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THE
PROGRESS OF CLASSICAL LEARNING
DURING THE PRESENT CENTURY.

A LECTURE

DELIVERED AS AN INSTALLATION-ADDRESS

BY THE

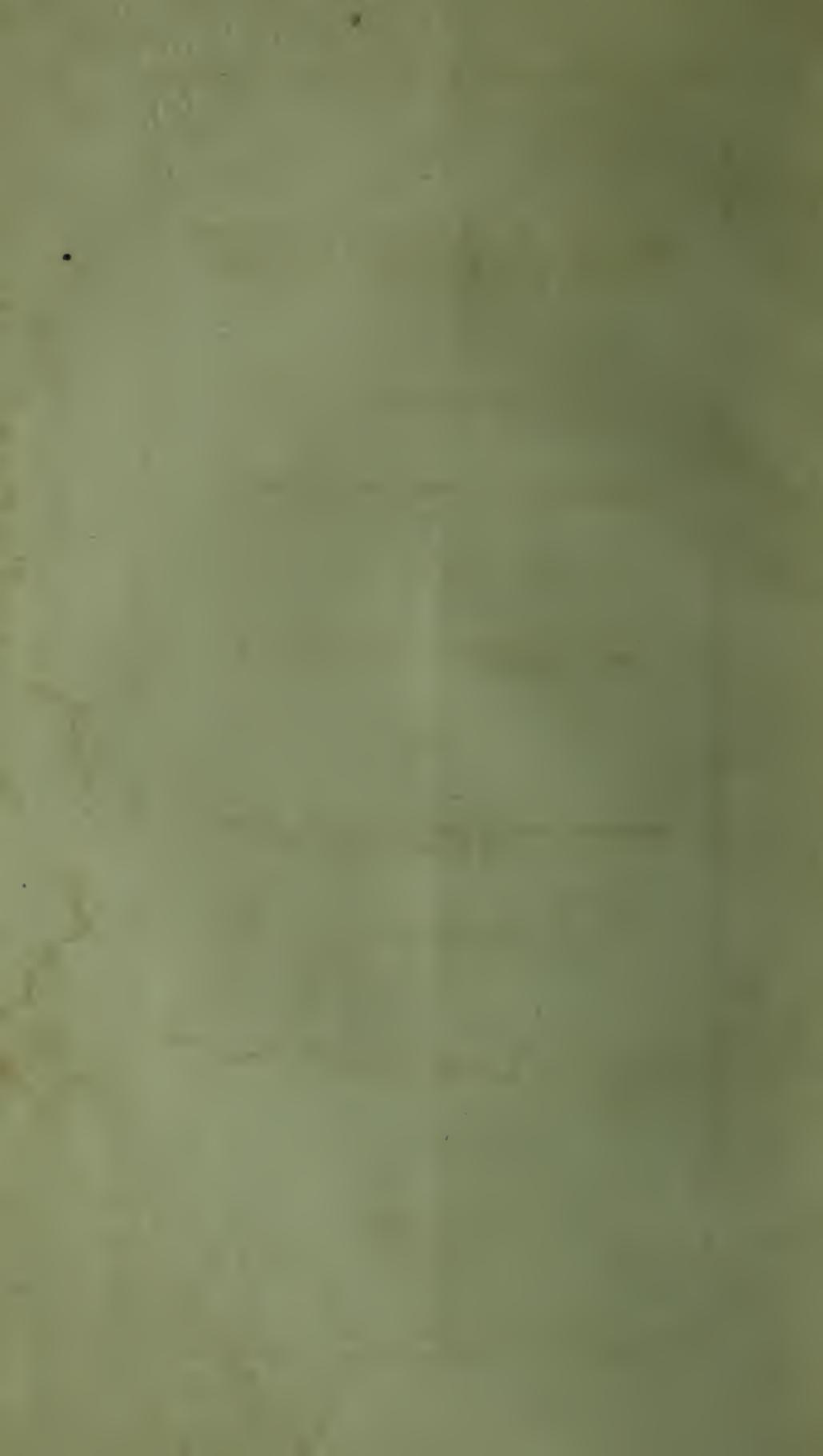
J. H.
REV. PROFESSOR MACKERRAS, M.A.,

IN THE

Convocation Hall of Queen's University, Kingston,
on Oct. 16, 1867,

BEING UNIVERSITY DAY.

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The Progress of Classical Learning during the Present Century.

Having been elected to the chair of Classical Literature in this Institution, I desire to acknowledge my sense of the honour thus conferred upon me—an honour, heightened by the circumstance that this University, to whose Professorial staff I have been appointed, is my *Alma Mater*. This circumstance, while it yields honour, entails responsibility. May it be my successful attainment, as it shall ever be my strenuous endeavour, to advance the usefulness and increase the fame of this seat of learning, to which I owe so much—to fill with lustre to the College and profit to her Students the Department entrusted to me, which has been so ably presided over since the foundation of the College! Custom requires that I should deliver an Inaugural Address. The subject which I have chosen, as appropriate to the occasion, is the Progress of Classical Learning during the present Century.

This progress has been varied, widely extended, steadily maintained. There unfortunately prevails an opinion which claims numerous adherents, that Classical learning is a *stereotyped* study. Such persons imagine that, because Greek and Latin are *dead* languages, our fathers knew about them as much as we can possibly know—that no additional light can be thrown upon their origin, structure, history, and connections—that their deepest mysteries have already been explored and their darkest recesses have been fully disclosed—that the subjects which engaged the attention of a class in this Department at the close of last century remain still the same, without addition to their number,

enlargement of their scope, or increase of zest to the interest which they awaken in the breasts of ingenuous youth. The prevalence of this opinion we believe to be the main cause, which has prompted the determined attacks that have of late years been made to dislodge this branch of learning from the prominent position it has for ages occupied in a liberal and Collegiate education. Whence has arisen this idea among those who claim to be Utilitarians—to be, *par excellence*, practical men in regard to the studies that form the staple of Collegiate instruction? These imagine that the Classical Professor *wholly* occupies his students' time in elucidating the meaning of the authors whose works engage their attention—that he confines himself to the *literature* of these ancient nations—that his sole aim is to improve the mind and cultivate the taste and enrich the imagination by expatiating on Homer's stately numbers and Horace's lyric beauties, on the thrilling oratory of Cicero and electric eloquence of Demosthenes, on Aeschylus' impassioned grandeur and Plato's philosophic simplicity; and that on these themes he *exhausts* the *training* capabilities, the *educating* powers of his Department. That good grounds for such a conception were furnished by the methods of instruction too commonly pursued therein two generations ago, we frankly admit. Nay more, the line of defence generally adopted by the advocates of this branch of learning, in confining themselves to the advantages resulting from an intimate acquaintance with the literary stores accumulated by these highly civilized and polished nations, and restricting their arguments to this one aspect of the question, has encouraged this erroneous idea. It further obtains countenance from the *name* attached to this Professorship in most of our Universities. The chair of "Classical Literature" is an anachronism in the present day. This name covers only half of the subjects which it is

now made to embrace. With more appropriateness might it be termed the chair of "Classical Languages and Literature," as an insight into the structure of the former is as essential an element of the course of instruction which it imparts as a knowledge of the range and character of the latter. Taking our stand on what *is*, and looking back to what *was*, we maintain that in scarce a department within the whole compass of letters and science has more activity been manifested—has greater progress been realized—have more substantial and brilliant successes been achieved. During this century, so pre-eminently distinguished by the gigantic strides with which knowledge has advanced in every walk, Classical learning has not lagged behind its competitors—has in its progress kept abreast with the other branches that claim to form the higher education of our youth. It hath caught the spirit of this *Inductive* age, and, as we shall presently see, asserts its right to be considered one of the *exact* sciences. Were the shade of a Professor, with whom 70 years ago the Eton Grammar was the standard of authority, and Scapula the ultimate source of appeal, now to revisit his haunts beside the Molendinar or the Cam, he would gaze with well-nigh as riveted an interest on our Jelf and Liddell—on Bopp and Muller, as on the locomotive that with demoniac shriek bursts from the tunnelled hill, or the electric wires that convey intelligence from hemisphere to hemisphere with the rapidity of thought. Philology has now established itself among the sciences as firmly as geology, botany, or zoology. Though with cosmopolitan range it embraces all languages within the scope of its studies, yet it bestows its critical researches mainly upon the Greek and Latin. With searching acumen it investigates the ground work and forms of other ancient tongues, chiefly to obtain materials wherewith to shed light upon the structure of

those. It lays down as its prime postulate that a thorough mastering of the classical tongues—that an intimate acquaintance with the mysterious subtleties of their framework is valuable not only as a mean to an end, but as an end itself. While it is of consequence to penetrate these shells in order to reach the kernel which they contain—to feast upon the literature which they embody ; a close examination of the composition of these shells will amply repay attention. If we would realize the full value of a study of the Classics as an *Educational* instrument, it behoves us to regard this not simply as a *key* to open up the precious repositories of thought and eloquence stored up by the giant minds of the most intellectual and polished nations of the old era ; but as a study worthy of being pursued for its own sake, for the mental training which it supplies, for the insight which a tracing of the development of these languages from an obscure rise to a powerful and brilliant zenith, and thence on to a rapidly waning decline, affords us into the successive processes of national culture and thought and taste indicated thereby. Doubtless many devote themselves to Natural Philosophy or the Natural Sciences because of what they term the *practical* utility of these branches—because the knowledge thus acquired they can convert at a future period in some of the professional or mechanical walks of industry into bank bills and gold. But if our colleges are to be regarded not as mere *apprentice shops*, wherein a youth may obtain the rudiments of that avocation wherein he intends to pursue life's monotonous struggle to earn bread by the sweat of his face or brain ; if they are to be viewed in the higher light of *mental gymnasia*, wherein his mental powers may be strengthened and developed—wherein bone and muscle and nerve may be imparted to his reasoning faculties—wherein he may be indoctrinated in those principles which must guide

him in his investigations after truth ; wherein he may be moulded to those habits of research and trained to that accuracy of perception as well as vigor of grasp which effectively enable him to explore to purpose every department of knowledge ; if for these and kindred ends such *Training* Institutions as this exist, then we claim for the Classics as taught in the present age a foremost place in these *Educational* appliances. Why has so prominent a position been accorded to Mathematics in every programme of University studies ? Not because a familiar acquaintance with such dry truths as that " the angles of a triangle are together equal to two right angles " possesses in itself a *pecuniary* value, but because as an *Educational* instrument it has an untold worth ; inasmuch as it trains the mental powers to exactness, as it teaches the reason in establishing an elaborate and complex argument to build from premises surely laid to a solid conclusion, again to make this the foundation of another storey, and so on to successive elevations, until at length it crowns the structure with the cope-stone, whence may be had a clear and extensive view over the domain of truth. In the same rank as a *training medium*, as an *elevating lever* must a position be assigned to the study of the Classical tongues, pursued in the manner in which it has been in our higher seats of learning during the past fifty years. On what plea rests this claim ? In the classical room special attention is now devoted to the investigation of those root-sounds which form the basis of the Greek and Latin languages, and their expansion through successive ages until they attained to the copiousness and refinement characteristic of their full maturity in their Periclean or Augustan eras. The laws which governed this development ; the influences which operated in this transforming process, as illustrated by the analogies found to prevail in other ancient tongues, are being brought to light

and firmly established. Derivatives, whose name is legion, are being traced back to a few original stocks. No study more bracing or interesting than to pursue the same stem-letters through the various languages that compose what is now termed the great Aryan family, as these are being brought to the surface by philological explorers, and find that these symbols represent fundamental ideas precisely identical. While our Lexicons are being revolutionized by the results of these researches, a process similar and equally sweeping, is changing the aspect of our Grammars. *Mediate* relation of subordinate to principal words is being resolved into *immediate* dependence. The inflections found in old Asiatic tongues are seen to throw light on the forms which modify the speech of the great European nations of the ancient world. Terminational syllables are thus discovered to spring from pronominal affixes, by means of which a people in their primitive state of rudeness express their ideas of relation. To these philological researches the strictest Inductive reasoning must be applied. In pursuing these analogies caution must be exercised against rash or hasty conclusions. Apparent harmonies must not be confounded with real connections. By no more invigorating or fascinating exercise can the mind be formed to habits of exact thought, accurate perception, and keen analysis.

Here arises the question—to what source can we trace the impetus which has thus been given to philological research? To what operating cause does the Classical Department owe this activity and progress? Mainly to that knowledge of ancient Asiatic tongues, which was first introduced into Britain at the close of the last century, and is now so generally diffused among European scholars. Foremost among these explorers into the sacred literature of Eastern nations was Sir William Jones, one of the most accomplish-

ed of that host of able and useful men which the world owes to the old East India Company. He and other kindred spirits of ardent genius and speculative mind made themselves acquainted with Sanscrit, in which was preserved the literature of the Brahmins, and Zend, the tongue in which the Persians embodied the creations of their fancy amid the dark ages of a remote antiquity. The former was ascertained to have been a fully equipped language—to have embalmed productions that still survive the decay of time centuries before the Christian Era, centuries even before Homer sang or Hesiod wrote. The Vedas, or Bible of the Brahmins, appear to have been composed within a very few years of the time when Moses bequeathed the Pentateuch as a Testament to the children of Israel. So far as known, it is thus, not indeed the parent of languages, but the eldest sister of that large stock which constitute what is called the Aryan, or Indo-Germanic family of tongues. Acquaintance with this elaborately constructed and perfectly developed tongue was facilitated by the aid of Grammars, composed by native authors, and marked by exact analysis as well as minute examination of details. A close investigation of its root-characters and forms of inflection disclosed the intimate relation which connected it with Greek and Latin—revealed the amount of light which it was capable of throwing on the origin, construction, and development of these. From this discovery may be dated the rise of those new branches of learning, Comparative Lexicography and Comparative Grammar. Nor is the task wholly left to a few antiquarians to trace back the pedigree of that multifarious mass of words which compose a Latin or Greek Dictionary through perhaps long lines of descent to a comparatively few original stems. It now to a certain extent forms part of the regular class work. Numerous indeed are the words which

claim descent from some of these primitive characters. From these have sprung families, whose connection with each other is so remote that it requires close examination to detect that in the far distant ages they had a common progenitor. Moreover a critical analysis of these fundamental sounds—of these radical characters—discloses the fact that the leading ideas which form the principal stock-in-trade of every nation in the early stages of its history are represented in these ancient Asiatic and European tongues by almost *identical* characters and sounds. To a certain extent scholars have succeeded in unfolding these primitive stocks, which, limited in number and simple in essence, constitute the germs of language. Whether they shall be able to go even a stage beyond this and discover what gave birth to these—what led the grey fathers of the several races of men to adopt these vocables as the outward representatives of certain thoughts and feelings—is a problem for the future. The process of reducing these countless derivatives to a small number of primitives has been wonderfully simplified; but, whence sprang these originals, we may never clearly ascertain. Even into this domain speculative research, having raised the curtain of mystery, has entered; but as yet has brought forth results exceedingly unsatisfying. Thence these explorers have reached forth to us dogmatic assertions, bold speculations, brilliant fancies; but these, we fear, cannot stand the test of keen, cold criticism and practised inductive reasoning.

From an examination of the Sanscrit much light has been thrown on the laws which govern the development of language, and which are found to apply in a special degree to those studied in the classical room. Scarce any literary pursuit more interesting than to trace the operation of the processes of assimilation, weakening, and expansion which occur in transforming the coarse, strong, guttural, and sibilant sounds

that obtain in the early periods of the growth of a language to the rounded, delicate, polished, and mellifluous expressions which mark the zenith of its fulness and refinement. In carrying out these investigations it has been found that what at one time were deemed *essential* letters of the root are not such, and have thus to be eliminated as epenthetic, as incorporated into the structure at a later era. The same process of research has also been applied to the *inflections* which these radical symbols have been made to assume so as to express their various relations—the different aspects in which they had to present themselves. These declension-terminations and verb-tenses have been resolved into their original forms through the successive changes which they had undergone in the development of the language. For instance, in the case of Greek (the Grammar of which was based on the forms found to prevail at the period of its highest culture) as Homer's works, which were written some centuries before this period, were formerly taught in our seats of higher learning, the forms and terminations different from those laid down in the Grammar which abound therein were set down simply as Epic and Aeolic or Ionic peculiarities, without any attempt being made to explain how these differences came to pass. Now these are clearly elucidated and distinctly set forth. They are discovered to have been the normal features of the Greek language in Homer's time, and the process by which these idioms of its early history were transformed into the subsequent characteristics of the Attic Era is minutely expounded. What at one time were held to be insoluble anomalies in the conjugation of verbs are now satisfactorily accounted for. The sweeping revolution that has passed over our Classical Grammars and Dictionaries within the past 40 or 50 years was lately remarked upon to me by an able scholar, as he dwelt upon the vast changes

and marked improvements that had taken place in teaching the Classics since his Collegiate days, spent in one of the leading Universities of Europe.

To increased acquaintance with the Eastern languages, of which we have spoken, may be attributed the rise of Comparative Mythology as well. In this department, however, the decided progress that has marked Comparative Grammar has not been made. Still we have a foretaste of what may be accomplished in this very interesting and important region of research. From a careful examination of the various Mythological legends which obtained credence among the Asiatic tribes of antiquity, light is being reflected on those that now enter so largely into our Classical Dictionaries; and we doubt not it will be clearly found that the same ideas and influences, which corrupt and debase the human mind as it wanders farther and farther from the light of the knowledge of the true God—as it descends more and more deeply into the dark caverns of idolatry and superstition, operate among all nations and in all ages. Hence we may obtain a clue by which to unravel our way through the chief ramifications of these labyrinthine systems, and ascertain the leading motions of the human mind which tended to form these elaborate and complicated structures of religious belief. Thus a gleam of insight is afforded you into the value of these methods of Classical instruction as a *mental training*. As in Natural Philosophy or the Natural Sciences we investigate nature, search out her mysteries, bring to light facts, compare these one with another, and from these data deduce what we call laws; so in Comparative Philology we trace out roots and inflections of similar sound and cognate form, bring them to the test of a close and comparative examination, discover them to be symbolic representatives of identically the same perceptions and conceptions; and therein find scope for the

purest forms of Inductive reasoning—thence are enabled to lay down, not as hypotheses, but as solid conclusions, the laws which governed their development. As we survey a wide-spreading tree, with its numerous branches and countless twigs all springing from a single stock, we observe in these the results and evidences of a vigorous life coursing its fibrous channels: so in these manifold inflections, intricate ramifications, and varied processes of word-growth, we delight to study the forthputtings of human thought in its complex operations.

Gentlemen! I desire you to seek in the Classical room *three* things, as objects specially deserving of attainment. First, gain an acquaintance, if not extensive, yet so far as it goes thorough, with the *literature* of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Well worthy of the profoundest study are the productions bequeathed to us by these noble nations! In those days and among those peoples were intellectual giants. In their brain-furnaces were forged works, which for massive grandeur, colossal power, and classic elegance have never been excelled—probably never will be equalled, so long as time endures, in the departments of philosophy and art. Deem not this the language of wild enthusiasm. We give a reason for this opinion. Heaven ordained a special destiny for the Greeks in the history of the world. Before God would provide for the race a Saviour, every opportunity must be given to man to achieve salvation for himself. Fair play demanded that he should possess full facilities for solving this problem. The best appliances must be furnished to him—he must be placed in the most advantageous circumstances for making the bold experiment—he must be endowed with intellectual abilities of the very highest order and most powerful calibre, so as to ensure to the attempt the highest possible chance of success. To that gifted people who drew

their inspiration from the Acropolis and the Academy was entrusted the working out of this redemptive process. The command of Providence to them was to this effect: "By wisdom seek to know God—wisdom of consummate power and perfect refinement you shall have—no ordinary weapons shall be furnished you for the attempt—with the most exalted mental gifts you shall be endowed; so that, if it be within the range of possibility for human wisdom to see and know the only True God, your efforts shall be crowned with success." Giants though they were, they failed to scale the heavens: but the very essays which they made to do so prove them to have been possessed of Titanic minds. The mountains of thought which they piled together for this purpose lie scattered around, betokening melancholy failure; but the Cyclopean massiveness of the remains evidences the calibre of intellect required to compose them. When exploring these precious repositories of thought and learning, let not your ambition be, to run over a large number of books—merely dipping into their contents, satisfying yourselves with those golden veins that appear upon the surface. That object was much prized of old, when the literature, and the literature alone formed the sole subject of study. Now, however, make yourselves masters of a few productions—be at home with a dozen select authors—show yourselves capable of exploring their darkest recesses, and render yourselves familiar with their most perplexing peculiarities. Better a small number of intimate friends than a large circle of superficial acquaintances.

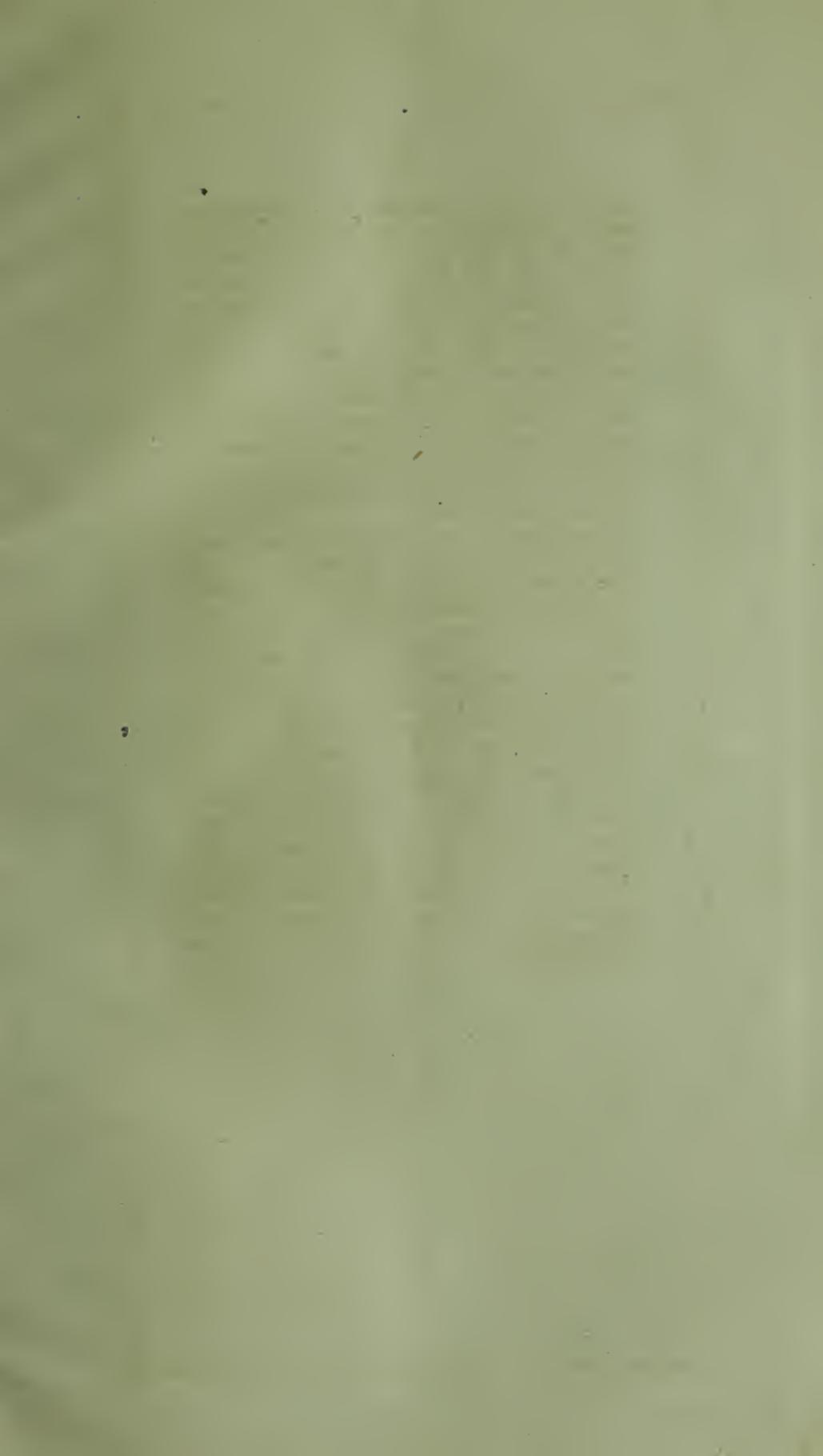
Secondly, pursue a study of the Greek and Latin languages for their own sake—as a goal as well as a path—not merely as a mean but an end. While you regard these tongues as heathen temples, containing enshrined within them rich treasures

and priceless gems, and hence ardently desire to secure the key of interpretation that shall lay open to you their contents: equally interesting will you find a minute examination of the foundations on which these temples rest—the materials of which they have been formed—the manner in which they have been built. Study the various orders of architecture employed therein—the different ages in which the several courses successively rose to the cope-stone—and the causes and processes of decay as well. Even though the literature embodied in these languages had been as poor as it is rich—as meagre as it is full; yet a knowledge of the origin, history, and development of these would well repay the years devoted to this branch of Collegiate Education. Note how a word grows from a simple root of three letters to polysyllabic dimensions. Trace from stem to limb, and from branch to branch, the connection between the primary meaning of a word in its ante-classic period, the rich outgrowth of ideas into which it has developed in its classic maturity, and the remote significations grafted on it in the post-classic ages of its decay. To observe the Greek genius in the different dialects of word-building is as interesting and instructive as to dwell on their taste in the several orders of architecture that mark their temples, monuments, and theatres.

In the third place, set yourselves to acquire and confirm correct habits of study. The habits, here formed and strengthened, whether good or bad, shall cleave to you, when a knowledge of these tongues has perhaps faded from your memories, or the reading of Cicero *ad libri aperturam* has become a thing of the past. Therefore is it of eternal consequence that these habits be such as become true students. Above all things, be accurate. Master whatever you undertake. Touch nothing, unless you resolve to do it well. Thoroughness is the great requisite of a successful

scholar. Leave no lesson in a *half*-finished state. Pass from you no task in a slovenly manner. It may be little you can accomplish: but let that little be *perfect* in its character. In studying the construction of words guard against hasty inductions. Be not led away by apparent analogies and traces of identity between formations, where none really exist or where the relation is far fetched and the connection exceedingly remote and doubtful. Lay deep and wide your *data* before you found laws and establish general conclusions thereon.

Gentlemen! to your Grammars and Lexicons! These are the mines wherein you must dig and search and re-search. Work them to their fullest capacity, and they will yield gold of the highest value, judged by an *Educational* standard. Finally, remember that what we all are, such will our Alma Mater be. She is the whole—we are the parts: and the whole will be brilliant or dim according to the lustre emitted by each part. If we prove inefficient, inaccurate, slovenly and careless in the performance of appointed work, Queen's College shall be weighed in the balances and found wanting for the times. If we are earnest, diligent, thorough (and why should we not be such?), then will our University have a *nomen* as well as a *locus* in this Dominion!



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