

# POETRY

(LONDON)



No. 15

MAY, 1949

TWO & SIX



# FRANK RICHARDS

---

## BRIGGS MAJOR SARCASTIC On the Value of a Classical Education

The case of Charlie Grigson was a sad one,  
His fate was hard, as you may well believe,  
He slacked and ragged—his record was a bad one  
From when he came, until he had to leave.  
With every lesson hammered into Charlie,  
'Twas practically *ave atque vale*.

At Barcroft School a classic education  
Befits a man to play his part in life,  
Sound knowledge of a Latin conjugation  
Girds up his loins for keen commercial strife,  
And I suppose that I need hardly mention  
The business-value of a Greek declension.

But poor old Grigson never had a look-in,  
Of scholars Barcroft never had a worse,  
So very little learning Grigson took in  
He scarcely could compose a Latin verse,  
And knew but little more than any sparrow  
Of all the works of P. Vergilius Maro.

Indeed, he found Eutropius a teaser,  
For him, alas! *all* Livy's books were lost,  
I fear he could not construe even Cæsar,  
And knew not when the Rubicon was crossed,  
So little Greek was knocked into his napper  
That Mu or Nu he hardly knew from Kappa.

His years at Barcroft School were wholly wasted,  
He ragged in class, and assed about in prep,  
Delights of classic lore he never tasted,  
Nor wanted to advance a single step.  
Homer he thought a bore, and Virgil rotten,  
And all he had to learn was soon forgotten.

Thus wholly unequipped for Life's stern battle,  
He quitted Barcroft School, and went his way,  
Nor Greek nor Latin could the poor chap prattle,  
He went all unprepared into the fray.  
He tried at first for something in the City,  
But soon found that put nothing in the kitty.

No one would give the simplest situation,  
To push a quill, or sit upon a stool,  
To one who'd missed his chance of education,  
And brought no classic knowledge from his school!  
No office chair poor Grigson ever sat in,  
For want of just a spot of Greek or Latin.

After long months of unemployed inaction  
At length he got a job as office-boy,  
He hoped to give his gov'nor satisfaction  
Though knowing little of the Siege of Troy.  
Poor chap! They found that he could not read Plato,  
And so they dropped him, like a hot potato.

Poor Charlie Grigson! Life grew sere and yellow,  
From year to year things went from bad to worse,  
But what could be expected by a fellow  
Who couldn't write a Greek or Latin verse?  
Thucydides he knew not, nor Plutarchus,  
What hope, then, to keep life within his carcase?

He might have been a Company Director,  
A Chairman's chair he might have sat upon,  
Could he have but construed a speech of Hector,  
Or told them all about Laocoön.  
He might have made a million, or a milliard,  
With just a little knowledge of the Iliad.

Had he but known the fragments of Menander  
He might have been the chairman of a bank,  
Some knowledge of the battles of Lysander  
Must have secured a high commercial rank,  
However high the prize, he might have won it,  
Hard study while at Barcroft would have done it.

But, as the matter stood, it was no wonder  
He found no opportunities to seize,  
How could a fellow fail to go right under  
Who couldn't quote a verse of Sophocles?  
Even a stoker's job was barred, though grimy,  
to one inapt at conjugating *επι*

The years passed Grigson by, no money earning,  
Then he became conductor of a tram,  
He hoped to hide his lack of classic learning,  
Though feeling like a humbug or a sham,  
It booted not—the manager who hired him  
Discovered how the matter stood, and fired him.



Then once again poor Grigson was a loafer,  
Job-hunting day by day, and week by week,  
He nearly got employment as a chauffeur,  
But failed to pass a simple test in Greek.  
That did it—cutting short all further parley,  
They showed the garage door to poor old Charlie.

Again he tried—and this time as a carter,  
They offered him a trial for the job,  
Had he worked harder at his Alma Mater,  
He might have earned a weekly fifty bob.  
Alas! he found that only classic scholars  
Were trusted to adjust the horses' collars!

One day he passed a navvies' gang, stone-cracking,  
He paused: "Is there a chance," he sadly said,  
"For one whose classic lore is somewhat lacking?"  
The ganger stared at him, and shook his head,  
And answered, "Not a hope! They always sack us  
Unless we know our Q. Horatius Flaccus!"

Poor Charlie Grigson's life was dark and dismal,  
Lodged in a poor precarious abode,  
Out of a job, in poverty abysmal,  
Barred ev'n from cracking stones upon the road,  
A chap so ignorant of Latin grammar  
Could not be safely trusted with a hammer.

Alas! poor Grigson! Old and worn and weary,  
Far from the reach of Learning's rich rewards,  
He eked out at the last a living dreary  
In London streets, between two sandwich-boards,  
Employed by some old unsuspecting geezer,  
Who knew not that he couldn't construe Cæsar.

The fate of poor old Grigson, sad and muddy,  
Should be a warning to all chaps who slack,  
Who loathe their prep, and jib at earnest study,  
And when they can on lessons turn their back.  
His sad, sad fate down to disaster brought him,  
For want of all that Barcroft could have taught him.