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CICERONIANUS: OR, A DIALOGUE
ON THE BEST STYLE OF SPEAKING**

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Teachers College Series

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Paul Monroe, Ph. D.

CICERONIANUS

OR

A Dialogue on the Best Style of Speaking

BY

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS

OF ROTTERDAM

Translated by IZORA SCOTT, M. A.

With an Introduction by PAUL MONROE, PH. D.

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Editor's Introduction

A few words concerning the setting and the educational significance of this treatise are desirable by way of introduction. The *Dialogus Ciceronianus* (1528) is the one important technical educational treatise of Erasmus, that has never appeared in an English form. Even in the original, it has had few reprints and none of these are of recent date. His *De Ratione Studii*, and the treatise *De Pueris Statim ac Liberaliter Instituendis* are given in English by Professor Woodward in his *Erasmus Concerning Education*,¹ the *Colloquies* have appeared in several forms, most completely in the Bailey edition;² his letters, which contain much discussion of direct educational value, are adequately represented in the recent Nichols edition;³ but the *Dialogus Ciceronianus*, his most extensive treatise on an educational subject as it demanded attention in his own day, has not been deemed of sufficient interest to the student of education to justify a translation.

In the broad significance of the term, almost all of the works of Erasmus are educational. As Professor Saintsbury remarks,⁴ "Very great man of letters as he was, and almost wholly literary as were his interests, those interests were suspiciously directed towards the applied rather than the pure aspects of literature—were, in short, *per se* scientific rather than literary proper." This suspicious practical interest constitutes the characteristic which gives his writings educational value. His dominant interest in scholarly work was to remove ignorance of literature and of life in the past, and to furnish a proper basis for the study of these by the editing of numerous classical texts; to establish proper standards of life's value and of conduct through his satirical and controversial writings; and to furnish a proper basis for formal educational processes through adequate linguistic aids. In following out the first of these motives he issued his critical editions

¹Cambridge University Press, 1904.

²The *Colloquies of Erasmus*. NATHAN BAILEY, 1733, with various later issues.

³The *Epistles of Erasmus from His Earliest Letters to His Fifty-first Year*. Translated by F. M. NICHOLS, London, Vol. 1, 1901; Vol. 1904.

⁴SAINTSBURY. *History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. 3, p. 10.

of Terence, Seneca, Cicero, Suetonius, Plautus, etc., and above all, his editions of the various church Fathers, notably Jerome. His critical editions of the New Testament, both in Greek and in Latin, had the same general design. In his efforts to remove the ignorance and improve the moral customs of his generation, he wrote the *Colloquies*, *The Adages*, and the *Praise of Folly*. But satire, while an efficient weapon for the destruction of moral evils, of prejudices founded on ignorance, of provincialism and of bigotry, is not an adequate or even a safe instrument in the education of youth. While Erasmus gave comparatively little attention to the problems of the school-room or of private instruction, yet many of his colloquies and letters relate to this field of activity; the *Adages* as well as selections from the *Colloquies* served as texts, and he gave some assistance in the preparation of grammatical and rhetorical aids to this end.

The interest of the student of education is necessarily focused on this latter phase of the subject,—namely, on the problems of instruction, such as the choice of material, the methods of teaching and of study, the organization of schools or of the instruction process, the forms of discipline and of control and the immediate aims and purposes of instruction and of school work. These and similar technical problems are considered in the treatise *De Ratione Studii* and *De Pueris Statim, ac Liberatè Institutendis*, in various uses of the *Colloquies* and *Letters*, in his *De Conscribendis Epistolis* and in a portion of the *Christiani Matrimonii Institutio*. All these educational discussions are concerned with the problems of the new humanistic education as opposed to the traditional education of the schools under ecclesiastical influence. Even where the traditional conception of the middle school—the Latin grammar school—was modified and the classical materials of study accepted, the spirit of the school, the methods of control, and methods of study, the treatment of pupil by teacher and of teacher by society remained much the same and needed to be reformed. The elaboration of suitable methods of linguistic and literary study was the work of some generations and, though much had already been done, Erasmus also contributed much.

Professor Woodward's scholarly discussion⁴ of these and similar topics leaves little to be desired by the student of the history

⁴WOODWARD. *Erasmus Concerning Education*; Cambridge University Press, 1904.

of education who must draw his introductory knowledge of the subject through an English source. With this discussion available, any elaborate treatment of Erasmus' ideas concerning education and school work is unnecessary at this time. But the other aspect of Erasmus' work, his conflict against the obscurantists of his own school of thought, has not been sufficiently emphasized; nor is the material available to our students for the consideration of this phase of the educational situation of the period when the humanistic ideals were being reduced to school-room procedure.

New ideas and standards once established, remained long in vogue. In fact the education of the 15th and 16th centuries erected much of the structure that the pedagogue continued to inhabit until well into the 19th century. Slight additions were made to enlarge the structure, but a structure upon an entirely new design awaited the 19th century. Now it is because the above-mentioned educational writings of Erasmus dealt with this structure that stood so long,—and dealt with it in the making,—that a general interest in them has been preserved, that they have been put into English and that they have been treated by the technical student of education.

But the nature of the *Dialogue on Ciceronianism* is wholly different and it appeals to a different interest, as it also illustrates another phase of education during the 15th and 16th centuries. Erasmus waged a two-fold battle in the interest of rational educational ideas and practices; one against the obscurantists of the traditional type, the scholastic and orthodox ecclesiastical educators. The other was against the extremists of his own party. The conception of education held by these latter was no less narrow and little less repulsive than the old, their method of school work was little less efficient and under them the school was no less inadequate to the performance of its proper social function than was the case under the traditional usages. This bitter conflict, however, was of an ephemeral character. In time any system of school practices tends to degenerate into formalism and to lose vital contact with the underlying principles, but the danger to a broad reformatory system from the extremists among its own devotees is not apt to be a vital one during the period of its establishment, nor is the discussion around the quantitative interpretation of such principles apt to