

DISCUSSION

THE TWO-YEAR LATIN COURSE

Out of the large number of students who begin Latin in the public high schools, especially in the Central and Western states, only a small proportion continue the subject beyond the second year. Credit is given toward graduation for this amount of work in these schools, and two units of Latin may be offered for college-entrance credit in nearly all of the colleges and universities of the states referred to, without any requirement that the subject be pursued further. As a result of these conditions there has developed a short Latin course which differs in character from that originally planned. The extent to which this short course exists may be seen from a comparison between the number who take this amount of Latin and the number who complete the four-year course in some of the high schools of Chicago. One school reports 214 students in Caesar and 16 in Vergil; another, 75 in Caesar, 18 in Vergil; a third, 65 in Caesar, 10 in Vergil. One school with 62 in Caesar has no Vergil class. Another which has seven classes in Caesar has only one Vergil class. The highest number of Vergil students found in any school is 60, and this school has 250 in Caesar. It is readily seen that the falling off in Latin students is greatly in excess of the decrease in the numbers of the third- and fourth-year classes as a whole. Other western cities show a similar condition, though the decrease is not always so great.

The question arises whether there has been a serious effort to meet the needs of this large class of students, by giving a reasonable measure of unity to the two-year course. The assumption that this can be done by merely slicing off the first two years of the established course and presenting it in the same form as if it were to be followed by two or three or four years' additional study in the same subject does not seem convincing. Much of the work in the second year is commonly presented with the definite purpose of preparing for the work of the third year. If there is to be no third year this presentation might well be modified by eliminating certain features and giving a larger place to others. The value of sight-reading, of extended drill on indirect discourse, and even of composition other than of a simple nature, may be called in question for students who will give but two years to Latin. All these things may be said to afford a general training for dealing with other material of a kindred nature, but in relation to the whole of what the school is likely to give this particular class of students their value is open to challenge.

In the tributes to the value of classical study which have been given

in recent years by men engaged in professional life other than teaching, or in the teaching of subjects not intimately related to the classics, much stress has been laid on the contribution to a knowledge of English made by the study of ancient languages. Along with this is frequently mentioned the aid afforded in learning modern languages of the Romance group. Other benefits enumerated, such as a knowledge of the literature and the life of the Romans, have little place in the results to be expected from a two-year course, and the general development of the powers of observation is perhaps best left out of the account.

If the chief value of Latin for this large number of students is to be found in the relation of Latin to English and other modern languages rather than in a reading knowledge of the Latin itself, it is worth while to keep this end in view in planning the work. At present, it is fair to say, almost no definite teaching is done along these lines. Most of the textbooks intended for beginners in Latin give a certain amount of attention to English derivatives from Latin words in connection with vocabularies, but mainly for the purpose of aiding the student in learning the Latin words. Even this small amount of material is seldom made use of to any large extent by the teacher. Furthermore, while insistence is often laid upon the fact that the student may be brought to recognize sentence relations through the medium of a highly inflected language, comparatively little time is given to the study of sentence-structure other than in the classification of special case and mode uses, very frequently those which are peculiar to the Latin and which have little value as illustrative of the usage of other languages. It would seem as if in the case of this particular group of students the stress is placed on the things which are least likely to be remembered or used, while the things on which the value of the study is most commonly asserted to rest are taught incidentally or not at all. If this work is to be valuable to the student because of added clearness of comprehension of syntactical principles in English and because of the knowledge of English etymology which may be gained from the study of Latin, then the prominent place should be given to such things rather than to the many topics which have no important relation to anything outside of the Latin itself.

The special need for change in the method of teaching is in the second year. The material commonly presented in the first year can be made the basis either of a course which is to be continued into college or of a two-year course. Whether Caesar should be read throughout the second year by those who are to study Latin for four years or more is a question to be discussed from a different point of view. But I do not believe a serious argument can be made in favor of giving the second year to Caesar for students who do not continue the subject further. The time spent in getting the meaning from different passages would yield far better results if given to simpler Latin studied with a view to making it in some sense an introduction to the general laws of language, and in particular to illus-

trating and explaining English usage. It is not infrequently the case that a boy or girl who has spent four years on the study of Latin carries away very little actual knowledge of the force of terminations and other elements of word-structure, for the reason that the time of the recitation has been taken up with the interpretation of difficult passages in the text, and the drill on unusual forms, and other matters which will yield little of value except in immediate connection with the reading of Latin. And yet the knowledge of derivation and word-formation in relation to English would have been of constant use and would have done far more to give the student a command of his own language than any amount of translation is likely to give. Drill which tended to fix in the memory material of this sort would have permanent results, whereas the drill on much of the material ordinarily presented is not expected to yield any particular benefit after school years, so far as the subject-matter is concerned.

Wherever the number of students is large enough to justify doing so, separate classes for those who are to take but two years of Latin might be organized, and work given of a different sort from that which is to be followed by Cicero and Vergil.

The fact that in the high-school years students are often uncertain as to their later work makes it sometimes seem desirable for them to keep in line with the largest possible range of college requirements. The first two years of Latin as commonly presented serve this purpose. But in the larger schools there is always a considerable number whose plans are reasonably definite at the end of the first year. In the school above referred to in which there are 214 enrolled in Caesar and 16 in Vergil it is unreasonable to assume that half of those who took Caesar expected to give four years to Latin. And the loss in time to those who wished to change from the two-year course to the four-year course would in the aggregate be far less than that involved in the present scheme. If the retention of Caesar for those who are to take four years of Latin be desired, a definite amount of credit for the Caesar course could be assigned to the parallel second-year course, so that students who found it necessary to change might do so without losing more than a fraction of a year's credit. The gain in the educational value of the whole course for such students would more than compensate for the loss in time. It need hardly be said that study directed along the lines indicated would be far more likely to appeal to the interest of the average boy or girl than is the narrative of the Gallic War. And in so far as it aroused an interest in language-material the tendency to read with closer attention and appreciation would be likely to follow.

With a comparatively small amount of text required for translation in connection with such a course, a stricter requirement of good English could be made. A teacher is sometimes compelled to pass by faults in translation for sheer lack of time. He must get the class through four books of Caesar, or nearly that amount, and he feels that he can correct in the next year's

work the faults which he has not time to take note of in the second year. But for those who do not read Cicero the careless forms of expression which are allowed in Caesar often tend to become established to such an extent as to call out the frequent assertion that the student's English is made worse instead of being improved by his study of Latin. If the work were directed with the specific purpose of aiding the student in his command of English, instead of having the translation of a fixed amount of Latin as its goal, there would be no excuse for this sort of careless translation, and its frequency would be greatly lessened.

In view of the large number taking Latin in the first year of the high school it is worth while to try to meet their needs more fully than is done by the present arrangement, which takes into account only those who complete the four-year Latin course. I believe such a second-year course as that suggested above would add greatly to the value of the first-year work to many students and would prove a means of raising the standard of English as well as of giving an introduction to a range of knowledge both suggestive and interesting.

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