

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN LECTURE SERIES  
No. I

THE CLASSICS IN THE  
MODERN WORLD

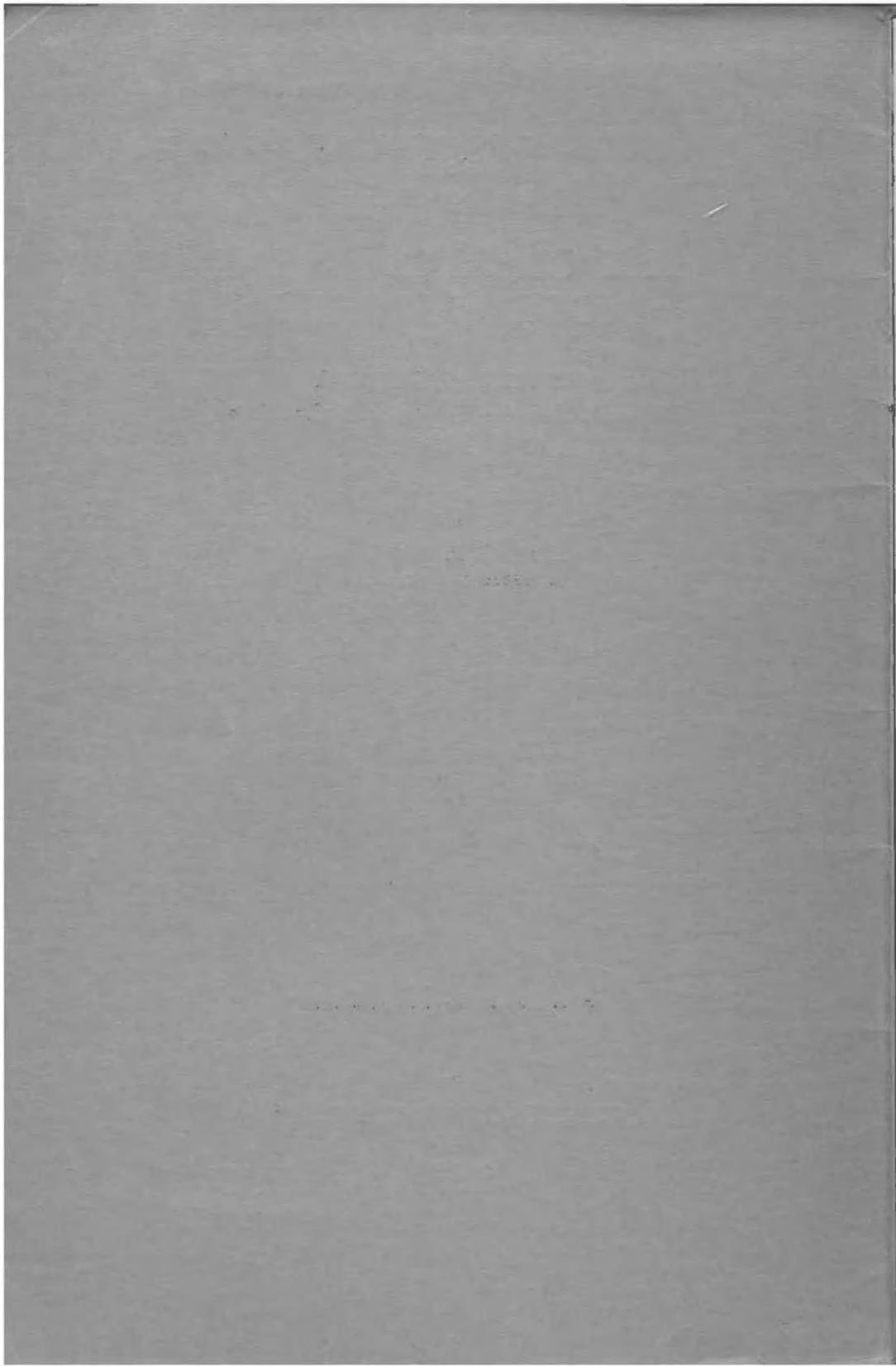
INAUGURAL LECTURE  
delivered before the University of Cape Town  
on 11 August 1949

*by*

H. C. BALDRY  
PROFESSOR OF CLASSICS

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## THE CLASSICS IN THE MODERN WORLD

### I

A FEW YEARS ago an eminent Classical scholar overseas was reported as having stated that the Classics were dead. Many who read the report may well have added: 'And high time, too!', believing that in these days of television and the atomic bomb anything so antiquated as the Classics and Classical education is better out of the way. Not a few, whose experience of the Classics had brought them more suffering than enjoyment, may well have felt that this was one of the least regrettable casualties of the second World War. But the scholar later denied having made such a statement, and indeed it is clear that it could not have been made by anyone really aware of the past history of Classical studies, or of their present state. The Classics are not dead, nor even moribund. They have lived through the hazards and upheavals of many centuries in the past, and they have as good a chance as any of us of living through the dangers and the turmoil of the twentieth century A.D. They have the same survival value as the music of Beethoven or the plays of Shakespeare. Thucydides claimed that his history was 'a possession for ever': so it is, and so it will remain. Horace declared that his poems would be *aere perennius*—'more everlasting than bronze'; and his boast has proved strictly correct. Modern science can disintegrate metal, can split that little particle which the Greeks called 'the unsplittable'; but Quintus Horatius Flaccus is still with us, and not likely to depart. You can scrap many things in this modern world, but—as another overseas scholar has said—you cannot scrap the Muses.

This lecture is not a defence of the Classics. Like all great art and great literature, they need no defence. I shall

not endeavour to prove that the Classics are still alive, and in no danger of extinction. Nor shall I dwell on that well-worn topic, the debt of modern civilisation to antiquity. Nor shall I attempt the impossible task of estimating the value of study of the Classics in comparison with other subjects—chemistry or accounting or needlework. Only time can settle such questions as these. I come neither to bury the Classics nor to praise them. The topic with which I do want to deal, the question which I do want to try to answer, is the one that seems to me to have most practical importance for those interested in the Classics to-day. How can Classical studies be of the maximum value to our modern world? How can they be most smoothly adapted to the circumstances of the age in which we live?

Here, I think, a glance at the past will be useful before we turn to the present.

It is said that every age makes its own Shakespeare, from the Globe Theatre of Elizabethan times to Sir Laurence Olivier on the screen. It is equally true that every age makes its own version of the Classics. Ancient art and literature, far from remaining always the same, have undergone a long series of metamorphoses in the minds of men as the centuries passed by. The process of transformation started in the days when Greek literature first began to be 'Classical', in the third century B.C., when the scholars of Alexandria took the works which earlier generations had created for performance and treated them as books, material for a science of textual criticism which the original authors would not have understood. Another stage came when the victorious Romans got to know Greek literature and made it the model of their own, valuing it for qualities often quite different from those seen in it by the Greeks.

The ancient legacy took fresh shape again in the so-called 'Dark' and Middle Ages, when a knowledge of Greek was a rarity west of the Byzantine Empire, but Latin for a large section of the population remained a living language—not only the accepted medium for learned literature, in the church

c. and the universities, in law and medicine, but something which a man could make so thoroughly his own that he could forget his mother tongue; a language in which the poor scholar would not only read the scriptures, but also write home for a pair of boots. Ancient literature meanwhile was often given a medieval flavour which would have made it almost unrecognisable to its original creators; but there can be no question that it still had vigorous life.

With the Renaissance came another phase, often described as a revival of the Classics, but more correctly seen, I think, as the adoption of a new approach towards a heritage that was never dead. Many ancient texts and physical remains of antiquity were rediscovered. Knowledge of Greek and appreciation of Greek literature in the original spread to the West. Precise scholarship replaced the mystical and allegorical interpretations of the Middle Ages. Antiquity and its literature were seen as a realm in which man was a monarch enthroned in his own right, not only the servant of God. For a time Greek and Roman authors were not only accepted as teachers of the arts and of philosophy, but as sources of knowledge, authorities on matters of fact in such spheres as astronomy, geography, zoology, medicine.

This heyday of the Classics came to an end when their literary pre-eminence was challenged by the growth of national cultures, and their factual reliability by the rise of science and experimental investigation. From now on they were regarded as fine literature, to be read not for information but for the training of the imagination and the reason. They were the embodiment of good taste. And so, to cut a long story short, we come to the position which Classical studies occupied, for example, in nineteenth century England, when they were accepted as an essential part of the culture of the leisured class, whose view of them was inevitably tinged by its own prejudices and ideals. Classical education in those times was not without practical aims. Dean Gaisford once ended a sermon with the words: 'Nor can I do better, in conclusion, than impress upon you

the study of Greek literature, which not only elevates above the vulgar herd, but leads not infrequently to positions of considerable emolument.' Training in the Classics was part of the ladder by which the sons of the aristocracy climbed to eminence in the church, in the law, in the civil service. But it was more than this. Classical studies were part of the education of the Victorian gentleman, something which no one who claimed to be a gentleman could do without. Those were the days when most men of note—philosophers, poets, even prime ministers—were good Classical scholars; when Gladstone delivered an address at Edinburgh University called: 'On the Place of Ancient Greece in the Providential Order'; when a Latin quotation was understood and applauded even by members of parliament. Clearly times have changed since then.

My intention in this brief historical survey was to point out that at each phase in the life of study and appreciation of the Classics this life has been conditioned and remoulded by the circumstances and the needs of the age. In each phase the Classics have had a different contribution to make—but always an important contribution—to contemporary culture and thought. Now comes the crucial question. What of our own age? What shape must Classical studies take now? What is to be their contribution during the rest of this twentieth century of ours?

To attempt to describe the character of one's own time is a far more difficult and hazardous task than to give labels to the past. It would be rash to claim that one knows where we have got to: still more rash, to prophesy where we are going. But if we are to pick out one key factor as the dominant feature of our age I would choose the rise of applied science. We live in a century in which science continually creates fresh possibilities of the conquest of nature by man—possibilities of causing space to shrink, of eliminating disease and lengthening human life, of raising the mass of mankind to a standard of living previously enjoyed by a few. It is an era which opens up vistas of

achievement scarcely dreamed of in the past, yet an era when most men's minds are strangely limited by the material and practical problems confronting them; when much attention is paid to death statistics, but little to the meaning of death itself; when there is much talk about old-age pensions, but little about the problem of youth and age.

Because of the development of applied science and machinery new relationships have sprung up among men, new class divisions, new awakenings of hitherto backward races, new forms of economic and political organisation, new struggles and conflicts which may destroy us all. But in the background of the whole confused situation is the advance of science itself—an advance mainly due not to any new zeal for truth, but to the possibilities of practical achievement. We need only look at a modern university to see on a small scale how science is enthroned in the modern world—our own university, for example, with its great faculties of medicine and engineering, both forms of applied science, as well as the various science departments themselves. And if one may hazard a guess about the future, it seems likely that this preoccupation with science and its results, with the material problems and possibilities which science has brought us, with the divisions and conflicts and upheavals which have followed in its train, will continue until the problems and conflicts have been settled and the possibilities worked out—unless in the process our whole civilisation comes to a violent end.

Many of those whose professional concern is with the past deplore these modern developments, but personally I do not wish to add my voice to their lamentations. To my mind these changes are to be welcomed rather than regretted. Like all transitional phases, ours is a painful age. It is also dangerous. But I regard it as a period of transition which contains great possibilities for good, which may lead to a better life not just for a minority, but for the great majority of mankind. Consequently I am not one of those who regard the Classics as a ditch from which to fight against the trend

of our time. I do not want to go back to the so-called 'good old days'; indeed I doubt whether they were any better to live in than our own. I am not advocating a return to the Middle Ages, nor to a leisured aristocracy with the classically educated 'gentleman' as its ideal. Nor do I want to retain the Classics as a mere quaint and charming appendage to modern civilisation, a source of mottoes and inscriptions, something to add bouquet to distinguished or ceremonial occasions, like the use of a Latin tag in an after-dinner speech. The true value of a tradition, I believe, is its power to enrich the present, not its power to drag us back to the past, or to keep in being survivals which have lost their meaning. And so I would say that the study of the Classics must find its proper and natural place in our modern life, where it can make a contribution in harmony with the trends of this scientific age rather than fight against them, where it can fit the needs of mass education and not only those of a cultured aristocracy.

Let it not be said that the maintenance of a tradition like that of the Classics is important only for Europe, that a 'new' country far away from Greece and Italy can afford to forget about these things. There is always a danger that such a country, while making the proud claim that it is an outpost of European civilisation, may be driven by the pressure of local circumstances towards prejudices and practices far removed from many of the true ideals of that civilisation. We here in South Africa have particular reasons for the study of some aspects of the ancient world—the close connection of our legal system, for example, with Roman law, and the parallel between our problems of bilingualism and those of Graeco-Roman times. But more important than these is the general fact that we in South Africa, even more than those living in Europe, need knowledge and understanding of the roots from which European culture sprang. In the educational sphere a programme recently put forward should be sufficient warning of the kind of narrowness of outlook which a grasp of the best traditions of Europe can help to prevent. I believe that here in the Union, at least as much as among the peoples of

Europe, the Classics have a place in the contemporary scene. What that place should and can be, how Classical studies must be changed in order to fill it, is the central question of my lecture, and I must try to answer this general problem before turning to any practical conclusions that may be drawn.

## II

First, perhaps, I should say something about some ways of bringing the Classics up to date which do *not* provide an answer to my problem, excellent though they may sometimes be in themselves. A few months ago a front-rank American baseball player, put out of the game because of an injury to his heel, is reported to have said to a columnist: 'They tell me I've made this guy Achilles famous'. Not only this guy Achilles and his heel, but many things in ancient civilisation and literature can be brought up to date in a sense, can be given a new brightness and attractiveness, by being related to modern events or put into modern dress.

A remarkable example of this approach was given by Lord Wavell, who recently uttered some criticisms of modern poetry, in his presidential address last year to the British Virgil Society, in which he dealt with the *Aeneid* from the military point of view. His translations certainly struck a modern note. When Ascanius scores a bull's eye and is praised with the words *Macte nova virtute puer, sic itur ad astra*, Lord Wavell put forward the rendering: 'Attaboy, you for the next Olympic Games'. He also suggested a Press headline for the incidents of the Eighth Book: *Venus Vamps Vulcan: Son Gets Shield*. He gave a new flavour to comment on Virgil's gods by pointing out that the unusual feature in the *Aeneid*, as in the *Iliad*, was that the same War Cabinet—the gods—controlled the operations of both armies. His defence of Aeneas' conduct in the Fourth Book was equally novel. What, he asked, was to be expected of a commander-in-chief, having Venus for mother and Cupid

for half-brother, when a lady with so just a claim as had Dido to be called a 'lovely' offered herself 'on a plate'? It was only when Aeneas received orders from the highest official levels to re-embark his force and make a landing in Italy that he gave up the idea of marrying and settling down in Africa. It was, in fact, the War Cabinet on Olympus that was almost wholly to blame for Dido's misfortunes.

*The Times* commented in a leader on Lord Wavell's speech :

Even if good literature entirely lost general currency it would be abundantly worth while to continue to enjoy it alone. That die-hard stance would, no doubt, cheerfully be adopted by Lord Wavell and other Virgilians if Latin were ever killed stone dead. They would accept the harsh verdict, once recorded in the proceedings of the Classical Association, that the average boy's mind is a pigsty; and, despairing of new generations, would live their time out, like prehistoric animals, browsing among the old ways. There was no sign of a retreat into such escapism in the fresh and racy approach of Lord Wavell to the story of Aeneas and its author. The blackest pessimist, faced with this tribute, must agree that there is vitality in the supreme artists that will always bring the world to their feet. . . . The day may seem to be coming when a false quantity will mean a mix-up in the chemical ingredients of an atom bomb. Even so, Lord Wavell has given a reminder that the creative spirit is immortal.

Whatever one may think of this kind of 'creative spirit', the *Aeneid* certainly has a 'new look' when seen with Lord Wavell's eyes. A rather different experiment in putting the Classics into modern dress is the Latin newspaper, *Acta Diurna*, published three times a year in England by the enterprising Orbilian Society. Each issue bears a date somewhere amid the most stirring events of Roman history, and those events are reflected in headlines such as :

CARRHAE

MORS IMPERATORIS

CRASSUS FOEDISSIME NECATUS

or :

ORATOR FIT IMPERATOR

CICERO IN CILICIA ARMA PARAT

They are reflected also in 'front-page news stories' and reports from the paper's 'own correspondents', in leading articles, in topical cartoons. There is a weather forecast—FLABIT FORTITER FAVONIUS was the last one—a column by *medicus noster familiaris*, a correspondence column, a crossword puzzle and other puzzles, and a stock cartoon character—Poppaedius Nauta—who makes his comments on his latest predicament. A children's supplement, *Acta Minora*, provides a serial story (ending, of course, *Avide exspecta Actorum editionem proximam*), and more jokes, puzzles and cartoons. As a final modern touch there are advertisements, which, I'm afraid, bring in no revenue. A Roman senator wonders why his toga is not as white as his neighbour's. Sosia the undertaker offers to burn your corpse by night or by day, giving as proof of his efficiency the fact that he was once cook at the house of Lucullus. There are some things, we are told, about which *etiam amicissimi tui te certiozem facere nolunt*—and the remedy is to suck Publius Popilius's pastilli!

Such novelties as this are admirable ways of brightening up the Classics, and certainly deserve all support and encouragement. A South African equivalent of *Acta Diurna* could be of great use to our teachers of Latin in the schools, and even in the universities. I am more doubtful as to whether we should imitate the example of a certain high school in America, where not long ago 150 pupils, in ancient Roman garb and speaking only Latin, staged a three-hour Roman banquet before an audience of 1,500 parents and friends—a banquet, we are told, 'as nearly like the ancient affairs as modern manners would allow'. But in any case these devices are no answer, and their inventors would not claim them to be an answer, to the basic problem of the place to be occupied by the Classics in our modern world. They are methods of sugaring a pill which is too often found unpalatable. They are no substitute for the diagnosis that we have to make.

In attempting that diagnosis, in trying to give some sort of answer, however inadequate, to the question which I have now raised in several forms and from several points of view, the most convenient approach will be to follow that division which we make in our universities, superficial though it may sometimes be, between the humanities and the sciences. The relation between the Classics and the sciences, or for that matter between all the humanities and the sciences, is the crucial part of our problem. But before coming to that let me say a word about the Classics and their nearer relatives, the other humanistic studies which constitute our Faculty of Arts.

'We are all Greeks', wrote Shelley. 'Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their root in Greece'. Add Rome as well as Greece, and the claim is not very far off the mark. All our humanistic studies have some roots in antiquity, and it is a principle generally recognised, though not, perhaps, as universally accepted as it should be, that some knowledge of ancient civilisation is essential for a full understanding of even the most modern of the humanities. It would be reasonable to claim that in these days when the disease of specialisation has infected the arts as well as the sciences, when the student of a modern language may be ignorant of history and the student of law innocent of ethics or politics, it is more important than ever for them to be acquainted with a period of civilisation when there were no such water-tight compartments and the different aspects of culture were fused together in a single whole. The same principle holds good not only for students in a university, but for all those who through reading or some other means take an interest in one or other of the humanities. But the main point I wish to emphasise here is that if the Classics are to make their maximum contribution in this sphere, those who teach them or write about them must adopt an approach different from the attitude they have sometimes had in the past. They must eradicate all traces of that intellectual snobbery shown by some old-style Classical scholars, whose

contempt for modern studies—a relic of the days when Classics had more of a monopoly—has naturally been answered by followers of modern studies with equal contempt for a subject which seemed so out of date. If we are to emphasise the fact that modern culture has its roots in antiquity, that a continuous line of growth and development links ancient times with our own, we must abandon the assumption, still maintained in some of the world's most distinguished universities, and constantly reflected in books about the Classics, that study of ancient civilisation and ancient literature can stop short at, say, A.D. 100; that no attention need be paid to any authors after Tacitus and Juvenal; that ancient thought came to an end with the Stoics and Epicureans. This iron curtain dividing the Classics from later years not so strictly classical must go. More than this: the teaching and study of the Classics must include emphasis on those links which chiefly connect ancient civilisation with our own, those channels through which the inspiration of the distant past has flowed into more recent literature and art. The Classical scholar's first concern is of course the Classics themselves, but if he is to meet students of the other humanities on common ground he must look beyond the Classics to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the eighteenth century and the so-called Romantic Revival, with at any rate some knowledge and understanding.

From this discussion of how the Classics can best get along with their closer kinsfolk I turn to the problem of their relationship with modern science, which is all too often regarded as a total stranger not only to the Classics, but to study of the humanities as a whole. It is a difficult question, and a question with wide implications, for to some extent we are all willynilly infected with the scientific outlook—even those who study arts subjects, even the general public who have no particular concern with either science or the humanities. In a scientific era we all acquire something of the scientific approach. This gives me a starting point. Before saying what I think Classical studies can contribute

to the betterment of science, what science can learn from the Classics, I will say a word or two about the other side of the relationship—what study of the Classics has gained and can continue to gain from science.

In sketching the past history of Classical studies I emphasised that, chameleon-like, they have taken their colour at each phase from contemporary circumstances and trends. Let me now complete the picture by stressing the fact that in our present scientific age study of the Classics takes its colour from science. It is not commonly realised, I think, what a transformation has come over Classical scholarship during the past century. The modern Classical scholar *is* a scientist. Unlike many of his predecessors in earlier periods, he has the same respect for facts and figures which science has inculcated in us all. It is true that there is little opportunity for experiment within his sphere; but observation, the accumulation of factual information, is the basis of his work. Within the last few generations this adoption of a scientific attitude has brought striking changes in many branches of the study of ancient literature and the ancient world: in textual criticism, now a separate science with laws and technical terminology of its own; in archaeology, now conducted on strictly scientific lines very different from the amateur methods by which Schliemann eighty years ago dug into the ruins of Troy; in linguistics, in ancient history, even in the study of ancient philosophy.

Has Classical scholarship benefited by the change? It has brought some dangers, some disadvantages. Mechanical collection of statistics has sometimes replaced literary appreciation instead of being used to assist it. Mechanical research into the Homeric question, to take one example, has sometimes obscured, instead of enhancing, the splendour of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Specialisation has come hand in hand with scientific method. The modern Classical scholar can claim real scholarship in only one section of his subject, and no more than an intelligent understanding of the rest. Papers in Classical journals, like those in scientific periodicals, are

often unintelligible except to the specialist. Nevertheless, the gains which a scientific approach has brought more than counterbalance the losses. Our knowledge of antiquity has been enormously enlarged. We now have a picture of the ancient world far clearer, far more detailed, than a hundred-and-fifty years ago. Perhaps even more important than this accumulation of fresh facts is our change of attitude. Looking at ancient culture with more scientific eyes, we have learned to see it as a natural, rather than a supernatural, phenomenon, to regard ancient literature as the product of human individuals and the environment in which they lived, not as holy writ. This path has already brought us, I believe, to better understanding and appreciation of our ancient heritage. Further journeying along the same road will bring us further gains.

So much for the Classics' debt to science. What of the other side of the question? What in this modern world can the scientist—and, as I have said, to some extent that means every one of us—what can the scientist get from the Classics? If the answer must be put in a single word, I would say 'humanism', but to avoid misunderstanding I must expand the point at greater length. I do not mean 'humanism' as something separate from science. I am not merely urging my scientific colleagues to devote some of their leisure moments to Virgil or Euripides, excellent though such advice might be. I mean a 'humanism' which is very relevant to science itself.

Just as it is not commonly realised how scientific Classical scholarship has become, so in these days when each branch of science embraces a huge mass of technical detail it is too often forgotten that science itself was once one of the greatest of the humanities. Scientist and humanist are not by nature opposed, or even divided. Some of the greatest scientists of the past—Aristotle, for example, or Leonardo da Vinci—were also great humanists. It is something of their attitude, I submit, that the modern scientist needs to recapture; and

many of the best modern scientists, I believe, are in agreement with this line of thought. Of course, times have changed since the fourth century B.C. or the Renaissance. The accumulation of knowledge has continued until to-day no one individual can be at home in every field of science as Aristotle and Leonardo were, still less combine this with extensive travel in the realms of literature and art. But it is not an encyclopaedic knowledge of facts that is required. I suggest that what the scientist often lacks—and the word 'scientist', I repeat, to some degree involves every one of us—is a *Weltanschauung*, a sense of perspective, a vision of the relationship between the various branches of science, and of the place of science as a whole alongside other forms of knowledge and culture and thought in human experience and human life. To put the same point in a different way, modern science is much concerned with analysis. What is needed is more synthesis, more consideration of how the parts fit together to form the whole.

Emphasis on this need is nothing new. Why do I draw fresh attention to it in a lecture about the Classics? How do the Classics come into the picture? It may well be said that any cultural study, any of the humanities, can influence the scientist's mind and all our minds in the direction required. Or it may well be argued that a strong dose of training in philosophy is the best remedy for our state. No doubt a number of different treatments of the malady is possible, and no one can judge which will be most effective. But there is this to be said about the Classics: just because the study of ancient civilisation takes our minds back to a period before specialisation was the accepted rule of life, a period in which we can see all the various branches of human experience and activity, including science, at first fused together in a single whole, and then watch the process whereby they became separate, though still closely related together; just because it is impossible to study the ancient world and ancient literature with any intelligence and understanding without acquiring something of that habit of

synthesis, of seeing the whole as well as the parts, which modern science so often fails to give us; just for these reasons it can be claimed that 'Back to the Classics!' is no bad slogan as a complement to that 'On with the advance of Science!' which is the prevailing cry of our age.

### III

I have said something about the place which the Classics should occupy alongside the other humanities, and about the part they should play in relation to science, not only in the work of a modern university, but in influencing the general climate of thought of our time. All this is very abstract, very up-in-the-air. It is time to turn from theory to practice, from the discussion of aims to the problem of how to achieve them, from what *should* be done to what *can* be done. Here I am necessarily concerned with my own field, the sphere in which I can perhaps hope to achieve some practical results. How can the study of Classics in South Africa, and especially at the University of Cape Town, be made, I will not say to fulfil the aims I have outlined, but to contribute towards their fulfilment?

Come down thus towards the earth, and straightway we are confronted by a question which I have so far ignored: what is the proper place of study of the Greek and Latin languages in our programme? It is all very well to talk of ancient civilisation, of the humanities; but what about *hic, haec, hoc* and *mensa, mensa, mensam*? What about the locative case and the three types of conditional sentence? What about the labyrinthine complexities of the Greek verb—territory which few nowadays attack, and still fewer conquer? One may speak of culture and literature and art, but these are the hard realities of a Classical education. What about them?

The old idea was that a classical education meant training in pure scholarship, an arduous process which continued until, it was supposed, the student had a thorough knowledge

of Greek and Latin and could read ancient authors without difficulty in the original. Appreciation of ancient literature was a mere by-product of this process, and became important only in the final stages, when mastery of the two languages was more or less complete. In some places, like Oxford and Cambridge, this ideal of pure scholarship may be maintained. But in the majority of universities, including our own, it is obvious that this is not our only or even our principal task. Of course, competent and accurate scholars in both Latin and Greek will always be needed, not merely in order to train other competent and accurate scholars in their turn, but because only people with such knowledge can be reliable teachers of the Classics in any form. Lectures may be given and books written about the Classics which use only translations, but if serious mistakes and misunderstandings are to be avoided those who give the lectures and write the books must draw their knowledge from the original text. If scholarship dies, all real knowledge of the Classics must ultimately disappear as well. It will continue to be the job of the Classics Department in the University of Cape Town, as in any university worth the name, to give the best possible training in classical scholarship, in both Greek and Latin, to those who have the ability for it and the inclination. I hope I shall not be accused of the intellectual snobbery which I earlier condemned, if I say that the few who become really good scholars will be the possessors of a privilege which is very great, if nowadays increasingly rare. But they will be few, and I repeat that they cannot be our only, or even our chief, concern.

What of the rest? Should others besides these few be taught the Classical languages, and, if so, why? To put the question in concrete form, should our first course in Latin at the university be limited to those who are going on to the third? Or, if the number in the first course is to remain large, are the majority to suffer just so that a few among them can eventually become good scholars?

My answer is that there are other things to be gained from linguistic training besides pure scholarship. I believe that from Latin, rightly taught—I repeat, rightly taught—benefits can be won which are of value to many people who never come near to being Classical scholars. (All that can be said of Latin applies equally to the study of Greek, but I confine myself to Latin because I am keeping within the bounds of what is immediately practicable.) The various arguments in favour of Latin as a subject to be taught in our schools and universities have been propounded and discussed many times, and I do not want to go over them again here. No doubt there is some truth in most of them, and each of us who has taught or learnt Latin must judge by his own experience which argument is the most important. All I will say this evening is that personally I believe the greatest gift Latin has to give to most people is training in the use and the real understanding of language. The point is clearly put in a recent address by Professor Bowra :

The Greeks and Romans expressed themselves in ways unlike ours because their minds moved differently. To understand them we have to make an effort which we do not have to make in our own or in any other contemporary European language, and in making this effort we widen our understanding and make our intellects more supple. We find that ideas habitual to us did not exist for the Greeks and Romans and that for some of their fundamental ideas we have no exact equivalents. It is this intellectual exercise, this adaptation of our minds to something alien and unfamiliar, that the classics have to give us. The differences between our use of words and theirs are enormous. There are few sentences in either Greek or Latin which can be translated literally into English without losing something essential; there are few sentences in English which can be translated literally into Greek or Latin without being absurd. To understand the classical languages we must get past the words to the ideas which they express, past the grammatical structure and the vocabulary to the precise colour and tone of their matter. Herein lies the special claim of the classical education.

Professor Bowra is talking of something which is of value to every educated man or woman, a permanent mental benefit,

unaffected by the fact that people forget their Latin in later life. Accuracy in the use of words is a virtue well worth cultivating in an age of slipshod speech and too easy reading. But it is particularly valuable, of course, to those for whom the use of language is in one way or another a special concern: intending lawyers, for example, or students of modern languages or of English literature. What is 'practical criticism', of which my colleagues in the English Department talk so much to-day, but taking a passage of literature and studying it so that we do what Professor Bowra describes: 'get past the words to the ideas which they express, past the grammatical structure and the vocabulary to the precise colour and tone of their matter'?

Here is one thing at any rate which can be learnt from Latin if rightly taught. But certain conclusions follow with regard to right and wrong methods of teaching. It follows that the most important part of the business of learning Latin is continual repetition of the process of moving from one language into another, from Latin into English or Afrikaans, from Afrikaans or English into Latin. Unseen translation of Latin should be the central feature, and, at any rate in the later stages, prose composition will have a part to play. What must be avoided is the mechanical reading of set-books, which can be useful as a means to an end but become pernicious when treated as an end in themselves. Also unserviceable for our purpose, attractive though it may seem, is the 'direct method', whereby the teacher (if he is skilful and a good scholar) can conduct his classes entirely in Latin and train his pupils to speak it like a modern tongue. The 'direct method' may be valuable in the early stages of learning Latin, and as an occasional accessory later on. But there is no point in learning Latin as a living language. Its usefulness, if the view I have put forward is correct, is enhanced by the fact that it is a dead language which must be translated into living modern speech. And dead—in this sense—it should remain.

I have said something about the learning of Latin as a language, but from the whole tenor of my lecture it will be clear that I do not think this linguistic study should stand alone. I am very far from agreeing with the headmaster who is reported to have said: 'Boys, this term you are to have the privilege of reading the *Oedipus Coloneus* of Sophocles, a veritable treasure-house of grammatical peculiarities'. The Classics must always be taught as literature, not merely as linguistic exercises. The boy or girl who learns Latin, in school or at the university, must at the same time gain some knowledge of ancient literature, ancient culture, ancient civilisation. How is it to be done?

For the intelligent pupil or student the reading of Latin, even without much scholarship, has some literary value. He gains an idea of the character and texture of Latin literature in the original which he can never get from translations, just as those who have once seen the ruins of antiquity in Italy or Greece, even with the most inexpert eye, have something which no book on ancient architecture can give them. But let us not imagine that stumbling through the pages of Caesar or Virgil gives a boy or girl all that they need of ancient culture. I think it was Whitehead who said that reading a Classical author sentence by sentence, clause by clause, is like looking at a cathedral through a microscope. If most students of Latin are to acquire a conception and an appreciation of any masterpiece of Latin literature *as a whole*, they must do so through reading a translation as well as through studying the original. If one thing is certain about the adaptation of Classical studies to the modern world, it is that Classical scholars must abandon their prejudice against translations, their idea that translations are nothing but 'cribs' or 'keys', or at best 'Classics without tears', which have no place in the classroom or the lecture-room.

In translation, of course, especially in translations of poetry, we miss much of the excellence of the original. But as Livingstone has put it, 'sensible people do not refuse to be saved from shipwreck in a cargo boat, on the ground that

they never travel in anything less than a liner'. Translations are the means of rescue for those would-be Classical scholars who have plunged into the mysteries of grammar and syntax and vocabulary and never emerged on the other side, or who would otherwise see Lucretius or Tacitus or Plato through a fog of subordinate clauses and irregular verbs. The readers of translations can at any rate see what is in front of them clearly, and see it whole. Excellent translations of many ancient authors are now available in English. There is an urgent need for translations in Afrikaans. Study of these translations and of the general background of ancient civilisation must go hand in hand with the learning of Latin or Greek.

So much for the place and the limitations of language study in modern teaching of the Classics. But this of course does not affect the great majority of students in our universities, still less the great mass of the general public. They are concerned with science, or with one or other of the manifold results of applied science which make up the texture of our modern life. They have no time or inclination for years of study devoted to Latin or Greek. If they are to make any contact with ancient culture at all, it must be by some quicker and easier means than this. I hope it is clear from what I have said this evening that I regard the task of giving these people some acquaintance with classical civilisation as one of the main functions of a Classics Department in a modern university. When I say 'classical civilisation', I use the phrase in the widest sense. I include ancient science and philosophy, art and architecture, as well as literature. These must be made known in a way which makes clear not only how they emerged from the ancient background, but also how they are linked with the culture and the science of more modern times. The literature must be read in translation. This is what we try to do in the Classical Culture course at the University of Cape Town, and it is encouraging that the number attending this course—mostly drawn of course, from students of the other

humanities—has nearly trebled during the fourteen years since it was instituted. In my opinion, for reasons I have already described, it is highly desirable that students of science and the various applied sciences should at some stage, whether at school or at the university, be given an opportunity to go through some similar course of study, perhaps with a bias towards the early history of science.

Outside the university every avenue must be explored which may lead to greater public understanding and appreciation of our heritage from antiquity. I hope that the Classics will play their full part in the work to be done under the new University Board of Extra-Mural Studies. The Classics and discussions of the Classics from the modern point of view should be heard more often on the wireless, a medium for which ancient literature is often peculiarly suited, as most of it was originally composed to be heard rather than to be read. Most important of all, of course, are books. Not a few good simple books on the literature and civilisation of antiquity, intended for the general public, have come out in recent years. We need many more.

#### IV

About twenty years ago Sir Walter Raleigh, Professor of English at Oxford, wrote some scathing sentences about the results of contemporary Classical education :

The great pagan civilisations march their eternal round, like weary ghosts, through the schoolroom; at the stroke of the clock they vanish and the activities of real life are resumed. By the time that the child reaches manhood, he is so inured to these habitual intruders, that he regards them as harmless and honourable appanages to an English homestead; hardly does the thought occur to him that these too, like other restless spirits, have a message to deliver and are burning to speak.

If this picture of the Classics as completely alien to the realities of modern life is correct, then the sooner our Classics Department closes down, the sooner teaching of Classics in

our schools stops, the better. But my thesis in this lecture has been that no such gap between ancient and modern need exist. I have argued that in our modern era, as in earlier phases of history, the Classics have a living contribution to make, and I have tried to outline what that contribution can be, and how Classical studies can be adapted and remodelled so as to make it. The Classics, I have suggested, can no longer provide us with an international language, as they did in the Middle Ages; nor with information, as they did for many during the Renaissance; nor with the exclusive aristocratic culture of the Victorian 'gentleman'. But they can give a wide background to the study of the more modern humanities; they can supply a sense of perspective, a habit of synthesis, which is badly needed by modern science and by all of us who are affected by the scientific outlook; they can promote accuracy in the use of speech in an age in which that virtue is all too rare. In short, I have been talking not only about the Classics *in* the modern world, but the Classics *for* the modern world. Probably my practical proposals seem an anti-climax after the ambitious aims which I put forward earlier. I would claim no more than that they are proposals which point in the right direction, proposals which are in harmony with the general trend of our modern era rather than in conflict with it.

I will conclude where I began. The Classics are by no means dead. They need not come into our lives only as weary ghosts. In this as in past ages they have a message to deliver; but they must speak it in a manner which the twentieth century can understand.



