

**MODERN
LANGUAGES
IN EDUCATION**

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Modern languages in education by George F. Comfort

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BY

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C. W. BARDEEN, PUBLISHER.

1886.

NOTE BY THE PUBLISHER.

At the meeting of the American Philological Association, which was held in New Haven, in July, 1872, a paper was read by Prof. G. F. Comfort, the Secretary and the chief founder of that society, upon the subject, "*Should the Study of the Modern precede that of the Ancient Languages?*" taking the affirmative of this question.

This paper was published in the August number of *Scribner's Monthly Magazine* of that year. It covered nearly all the points that are involved in the discussion of the relative merits and claims of the ancient and the modern languages in a general system of education. This subject has recently been brought with great prominence to the attention of the American public, chiefly through the work of the Modern Language Association, and through the action of Harvard University in eliminating Greek from the required studies in the college curriculum. Many calls have been made by teachers and others for the article by Prof. Comfort alluded to above. As the plates for the series of the magazine in which it originally appeared have been destroyed, the undersigned takes pleasure in presenting it to the public in this separate and permanent form, with the title changed to "*Modern Languages in Education.*"

C. W. BARDEEN.

Syracuse, N. Y., May 1st, 1886.

MODERN LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION.

In the discussion concerning the position which the study of language should occupy in a general system of education, two main views have divided, in nearly equal proportion, the educators and the patrons of education in England and America.

The advocates of one view would retain essentially the traditional classical curriculum, introducing into it, however, such changes as are demanded by the present advancement in philological science, and increasing the amount that must be read as a condition for entrance to college and for graduation. They hold that all who intend entering upon a professional life, or who aspire to a liberal education, should go through this modified and improved classical curriculum, as a necessary preliminary course of training.

The advocates of the other view, including in their ranks the great body of business men,—of those who arrogate to themselves the title of “practical men,”—hold that the ancient languages should be abolished entirely from our general system of education, and should be replaced by the modern languages and the natural sciences; or that, if studied at all, the ancient languages should be left to that small class of “useless, impractical men which infest every community, who prefer to alienate themselves from the living present and to live among the musty remains of past ages.”

In many of our colleges a convenient solution of the question is sought by avoiding the issue, and admitting two parallel courses of study embodying these conflicting views, to which are given the conventional names of "classical" and "scientific" courses. The "scientific" course is frequently made but three years in length, and the requirements for admission to it are usually inferior to those to the "classical" course. In a few of the best colleges another solution of the problem is sought, by retaining the old classical course and adding recitation in one or more of the modern languages during a portion of the college curriculum.

We shall endeavor to show, as well as the limits of this paper will permit, that all of the above views and methods are fundamentally wrong, and that the true solution of the question as to the position which the study of language should occupy in our educational system is to be found in a method which is radically different from any of those at present in vogue.

By the system which we shall propose, many advantages will be gained which are unattainable under either of the present methods. A unity will be maintained in the entire academic and collegiate courses, making them the most profitable for the several classes of students: for those who, after finishing the academic course, shall enter upon the duties of active life; for those who shall continue through the college course before entering upon their careers in business or professional life; for those who shall complete the college course, as preparatory to special study in any of the learned professions; and, finally, for those who intend to become professional linguists. Thus the so-called "practical" men and the

scholastic party will be reconciled and will work in harmony, instead of injuring our educational system, as they are now doing, by their distracted counsels and conflicting efforts.

To illustrate this reorganization of the linguistic part of our educational system, we will imagine one of our great cities or States having a complete system of graded schools, the whole being crowned with a post-collegiate university. The great need of such universities in America is now becoming so extensively felt that it is only a question of time as to how soon they shall be established. In all probability the next ten years will witness the founding of one or more such universities, which will soon rival, in the extent and excellence of their appointments, the largest and best universities in continental Europe. It is to be hoped that, in their plan of organization, they will be in advance of even the great and time-honored European universities, all of which retain more or less of mediæval tradition, both in their plan and their spirit. But the modification in linguistic instruction which we shall propose will greatly improve our educational system, even without these much needed post-collegiate universities.*

* Since the above was written (in 1872) the John Hopkins University, at Baltimore, has been established, with a number of incomplete post-graduate departments. Several times the amount of the endowment of that institution will, however, be needed to found and equip in America a university which shall be the peer of the great universities of Continental Europe. Buildings, libraries, museums, apparatus, and other appointments representing several millions of dollars, and an annual income of at least one million dollars will be requisite in order to found and sustain what we may at present term a "post-collegiate university," in which shall be given the most advanced instruction of the present age in every branch of thought and in every department of professional study. At least one hundred thousand dollars annually will be needed, in order to

According to the plan which we propose, the study of one living language will be commenced by pupils when between the ages of ten and twelve years. The method of instruction should at first be very simple, and adapted to the stage of development of the young child. As at this age the memory is more active than the judgment, and the mind inclines to details rather than to principles, the attention should be directed at this time to learning the names of the most familiar objects, and to gathering a store of familiar phrases and expressions, referring to the simplest physical facts and phenomena, and to the simplest operations and emotions of mind and heart. A body of linguistic material will thus be accumulated in this new language, as had previously been the case with the pupil's own vernacular, to be subjected in his more mature years to rigid grammatical analysis and philological treatment. The pupil should also immediately utilize what he has learned, and should be taught to express his childish thoughts, desires, and emotions in this new living language. He should also read juvenile literature in this language, of no higher grade than that which he is reading in his own vernacular. More rigid grammatical instruction will be added as soon and as fast as the intellectual development of the pupil will admit.

As much time, or more, should be given to the study of this living language in the academy or preparatory

sustain the philological faculty, which should contain not less than twenty professors, with salaries of not less than five thousand dollars each. The rinoety and hitherto unexampled donation of twenty millions of dollars by Senator Stanford for a university in California approximates the sum needed to found, equip, and endow a great "post-collegiate" university in America.