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COMMUNICATION.

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Nathaniel Sanders

BOARD OF EDUCATION,
CORNER OF GRAND AND ELM STREETS, }
NEW YORK, June 5th, 1869.

To MAGNUS GROSS, Esq.,

Chairman of the "Executive Committee for the Care, Government and Management of the College of the City of New York:"

DEAR SIR—

I have observed with surprise, and with a sense of deep regret, that the proposition is entertained by a large number of the Trustees of filling the chair of Latin and Greek, now vacant, and even of establishing separate chairs for each, at the College of the City of New York; involving, with the necessary tutors, an outlay of not less than \$20,000 per annum. The subject in all its bearings is one of too vast importance to be treated in the ordinary method of discussion by the Committee, and I therefore beg leave to place my views in writing to ensure their receiving more matured consideration than oral observations could secure.

I pass over the question (on which considerable difference of opinion exists) as to the propriety of sustaining at all, at the enforced expense of the public, an educational institution to supply the needs which the College of the City of New York is intended to meet. The College exists by law; we are its guardians, and the only question we have to consider is, how most efficiently and most economically to secure the attainment of the ends desired by the Legislature.

New York, 1869

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These ends we shall no doubt all agree to be—First : That any of the youth of this city possessed of special talents, but lacking means for their cultivation, may have placed within their reach an education the best possible for the development of their powers for the benefit of themselves and of the community ; and, second, to provide for the comparatively well-to-do the means of pursuing useful studies in compensation for compelling them to provide for the instruction of their less fortunate citizens.

As it is self-evident that whatever course of studies will tend to secure the first of these ends will tend also to secure the second and less important, we are spared the necessity of a two-fold investigation.

A very few statistics suffice to show that neither of these ends has been hitherto attained by the College of the City of New York.

It is immaterial what year we select for examination, the numbers which follow will be found to bear about the same relative proportions in every year. I quote from the Trustees' Report for 1866 merely because it is the latest document at hand which furnishes the numbers in the different classes and of the graduates ; from this report I find, that while there were three hundred and eighty-one students in the introductory class, only twenty-five graduated in that year. The number of graduates in 1867 was thirty, and twenty-nine in July, 1868. Of the three hundred and eighty-one who composed the introductory class in 1866, one hundred and fifty-one left the College during the year, and doubtless the two hundred and thirty who remained will have dwindled to about twenty-five or thirty by the year 1871.

Without doubt some proportion of the three hundred and eighty-one leave the College because of the necessity they are under of obtaining, by their labor, the means of subsistence ;

but, when it is remembered that these three hundred and eighty-one are the *picked youth from the many thousands attending the public schools*, and when the sacrifices and privations which men and youth imbued with a love of learning will make and undergo for the acquirement of knowledge are borne in mind, we must look to something in the constitution of the College itself to account for this result. In short, we can but come to the conclusion that the main cause of this falling off is to be found in the feeling, which grows upon the pupils and their guardians, of the comparative uselessness of the studies to which they are consigned.

Let us examine the course of studies, as given from pages 8 to 14 of the Report of the Board of Trustees for the year 1866, or from pages 24 to 28 of the Manual of the College.

The first observation which must strike the mind of every thinker is the fact that the primary analysis—the main classification which has been adopted of studies which ought to be framed to fit the students for “complete living” is one of “words”—*i. e.*, the tools of knowledge, instead of knowledge itself. Or in the words of the report: “There are two courses of studies—ancient and modern—differing only in the languages studied.”

On examining the course for the introductory and freshman classes, a feeling of astonishment must fill the mind at the marked want of wisdom by which it was dictated, but which at the same time affords a sufficient explanation for the abandonment of the College by its students.

Even if “words” ought to be the real object of education, it would be supposed that English words would be more useful to a people whose mother tongue is English, than the words of any other language; yet the students of the introductory and freshman classes of the ancient course receive instruction *five hours a week through both terms in Latin and Greek*, and *one lesson per*

week during one term in the English language. The students of the modern course substitute for Latin and Greek the French and Spanish languages.

I purposely abstain from saying anything as to the method of instruction, which is the converse of that adopted by nature, and as a consequence signally fails. This has been so forcibly put by President Barnard, of Columbia College, that I need only refer the members of our Committee to his essay on "Early Mental Training and The Studies Best Fitted For It."

What steps are taken to familiarize the students of, say the freshman class, with that great nature of which they form a part? What, for instance, do they learn of the structure of their own bodies and of the means of preserving health? *One lesson a week* is given on Physiology and Hygiene, and that is all! The fear of making this letter too long compels me merely to refer the Committee to pages 40 to 42 of Mr. Herbert Spencer's chapter on "What Knowledge is of Most Worth," in his work on Education, in further illustration of this subject, instead of making extracts from it as I would otherwise like to do.

Attention, it is true, is paid throughout the college course to mathematical studies, yet very little to their practical application; while to Chemistry, the parent of modern physics, the manual (which is our guide) prescribes two lessons per week to the introductory class, and to the freshman, sophomore, and junior classes absolutely *none at all!* Mining, Mechanical Engineering, Architecture, Theoretical Agriculture, Biology, and Botany are utterly ignored; and no branch of Zoology is even mentioned in the curriculum. We next come to a science more important, because universal in its application and in its need than any other, viz.: The Science of Human well-being, com-

monly called Political or Social Economy. Here, too, like exclusion! except that in the sophomore class, for one term, one hour per week is given to it. That is to say, a people who are to live by labor are left by the guardians of their education in ignorance of the laws by which the reward for that labor must be regulated; they who are to administer capital are to be left to blind chance whether to act in accordance with those laws of nature which determine its increase, or ignorantly to violate them!

Restrained again from quotation by the fear of wearying the Committee, permit me to refer them to the lecture of Dr. Hodgson, delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, on "The Importance of the Study of Economic Science," which will be found in the work of Professor Youmans, on "The Culture Demanded By Modern Life."

I confess to a feeling of deep discouragement at the perusal of such a record as that presented by the course of studies at the College of the City of New York, especially, when I find that this is the state of things a large number of the Trustees seem desirous of perpetuating. My views on this subject are confirmed by the following remarks found in President Barnard's Essay on "Early Mental Training, and The Studies Best Fitted For It."

"Whatever may be the value of the study of the classics in a subjective point of view, *nothing could possibly more thoroughly unfit a man for any immediate usefulness in this matter-of-fact world, or make him more completely a stranger in his own home, than the purely classical education which used recently to be given, and which with some slight improvement, is believed to be still given by the universities of England.* This proposition is very happily enforced by a British writer, whose strictures on the system appeared in the London Times some twelve or thirteen years ago.

"Common things are quite as much neglected and despised in the education of the rich as in that of the poor. It is wonderful *how little* a young gentleman may know when he has taken his university degrees, *especially if he has been industrious, and has stuck to his studies.* He may really spend a long time in looking for somebody more

ignorant than himself. If he talks with the driver of the stage-coach, that lauds him at his father's door, he finds he knows nothing of horses. If he falls into conversation with a gardener, he knows nothing of plants or flowers. If he walks into the fields, he does not know the difference between barley, rye and wheat; between rape and turnips; between natural and artificial grass. If he goes into a carpenter's yard, he does not know one wood from another. If he comes across an attorney, he has no idea of the difference between common and statute law, and is wholly in the dark as to those securities of personal and political liberty on which we pride ourselves. If he talks with a country magistrate, he finds his only idea of the office is that the gentleman is a sort of English Sheik, as the Mayor of the neighboring borough is a sort of Cadi. If he strolls into any workshop or place of manufacture, it is always to find his level, and that a level far below the present company. If he dines out, and as a youth of proved talents, and perhaps university honors, is expected to be literary, his literature is confined to a few popular novels—the novels of the last century, or even of the last generation—history and poetry having been almost studiously omitted in his education. *The girl who has never stirred from home, and whose education has been economized, not to say neglected, in order to send her own brother to college,* knows vastly more of those things than he does. The same exposure awaits him wherever he goes, and whenever he has the audacity to open his mouth. *At sea, he is a landlubber; in the country, a cockney; in town, a greenhorn; in science, an ignoramus; in business, a simpleton; in pleasure, a milk-sop*—everywhere out of his element, everywhere at sea, in the clouds, adrift, or by whatever word *utter ignorance and incapacity* are to be described. In society, and in the work of life, he finds himself beaten by the youth whom at college he despised as frivolous or abhorred as profligate."

Take the preparation of our youth for their duties as citizens. Here again, a knowledge of political and social economy is indispensable. We have seen the attention it receives; and while two lessons a week for one hour, and that only to the senior class in its last term, are given to American citizens on the Constitution of the United States and on International law, *none whatever is given on the science of Government throughout the entire course of five years!*

I might go through the whole course of studies with similar results. Here and there, in this or that class, a small amount of attention is given to some of the sciences omitted in the other classes; but the entire record is one of the most disheartening character.

Words! words! engross almost exclusively the attention of the students from the hour they enter the College until they leave it; and it is not to the five and twenty graduates the palm of useful industry should be awarded, but to the many who, in discouragement, abandon a course which tends to *unfit* them for the great battle of life!

What, then, are the reasons generally assigned for this perverse conventionalism of devoting the time of youth to the acquirement of dead words, to the unavoidable exclusion of nearly everything that is of value? First, we are told, that we cannot understand the English language without a knowledge of Latin, from which it is derived. The inaccuracy of this pretension is at once made manifest by reference to Webster, where he states :

“That English is composed of—

“*First.* Saxon and Danish words of Teutonic and Gothic origin.

“*Second.* British or Welsh, Cornish and Armoric, which may be considered as of Celtic origin.

“*Third.* Norman, a mixture of French and Gothic.

“*Fourth.* Latin, a language formed on the Celtic and Teutonic.

“*Fifth.* French, chiefly Latin corrupted, but with a mixture of Celtic.

“*Sixth.* Greek formed on the Celtic and Teutonic, with some Coptic.

“*Seventh.* A few words directly from the Italian, Spanish, German and other languages of the Continent.

“*Eighth.* A few foreign words, introduced by commerce, or by political and literary intercourse.

“Of these, *the Saxon words constitute our mother-tongue*, being words which our ancestors brought with them from Asia.

“The Danish and Welsh also are primitive words, and may be considered as a part of our vernacular language. They are of equal antiquity with the Chaldee and Syriac.”

But even were it true that our language was derived from the Latin, wherein lies the difficulty in the way of the teacher explaining to his pupils the meanings of the parts of English words which are of Latin origin, without the necessity of the pupil's acquiring the same knowledge by the roundabout process

of learning one thousand words he will never need, for one that may at some time be to him of some service as a mnemonic.

Driven from this position, the advocates of "*classical*" studies tell us that the study of Latin and Greek serves as a training for the intellect. Unquestionably the exercise of the faculties of the mind serves to develop the faculties so exercised; yet if this were the object to be attained, Hebrew, nay Chinese, would be preferable to Latin; but SCIENCE develops the same faculties, and far more efficiently. The facts of science to be stored up in the mind are so infinite in number and magnitude, that no man however gifted could ever hope to master them all, though he were to live a thousand years. But their arrangement in scientific order not only develops the analytical powers of the mind, but exercises the memory in a method infinitely more useful and powerful than the study of any language. Finally, we are told classical studies develop the taste. If then to this the advocates of such studies are driven, its mere announcement must suffice to banish Latin and Greek from all schools supported by taxation; for however essential it may be to provide the means of the best possible instruction, it is as absolutely out of the sphere of the Trustees of Public Moneys to provide, at the public expense, so *mere a luxury* as on this hypothesis Latin and Greek must be, as it would be to provide the public with costly jewels! But even for the cultivation and development of art and taste, SCIENCE is the true curriculum!

He who is ignorant of anatomy cannot appreciate either sculpture or painting! A knowledge of optics, of botany and of natural history, are necessary, equally to the artist and to the connoisseur; a knowledge of acoustics to the musician and musical critic. "No artist," says Mr. Spencer, "can produce a healthful work of whatever kind without he understands the laws of the phenomena he represents; he must also understand how the

minds of the spectator or listener will be affected by his work—a question of psychology.” The spectator or listener must equally be acquainted with the laws of such phenomena, or he fails to attain to the highest appreciation.

I now come to the last and most serious aspect of this question, and I fearlessly assert that classical studies have a most pernicious influence upon the morals and character of their votaries.

It should not be forgotten that Greeks and Romans alike lived by slavery (which is robbery), by rapine, and by plunder; yet we, born into a Christian community which lives by honest labor, propose to impregnate the impressionable minds of youth with the morals and literature of nations of robbers!

This letter has already extended to so great a length that I am compelled to abstain from making extracts from the works of the greatest thinkers, which I had desired; and I can now but cite them in support, more or less pronounced, of the views above put forward, viz.: President Barnard, of Columbia College, who with rare honesty and boldness has spoken loudly against the conventional folly of classical studies; Professor Newman, himself Professor of Latin at the University of London, England; Professors Tindall, Henfry, Huxley, Forbes, Pajet, Whewell, Faraday, Liebig, Draper, De Morgan, Lindley, Youmans, Drs. Hodgson, Carpenter, Hooker, Acland, Sir John Herschell, Sir Charles Lyell, Dr. Seguin, and rising above them all in *educational science*, Bastiat and Herbert Spencer. To a modified extent, the name of Mr. John Stuart Mill may be quoted—for he loudly advocates science for all—science, which is unavoidably excluded by the introduction of, or at least the prominence given to, Latin and Greek in our College. Mr. Mill, it is true also, advocates classical studies, but for certain special classes which exist in England who have no regular occupations in life.

Neither is it without importance as a guide to ourselves to observe that in the very best school in this country—a school perhaps not surpassed by any in the world, viz., the Military Academy at West Point—neither Latin nor Greek studies are permitted.

If now, in any career whatever, any use could be found for Latin it must be in that of the professional soldier, to whom, if to any one, the language and literature of the most military people the world has ever seen should be of some service. But, no! the wise men who framed the curriculum of West Point, though they knew that the study of the campaigns of the Romans would be servicable to their students, provided for their study, *not* by the roundabout method of first learning a language which could never be of any other use; but by the direct method of the study of those campaigns! Are the pupils of West Point generally found deficient in intellect? Is not, on the contrary, the fact of having graduated at that school a passport to the *highest scientific and practical* employment?

Our duty to the people is clear; let us neither waste the precious time of our youth on worse than useless studies, nor the money of the citizens on worse than useless expenditure.

I do earnestly hope that our Committee will give to my observations their most serious deliberation. Let us come to no hasty conclusion on this subject: accustomed as we have been to hear constantly repeated such conventional phrases as that "Latin and Greek are essential to the education of a gentleman;" that "classical studies are indispensable to a liberal education;" to hear applauded to the echo orators who have introduced into their speeches quotations of bad Latin or worse Greek, by audiences of whom not one in one thousand understand what

was said ; we have been apt to receive such phrases as embodying truths, without ever examining their foundations. I respectfully urge the Committee to consider well before they act, to study the reasons assigned by the great thinkers I have named for condemning, as, humbly following in their wake, I venture to condemn, as worse than mere waste of time, the years devoted to Latin and Greek studies.

Let us endeavor to make the the College of this city worthy of the city and of the State; let us cast aside the trammels of mediæval ignorance, and supply to the pupils of the College "the culture demanded by modern life." Let us in this, the first important matter which has come before our Committee, act in harmony and without prejudice, for the welfare of the College and "for the advancement of learning," and so prove ourselves worthy of the sacred trust we have assumed.

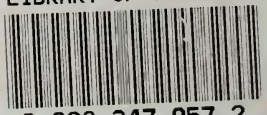
I am, Dear Sir,

Very truly yours,

NATHANIEL SANDS,

Member of "The Executive Committee for the Care, Government, and Management of the College of the City of New York."

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