

**CLASSICAL AND SCIENTIFIC STUDIES
AND THE GREAT SCHOOLS OF
ENGLAND: A LECTURE READ
BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF ARTS OF THE
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF
TECHNOLOGY, APRIL 6, 1865**

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Classical and Scientific Studies and the Great Schools of England: A Lecture Read Before the Society of Arts of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, April 6, 1865 by W. P. Atkinson

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W. P. ATKINSON

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Great Schools of England :*

A

LECTURE

READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF ARTS

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology,

APRIL 6, 1865.

By *W. P. ATKINSON,*

WITH ADDITIONS AND AN APPENDIX.

"Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur."

Cambridge :
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PRESS OF JOHN WILSON AND SON,
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P R E F A C E.

It will be obvious at a glance that I have extended this paper quite beyond the limits of a lecture; and I ought to state, that for the sentiments, both of the part which was read, and of that since added, so far as they are not quoted from others, I am alone responsible.

For these sentiments, however, I can lay no claim to originality. The ground has been often traversed before; though, so far as I have dealt in controversy, I have endeavored to place the merits of both sides of the question in dispute in a juster light than is done by the extreme partisans of either. I have made copious references to my authorities, in the hope that those interested in the subject will follow up the reading of much that want of space compelled me to omit. In making up my account of the English schools, I have been able to embody in my pamphlet but a tittle of the interesting and valuable material that may be found buried in the folios of the original Report.

In taking upon myself the ungracious part of an advocate, I have had to lay grave charges of neglect and imperfection;

but I have endeavored, I hope not unsuccessfully, not to appear insensible to merits as well as defects. That the schools and Universities of England, with all their shortcomings, have yet done a great work in the past, no one can be so blind as to deny; no one, with any love of good learning, can be insensible to the influence of all the venerable associations that cluster round them. As seats of learning and centres of thought, they possess a power which hardly any amount of abuse or mismanagement can wholly deprive them of. *Emollit mores, nec sinit esse ferus*, may be said of any course of liberal study, however antiquated or perverse. A mere residence at Oxford or Cambridge, one would think, should be a liberal education; and it may often be worth a young man's while to undergo any amount of useless drudgery, rather than miss the refining influence of the only higher intellectual training within his reach. My argument has only been that such a price should not be exacted of him.

But neither will it, I hope, be laid to my charge, because I have undertaken here to defend the interests of science, that I am insensible to the glory and beauty of the literatures of Greece and Rome, or to the splendor of their immortal story. That is a cause which will never lack defenders more eloquent than I am: yet, in one sense, I can claim that I too am its defender; for surely he may be reckoned among a cause's best friends who strives to protect it from perversion and abuse.

It has been my chief object to place before readers who will not have access to a document not likely to fall into the hands of many in this country, the very surprising picture of the great English schools which it contains, — schools, some

of which, at least, would seem at the present time to answer hardly any other purpose than that of serving as the demonstration, by a *reductio ad absurdum*, of the insufficiency of a one-sided and obsolete system of education. If I shall thereby contribute in any degree to the great work of building up a more perfect and more truly liberal one in this country, where, comparatively untrammelled by old traditions, we have a fairer field for experiment, I shall be abundantly rewarded.

W. P. A.

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, May 21, 1865.

CLASSICAL AND SCIENTIFIC STUDIES.

I HAVE ventured, gentlemen, to offer, this evening, to draw away your attention from the special topics which usually occupy you here, to the great general topic, in which, as engaged in a new educational enterprise, we are all interested, — the topic of scientific education. You are about to organize a new institution, differing in many of its features from any other in the community: it seems fit, that, while doing it, you should view it in all its relations to the instrumentalities already existing. Have we a national system of education already completely organized? If so, in what relation does our enterprise stand to it? if not so, what bearing will it have on the solution of an undetermined problem? We cannot isolate ourselves if we would. Our institution must stand in some relation, true or false, to other agencies at work in different parts of the same great field. It is important that that relation should be a true one, and that the enterprise should be undertaken with wide and just views of the whole problem. Whatever light we can get from other systems and experiments, successful or unsuccessful, should be welcome.

Our President has recently made a thorough personal examination of those European schools of science which most nearly resemble, in their purpose and objects, the one you are about to inaugurate; and the benefits of his well-known skill and ability will soon be apparent in the organization of your school.