

**THE MEDIAEVAL AND
THE TRUE MODERN
SPIRIT IN EDUCATION**

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The Mediaeval and the True Modern Spirit in Education by H. F. Osborn

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H. F. OSBORN

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*Or that the past will always win,
A glory from its being far.*

*From art, from nature, from the schools,
Let random influences glance.*

THE MEDIAEVAL
AND
THE TRUE MODERN SPIRIT
IN
EDUCATION

H. F. Osborn.

A THESIS

ON EDUCATION, WITH A FEW TRUISMS, COMMENTARIES AND SUGGESTIONS ON THE
PRINCETON CURRICULUM, BY A LOYAL AND GRATEFUL ALUMNUS,
TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER GRADUATION.

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THE MEDLÆVAL AND THE TRUE MODERN SPIRIT IN EDUCATION.

Written at a distance and some time after severing direct connection with the University these observations may gain in perspective while they may lose in exact reflection of present conditions. Wholly impersonal, they represent the result of years of experience, also of questioning students in different colleges, especially those of Princeton, Columbia, Yale, and Harvard universities. They purposely omit all reference to questions of moral and physical education. In course of comment on education as it is at Princeton an original attempt is made to develop a fundamental theory of education which it is hoped may be of some service. This paper is therefore partly critical partly constructive.

Let us love the Alma Mater, but not blindly.

It is the part of loyalty to an institution to recognize its defects and its merits, not to publish abroad, but to discuss them in the inner circle of friends, who may differ as to means but are absolutely united as to the end to be attained. This, all would agree, is to keep Princeton to the front in religion, letters, science and the service of the State.

As regards the public and educational life of the

country, we must take more account of changed conditions ; of the fact that we are no longer preparing largely for the ministry, although strong influence should be exerted in this direction, and that while law and medicine still make large demands on our graduates, new objects of education are rapidly springing up. There is the public service in city, state and nation, the call for college-trained men in the government scientific bureaus, in the colonies ; the large demand for teachers incidental to the rapid extension of educational institutions throughout the country, and for men trained in literary lines. Is Princeton doing her full share in entering men into these lists ? This could only be fairly answered by careful statistical inquiry, but we must not forget that Princeton once held a leading position in the national government and that this is no longer the case. At present only a single graduate holds a highly influential government office. In state service, especially in New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania, some of our graduates are prominent. Among great lists of appointees recently made under the reform government of the city of New York, Princeton graduates were conspicuous by their absence. In the filling of hundreds of legal and other offices under the new government but two Princeton men were chosen. Both, it is true, have achieved conspicuous success.

It appears that Princeton is not in as close touch as the third college of the country should be with modern life in any of its manifold phases. As a college every historical and natural advantage is hers

and it is the college that we have in mind in this paper.

Symptoms of the lack of public appreciation of the Princeton educational system are found in the lack of gifts to the University outside of those which come from the large and ever-increasing circle of loyal alumni. Our curriculum certainly does not inspire public interest or confidence. It has the general reputation of being excessively conservative. It classes us with all the smaller colleges and separates us from all the larger universities of the country and the world. There is, moreover, a profound dissatisfaction on the part of many of the most thoughtful of our alumni with its present stationary or rather reactionary condition. The writer's own thoughts were turned several years ago in this direction by the casual remark of an alumnus, who said: "Say what you please of —— one can get an education there."

One might pronounce with equal or greater stricture and more or less fairly on other colleges but we shall gain more at Princeton by cultivating a warm admiration for the strong and good qualities of our rivals and a judicial sense of our own vulnerable points.

If our present college course is not accomplishing what it should, let us reconstruct it; if other colleges are rising to modern conditions, let us frankly admire, not for imitation, but to build a system of our own as effective or more so.

AN ILL-BALANCED CURRICULUM.

It is first to be noted that during the past twenty-five years the Freshman and Sophomore curricula have stood practically still, the new riches of the University having been chiefly poured into the Junior and Senior years, with the result of a total lack of balance in the course as a whole. As a fact, we have a two-year mediæval and a two-year modern curriculum, largely unconnected; and the question is, whether one is really preparing for the other.

This will, however, be made more clear after we have considered the relations of School, Freshman and Sophomore life, the nature of the mediæval and of the true modern spirit in education.

Unattractive to the Schools.—As related to the schools, two head masters, both loyal alumni and exceptionally able educators, have recently expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of attraction in our early curriculum. If one's advice were asked in the case of a student with strong natural science tastes, could one conscientiously recommend the early Princeton curriculum? Take a single instance. Mr. A. (a man of classical and philosophical training) has a son of fifteen, of strong scientific tastes, preparing for Princeton. The boy is now reading Virgil and a Greek reader, and at eighteen will be ready to enter. At this time Princeton will demand of Mr. A., "We know more about this matter than you do; the mind of your boy still needs training in the classics, he must continue until he is twenty. According to our theory of education one third of your son's entire

life should be given to those studies. He will then be admitted to the observational work of science." What Oxford would demand of the same student will be seen on another page.

I am not holding a brief for President Eliot's policy as a whole, in general I am opposed to it; in some respects it has set back the cause of education; mere change has been mistaken for progress; there is a misdirection of fine intellectual material; there is a lack of sequence and logical development of studies which is theoretically and practically at fault, especially prejudicial to scientific development, and against which many Harvard professors are strongly outspoken.

But when we candidly apply to the two systems, as actually operating, the criterion of results we find that: Harvard graduates in every sphere of human activity are as successful as or more successful than Princeton graduates; and we must certainly judge a system rather by its results than by its theoretical value.

Whatever one may think of this freedom of studies in general, it has certainly been *masterly* in its attractiveness to the schools and to a very large proportion of parents of culture but without college affiliations throughout the country. By raising the standard a few months above that of Princeton and Yale, Harvard has attracted the cleverest and most able students; by enabling freshmen to hear some of the ablest men in the University she holds out a further inducement. It is a great mistake to suppose that sub-freshmen are influenced only by social