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What kind of Classics ?

An Inaugural Lecture

GIVEN IN THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF
RHODESIA AND NYASALAND

H. F. Guite

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*An Inaugural Lecture
given in the University College of
Rhodesia and Nyasaland*

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by

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WHAT KIND OF CLASSICS?

PRINCIPAL, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN, it will already be clear to you from my title that I take classical education for granted, as the Founders of the College did when they established the Chair. But my title is also a concession to our saner critics and an abandonment of the rigid and exclusive claims that have lost the classics so many friends. It is not very long since there was no question of what kind of classics: there was simply classics, four-square, impregnable, a total education, the only education conceivable. It is not very long since a Grammar School was a school devoted almost exclusively to Latin Grammar, and only 151 years ago that a group of parents, greatly daring, made two submissions to the Governors of the Glasgow Grammar School: '1. That six hours a day is too large a portion of the day for the study of the Latin Language. 2. That there are many branches of learning perhaps equally important, at least to those who mean to follow the mercantile profession.'¹

Today we acknowledge, and it was true 200 years ago, that the reasons for the dominance of classics in western education are no longer all operative. In the time of the Renaissance you had to have Latin and Greek in order to get anywhere in arts or science or politics. They are still necessary for serious research in a number of fields outside themselves, but in an age of universal education they are far from being a universal necessity. And in an age when vocational pressures are determining the shape of even the most autonomous of universities we do not expect the

¹ *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Glasgow*, ed. J. D. Marwick and R. Renwick, 6 vols., Glasgow, 1876-1911: record for 6 April 1813.

majority of students to be doing Greek, Latin, and Ancient History.

Nor do I think that the ordinary student has sufficient background to justify first degree specialization either in classics or in anything else. I therefore begin with the axiom that a classical education is a good thing, but that classics by itself is not enough, and that classics today must nearly always mean classics in association with something else.

By way of preface, I want to set out three basic assumptions about the nature of university teaching.

First, there must be a willingness in both teachers and students to tackle subjects that are difficult. It may seem an unnecessary thing to say, but there are people in the university world who would like to reduce all courses to the level of the average student.

Second, we must be realists. We must ask ourselves, 'What kind of people are we taking in and where can we get them to in three years?' It would be very nice to have a few students like Josephus Justus Scaliger, who taught himself Greek, then read the whole of Homer in twenty-one days and the rest of the Greek poets in four months.¹ But you cannot construct a syllabus on Scaliger. We have to come to terms with the fact that it is now the established practice in most universities to admit students who are entirely lacking in intellectual curiosity, and who are unlikely to read any book that is not prescribed.

Third, we must somehow, in the teeth of all the evidence, maintain the faith that some of our pupils are better men than we are. The alternative is Horace's melancholy vision of galloping degeneration:

¹ Scaliger, *Epp.*, p. 51 (L.B. 1627), quoted by J. E. Sandys, *A Short History of Classical Scholarship*, p. 221, C.U.P., 1915.

aetas parentum, peior avis, tulit
nos nequiores, mox daturos
progeniem vitiosiore.

Now to my contention that we ought not to teach any single civilization, however rich and varied, in total isolation from the rest of world-history, and in isolation from the problems of our own day.

Of all the arguments for studying the classics the one that wears best is the argument that in studying the classics we are studying ourselves. It is a good argument as far as it goes, but for the last hundred years it has contained an element of fraud. It simply is not true to say that modern Europe (I mean the civilization, not the continent) has its roots in Rome and Athens: its roots are in Rome and Athens and Jerusalem. We may think like Greeks and we may govern like Romans, but we have the remnants of a Hebrew conscience and our whole way of life, modern paganism notwithstanding, owes more to the Bible than to all classical literature put together. If we want to study our origins we shall have to include the history and writings of the Hebrews, the life of Jesus, and the beginnings of the Christian Church. Now there was a time when a good many classicists were also ecclesiastical historians. In those days classics was an ancilla to theology. But when theology ceased to be recognized as queen of the sciences and when religion ceased to be an integral part of the western way of life and became instead a matter of individual conscience, then the educationists began to isolate theology and to make it optional, autonomous, and suspect. Nineteenth-century foundations fought very shy of it. And the classical philologists, whose hard-fought controversies broke no bones, were well content to be separated from the really dangerous passions aroused by theology and church

history. But all that is over now. It is now recognized that church doctrine and church history can be academic disciplines. Modern universities appoint professors to teach theology and even build chapels for its practice. But the effect survives the cause. I once set a syntax gobbet from St. Matthew, only to be told that the New Testament was not classics. And yet it was written in Greek, within the Roman Empire, and within the period that we usually call classical.

The study of Jewish and Christian traditions is only one way of bridging the gap between the classics and our own day. If it is true that we can never understand the present apart from a study of the past, it is equally true that nothing in the past should be studied without some attempt to trace its history down to the present. I would go further and maintain that we ought, after making a reasonable concession to the delights of antiquarianism, deliberately to choose from the past whatever most directs a man towards his obligation to judge and resolve and act in the present. I concede at once that there are practical limits to what I have in mind, and that room must be left for the detailed study without which the student will never know how history comes to be written at all. I only want to say that, in my opinion, both we and our students are needlessly parochial. I don't see, for instance, why every student shouldn't read Somervell's abridgement of Toynbee, or a few volumes of Pirenne, or Christopher Dawson's *Making of Europe*. Nor can I see any case for giving students pieces from different corners of a jigsaw when it's perfectly possible to sketch, if not to paint, a complete canvas. The new universities in Britain are moving in the right direction. Sussex, for instance, instead of offering courses in English, French, Latin, Greek, Geography, History, and Philosophy,

and teaching these courses in isolation, is trying to integrate them in a School of European Studies.

Is there not something absurd about teaching Greek history, at university level, to a man who has no interest in the history, customs, and tongues of Rhodesia? Is it not absurd that a student should know that Greek literature is the source of almost every genre in western literature and yet be unable to trace even one genre down to his own day, not even when some of its masterpieces are written in his own language? Is it not strange to read the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid* and not to read Dante, Cervantes, and Milton; to read Plautus' *Amphitruo* and not to read *Amphitruo* 38; to read Horace and not to read Pope; to read Juvenal's third and tenth satires and not to read *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*; to read Plato's *Gorgias* and not to know that the dialogue is still going on, and that it matters all the world whether we stand with Socrates or with Callicles?

Doubtless a good student (*rara avis in terris nigroque similima cycno*) will read some of these things by way of relaxation from his labour in Latin and Greek. He may even have heard of Nietzsche.¹ But I have said that I want to keep my feet on the ground. The ordinary student of Latin does not read *Paradise Lost* or *Amphitruo* 38 or *The Vanity of Human Wishes* or political philosophy, or anything else of the kind. Fervent exhortations to read European literature move him not at all: he has his degree to think about. I may even tell him, quite truly, that the more he knows, the wider his aesthetic experience, and the deeper his involvement in the life of his own day, the better he will do his Greek Unseen. But he will not believe me.

No: if I think it important that a student of Latin and

¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, ed. E. R. Dodds, Appendix, O.U.P., 1959.

Greek should read some English, then I must make English an examinable part of his degree. A radical decision like this raises two problems. The first, to which I shall return, is this: 'What is to be sacrificed from the classical course in order to make room for the new additions to the syllabus?' The second, which I shall take now, is: 'How is the new material to be taught?' The answer is that some of it will be taught by teachers in the Classics Department, and some of it will be taught by teachers in other Departments.

Now there are in the academic world (and I am speaking throughout of the academic world and not of this College except where I so specify) a good many people to whom both these answers are anathema. The specialist will at once cry out in horror, 'What, a Latinist teach Dante! What, a Hellenist meddle with Racine! What, a classics man lecture on English poetry!' It is, of course, very probable that an English Department has a man who knows more about Milton than anyone in the Classics Department, and that someone in the Classics Department will know more about Virgil than anyone in the English Department. But what I am looking for, and I don't mind from which Department he comes, is a man who is sufficiently at home with both writers to teach them together and at the same time. We do have a few people in the universities who are at home in more than one field; and, if we really believe in the unity of knowledge that we are always preaching about, then we ought to be always on the lookout for men who can operate on the border-lands and in the areas that, to our common loss, are a no-man's-land between two or more Departments.

One would think that the second part of the answer, namely, that a classics student should do the modern part

of his work in other Departments, would be entirely acceptable to the specialist. Not at all. This same specialist, who was a moment ago admonishing me to stick to my last, now turns out to be a departmental imperialist: he will have no courses in his Department that are not devised by himself for his own purposes under his own exclusive control. This man is a product of the system. The main reason that I am not myself a departmental imperialist is that this is only my eleventh month as a Head of Department. So long as Departments exist there must and should be a measure of departmental autonomy. But the departmental system assists in the fragmentation of knowledge and helps to build middle-walls of partition between the disciplines; and departmental control has a limiting and sometimes even an ossifying effect both on what is taught and on the way it is taught. It has one excuse and one only: administrative convenience. It would be a nuisance, when there is so much administering to do already, to have to cope with all the disruptive problems, problems of syllabus and timetable and personnel, not to mention the academic work involved, that would arise if Departments were really going to work together. But is current administrative convenience the best foundation on which to build the structure of undergraduate studies? Ought we not to decide what we want, even if it is something outrageous but not unheard of, such as asking scientists to write English or arts men to be less than totally ignorant of science, and then set to work to create the needful machinery? There are so many things that are generally agreed to be desirable, but which will not in fact happen till some crusader beats down or some genius circumvents the solid walls of habit and builds a system that makes the desired course of action appear natural and even inevitable.

In what I have said so far I have been relying on a fundamental principle which is taken for granted within the university but which is imperfectly understood by the general public, who, even when they are aware that universities carry out research, assume that university teaching is like secondary school teaching, only on a higher level. This is *one* difference, but not the main one, which is that school-teachers, with rare exceptions, have their syllabuses laid down for them, while university teachers have to make their own. And what is more, they have to change them year by year, in substance and in shape, to a far greater extent than appears from the summaries published in the handbooks. It is this function of syllabus-making, even more than research itself, which is already being extruded into separate institutions, that characterizes the university. Social pressures may determine, not always improperly, whom we teach and even what subjects we teach, but within the wide and advancing frontiers of the subject it is we and we alone who decide what shall be taught.

Thanks to the generous freedom of Special Relation, the making of syllabuses already takes up a great deal of our time in this College: it will take up even more when the College becomes autonomous. It is by no means easy to survey a vast field of knowledge and choose from it what should be taught and what can be taught in such a way as to make a coherent and balanced course that is both an introduction to post-graduate work and also a reasonably rounded education for the man who will go no further.

In classics our freedom of manœuvre is more limited than in most subjects. That is because our studies are founded on fluency in Greek and Latin. That is what classics means. Classics-in-Translation is a desirable but altogether different thing from classics. Students of classics have to spend half

their time on language, and in consequence their teachers have to endure the derision of critics who take one look at our syllabuses and cry, 'Prose and Unseen! Prose again and more Unseen! How like school! How dull and mechanical! How devoid of the warm human interest that animates the newer subjects such as automation and criminology!' We are, of course, asking for trouble when we present the public with such typically English understatements as 'Prose Composition' and 'Unseen Translation'. It all comes of not employing a P.R.O. Instead of 'Prose Composition' we should say, 'Ancient Rome and Modern Europe: a comparative study with special reference to the religio-socio-political aspects of applied linguistics'; and instead of 'Unseen Translation' we should say, 'Extra-Sensory Perception, with special reference to psycho-semantic transference on frequency-intervals within the range $2.0 \pm 0.6 \times 10^3 \gamma$ '. If only we could bring ourselves to do it we should have the best of both worlds: Prose and Unseen, and golden opinions for being with it.

Not that I am a last-ditch defender of our present methods of teaching (I am at present demonstrating the success of a new kind of prose for beginners): it stands to sense that with our heavy dependence on language we must be willing to believe that there may be quicker and better ways of learning Latin than the way we learned it ourselves. We must be alive to whatever can be learned from the new methods of teaching modern languages, and we must initiate and encourage research into the peculiar problems of teaching Greek and Latin.

The question now arises: granted that learning the language is going to take up half our time, what are our priorities for the other half? There is no doubt that in the past the main emphasis was philological: the high linguistic

standard achieved left room for little else. Philology, the love of words, has suffered a sea-change since the word was first invented. It is now an exact science, but with enough of romance in it to attract the aesthete as well as the systematist. Julius Caesar, who was both, spent the leisure moments of his Gallic campaigns writing a book on the theory of grammar.¹ But, now that the balance has begun, and not too soon, to swing against philology, some people want to be rid of it altogether, mistakenly supposing that the content of a work can be studied in isolation from its language. On the contrary, *le style est l'homme même*; and, as T. S. Eliot says, 'you have only to examine the mass of newspaper leading articles, the mass of political exhortation, to appreciate the fact that good prose cannot be written by people without convictions'.² The man who has a sense of style will have a sense of many other things besides.

Most of the hostility centres on the study of syntax. But what is left of style if you empty it of syntax? The real trouble is that classical syntax is both badly taught and badly examined. Not content with forcing it into false categories, we distort it further by an improper stress on abnormality, just because abnormality provides us with convenient snippets for examinations. Worst of all, we fail to bring it home to our students that our categories are nothing more than adumbrations, not a divine revelation of linguistic reality. When a Roman heard an ablative inflection he did not say to himself, 'Ah! A Causal Ablative'. He did not, unless he were a professional grammarian, hear even an ablative. He was made aware of a rich cluster of associations within a familiar field, the choice of which, not delimited by categories, would depend on the context

¹ Suetonius, *Caesar* 56.

² T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p. 20, Faber, 1939.

and on his memory of previous usage. The failure to listen with a Roman ear, and the swallowing of the superstition that Latin is strict and logical and unambiguous are among the reasons for our poor showing as literary critics. (How many classical readers of *Seven Types of Ambiguity* realize that everything that Empson says about poetry and syntax can be paralleled from Greek and Latin?) Every so often there is a student for whom Latin poetry breaks through in spite of bad linguistic habit, but the bulk of our students will never enjoy it until we either teach them more and better syntax, or else find a new way of teaching Latin that puts an end to the present need to parse and to construe.

But there are no grounds for supposing that students, just because they are arts students, will respond to poetry in any language, and however taught. Most of them will go further and fare better with history and philosophy.

The study of Greek thought meets all my requirements for a course that is neither historically isolated nor remote from the business of living. For it is perfectly arguable (though there is no time to argue it now) that everyone who has been born into the Western tradition, provided that he thinks at all, is thinking not very differently from the way that Plato and Aristotle used to think. The result is that in Southern Rhodesia there are, in the main, two distinct ways of thinking, and the key to our future is with the people who understand them both. Most of us are limited to one way of thinking, which we do not understand. And having no understanding even of our own way of thinking we are quite unable to enter into anyone else's. There are all kinds of things that we can do to promote self-knowledge and mutual understanding, but if we want to know why Europeans are different from Asians and Africans we shall have to go back and ask the Greeks.

It was because the Greeks themselves were always asking questions that we are privileged to study Greek and Roman History. In the College, apart from our first-year course in Ancient History for non-classicists, all students of Greek and Latin take Ancient History whether they need it for examinations or not. Many of you will recall that Ancient History was the field in which my predecessor, Professor Carney, won distinction both for himself and for the College. May I pause for a moment to observe that he also found time, in the interstices of scholarship, to build a Department and to establish high standards of teaching?

Ancient History is remote only in time. My students in West Africa were immediately at home with the social life of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and found in Greek and Roman politics all the familiar ingredients of their own: colonialism, anti-colonialism, and even neo-colonialism; bribery and intimidation; gradualism and revolution; federal experiment and the perpetual canvassing of constitutions. There is one branch of Ancient History that is often neglected, but which seems to me to have a strong claim on those of us who maintain that in studying the classics we are studying the permanent institutions of Europe. I mean, of course, Roman Law, surely the most living part of our Roman inheritance, and more obviously so in Rhodesia than in England.

We might now go on, had we but world enough and time, to try to construct some new syllabuses. But I am content for the moment to enunciate three negative but liberating principles of choice.

First, we must be willing to reduce what we have always said was irreducible. Set a group of classical lecturers to make a reading-list. Each of them will at once say that you can't give a man a degree in classics if he hasn't read this

and this and this, and in less than two minutes the list will be carrying its full load of orthodoxy. Ought we not to reflect on what became of earlier canonical orders of merit? Do you remember Dante's *quattro grand' ombre*? Which of us would follow him now in listing the top five poets as Virgil, Homer, Horace, Lucan, and Ovid? I'm not saying that Homer, Virgil, Demosthenes, Cicero, and the rest of the establishment are to be scrapped simply because they *are* the establishment. But I *am* pointing out that the establishment is now so full that even the least change is going to involve an agonizing reappraisal.

Second, there must be no exclusion from our studies of an author or of a field either on the grounds of subject-matter, such as befell theology, or on the grounds of date, which is what excludes Roman Law, excludes Augustine, Abelard, Aquinas, and much else that is profound or lovely. Why do we learn Latin and Greek, if not in order to read whatever is written in Latin and Greek? Then let us feel free to choose whatever is worth reading in itself and in whatever combination suits our purpose best. The stratifying of Latin into Early, Classical, Late, and Medieval, reasonable enough as a rudimentary time-chart, has become a ready reference of quality, as when we speak of Latin as Golden, Silver, or Monkish. But the superiority of Golden Livy over Silver Tacitus is by no means obvious to me; and the worst possible reason for not reading St. Augustine is that he might corrupt our compositions.

Third, we ought not on the whole to require students to read works that no one would dream of reading were they not hallowed by having been written a long time ago and in Latin or in Greek. I say 'on the whole', since there are obvious exceptions to such a rule. We shall pay some attention, just as students of English do, to the lesser men who

changed the direction of a genre or who contributed to the making of greatness. Nor do I exclude those tiny jewels whose workmanship, beauty, and meaning shatter or fade at the first touch of translation. But what I do want to exclude is the dull, the vapid, the naïve, the texts that survived not by merit but by the company they kept.

Enough about content. For my question 'What kind of classics?' asks for an answer to another question, 'What kind of teaching?' Successful university teaching is partly the product of technique but much more of attitude. The teacher who is going to teach the kind of classics I have been talking about will be a modernist, concerned and eager to appraise a new poem, a new painting, a new idea. How else will he be able to understand the impact of a new work on ancient society? The Roman poet Ennius, who lived from 239 to 169 B.C., was a giant in his day, a pioneer in matter and technique, vivid, humorous, humane, and always welcome in the best society. To Quintilian,¹ 250 years later, he is a sacred primeval grove, revered indeed, but just as remote from the Rome of A.D. 100 as he is from us (it's worth remembering that remoteness is not a function of time: is Milton only a quarter as remote as Virgil?). Now Quintilian was a great teacher of rhetoric and of more than rhetoric. But, for all the felicities of his famous survey, he was not a literary critic. This is the way to kill poetry, to see it from a great distance and call it primitive. Another way, even more lethal, is to see it from a great distance and call it classical. If only I could convince my students that the lays of Homer were once the latest songs; that archaic Aeschylus was avant-garde; that classical Virgil was an offence to reviewers; that Roman girls waited impatiently for a new Ovid!

¹ IO. I. 88.

It would be a great help if we read Greek and Latin aloud. Some of us do. But for the bulk of our pupils, whether in school or in college, Greek and Latin are silent symbols on a printed page. In years and years of Latin they never hear or speak a word of it, except perhaps for paradigms, of which they usually mispronounce both the accent and the quantity, as in *amó amás amát*. A few years ago I produced a Latin play in Latin. The children who came were delighted and astonished. 'But we never knew', I heard one say, 'we never knew that you could actually *talk* Latin.' In thousands of schools there are children reading Virgil, dimly aware of its being verse by the way the lines are set out, but never allowed to hear its music and its rhythm. Some teachers leave scansion till the week before the examination; some leave it altogether, on the just assumption that, once the translation has been committed to memory, the paltry marks for metre may be safely thrown away. And so the product of this sort of teaching comes up to the university saying *tāmen* and *rātio*, *fīnis* and *amābāmus*; and, what is worse, convinced that the length of a Latin vowel is a matter of complete indifference. And he will even find lecturers who share his indifference. Why? It is no answer to say that the sounds of Latin, especially verse, are beyond recovery. We may never attain to certitude, but we now know enough to be confident that our attempts are somewhere near the mark. There can be no certitude about *any* sounds that were uttered prior to 1876, but who is inhibited from staging Shakespeare or Molière in whatever pronunciation he thinks proper? No: the indifference arises from the myth that scansion is impossibly difficult for the ordinary student and should therefore be reserved for specialists. But it is no harder to remember a true quantity than to remember a false one: if you learn in

Form I to say *amās* there is no reason why you should ever say *amās*. And I have shown in three Nigerian schools that the basic principles of metre can be taught in two to three hours, and that after a further one to two hours a hexameter can be accurately scanned in less than ninety seconds.

Prose, too, was written to be read aloud, and the student must read it aloud if he is ever to get inside a Greek or Roman skin. The student who makes the effort to read a speech of Cicero as it might have been delivered, may even begin to covet its coherence, sonority, and rhythm for his own efforts in his own tongue. Two or three years ago I gave a course of eight lectures on classical rhetoric. It began with the political, judicial, and physical background of speech-making, then traced the rise of schools of rhetoric and discussed in detail their syllabuses, their methods of teaching, and the different styles of orator that came out of them. After that I went on to discuss the effect of rhetorical training on the rest of education and on literature. Finally I tried to follow the influence of rhetoric and rhetorical training on European education all the way down to the survival into the nineteenth century of the trivium and quadrivium. It was a good course, and I shall doubtless give it again, except that the advance of classical scholarship makes it impossible ever to give the same course twice. I have only one misgiving. A student who has attended this course may be called on shortly afterwards to second a vote of thanks. The chances are that he will lurch to his feet, fidget with his tie, look either at the roof or at the floor, mumble a few tired clichés, say nothing to the point, and sit down amid general relief. Is it fair to the taxpayer? Is it right to confine ourselves to theory when the public can reasonably look for practice?

Such are the anomalies of a bookish education. The

trouble with bookish education is its tendency to turn to fudge, or what Aldous Huxley¹ calls symbol-manipulation. This is why every arts man ought to spend a little of his time either on a physical science which correlates words with observed facts or on a social science that correlates words with living men and women. But there is no escaping from symbols and abstractions. All we can do is to keep them as close as we can to reality and to be as honest as we can when we use them. That is, we must wage unceasing war on fudge. One kind of fudge is writing essays on an author whom you have never read, the sort of thing that Housman scorned to do even though it cost him his degree. Another kind of fudge is concocted when we invite students to pronounce the verdict of history on matters that are altogether outside their experience. A Professor of Ancient History once told me that it was a close-up view of politics in modern Australia that first opened his eyes to the political realities of ancient Rome. Our own society is small enough and turbulent enough for some of our students (and some of their teachers) to know something about politics at first hand. But we still have the cocooned youth of eighteen, who has never even sat on a committee, but who will confidently tell you just where Cicero went wrong. A third kind of fudge comes out of the oven of what Quintilian² called *superstitio praeceptorum*, which means 'unthinking reliance on techniques'. Quintilian was talking about students of rhetoric who imagined that, because they had mastered the techniques, they could therefore make a good speech. In the same way it is possible for a student of classics to acquire techniques without acquiring the judgement to use them and without acquiring a sense of what the whole thing is all about. This man will turn out fudge

¹ *The Island*, pp. 185, 209, Chatto and Windus, 1962.

² 4. 2. 85.

of the highest quality and may even get it published. What can we do about all this fudge? We can search our souls and revise our courses; we can abolish or reform examinations; and in all our teaching, however laborious and technical, we can do obeisance to the primacy of thought.

There is at least one thing that we can do about excessive bookishness, and the Classics Department in this College has begun to do it. Already, through the munificence of Sir Stephen Courtauld, our students can hold in their hands the solid history in 300 Greek and Roman coins. And soon, for less than a hundredth part of the cost of a science laboratory, we shall fill our classical seminar room with reproductions of bowls and vases, murals and reliefs, terracottas and sculptures. There they will serve not only as evidence of what happened in history but also as a testament of timeless beauty. We shall try to tell our students how all these lovely things came into being, some of them made by journeymen at low cost for common use, others lavishly commissioned from great artists by private or by public patrons. And we shall try to discover what makes the rose of beauty bud and flower and fade and die. It may be that in doing these things we shall help in the nourishing of graduates who will recognize their responsibility for the making of beauty here and now.

I now come to my final question, 'What kind of classics, for whom?' I only gave a partial answer when I suggested the sort of course that might be followed by the relatively few students who will read Greek and Latin in the original. But there are a large number of students who will be ignorant of Greek and Latin but who ought not to be ignorant of what the Greeks and Romans did and said. It is quite wrong to say to these people, even supposing they

stay to listen, 'Classics in the original, or nothing'. We have queened it long enough: let us now be Abigail and make our humble offer of service: brief, practical courses for students struggling with Miltonic myth and idiom, with the origins of drama, with medieval charters, with old French syntax, or with the strange Latin of the law; courses for political scientists who need to know something of Plato and Aristotle; courses for medical students who would like to know the meanings of Greek prefixes and suffixes and the way Greek roots are Englished and compounded. All these jobs of work, some of them essential, have to be done by Abigails with Greek and Latin. If Classics-in-Translation were to be taught at or above O-Level by teachers who were themselves products of Classics-in-Translation, distortion and deterioration would be swift and sure.

So much for classics within the walls. We are also concerned with classics in the schools. It is in our own interest and in the interest of the community that we should do everything in our power to close the gap, sometimes as wide as fifty years, between classics in the schools and classics in the university. Here in Salisbury we work through the Classical Association to provide visits, lectures, conferences, and technical advice. These things are all valuable, but they minister to the people who appreciate them most and need them least. Only a minority of teachers make any effort to keep up with their subjects once they have graduated. It is rare in my experience for a teacher to be aware of, much less to possess, the current standard edition of a text that he is teaching for a public examination. If the community knew and cared about such things, if it were as aware as it is in other fields of the diminishing returns on irrecoverable assets, it would probably protect

its investments by declining to recognize degrees that were not regularly renewed or supplemented.

This would be another job for us, a job that we could not very well refuse. For we, too, are responsible for the sickly condition of our subject in the schools. The teaching of classics is dependent on good editions of texts. But some of the editions now in use are eighty or even a hundred years old, some still very good, but most of them hopelessly out of date both in content and perspective; and every one of them needing revision. And what of the new editions? A few of them are very good indeed. Some are disgraceful, and most are inadequate: the authors simply do not know enough classics nor do they show any evidence of knowing anything else. Now this is partly the fault of the publishers who commission such people, but the main responsibility is ours. First, we think that school editions are beneath us, and so we prefer to put our efforts into articles that few will read but whose mere existence means promotion and prestige; second, in our researches we pursue the peripheral and permit our students to do the same. Hence a profusion of work on texts that have little or nothing to say to us, and not enough people qualified to interpret the good work being done on things that matter. I don't mean, of course, that research should be limited to what is seen to be immediately useful. I do mean that research ought to be the attempt to answer a question that someone has asked because he really wants to know. And, if teachers were to be made to go back to college, it would only be fair that lecturers should be made to write for schools.¹

Classics for students, classics for teachers. For whom else?

¹ Some text books call for two writers: a scholar who knows the subject and a teacher who knows the pupils.

For you, the public. I have left you till last, but you should really come first. It was not the ambition of the great writers to be prescribed at O-Level or even for Honours (though something like this did in fact happen to Horace within his lifetime). They were writing for the public and they were writing for posterity. And posterity still reads them: witness the success of the Penguin Classics. But what happens when a classical scholar tries to interpret classics to the public? His colleagues shake their heads and call him a popularizer, even when he has first proved himself a scholar. When Wilamowitz presented Plato to the German public 'as a man and not as a self-generating system of metaphysics' one critic described his book as 'a biographical novel', another as 'Plato for housemaids'.¹ Well, what is wrong with imagination serving scholarship, and what is wrong with Plato for housemaids? One of the best things in Cambridge twenty-five years ago was Sir John Sheppard's 'Homer for shop-girls'. Once a week during term he used to give a public lecture in the lunch-hour, and scores of shop-girls and clerks and other *hoi polloi* used to bolt their sandwiches and travel 3,000 years to Priam's Troy and live for an hour in the rhythm of another world. Listen for a moment, as they listened, to the story of Hector and Andromache:

Hektor turn'd

Back from his house with speed, by the same way
Thro' the fair-built streets, across the town,
And so to the Skaian Gates wherethro' he must go
Out to the plain; and there his fruitful wife
Came running to him, even Andrómachē
Daughter of Eëtion of the mighty heart,
Who under leafy Plakos used to dwell,

¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, ed. E. R. Dodds, p. 31, n. 2, O.U.P., 1959.

In Thèbè below Plakos: he was King
Of the Kilikians, and mail-clad Hektor had
His daughter to wife. She came to meet him now,
And with her came her woman, who on her breast
Had the young child, the tender innocent,
Hektor's belovèd, beautiful as a star,
Whom he had nam'd Skamander, but the rest
Called Ástyanax, seeing his father alone
Was saviour of Troy. And Hektor smiled and lookt,
Saying nothing; but Andrómachè stood
Close to him weeping, and took his hand in hers
And spake to him, saying, 'Lord, this might of thine
Destroys thee. Pity him, thy little child,
And me the unhappy, thy widow very soon.
For very soon the Greeks will set on thee
And slay thee; better then that I were laid
Under the earth if thou wert gone, for then
There would be no more joy, but only sorrow
For me, if thou should'st die. Father nor mother
Have I now. Great Achilles slew my father
When he laid waste the many-peopled town,
High-gated Thèbè of the Kilikians.
And there he slew Eëtion, but forebore
To spoil him, for of that he was ashamed,
So burn'd him in his wrought harness, and rais'd
A barrow over him where all about
The Orèads, children of Zeus, made elm-trees grow.
I had seven brothers within our house,
And these too on that same day were sent down
To the house of Hell, when Achilles the swift-footed
Slew all of them among the shambling kine
And woolly flocks. Then with the other spoil
He brought my mother here, my mother, a queen
Once under leafy Plakos, but let her go
Presently for great ransom. And then she fell
Struck in her father's house by Artemis

The Huntress. Hektor, so it is thou art
Father, mother, brother, as well as lord
And loving husband to me. Pity me now
And stay here on the tower for fear to make
The child an orphan and a widow of me!
And bid our people stand by the fig-tree,
There where the city may be entered best,
And where the wall lies weakest to assault.
Three times the best of them have made essay
At that point with the Aiantēs and renown'd
Idómeneus, and Atreus's two sons,
And the great son of Týdeus, as if some man
Skill'd in soothsay had given word of it,
Or their own wit had led them find it out.'

Then said great Hektor of the gleaming mail,
'Wife, all these things are heavy on my soul,
But I have terrible fear to be ashamed
Before the Trojans and their long-robed wives
If I should be a coward and shirk the war.
That my heart will not suffer. I have learn'd
Nobility, ever to be the first
Fighting among the Trojans, for to win
Fame for my father and myself. And yet
I know this very well, the day shall come
When holy Troy shall fall, Priam shall fall,
And the people of Priam of the goodly spear;
But not the Trojans' grief that is to come
Afflicts me, nor yet Hékabê's, nor yet
King Priam's grief, nor yet my brothers' grief,
The many and brave who must lie in the dust
Before their enemies, so much as thine
When some mail'd Greek shall take thee wailing away
And reive thy freedom from thee, and set thee down
In Argos, to some other woman's loom,
Or water-carrying from Messêis belike
Or Hypercia under harsh duress

Driven by heavy need. Then, seeing thy tears,
Some one may say, "This woman was the wife
Of Hektor, once the first man in the battle
Of the horse-taming Trojans when men fought
Round about Troy." So thou wilt hear them say,
And weep again for need of such a man
As I was to keep off the day of chains.
May I be dead and the earth heapt on me
Before I hear thee cry and know thee a slave.'

So saying, noble Hektor opened his arms
To take the child, but whimpering he held back
Upon the breast of his fair-girdled nurse,
Afraid to see his father look so grim,
Afraid of the mail and nodding dreadful crest
Topping his helm. His father and mother laugh,
And then Hektor took off his helm and laid it
Shining upon the ground, and kist his son,
And lift him in his arms, praying the while
To Zeus and all the Gods, 'Zeus, all ye Gods,
Grant to this child of mine that he may be
Even as his father, excellent in Troy,
As brave as he, a mighty king in Troy,
So that men say who see him coming home
From battle-faring, "This was a better man
Than even his father was." Grant him the spoils
Of war, grant him to slay his enemy,
And make his mother glad because of him.'
So said, he put the child back in the arms
Of his dear wife who in her fragrant breast
Received him, smiling in the midst of tears;
Which pitying he saw, and stroked her cheek,
Speaking again to her. 'Let not thy heart
Be too much troubled, my love; there is no man
Shall drive me down to Hell against my fate.
But who shall avoid his fate, once he is born,
Coward or high of heart? Now hic thee home,

Set-to at loom or distaff, busy thyself,
And bid thy maids be busy. As for war,
That is the men's affair: and it is mine
Chiefest of all in Troy.'

Having so said,
Great Hektor took his plumèd helm, and she,
His gentle wife, with many a backward look
Went home, shedding hot tears.

(*Iliad* 6. 390-496)¹

The voices of the past will only die when no one cares to listen, or when those who listen lose their sense of kinship and listen only for themselves. But Homer has been poet to a hundred generations, and now he is your poet, alive and singing on the lips of men.

¹ I cannot recall Sir John's *ipsissima verba*: this version, by Maurice Hewlett (*The Iliad of Homer*, pp. 111-14, Cresset, 1928), is taken from *The Oxford Book of Greek Verse in Translation*, No. 9.

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