

THE EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE

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The evolution of the American college by John Bodine Thompson

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JOHN BODINE THOMPSON

**THE EVOLUTION OF
THE AMERICAN
COLLEGE**

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The Evolution of the American College

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President's office B

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Three thousand years ago Achilles had a tutor to teach him to be

A speaker of words and a doer of deeds, able to take his part in council and in conflict. As the struggle for existence became less severe and there was more leisure for thought, wise men and philosophers arose, the outgrowth of preceding conditions, but transcending those conditions and showing themselves the divinely endowed instructors of the race. Under their teaching civilization developed, and was transmitted from generation to generation. The elements of education were derived from the Orient, but found their *habitat* and had appropriate development in Greece.

Pythagoras was the first to designate the system of nature as a *kosmos*, the Greek word to indicate beauty, the beauty resulting from order and intelligent design. He perceived that evil consists in being out of harmony with environment; that harmony consists in proportion; and that proportion is expressed by numbers. He gathered round him the disciples whom he instructed that they might be able in turn to teach others also. And when his disciples were scattered abroad by the persecution that arose about Sybaris, they that were scattered abroad went everywhere telling what they had learned from him. Thus Pythagorean principles came to pervade Greek life and Greek thought. Pythagoras had discovered the numerical relations of the harmonic scale. His

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disciples taught that Music has to do with discrete quantity as related to another, and Arithmetic with that which subsists by itself; that Geometry considers continued quantity so far as it is unmovable; and that Astronomy considers it as far as it is of a self-motive nature. These four sciences they called "Mathematics," (things learned).*

At first education had been comprehended under two titles: gymnastic and music.

Gymnastic made the body strong and lithe and beautiful, the fit and flexible instrument of the animating soul.

Music included all the studies over which the Muses presided. It began with poetry. Words and tune were composed by the same impulse. They were memorized by the same effort. Poetry was chanted; not read. Homer was the universal text-book. Even among the distant Borysthenes, "almost all the inhabitants knew the Iliad by heart."

After these poems were reduced to writing, Music included also reading and writing and grammar and history and literature and war and statecraft, and whatever else was sung by Homer. Indeed, it is no inferior education that might be obtained from Homer as a text-book if one could have such a teacher as Pythagoras or Mark Hopkins.

Adult life begins at twenty-one; and the preceding portion falls naturally into three divisions of seven years each, devoted respectively to primary, intermediate and higher education.

Primary education was left to the mother and the nurse. It consisted chiefly of plays and games appropriate to outdoor life in a genial

* Geography is called Mathematics in the Rutgers College statutes of 1828.

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-clime, and was in some sense a continuous kindergarten.

Intermediate education began at seven, when the boy was registered as a prospective citizen and began to go to school. The school houses were public property and were rented to the schoolmasters, of whom there were two; one for gymnastic, and the other for music; and to both the pupil went every day.

Higher education began at about fourteen, and continued until the young man reached his majority. During this period the elegant gymnastic of the preceding period was continued, and was supplemented by athletic and military training.

The studies which had been called collectively Music, were divided into four; and afterward into nine; but were ultimately fixed at seven. The first three were: Grammar, Dialectic and Rhetoric.

Grammar included language and literature.

Dialectic taught how to reason from what had been learned by language.

Rhetoric taught how to express the results of such reasoning. It included conversation, oratory and civics.

The other four studies were those which the Pythagoreans called Mathematics.

The object was to bring man into harmony with his environment. The Greeks were deeply conscious of the unrest and disharmony pertaining to every man coming into the world. They were aware also that this lack of harmony is the consequence of evil within the man. They were earnest in their efforts for *κάθαρσις* (*katharsis*), purgation of the evil.*

Endeavor after harmony always remained the

*Compare John xiii. 10, 11; xv. 3; and 1 John i. 7, 9.

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distinguishing characteristic of Greek education. This was the chief element in producing that array of mighty men "whose spirits still rule us from their urns." This was the secret of Greek superiority in philosophy, in civilization, in art, in education. This it was that made the Attic state a school of virtue. Free citizens must be able to perform harmoniously their proper function of governing themselves and others. The youth of the governing class were trained in the studies found conducive to this end, the studies proper and necessary for freemen, for this reason called Ἐλευθέριαι Τέχναι (*Eleutheriai Technai*), which the Latins rendered by *Liberales Artes*, whence our "Liberal Arts."

During the first part of the seven years devoted to these studies the lad became acquainted with the laws governing civilized society and formed the habit of acting in accordance with them. He learned how to conduct a conversation, and to discuss social and civil questions.

About the middle of this period he was brought before the authorities as a candidate for citizenship. He was examined in public by trial of his capabilities. If he came up to the physical, intellectual and ethical standard, he was passed to the rank of ἐφηβος (*ephebos*), or cadet-student; and matriculated by taking the oath of citizenship:

I will transmit my fatherland, not only not less, but greater and better than it was committed to me.

I will obey the magistrates.

I will observe the laws.

If any person set them at naught I will do my best to prevent him; and will defend them both alone and with others.

I will honor the religion of my fathers.

Religion was a part of statecraft. **Handi-**

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craft and the productive arts were left to the inferior classes and were despised by citizens as "banausic," a word well represented by the modern German phrase: "Brod-und-butter Wissenschaften," (*bread-and-butter sciences*).

Attica gave its form of government to the first European institution for higher education. It was literally a Republic of Letters; and was named after Plato's school of philosophy. *Ἀκαδημία* (*academia*) is still the Greek (and Latin) word for what we call a University. The curriculum was that which had been required for citizenship in Athens. *It is our curriculum still.*

Even the technical terms are the same. Grammarian, Logician, Rhetorician, Philosopher, are all Greek words which denoted primarily teachers of those arts. At a later day such teachers were called by the general name: *Ἐπιγγελλόμενοι* (*Epanggelomenoi*), of which the literal rendering is "Professors." So Faculty is *Facultas*, the Latin rendering of the Greek *διδάχαις* (*dynamis*), used in the same sense. And (Socrates to the contrary notwithstanding), Sophist and Sophister have been used in a good sense from the days of Pythagoras until now. "Junior" and "senior," as designations of college classes, are simply abbreviations of "junior sophisters" and "senior sophisters," which were the names of the upper classes in the first American college.

Prominent among the teachers to whom we are indebted for our curriculum and the philosophy of which it is the outgrowth were Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Philo.

But after these came one wiser than them all;