

OUR DEBT TO ANTIQUITY

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Our debt to antiquity by Tadeusz Zielinski & H. A. Strong & Hugh Stewart

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TADEUSZ ZIELINSKI & H. A. STRONG & HUGH STEWART

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BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE following lectures were delivered by Professor Zielinski of St. Petersburg University in the spring of 1903 to the highest classes of the secondary schools in the capital. In the same year they were published in the Journal of the Ministry for Popular Education and appeared in separate book form. Despite a somewhat unfavourable reception in the Press the work created widespread interest, and a second edition was soon called for. In preparing it Professor Zielinski retained the form of the first. "I do not want to undo it and undo therewith the memory of hours which I count among the happiest in my life." But he emphasises the fact that this second edition, which the translators have used, is meant for the world at large. He feels strongly and reasonably that "the regeneration of the classical school, which is indispensable in the interests of Russian culture, will come about only when Society itself is convinced of its necessity."

It is hoped that the work may be found of no less interest to English readers than it has proved to students on the Continent. Its interest seems to the translators to consist first and foremost in the reasons advanced for the maintenance of the

classics as the groundwork of education. These arguments are in some cases different from those which we are accustomed to hear from partisans of the classical school in Western Europe. The whole question indeed is surveyed from a fresh standpoint; the lectures form a stimulating and suggestive treatment of a familiar subject on new lines. Certain statements and theories are perhaps open to question, but the work throughout is distinguished by a high level of discussion, unflagging spirits, and a philosophic breadth of view which make powerful and constant claims on the reader's interest and sympathy. A welcome note of enthusiasm and insight pervades the whole subject, and the clear-sighted and original ideas that are strewn throughout the pages must arrest the attention and compel thought. They are for the most part expressed with that characteristically Russian naïveté and use of vigorous and illuminating similes which give the style a flavour of the peculiar charm familiar to readers of Russian literature.

It will in addition be of interest to English readers to note the importance attached to the study of Latin by a teacher in a country which looks back to Byzantine Greek as its classical language. This judgment is in remarkable contrast with the view which obtains generally among the professor's countrymen, and is based on the small part played by Rome in Russian civilisation. The history of classical study in Russia is more in accordance with this latter

view, although it cannot be said to have advanced the cause of Greek. The record is one of constant vicissitudes, but not at any time of prosperity. In archæology, indeed, a great deal of good work has been done, the importance of which has not yet been grasped by Western students, but classical scholarship generally has been but a feeble and languishing product. At the present day, beyond a few notable exceptions, among whom Professor Zielinski himself is a prominent figure, it is at a low ebb indeed, if that term be permissible in a case where the tides were never high. The small group of leaders might take their place in the van of European scholarship, but the unenthusiastic rank and file lag far behind. In most of the gymnasia Greek is not taught at all, and the standard of Latin required for the "Attestat Zrailosti," the "certificate of maturity," which corresponds in a sense with our "Leaving Certificate" (cf. note on page 207), is undoubtedly low. With these facts borne in mind Professor Zielinski's triumphant vindication of his cause gains a new significance.

Scholars in our own country would probably have dwelt on some other considerations in favour of classical study besides those mentioned by the Russian lecturer. One of these might well have been that the characters and the social life described in the classics are simple and easy of comprehension, and as such afford useful models to the students of a mature and complicated civilisation. But it is to be hoped that those

who come forward to champion the cause of classical studies will insist more and more that Latin should be learnt in connection with French and, if possible, the other Romance languages. The teacher of Latin should be a good French scholar and should possess an adequate knowledge of French in its several stages. Conversely the French teacher should be a good Latinist. If French and Latin were taught as thus intimately connected, the pupil would develop an intuitive instinct of the evolutionary nature of language in general, and would acquire from a knowledge of the different features in French a similar instinct for the processes of Comparative Philology. For it should be noted that the various processes which take place in language such as sound change, change of meaning, contamination, and so forth, may be instanced from the history of Latin and French; and it is surely wiser to illustrate one known language by another than to compare a known language with an unknown one, such as Latin with Sanskrit or Slavonic.

The German translation of Professor Zielinski's lectures is by Herr E. Schoeler. Herr Weicher, of the Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Leipzig, most kindly allowed us to compare the German translation with our own.

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