

**THE STUDY OF LATIN
IN THE PREPARATORY
COURSE**

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The Study of Latin in the Preparatory Course by E. P. Morris

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PREPARATORY COURSE

Edmond BY
E. P. MORRIS,

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COLLEGE

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following paper was written at the request of the Conference Committee of Williams College. A few notes have been added, but it is in the main unchanged, and the writer hopes that the fact of its having been prepared as an address to college students will excuse some peculiarities of presentation which would be out of place in an essay.

One of the changes is in the title, which, as selected by the committee, was THE RELATION OF THE STUDY OF LATIN TO A LIBERAL EDUCATION. That is a subject broad enough for a good-sized volume, and, having to choose between a general treatment of the whole and the selection of some single aspect for fuller discussion, the writer preferred the latter alternative.

The classical work of the college, at least in the first two years, should undoubtedly deal mainly with the literature and history, with the contents of the writings, not with the form of the language. The arguments, therefore, which would naturally be used in support of the study of Latin in these years are those which are drawn from the excellence of the literature, from the political and social history of the Roman race, and especially from the fact that the most important elements of modern civilization have come from or through Rome. Taking the whole curriculum together, from preparatory school to university, these are beyond a doubt the chief aspects of the question, and it would be a matter of regret to the writer

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should their omission here be understood to indicate any doubt on his part of their weight as arguments, or of their supreme importance in contributing to culture. The reason for passing them over is a twofold one: first, because they have been often and fully presented, and, second, because any discussion of the college work brings in at once the question of elective studies,—a question upon which the writer had no warrant for entering.

On the other hand, a statement of the meaning and purposes of Latin philology, and of the extent to which it has, without conscious choice on the part of teachers, made its way into the preparatory course, may not be without value. That is the purpose of this essay,—to show that Latin philology has a place in the definition of the study of Latin, and the title has therefore been changed to express this purpose.

E. P. MORRIS.

WILLIAMSTOWN, MASS., August, 1886.

THE STUDY OF LATIN.

THE subject upon which your Conference Committee has asked me to speak to you is an old one,—the *Relation of the Study of Latin to a Liberal Education*. But it is a subject which will not cease to be of interest until public opinion has reached a conclusion more positive than any yet arrived at, and a teacher of Latin need hardly apologize for taking part in the discussion. If any of the views which follow shall seem partisan in spirit, I can only remind you of the extreme difficulty of looking with entire impartiality at one's favorite study, and beg you to make such allowance for professional prejudice as you may think best.

I shall make no attempt to define a liberal education. Two points, however, in regard to the current thinking for which a liberal education is to prepare you cannot be entirely passed over.

First, those who desire to see the classics retaining their place must face the fact that the literary spirit of fifty years ago has passed out of sight, and that the scientific spirit has taken its place. I disclaim, therefore, at the outset, any share in an attempt to reconstitute the college curriculum upon the basis of a mainly literary training,—an attempt which would result, in my opinion, simply in a prolonged struggle, disastrous to our higher scholarship, and certain to end in defeat.

But, *second*, a denial of the prevalence of the scientific spirit is no more mistaken than is the tendency to suppose that this spirit is confined to the physical sciences. On the contrary, there is hardly a department of thought and work which is not touched by it. Mommsen's Rome is as thoroughly scientific as any of Darwin's work, and whether one follows the criminal record of the Jukes family or opens the latest book on Greek sculpture, whether he marches with the Russians to the gates of India or consults an English dictionary, — whatever be the subject, he seems to be following a chapter in the evolution of something, a race or a family or a language.

The meaning of this is plain, namely, that all thought at present tends toward the scientific form, and that the intellectual revolution of the century is a revolution in the manner of thinking, not in the subject-matter. That the physical sciences should have been so far instrumental in producing such a change is at once their glory and the unanswerable proof of their lasting educational value; but it is, on the face of it, absurd to suppose that men have turned their thoughts finally away from the great problems of ethics, of art, and of philosophy. A scientific spirit, but a scientific spirit which is no longer confined to the physical sciences, is the primary characteristic of the culture toward which a liberal education seeks to lead us.

A definition of the other factor, whose relation to a liberal education I am to discuss, cannot be so briefly given. The phrase, "the study of Latin, French, English," has at least four distinct senses. It may mean, *first*, the acquisition of the language for reading or speaking; *second*, the study of the literature written in it; *third* (and this is particularly common in connection with English), the study of the language with a view to using it effectively

in composition; or, *fourth*, it may mean the investigation of the language itself as an organic growth, its changes in form and usage, the characteristics which mark its age and which distinguish it from other dialects. It is true that no one of these ways of studying a language can be entirely separated from the others, but according as one or another is emphasized we have four branches of study,—linguistics, literature and history, rhetorical composition, and philology,—studies which differ widely from each other in the end at which they aim and in the methods which they employ, and which consequently bear widely different relations to a liberal education. Now, before we attempt to balance the study of Latin against the study of French or English, for example, we must make clear to ourselves, not only in which of these four senses we intend to use the phrase, but also which of them most accurately describes the method of teaching in use in our schools. For if the “study of English” is so pursued as to make it mean the history of English literature, while the “study of French” means learning to speak French, and “the study of Latin” means Roman history, then the change from one of these to another is quite a different thing from the mere substitution of one language for another, and must be supported by more weighty reasons. It is the old story: keep “the study of English” standing in the catalogue, and most people will think it inquiring too curiously to ask whether it means writing compositions on *Spring* or investigating the sources of the *Canterbury Tales*. Mr. Adams, in his oration at Harvard, when he speaks of the study of Greek, means for the most part linguistics and literature, but does not recognize the existence of Greek philology, and still less the progress in that direction within the last twenty-five years. So, too, the statement that a knowledge of the classics is