Imperial Institutes. The Greeks can hardly be said to have possessed anything which could be called a College, though the philosophical schools of Plato and Aristotle and others approximate thereto. And our third Faculty of Medicine was never brought into any connexion with the other subjects by them.

The Faculty of Medicine, indeed, has *always*, so to say, dwelt on the other side of the street<sup>1</sup>. In primitive times no doubt there was no such thing—I have sometimes speculated whether that is why Methuselah lived so long. Herodotus informs us that in Babylon if anyone was ill he was taken out and laid on the ground or propped against the wall in front of his house, and everyone who passed that way stopped to ask what ailed him and recommended him anything that he thought useful. How long any sick man ever survived this course is a question which Herodotus

<sup>1</sup> University College and its Hospital are on opposite sides of Gower Street.

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does not raise. Nor does he state that anyone ever went back into his house.

In Homer also we are told that a physician is better than any other man at cutting out arrows and applying healing herbs. He is only *better*, but there is as yet no separate Faculty. But in Greece, at any rate in very early times, physicians wrote great text-books and killed men according to rule, and already by the time of Plato and even earlier the philosophers had marked off this profession as the only one with which they would not meddle. It is possible they did not know when a doctor might not be called in to them. The encyclopaedic Aristotle left them to themselves, and I believe that even Mr Herbert Spencer has done the same. Leaving this then aside, the first germs of the division of knowledge and education into two Faculties of arts and science appear at the time of the great awakening of thought in the fifth century before Christ, 2400 years before this lecture. The antithesis began between two classes of men who typified the two great aspects of the human mind, the creative or imaginative or artistic on the one hand, the inquiring or understanding or scientific on the other. The poets were the voice of the former, the philosophers of the latter. Philosophy in those days did not mean what it does now: to put it briefly it included all literature or written matter which was not art or history, and an enormous quantity of talk; but it also included rhetoric, which is generally counted to be an art. The name applied to the first philosophers was "sophist," a word of no bad signification at first—it meant simply a man who was notable for wisdom or learning, a man who, like Browning's Grammarian, decided not to live but know,

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not to enjoy but to think and analyse. Professor Ker told you a story in his Oration last Foundation Day about a certain unprincipled person who being asked what the sophists were like referred the inquirer to the Professors of University College. I have always thought myself that this was rather hard on the sophists, who were after all a body of very remarkable men. However that may be, at first the philosophers devoted their energies simply to speculating about natural sciences. They had no method for the most part—they simply sate down and made guesses, some good, some bad, a pleasant but ineffectual method of advancing human knowledge, still popular I understand among candidates. Then they began to turn their attention to the life of men; they taught rhetoric, they taught virtue, they examined and criticised the current ideas of mankind, and among other things they came across poetry.

Up till that time the poets had had everything their own way, they were monarchs of all they surveyed and their right there was none to dispute. The inspired verses of Homer were regarded as a Bible, appealed to as a final and sovereign settlement of every question. By a verse from Homer Solon is said to have disposed of an awkward political difficulty, just as the President of the Transvaal even now confounds Mr Chamberlain by a quotation from Isaiah or the Psalms—in Dutch.

In education also the poets were supreme. In those blessed days, a true age of gold, a young man was expected to learn nothing but what young women used to learn in England until recently. I have heard distinguished scholars wish that they had lived in those days. Music and poetry along with reading, writing and arithmetic—a *very* little

arithmetic—these formed the whole intellectual education of the men who fought at Marathon and Salamis, who built the Parthenon and wrote the *Agamemnon*. Music and poetry always went hand in hand, and it is now quite impossible for us to understand the value the Greeks set upon music. To them it was not a mere amusement but the most powerful agent, or one of the most powerful, for forming character. It was of an excessively simple character, as we should now think; harmony in our sense of the word was unknown, counterpoint could still less be expected, and the instruments used were principally occupied with supporting the voice. Yet the effect wrought upon them by it was far beyond anything which we can now comprehend. Nothing perhaps can better make us realise the importance of music on moral training among them than a very remarkable passage of Polybius. Perhaps you will excuse my reading it to you in an English translation.

“Music,” he says, “and I mean by that *true* music, which it is advantageous to everyone to practise, is obligatory with the Arcadians. Everyone is familiarly acquainted with the fact that the Arcadians are the only people among whom boys are by the law trained from infancy to sing hymns (and paeans), in which they celebrate the heroes and gods. They next learn the airs of Philoxenus and Timotheus, and dance with great spirit to the pipes at their festivals. Similarly it is their custom, at all festal gatherings, not to have strangers to make the music but to produce it themselves, calling on each other in turn for a song. . . . Their object in introducing these customs was not the gratification of luxury and extravagance. They saw that Arcadia was a nation of workers, that the life of the people was laborious and hard, and that in consequence of the coldness and gloom which were the prevailing features of a great part of the country the general character of the

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people was austere. And it was with a view to softening and tempering this natural ruggedness and rusticity that they not only introduced the things I have mentioned, but also the custom of holding assemblies and offering sacrifices in both of which women took part equally with men, and having mixed dances of girls and boys, and in fact did everything they could to humanise their souls by the civilising and softening influence of such culture.

“But the people of Cynaetha entirely neglected these things, though they needed them far more than anybody else, because their climate and country is by far the most unfavourable in all Arcadia. They on the contrary gave their whole minds to *mutual animosities and contentions*. They in consequence became finally so brutalised, that no Greek city has ever witnessed a longer series of the most atrocious crimes.

“I have had three objects,” concludes the historian, “in saying thus much on this subject. First that the character of the Arcadians should not suffer from the crimes of one city. Secondly that other nations should not neglect music. Lastly I speak for the sake of the Cynaethans themselves, in order that, if God gives them better fortune, they may humanise themselves by turning their attention to education and especially to music.”

So far Polybius.

When I consider the coldness and gloom of the metropolis, and the melancholy results which followed upon the Cynaethans' neglect of music, I feel inclined to hope that the practice of pianoforte playing may not entirely be dropped by *both* sexes in favour of the “mutual animosities and contentions” of the fierce struggle for a University degree. Heaven only knows how dreadful the results may be. Perhaps there may be one or two among my hearers who will be warned in time.

The decline and fall of music is indeed one of the most



remarkable phenomena in the history of education. It is a symptom of a great change, not entirely for the better. The reason why music was valued by the Greeks was its moral influence. *We* have made education purely intellectual and leave moral influence to come in how and where it can manage it. Briefly, all education began by being *moral*—and it has ended by becoming all intellectual. Hence when music is recognised at all by Universities and similar institutions (unless it is a mere accomplishment) it is studied as a branch of mathematics and nothing else. One is expected to know about thorough bass and the chord of the thirteenth and so on—as a part of general education it holds no place, and the practice of it is contemptuously relegated to the realms of deportment and dancing.

Aristotle himself, while considering music a most important branch of education in youth, actually forbade the practice of it in later life—he declares that “no well-bred gentleman ever sings or plays unless it be over his wine or for a jest.” But the consideration of the ethics of music in advanced life must be left to my amiable colleague Professor Roberts<sup>1</sup>. It is time to go back to the fifth century before Christ.

Homer was backed up in a more philosophical style by a number of poets who wrote doubtful ethics in verse, chief among whom were Simonides and Pindar. These bards were quite happy to hitch the ordinary ethical ideas of the period into verses, to make with an air of profound thought generalisations not unworthy of Mr Tupper, and to contradict themselves and one another with the careless felicity

<sup>1</sup> Who had a fine voice, and was always called upon for a song after a College dinner.

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of didactic poets or occasionally with the acrimonious politenesses of modern philosophers. But nobody at first cared to ask exactly how their various maxims were expected to square with the rude possibilities of actual life or even the airy fabric of a complete system. If one of them said "Money, money makes the man," and another said virtue alone can make one happy and keep him so—if a third extolled knowledge or genius—the public were quite content to quote them all indifferently as all of them equally infallible—they were poets—servants and prophets of the sacred muse—they *must* know all about it like Mr Kipling. To criticise them was as if one were to criticise the papers on general science set in the Matriculation Examination.

Great was the outcry, as may be well supposed, when the daring and impious sophist laid his hand upon the ark. Heraclitus of Ephesus, a man of unquestionable sagacity and depth of mind, and one of the proudest and haughtiest of men, declared that Homer ought to be flogged out of Greece. Such blasphemy must have struck the rest of the world with something of the same horror as Voltaire's *Écrasez l'Infâme* struck Catholics of France in the last century. Plato followed up the attack by another of a very elaborate kind. His assault was made from two distinct points of view, the one ethical and the other metaphysical. The stories told by Homer about the gods are immoral and disgusting, he said; therefore they cannot be true, because the gods are good. But if we should grant for the sake of argument that they were true, they ought even then to be buried in silence, the minds of the young especially should not be contaminated by such doctrines and by such