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PLACE OF ENGLISH

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CLARA MYERS.

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The Place of English in the College Curriculum.

A question which has occupied the public attention very much of late, and one which has been thoroughly discussed in all its different phases, is, the place that our own language should hold in a college course of study. The study of a language cannot be made without taking into consideration, also, the literature which has been produced in that language. In discussing this question we will, therefore, be led not only to a consideration of the advantage to be derived from a more careful study of the English language in its origin and composition, but also in its literary masterpieces.

In general we may say that language
study in the commonly accepted meaning of the term, serves to open up the undeveloped, nature of the human being, to set his powers to growing, and to give him a knowledge of human nature.

Language has been defined as the "medium of communication to others of our thoughts, feelings and desires through spoken words." It is probable that language was used almost exclusively as a means of communication when it first originated, and this is how the most important office of speech.

Language is also an aid to thought. Some philosophers hold that thought is impossible without language. This may not be true, but it must be allowed that unless general ideas were fixed and represented by words, we could never attain to thought such as we at present enjoy. Language serves also as an instrument of record. Without
the record of language we would have no means of inquiry into the deeds and facts of mankind during the ages which precede direct historical record. It is pregnant with information respecting races which lie beyond the reach of physical sciences. We may further add that a careful use of language is a mark of culture and refinement.

A thorough investigation of language is therefore of great practical value. Literature, in its masterpieces, furnishes the student with models of good style, enriches his vocabulary, perfects his expression and enlarges his knowledge.

Having stated some of the advantages to be derived from language study, let us consider some of the facts which have given the ancient classics such a prominent place in our courses of
study, and thus led to the revolt against them in modern times.

During the middle ages the literature and learning was in the hands of the Church. Latin was the form which all their documents took; the Church services were conducted in Latin. This was during the infancy of our tongue. The training of the past was locked up in Greek and Latin and the key to those languages, as well as the care of education was in the hands of ecclesiastics. The changes in the early stages of the development of the English language gave color to the opinion that English would never become stable enough to give permanence to the immortal thoughts of great men. So Bacon caused his works to be published in Latin. The example of Bacon and others soon became the accepted dictum that
Greek and Latin were the only means of literary culture and of making a select literary style. From such causes as these a prejudice in favor of the ancient classics arose; a man was not thoroughly educated unless he had some knowledge of them, and this resulted in our so-called classical courses of study which in the end almost excluded our own language from the system of education.

That the ancient literature has been a valuable acquisition to us in some ways is not denied. The question is, rather, should our own literature and language be crowded out of schools in order that the time may be given to the ancient literature and languages? There have been two views recently advanced concerning this question. One party holds that in the general system of education
the classical course should be essentially retained; introducing only such changes as are demanded by the present advancement of philological science. The other holds that the ancient should be entirely abolished and replaced by the modern languages. The leading question to rule, seems to be, not the complete abolition of either the one or the other; but does the English language receive the proper time and attention as the course of study now stands? It cannot be denied that if the necessity of actual use be taken as a measure of importance, the English language and literature rank first in all education at work, for English speaking people; from primary school to the close of the college course they rightfully demand as much time and attention as any other study.

But why should we retain the classics?
First, because they aid us in the study of English. Second, English grammar cannot be taught successfully without a knowledge of Latin. Third, they are necessary for a good training in English composition. Fourth, they are essential for mental discipline and training. These are advantages claimed to be derived from the study of the language. From ancient literature we have some of the best models of composition; those which, when studied, must purify and cultivate the taste. The ancient languages contain the key which unlocks the treasures of classic thought. The etymology of modern civilization is to be found in the literature and institutions of these wonderful people.

I have stated some of the claims made by supporters of the classical schools. That some of them are legitimate is evident; but cannot their places in all
these lines be supplied by our own tongue?
First, they are an aid to the study of our own language. The English is a composite language formed from elements of almost all languages of the globe. It adopts and assimilates terms which it finds convenient or necessary. The basis, however, remains Latin; only the embellishments are foreign. We do not have to go back to the Greek or its sister language, the Latin, in order to find the parent of our tongue. The meaning of words is not determined by derivation but by usage. Words in their present signification are often radically different from what they were originally. When they have become a part of the English language or vocabulary the meaning will be as easily learned in English as in Latin and this method will be far more reliable. Second, English
grammar cannot be taught without Latin. By a comparison of the two languages we find them alike in parts of speech, in inflection and arrangement of sentences there is no similarity whatever. Latin has case endings for all its nouns, pronouns and adjectives; English is an uninflected language. Third, mental discipline. That better mental discipline can be obtained from pursuing a long and systematic course of study of any kind than from following a short, rambling and fragmentary course should be a matter of no great surprise. In comparing the intellectual benefits to be derived from the study of ancient and modern languages we must not limit to take into account the interest that is awakened in the mind of the young pupil by the study of the latter, which interest is continued through the whole course of study, and which
remains unabated through the entire subsequent life. That studying the ancient languages gives us discipline in patience is indisputable. In order to be able to translate, the mental powers must be brought to bear upon the subject; the relations of words must be kept in mind; each word with its distinctive case ending, mood and tense must be assigned its proper place. No one can deny that such work is an excellent discipline, if for no other reason than because it leads him to concentrate his attention upon the work in hand. The ancient languages are then of great value and efficiency in mental development and training, because of the effort required to bring the resources into action when translating. Fourth, Latin and Greek are necessary for a training in English composition. I know of no better way to refute this statement.
than to give an example to the contrary. Shakespeare, who stands equal to any of the writers of antiquity, knew no ancient language, and held that a man could be liberally educated with "little Latin and less Greek." Many of our most brilliant authors have won their fame without a knowledge of the dead languages. Another argument in favor of the classics is that they perfect one's style. This is perhaps doubtful. The effort required to obtain the meaning from the words detracts the mind too much from the perfection of the style for it to be of any great advantage to the translator. If the difficulty in translation is overcome then it may safely be said that the direct reading of the solid works of great writers, ancient or modern, is of indisputable efficacy as a means for cultivating the higher faculties.
The classics are replete with good sense and penetration, applicable to both political and private life. Although this is true, it does not make it incumbent upon every student of the present day to pass his life in wearisome translations. What must at one time be learned by the toilsome translating of Greek and Latin is now open to all. Translations of these great works have been made, and it is by this means that the far greater number of Greek and Roman ideas have been given to the world. Some have a special aptitude for this line of work; let all such continue in their work, but let us revolt against the system which gives no attention to the study of our own language. Giving the ancient languages their due, we cannot admit as true such opinions.
as some which have been advanced by suppos-
ters of the classical school. We are told that
English is the offspring of barbarity and heathen
and can never equal the classic Latin and
Greek which were the linguistic media of
cultured and intellectual races; that English
is analytic in structure and can never express
thought with so great accuracy as the highly
inflected ancient classics; that Anglo Saxon
in English was a jargon of ignorance and
cannot be compared with the fruitage of
centuries of intelligence. Our superiority over
past ages in all lines of thought and actin
is the most forcible denial that can be given
to the oft made assertion that English as a
medium of thought is inferior to Latin and
Greek, either as a means of communication
or as a factor in the education of a people whose ownacular it is. What if English is the offspring of barbarity and heathenry? Shall we allow future generations to say the same thing of us by denying it a place in our modern education?

Those who hold that English should receive more attention in the schools of today support their view with various arguments. I will enumerate a few of them. First, the knowledge gained from English is of most value in practical affairs. Second, it may be made the instrument of the highest culture of the mind. Third, it is our means of communication. Fourth, its mastery is an evidence of refinement. Fifth, it furnishes a great source of entertainment. The highest aim of teaching English is to make
men better composers by ear and mouth. Here the study of English made as systematic as that of Greek and Latin we should see a great purification in our language. English ears at least to keep the mind occupied with the best usages of our own language, and its study can be so directed as to cultivate force and clearness of expression. A good style can be formed only by familiarity with the best authors. Perfect familiarity with the best authors of antiquity, by direct reading is practicable only impossible for every student; this makes the study of our own literature the more necessary. There is no lack of material to gratify the wants of all. There is an unbroken succession of authors from Caedmon to Tennyson. Macaulay says "It may safely be said that the literature now extant in the English language is of far greater value, than all the literature
which, three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world, put together.” This succession of authors has not been and cannot be studied as they deserve to be so long as so much time is devoted to the dead languages.

A thorough study of a language cannot be made without some knowledge of its history. Modern English without Old English is like a tree without roots. Admitted that much may be gained by the comparison of English with the forms and laws of Latin and yet it will be perfectly clear to the unprejudiced that far greater help may be obtained by studying it in the light of its own history. Go back to its origin in Western Asia and trace its changes. Our present English is a Teutonic language first modified by Celtic and Latin elements, then by the
Danish Invasion; and again modified, indeed almost completely changed in 1066 by the Norman Invasion. It was variously revived to become by the additional elements a more perfect language. The Normans and Saxons for centuries remained apart but gradually their languages fused and each served to beautify, strengthen and perfect the speech which is now spoken by the English people. Study this history of the origin and development of our language and unite with it a thorough mastery of what is best in our literature and the English student will have acquired a more beneficial education than all the study of the ancient languages could give him. Most literature students maintain that the literature treasures of our own tongue are unsurpassed in richness and extent, but many college
graduates are compelled to take opinions of others on both richness and extent of English reading.

"English literature is a fountain where the seeker after knowledge may at all times repair for the renewing of his mind." But as it has been taught the student is rarely permitted to see an author except "through a glass darkly." He is told that the study of critics, interspersed with biographies and an appendix of the names of the author's works is literature. The office of the teacher is to produce a desire to read—after graduation.

The accurate and refined use of the mother tongue is an essential part of the education of any lady or gentleman and the way to master our mother tongue is to study it. Some one has truly said "studding to think in dead language is shackling the mind instead of liberating it."
The argument has been advanced against the study of modern languages, that they are still changing, while the dead languages are fixed. In my opinion this makes it all the more necessary to study them, to keep before us constantly the changes.

Though the English of today is changing is that of Shakespeare or any of the authors who are dead but have left behind them great monuments, in their works? To these are as unchanging as the works of Homer. Why, therefore, should they not be as important to the English student?

Having then, given some of the arguments on both sides of the question and attempted to prove that English is the study of most importance to the English student, I will say in conclusion, let us give English the central place, the place of honor in every scheme of higher
education. Let the ancient languages which are almost valueless in the work of fitting one for the duties of modern life, and by no means indispensable in the work of mental development be relegated to the position of pleasant accomplishments, leaving them for those whose professions demand a knowledge of them. Let Latin and Greek be the optional studied in the course rather than English. In this way an opportunity will be furnished for those students who desire to make a study of the classics at the same time providing means for instruction in their own tongue.

Having obtained a knowledge of English in its historical development, and if practicable, by comparison with French and German as collateral languages, the student will enjoy the last fruits of language study—a liberal
culture; a critical knowledge of his mother tongue; an intelligent insight into the laws of language; and as key to what is best, most useful and most inspiring in literature.

Clara Myers.