A THESIS

ON

"AN IDEAL UNIVERSITY COURSE,"

FOR THE DEGREE OF B. L.

BY

CHAS. A. KILER.

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German University Students, when they begin the preparation of their theses, bear constantly in mind the precept of the famous historian, M. Von Sybel: "However small your subject may be, you must attack it vigorously, and write out your work only when you have convinced yourself, that upon the subject you have chosen, you are the wisest man in the world". If this be true of German students; it ought to be true of American; but what senior of this University would be willing to assert that he knows more about his particular theme, than any other man in the world? It is much easier for us to follow the first part of M. Von Sybel's advice.

Previous to deciding on a subject for his thesis, the writer had read practically nothing of the various systems and courses of instruction offered to students in the great Universities of the world, and particularly those of our own country. But his experience at this University has made him very positive in the belief that something is radically wrong with the system in vogue here. Objections to the present system will be stated in what follows, together with an ideal course of instruction. It might not be out of place to say, that since reading what eminent men have written on this subject, the writer has had the easing satisfaction of finding that about all of them are on his side of the
case, two proposing almost the same ideal course that his small and humble experience had led him to formulate.

In approaching this subject, let us first look at what prominent educators have to say about the different educational systems. Andrew D. White, Ex-President of Cornell University, in an article published in the Forum of January 1889, thus describes the evolution of the American University -;

"Down to about twenty-five years ago, an American University was a very simple thing indeed. Apart from a few outlying professional departments, it consisted generally of a 'college proper,' in which a great mass of students were carried, willingly or unwillingly, through the same simple, single course, without the slightest regard for differences between them in aims, tastes, or gifts. The minds of the students were supposed to be developed in the same manner as are the livers of the geese at Strasburg, every day sundry spoonfuls of the same mixture forced down all throats alike. ---- A few students did well in spite of the prescribed courses, but the scholarly energies of the most were paralyzed by them. Anything like research or investigation by an undergraduate was unknown. The work was altogether recited from text-books; and all was culminated in at commencement by a presentation of diplomas, preceded by orations on such subjects as 'Great Thinkers', 'Altruism vs Egoism', 'Real and Ideal', 'Importance of
the Classics', 'The Nobility of Man', 'Grandeur of Truth' etc. etc.

"But all of this is outgrown. The day when the function of a University was to force a great body of young men through the same simple illogical process called 'mental discipline' is gone. There has come a demand for a far greater range of studies, giving not only fitting discipline but the highest knowledge needed in the various professions. There must be a large array of courses suited to the tastes and aims of different men"; libraries, laboratories, and the like are also needed and must be kept up, no matter how great the expense. Dr. White also states, "that it is a broad farce to found an institution and call it a University, with an annual income of less than a quarter of a million". It is very easy to see where Dr. White stands on the subject of prescribed courses; the last statement quoted from him shows that money is needed in educational as well as in all other matters, and should lead us to a determination to do something toward securing heavier appropriations for our own University.

Josiah Royce of Harvard College, in the September number of Scribner's Magazine for 1890, has the following to say about the "Ideals of the American University"-

"The University grows toward oneness of life, which is its great glory. It grows too toward Academic freedom, which means the subordination of so-called 'disciplinary' ends, to the true goal of scholarship, namely, the advance of human learning. The
separation should come when higher studies are begun, and then those desiring certain studies not in their courses should be allowed to take them. Dr. Ely is another eminent educator who advocates policies quite different from those of our University.

Last of all, read what Charles Kendall Adams, President of Cornell University, has to say on this subject —;

"There is an irresistible tendency in our colleges to separate undergraduate from graduate work, at the beginning of the Junior Year. Elective work is being universally introduced at this stage. Our students are better prepared to begin University work at the beginning of their Junior year, than the Germans are when they enter the University. Work before the Junior year is radically different from work after it. Before it we want the mind disciplined -- want to learn how to read and study; want general information and intimate association with the professors. After the Sophomore year we do not want simply elementary science and languages; we want instruction that is to fit us for the particular subject we have chosen, to make us specialists.

"If a student is to be a lawyer, he wants History and Political Science, -- not a smattering, but a full course. If he is to be a physician, he wants a knowledge of all the biological sciences. If he is to be a clergyman, he wants the early languages, early civilization, and kindred subjects. The furnishing of such op-
opportunities constitutes the work of the University, not of the colleges. The work of these two cannot interchange without serious consequences."

The grounds taken by the four gentlemen quoted, are practically the same as those taken by about all modern educators. Notwithstanding the numerous stand-points from which educators look at this subject, there is a wonderful harmony in their views. The sum of all the well-made and timely arguments offered by the numerous writers on this subject, is about as follows—:

First. There is an important distinction which must be made between the work of the University, and the work of the college. In college, preparation is made for the University. Here the courses are much the same for all students. The studies, to a large extent, must be prescribed; there should be an intimate relation between instructor and student. Here, the student is to discover his inclinations, learn how to study, and get the necessary mental discipline. He should finish this part of his education at about twenty years of age.

Second. When the student comes to the University, he knows what he wants to study; he should have a specified line along which his work is to be directed. He is preparing for some specific thing -- his life work, -- as well as drawing in a fund of general information from his association with specialists in other
lines. He has the privilege of the election, or selection, of his own studies, under the advice of the Dean of his department. Individual work is obligatory, and thus originality is fostered. Hence all of his manly qualities are directly appealed to, and his work is pursued with pleasure as well as with profit.

Here, in a few words, is the essence of the principles of higher education as advanced by leading modern authorities,--- the result of long years of practical experience in teaching and intimate association with students.

Let us now ask ourselves these questions: has the University of Illinois kept abreast of the great advancement in educational systems?-- is it doing the proper thing for its students?-- is the University of Illinois a college? or a University? or both?

How shall we answer these questions after considering the following facts--;

1. Under the rules as they now stand, a student once entered in either of the courses provided here, has to take each of the thirty-six prescribed studies laid down for that course, whether tasteful or distasteful, if he would gain a degree or even have the privilege of graduation.

2. He is thus compelled to take what he does not want, and is not fitted for.

3. A student cannot take special studies, and become proficient in some one branch, but must take what is prescribed for
all, if he would graduate with his class.

4. Twenty-five, thirty, and even thirty-five hours work a week is expected of certain students.

5. The engineering and scientific departments are much better provided for than are the literary departments, which is an abnormal development on the side of science and engineering.

6. In most of the classes, text-book work is rigidly adhered to; the library and the lecture system being almost wholly slighted.

7. Not enough courses provided.

How do these facts accord with the views of the eminent men quoted above? But throwing aside what Andrew D. White, or any other man has said on the subject, a rational consideration of these facts is enough to convince any fair-minded person that the present state of affairs here, is altogether what is ought not to be.

It might be argued at this point, in refutation of 1 and 2, that a student should know what course he is fitted for before he enters the University; or, if he has made a mistake in selecting his course, it may be said that he has the privilege of changing to another. The first point we will not now answer. The second is true. A student can change his course, but he has to make up every prescribed study which he lacks in the course to
which he has changed, thus making it practically impossible for him to change; he might just as well re-enter the University. Under the laws of this institution, no student can graduate with a degree until he finishes the thirty-six studies prescribed for the course in which he has entered. It makes no difference whether this law is rigidly adhered to or not, it has been the law, and a breach of it by the authorities, is the strongest evidence that can be produced to show its weakness. When a student has finished these thirty-six studies laid down for him, he receives his degree, and is counted as educated, if not in reality, by "the order of the Board of Trustees".

Many of the students who leave this University without finishing their courses, do so simply because they realize that they are in the wrong courses. Feeling that their studies are distasteful, and never expecting to follow a profession where-in their University studies will prove a benefit, they leave for home or for some other institution of learning. Take, for instance, the course in Chemistry. This is one of our strongest departments, and receives ample appropriations. The Freshman and Sophomore Chemists generally number from ten all the way to twenty-five. But how many of these stay through the Junior and Senior years? The number of graduates in Chemistry in this University averages but a little more than two students yearly. Out of nine chemists who entered with '92, only one is left, and that
one is kept here by being an instructor in the University. I realize that strength does not always lie in numbers, but it does seem as though there is a reason for our chemists leaving at the beginning or at some time during their Junior year.

The development of the Engineering and Scientific sides of our University is a good thing in itself, but when these are developed, and the Literary side left largely to take care of itself, then it is time for some one to object. Up to a very short time ago such was the fact, but of late the Literary departments have been receiving some of the attention they merit, and in a short time they may expect to receive as ample appropriations in proportion to their needs, as do the other departments.

A studious Sophomore not long since said to the writer:

"Those engineering courses seem to be arranged for the purpose of keeping a man at work in the University all day long, and then shifting the scene of labor to his room, where he has to solve calculus and other terrors all night long". That Sophomore works thirty and thirty-five hours a week at the University buildings. He is only one of many who are required to do this.

But there is nothing to be gained from multiplying practical objections to the present state of affairs here. Nearly every one acquainted with our system of courses and requirements, including members of the Faculty and Board of Trustees, is of the opinion
that a change is needed. If it is evident that a change in courses is needed, are we going to fall in line with the great Universities of our land, or invent something new and fitting for ourselves? Let us look at the systems in vogue at several representative Universities before answering this question.

One of the first institutions of learning to reduce its courses to a state of order, was John Hopkins University. At this place two distinct efforts have been made.

First. Graduate work is organized on the basis of completed college education: Graduate work being that of the Junior and Senior years, and synonymous with University work, while college work is that of the Freshman and Sophomore years.

Second. They have established a modified system of undergraduate studies leading to Baccalaureate degrees.

This system differs radically from any other in the country. It presupposes that a student is well advanced in general information when he enters the Freshman class. The distinguishing feature is, that it concentrates the work of the undergraduate upon some special subject, thus preparing him for more closely specialized work in the Junior and Senior years. All other Universities, during the Freshman and Sophomore years, give elementary instruction in a large number of studies, thus preparing the student to advance in the higher realms of work in any one of
a large number of subjects.

Harvard prides itself on the liberality of its courses, and the freedom given its students in the selection of their studies. It dazzles young men by offering them their choice from two hundred and forty-two different courses of instruction. The new student at Harvard is turned loose among all this array of courses, and allowed to pick for himself, while the Juniors and Seniors are held to specialized work. According to nearly all authorities, and to my personal experience as a student, Harvard has the thing turned around, — she has the cart before the horse. The University part of education, — that part coming during the Junior and Senior years, should be the time for freedom of selection, while in the Freshman and Sophomore years, students should be held, with some degree of firmness, to prescribed courses. Graduate, higher, work is made paramount at Harvard, just as though the undergraduate work is able to take care of itself.

The efforts of rich old Columbia to better its courses, have been the very opposite of those of Harvard, and something like those of Johns Hopkins. At Columbia, the advanced work is commenced at the beginning of the Junior year, at which time election or selection of studies by the student is permitted. Previous to this, he is held to prescribed studies. This system is a very good one and would be much better, if the Juniors and Seniors were worked harder in their specialities. As it is, members of these
classes are allowed to pursue and receive credit in professional studies, at the same time that they are prosecuting their University work. The University of Michigan permits the same thing.

Here we have the systems of three leading American Universities, each one of which seems to have copied after the plan of German Universities. They evidently believe that the young German, who has just graduated from the gymnasium, is at the same stage of his education as is the Sophomore of our American Universities. Some writers deny that the gymnasium graduate is as capable of beginning University (i.e. special) work, as is our Sophomore. They strongly assert that he is no more than on a par with the American High School graduate. This is an important point bearing directly on this question, and as the weight of opinion seems to be on the side of those who hold the first view, we must accept that for the purposes of this discussion.

Objections to the courses of the institutions given above, have been very briefly pointed out, and from these it may be seen that it will not do for our University to follow in the footsteps of either Johns Hopkins, Harvard, or Columbia when it comes to change its courses. It is now in order to outline a system which personal experience leads me to think would be very desirable, and which is largely identical with Charles Kendall Adam's "ideals". If there is anything "ideal" about this system, it lies in the
fact that the system has yet to be tried, and not because of any impracticability.

Few -- very few -- students come to college with any definite ideas of their own powers and inclinations. They have reached that stage of their lives, when they are to "go to college and get educated", what that means very few of them know. Without any knowledge of themselves, of their own tastes and definite desires, they cannot at once decide upon a course of studies which they wish to pursue for four years. They cannot select thirty-six studies with any degree of certainty that they are going to persevere in the studies chosen, because they do not know what they want. Hence arises the absurdity of compelling a new student to choose a course which he must pursue for all the time that he is a student at this University. If anything, this system is more absurd than that at Harvard, where the new student has to choose from among two hundred and forty-two different courses.

The same primary class-room drill in the elements of language, the same elementary instruction in the natural sciences, the same class room work in all branches of engineering, the same general preponderance of elementary and secondary work, is followed in all courses during the Freshman and Sophomore years. This must necessarily be the case as long as our students are received from the same class of high schools. During the Freshman
and Sophomore years the student is finding out what he can do, and what his inclinations are; he is getting used to life here, and is learning how to study. He is learning that ten text-books on higher physiology, for instance, are not ten separate and distinct works to be mastered chapter by chapter, but that they are simply ten different ways of putting the same thing. When he has to a certain degree, learned these things, then is he ready to choose some special line along which he desires to study. Then, and not until then, can he intelligently choose his course.

Hence, because the student does not know what he wants, the work of the first and part of the second years should be laid down for him. His studies should be prescribed, and his work closely directed by the instructors. Such association and practices are just what is needed to put him of his feet and give him a good foundation upon which to build the higher edifice, - the special work of the upper classes.

Many young men who come here thinking that they are going to adhere to some particular course, find after a little experience, that they are wrong, -- that they cannot with profit persevere in the line which they chose so prematurely. For such as these, only one of two things remains to be done. They must either change their courses, or quit the University. Under the existing rules, many are led to do this latter. Surely the rules should be so arranged that a student can right himself when he discovers that
he is going wrong.

At the beginning of the Junior year, the special or higher work should begin. At this stage commences the work of the University, up to this time the student has been in college. At Johns Hopkins University, he would by this time have received a baccalaureate degree. At Harvard he would be entering upon the graduate, higher, or special work; so at Columbia and most of the other great Universities. The beginning of the Junior year is almost universally accepted as the time for the special work of the student to begin. If he is to be a lawyer he wants History and Political Science; those subjects which are so invaluable to his calling. It so happens that neither of these all important subjects is at all adequately offered to the students of this University. We get the smattering that Mr. White says the lawyer shouldn't have. Special courses in these subjects should be provided. The Library work should be large and extensive, and personal investigation encouraged. Just so with those preparing for the professions of Medicine, Theology, Engineering, Chemistry or anything else.

Seniors in the Engineering courses should not be compelled to take psychology, if they do not want it; for in almost every case where they are forced to take such a study against their will, more harm than good results. They either fail entirely, because
of their lack of interest, or pass by means which cannot be said to reflect any honor upon those who resort to them. Many engineering students who have been thus compelled to take studies, not only foreign to their special courses, but also very distasteful to them, have told the writer of the disgust which this compulsion has caused in them. All that such students care about the study, is to be able to hand in an examination paper that will call for seventy-five per cent. Thus are the rules of this University satisfied, often to the utter disgust of those for whom they are made. Engineering seniors should be allowed an option between history, political economy, and psychology on one hand, and studies bearing directly on the line of their special courses on the other. Then those who object to taking the former, can take the latter, while those preferring the former are at liberty to take them.

Then, without making the mistakes of Johns Hopkins, or of Columbia, I would to a very large extent, prescribe the studies of the Freshman and the Sophomore. If they can, let them say what special courses they wish to pursue; but if they cannot, or make a mistake in their choice, let the work in these two years be so arranged that such students can right themselves by the beginning of the Junior year.

Then, when the student knows what he wants, he should be al-
lowed to take it,—which is a privilege that every student right-
fully possesses. Of course mistakes will happen. Men will
choose chemistry who ought to be preparing for the ministry, or
civil engineering when they should be in the political science
course. But these mistakes cannot be avoided entirely under any
system. We have men occupying pulpits to-day, who would be far
more successful and who could accomplish their work with better
grace, were they following a plow. We have lawyers who ought to
be merchants, doctors who ought to be architects or butchers, and
teachers who ought to be soldiers in the United States Army.
These are things which no ideal course can entirely prevent, but
we believe that by a proper arrangement of the college curriculum,
these men will find out their mistakes and failings before they be-
gin the life's work.

Under the system laid down, members of the Senior class
would be specialists; young "to be" lawyers, doctors, teachers,
preachers, journalists, engineers, chemists or merchants. It is
true that they are such under the present system, but most of them
are a long ways off from their specialty. Under the system pro-
posed, a young man could step out of the University into a law-
yer's office with a thorough preparation and love for the pro-
fession which he is about to begin to study. Or he could go at
once into a bridge builder's office and take a place as from which
he would soon become a specialist in Bridge Construction. How often have we heard it said that "this is an age of specialists". The truth of the statement is unquestioned. Students are spending their parents' money for this purpose, and using the best years of their lives for its attainment.

The University of Illinois realizes its situation with regard to the needs of the young men of this State, and will do all in its power, by changes in the existing courses and the addition of new ones, to meet and satisfy these needs. Let its policies be so outlined that they will appeal directly to the citizens of the State. Every person in Illinois should know what is taught here, should know that this is not a sectional, nor a partisan institution; it is not the "college at Champaign", but the University of Illinois, founded by our Government and supported by public funds. When all know these facts, and come to see the University as they should see it, then will students come here from every section of the State, and the loyal citizens will respond with bounteous appropriations.