



DIDASKALOS

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Editorial

Why – or, more precisely, to what end – do we propose to continue teaching Latin and Greek in schools in the second half of the twentieth century? Most of the claims formerly made for classical education were examined by Henry Sidgwick nearly a hundred years ago and found wanting. Yet classical teachers when they feel they are working successfully do not seriously doubt that what they are doing is of value. Enquiry into the nature of this value might seem difficult and superfluous. Difficult certainly, but justifiable for its bearing on administrative decisions and on the choice of methods of teaching, content of syllabus and arguments with which to defend ourselves against our enemies. Sidgwick's essay has therefore been made the starting point for a series of articles of which Dr. Robert Bolgar's is the first. In the next issue E. J. Kenney will comment on Dr. Bolgar's views and put forward his own. The articles by Professor Martin Wight and by Professor Schilling are also relevant to this debate.

If it were reasonable to expect a speedy and definitive answer to the question 'why', one might suppose that the question 'how should we teach the classics?' must wait on this answer. In fact there is every reason to discuss how well we can teach them, particularly while the abolitionists can point to undeniable failures in our teaching – failures in imparting facility in the languages, in relating classical to other studies and to the mod-

ern world, and in transmitting the spirit of the literature and the quality of the civilization. A large place must therefore be found in *Didaskalos* for articles which offer expert knowledge, useful ideas or the fruits of experience, when these are closely concerned with the teaching of Latin and Greek in schools.

No apology should be needed for the inclusion of articles on modern language teaching and on visual techniques, and of a bibliography and note on research. As heirs to methods based on an analysis of our task which has been elaborated over some two thousand years we are likely to underestimate the contributions of modern linguistics and psychology to the development of teaching techniques. One might hazard a guess that in the unlikely event of its becoming a matter of urgent national security for everyone with an I.Q. over ninety to be able to comprehend the Latin of Cicero's popular orations, the linguistic and pedagogic problems would be solved within eighteen months, at the cost of several millions, by the kind of rationalization which made it possible to teach housewives to build aeroplanes or the personnel of S.H.A.P.E. to be fluent in French. The products of such methods would not be educated any more than the housewives were skilled craftsmen or the S.H.A.P.E. personnel French scholars; but the existence of a canned process might well help the teacher — as distinct from the instructor — to put his pupils more quickly in touch with the educative influences of Roman thought and Latin style.

But this is a day-dream. A security crisis of this peculiar nature will not be forthcoming, nor the nationally directed effort, and certainly not the millions. Classics teachers must develop their own resources. For example: there is concern in certain quarters that the modern undergraduate does not read enough; perhaps this is because he does not read fluently enough; and perhaps this in turn is because the methods employed to teach him Latin and Greek at school are not those best calculated to enable him to read fluently. Perhaps and perhaps; but no one knows. Why does no one know? Because there is no one competent to undertake the systematic investigation necessary to

provide reliable data. And why is there no one competent? Because if you are a classical scholar and have the acumen and temperament for research you inevitably turn to some project of pure scholarship. It does not occur to you to look towards education as a field of study. Traditionally it is beneath your notice. Yet the command of psychology and linguistics, together with the commonsense grasp of classroom realities which would be required to carry out worthwhile research into the more complex problems of classics teaching, makes this an undertaking intellectually arduous enough to challenge the most gifted. The only way in which this state of affairs could be changed is for some of the most eminent of pure scholars to take an interest, however distant, in work of this sort, and judiciously to foster in some of their best pupils the ambition to equip themselves by study and teaching to do work which could well make the difference between the revival and the extinction of Latin and Greek in English education.

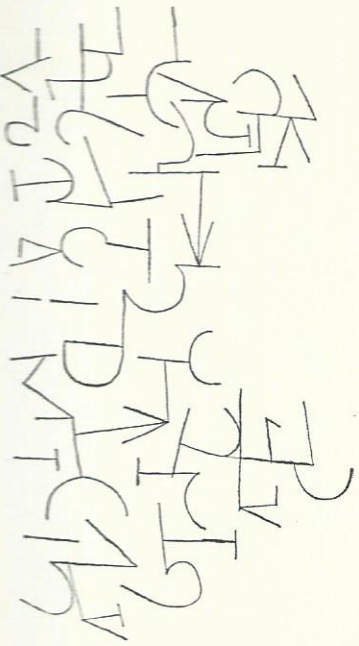
Some may regret that space should be taken up in renewing the discussion of the O-level Latin Examination. But this topic is too important to neglect. Every year about fifty thousand pupils take Latin at O-level. For some forty thousand of these it is the climax and the termination of their experience of the classics. Furthermore it is a truism that the standard and content of this Examination exercise a rigorous influence on the content of the Latin course in almost all schools; only where there is exceptional teaching or a generous allowance of the timetable, or exceptional ability in the pupils, or all three of these factors has the teacher elbow room to teach as and what he wishes.

Encouragement of research and of cross-fertilization with other disciplines, discussion of examinations, technical articles on classroom teaching and debate of the theory of Classical education are, then, the province of a journal supported by an organization of teachers in schools. Appearing no more than once a year it cannot usefully undertake to review the latest books or recordings; but it can survey, from time to time, recent productions in some particular field. Equally there is a case for

noticing the appearance of a new journal as important for classics teachers as is the Texas quarterly *Arion*.

Didaskalos cannot claim to be a pioneer. *Latin Teaching* has been publishing articles on the teaching of classics for fifty years, and *Greece and Rome* has carried many since its inception in 1924: in 1962 it published an admirable teachers' supplement entitled *Re-appraisal*, to which we direct the attention of our readers in case they do not already know it. Referring to its occasional nature the editor of *Re-appraisal* asked what, if the giants in Vulcan's smithy worked a forty hour week, did Jupiter do with all the spare thunderbolts. To us the evidence suggests that the world of the Olympians contained plenty of uncastigated villainy and that the world of classics teaching contains plenty of imperfections, and we doubt that a good thunderbolt or a good article ever lacked a worthy target. The imperfections, however, are not, as some critics seem to suggest, confined to any one aspect of classics teaching, and it will be the duty of editors of *Didaskalos* to see that the thunderbolts do not all go in the same direction.

JOHN SHARWOOD SMITH



A Theory of Classical Education

R. R. BOLGAR

Facilis descensus Averno

Noctes atque dies patet atri ianua Ditis

Sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras

Hoc opus, hic labor est.

1867

The debate on the merits of the classical education has a long history. Recent years have made few additions to its fund of arguments, and much of what was said in the nineteenth century is still relevant. We can still read with profit what Henry Sidgwick wrote during his early Cambridge years when he was classical lecturer at Trinity. Published in 1867 in a symposium¹ edited by F. W. Farrar – the author of *Eric* who became an eminent Victorian Dean of Canterbury – Sidgwick's article remains one of the shrewdest surveys ever produced of the educational case for Latin and Greek. Progressive men were growing tired of the Kennedys and Moberlys who ruled the mid-Victorian public school establishment, and the symposium was the manifesto of a generation in revolt. Most of the contributors were schoolmasters or young dons: E. F. Bowen, John Seeley, William Johnson (“They told me, Heracitus . . .”) Cory. Farrar himself was teaching at Harrow. They were men whose lives were bound up with the study of antiquity – we find no traces here of that imperceptive utilitarianism which had Wells for its champion a few years later – but they were aware of

¹ *Essays on a Liberal Education* ed. F. W. Farrar, London 1867.