

**EDUCATIONAL  
ADVANTAGES FOR  
AMERICAN  
STUDENTS IN FRANCE**

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Educational Advantages for American Students in France by James Geddes

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**EDUCATIONAL ADVANTAGES**  
**FOR AMERICAN STUDENTS**  
**IN FRANCE**

BY

**JAMES GEDDES, JR., PH. D.**

PROFESSOR OF ROMANCE LANGUAGES IN BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
CAVALIERE DELLA CORONA D'ITALIA



Reprinted from  
The WAVERLEY MAGAZINE  
Fall of 1908

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This article first appeared in *Bostonia* (October, 1903, January and April, 1904). It was separately reprinted. The first edition was soon exhausted. Owing to repeated calls for the article, it finally appeared in the *Waverley Magazine* (September, October, and November, 1908), the organ of the *North American Teachers' League*. In its final form, in the present reprint, the article appears thoroly revised, considerably augmented, and brought to date.

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## I. PAST AND PRESENT.

**I**T is becoming more generally recognized that, except in special cases, an American student has no need of going abroad to secure what was formerly unattainable at home. At the beginning of the twentieth century the situation of America as regards education is radically different from what it was at the beginning of the nineteenth century. With the rapidity with which changes take place as time goes on, the chances are that the changes that will have taken place at the opening of the twenty-first century will be even more remarkable to contemplate than those which have occurred during the century just closed.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century there existed a strong intellectual sympathy between France and America. Benjamin Franklin, during his ministry in France [1776—1785], had more to do with stimulating this friendly feeling than any other American in those early days. Thomas Jefferson, however, Franklin's successor as Minister to France [1785—1789], was no whit behind his illustrious predecessor in encouraging these relations between the two countries. It was while in Paris that he conceived the idea of founding an academy of arts and sciences at Richmond, Va., which should have branches in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. But before his plans could be matured the French Revolution interrupted them. Nevertheless, upon his return to America the higher education continued actively to interest him. He corresponded with the French political economist, Dupont de Nemours, upon this subject. The result of this correspondence was that the French scholar published an essay embodying his own ideas in regard to education in the United States. French was then the language of international communication. France had, thru her distinguished writers, contributed powerfully to enlarge science. In Jefferson's opinion the only two modern nations whose career deserved to be closely studied were France and England.

The trend of ideas, as shown by Jefferson's attitude, turned gradually but persistently in another direction, towards Germany. The scholarly methods and work of the Germans became appreciated. Edward Everett was the first American to take the degree of doctor of philosophy, at Gottingen, in 1817. His example was followed by such well-known Americans as George Bancroft, Basil Gildersleeve, and William Goodwin. In this country, Yale University was among the first of the institutions



of learning to confer this degree, in 1861; Harvard followed in 1875, and Johns Hopkins in 1878. In all of these institutions the reasons for conferring this degree were practically those for which German universities gave it. That is, essentially, that in addition to college instruction the student must have had long training at a university in original investigation and proven his right to be recognized as a master workman by university examinations and the publication of some results or original research.

Thus it will be seen that if France and England hold places of importance in the world of science, they are not the only countries whose ways of investigating subjects and accomplishing results are considered worthy of attention. Particularly since 1870, Germany has developed remarkably, both materially and intellectually. During the nineteenth century the prestige of England, due largely to the admirable administration of her colonial possessions, has not failed to receive due recognition. Moreover, the ties of kinship, mutual interests, and common language are factors that must ever attract American students toward English university centers. It is, therefore, easy to understand why Americans go to the universities in Berlin, Leipsic, Bonn, and Heidelberg, as well as to Oxford and Cambridge. The influence of Americans who have received their training in German universities and are employed as teachers in many institutions of learning thruout the United States is now very sensibly felt. This is one of the reasons why hundreds of American students may be counted in German university centers. The inducements held out to foreign students in Germany are attractive. They are hospitably received, and upon presenting their credentials from an institution whose standing is known, are ordinarily duly matriculated. Two years of serious work along their chosen lines, together with a thesis showing some originality and hard work, and the passing of an examination upon the entire field covered, constitute a fair guarantee of receiving the degree of doctor of philosophy. The value of this degree to a young man intending to make teaching in his own country his life work nobody will be disposed to question.

## II. THE EFFECT OF CENTRALIZATION.

The advantages, particularly to Romance students, of a sojourn in France, and especially in Paris, are unsurpassed. Nevertheless, even for Romance studies our students flock in considerable numbers to Germany. There, as has just been shown, besides a hearty welcome and advantages of a high order, it is possible for them to secure a reward in the shape of something tangible, which upon their return home may prove of the

most valuable assistance in obtaining positions. These advantages are, generally speaking, very clearly understood by American students. Why is it, then, that our students, who during the past fifty years have known so well how to take advantage of the opportunities offered for study in England and Germany, have not been attracted towards a friendly country no less distinguished in letters, arts, and sciences than the other two foreign countries? In the first place, because the organization of the higher education in France has hardly been known. Almost everybody in the scholastic world has heard of the *Université de Paris*, of the *Sorbonne*, and of the *Collège de France*; also, perhaps, of the *Université nationale de France*, the *Ecole pratique des hautes études*, and sundry *académies* or *universités* in different parts of France, like Toulouse, Montpellier, Bordeaux, and Grenoble. But just what these institutions are, their relation to the state or to each other, whether they receive foreign students, or if so, whether degrees are granted, are questions not readily answered by those of us not making a specialty of educational topics. The vicissitudes, moreover, thru which educational institutions along with everything else in France passed during the French Revolution, have served to make the status of higher education seem more complex than it really is.

The *Université de Paris* still exists, bearing at least the name of the celebrated old seat of learning that came formally into existence about the middle of the twelfth century. A century later, Robert de Sorbon, the chaplain and confessor of St. Louis, founded in the University of Paris a school of theology. This school became one of the constituent parts, and the predominant one, giving its name to the entire theological faculty in the University; and today the University of Paris itself is everywhere familiarly known as the "Sorbonne," altho the latter school ceased to exist in 1790. The provincial universities in France arose to meet the wants of the districts where they were, at different epochs after the founding of the University of Paris. There were twenty-five of them, of which Toulouse, founded in the first part of the thirteenth century, and Montpellier, in the latter part, were the oldest. The *Collège de France* was founded by Francis I., in 1529. The king believed that the University of Paris was devoting too much attention to some subjects and not enough to others. It was designed to promote the more advanced tendencies of the time and to counteract the scholasticism taught in the University. The *Ecole pratique des hautes études* is a unique institution of comparatively recent origin, dating from the Second Empire (1852). These names, then, so often heard in connection with the subject of education in France, have indicated institutions whose status was clearly defined and easily understood. Why is it, then, that these establishments do not stand forth clearly cut like Oxford, Cambridge, Göttingen, and

Bonn? Both the names of the French universities, as well as the institutions of learning themselves, have a haze about them that is absent from similarly organized faculties of learning abroad. The principal reason for this vagueness is that at the time of the revolution the entire system of education was revolutionized. The University of Paris, as well as all the provincial universities, was suppressed. The hand of Napoleon then made itself felt in the new organization. Centralization in education became the order of the day. The universities, originally independent, were consolidated into one great institution, the *Université nationale de France*, of which the *Université de Paris* and the faculties at Toulouse, Montpellier, and elsewhere in the provinces were sections known as *académies*. The whole system of education was directly under the minister of public instruction, entirely a government affair. Everything went on automatically and with such clockwork precision that it was said the minister could tell a visitor not only what subject was being taught thruout France at a particular time, but the verb itself that was being conjugated just then in all the schools.

### III. RECENT SWEEPING CHANGES.

Since those times there have been a great many changes covering the entire educational field in France. Together with colonial expansion and the reorganization of the army, the educational transformation is the most considerable undertaking the government has accomplished. Characterized briefly, it is this. Public instruction has been developed in all directions and withdrawn as far as possible from the influence of the church. The laws relating to primary instruction have been improved and elementary education has been made free and obligatory. Moreover, France has awakened to a realization of the benefits to be derived by making her educational centers attractive to foreign students. Before the act of July 10, 1896, higher education was entirely under the control of the minister of public instruction. The act of July 10, 1896, did away with state control of the institutions for higher education, giving to them an independent existence of their own. Thus this act abolished Napoleon's consolidated organization, the *Université nationale de France*, and restored the academies to their former status of universities. These institutions are no longer under state control, for the regulations governing them are made by the University Council, a body consisting of the principal members of the various faculties. Moreover, the French universities now have a legal standing like that of individuals, and may receive bequests or gifts from any one desiring to aid them financially. Formerly they could not receive gifts of money.