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The Present State of Classical Studies in France

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ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

THE PRESENT STATE OF CLASSICAL STUDIES IN FRANCE.

A PARIS Professor at the *Hautes Études*, whom I consulted, answered me textually as follows: 'La question, sur laquelle vous m'interrogez, est de très vaste étendue, et elle devrait être traitée historiquement, comme histoire de toute décadence. . . . On faisait (dans ma jeunesse) des vers latins, et pour moi c'était un plaisir; on faisait aussi un peu de grec, quoique pas autant qu'en Angleterre. Aujourd'hui, à ce que j'ai appris, on ne fait plus de vers latins, à peine même de compositions latines, et l'on ne pousse plus guère le grec au delà l'alphabet.' We shall see that this is slightly exaggerated, and may begin with Greek in France since May 31, 1902. This is the date of the new programme, which regulates Secondary Education. Greek is no longer obligatory, as it was up to 1902. And the same is the case with Latin, which, however, will, according to actual provisions, be continued by some half of the lycée and college pupils. French is a Latin language, and so Latin is useful for its philology, historical institutions, manners, and civilisation, to say nothing of the *Formale Bildung* thence resulting. And, if Latin has taken all—epic, theatre, lyric, history, eloquence, philosophy

—from Greece, it is to Greek that we must go. The French still do so, but less and less year by year. Following Prof. U. von Wilamowitz,—whose *Der griechische Unterricht auf dem Gymnasium* appeared in 1900, and who wishes to make pupils understand Greek antiquity in its entirety,—at a most respectful distance, French teachers see that von Wilamowitz has saved Greek in Germany, but find his scope too wide for French teachers and pupils alike. They fear to be caught between the deep sea of Encyclopaedic, and the devil of specialised, Greek. Of these specialised Greek studies the best informed Frenchmen advise the retention of Greek history dealing with the development of ideas, the historical reading and explanation of literary masterpieces, considered as the product of their time and of Hellenic civilisation, to the building up of the pupil aesthetically and morally. Abandon the Greek particle for a large mental sweep of those Greek works that sensibly influenced later writing to the fullest satisfaction to-day of our modern mind; and taste! *Mental Gymnastic* is already maintained, on this theory, by the retention of *Latin* for the Latin race of France. Greek, when all is

said, is the source of all modern literature and civilisation. Greek, then, must be studied in Secondary Education; if not aesthetically, yet to furnish forth youth for life, by initiating young people in a method aiming throughout at truth,—truth in the domain of letters coming from historic and critical study of action. A Frenchman cannot, constitutionally, study Antiquity integrally in Old Hellas, as the German programme (of 1900) requires of the Germans. But practice in the richest and, perhaps, most artistic of tongues,—mental commerce with the noblest and highest of principles and sentiments, these a Frenchman can have in what he retains in the Greek of his Secondary Education. True, Grammar is hated by Germans and French alike, and Greek Grammar is no exception. For the anti-Greeks it is ‘a torture’; for the pro-Greeks, a bugbear to beginners. An anti-Greek wanted to add a third aorist and third perfect to the Greek verb, to make it a better mental exercise for pupils! This irony is common among the ultra-‘Moderns,’ wolves to whom something must be abandoned perhaps of the Greek curriculum. The dialectical varieties? the vagaries of the *κοινή*? without the former of which even Homer, Herodotus, and Theocritus, for instance, are closed books. The new French programme has settled this point.

It orders, along with reading the texts, *version* and *thème*, so that the double translation into and out of Greek (and Latin) is parallel and constant. As in England, the Greek required is the Attic of the fifth and fourth centuries, without the pedantic purism of following the Attic of the inscriptions. By ‘Attic’ is meant in the new programme the Greek of the best authors in the centuries named, who generally are Athenians. This for the fourth class boys of lycées and colleges, who read Aesop, Lucian’s *Dialogues*, Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* and *Anabasis*. But why does the third class read Herodotus? His grammar is hardly explained in this form, which cannot enter into his style or into the spirit of his morphology: the third is still too weak linguistically. And what are three hours a week? Scarcely enough to devote to Xenophon, who is sufficiently Attic, grammatically hard and a pattern of military courage.

We are now in the second cycle of the French School according to the new programme. Henceforward five hours a week are given to Greek. Here the counsel of perfection has been given, but not followed, to give three hours a week to prose and the Tragedians, in the second and first (along with *version* and *thème*), and the remaining two hours to Herodotus and Homer, in the second; to Homer and the Lyrics, in the first. Archaeology should here have a word, even the repellent dialectical form. In the first Syntax should, according to this counsel of perfection, be a special feature in class. It is, at least, scientific to be able to distinguish Plato from Demosthenes, Thucydides from the author of the *Hellenics*. In the first class, too, the French master is supposed to allow himself most discreetly to touch *mollissimo brachio* on that abominable Grammar which Teuton and Gaul alike execrate. He may even go so far as to hint the difference between *εἰ πλούσιος ἔην* and *εἰ πλούσιος ἦν*. But this must be done tentatively, as by one who does good by stealth. Accents are to be reduced to a minimum. This is the rule even in the highest classes. At the same time the new programme allows that the accent is the soul of the word, and that, when essential, it may be taught: e.g. *τίς* is not *τις*. In a word, then, the new programme due to M. Georges Leygues, the then minister, has done something for Greek. Before this programme the *thème* and *version*, for instance, were always the same, and the corrections were always the same. The teacher said: ‘C’est ça’ or ‘ce n’est pas ça,’ but never ventured on giving reasons. The result was, all these exercises of and into Greek (and Latin) did not constitute one real exercise. Again, then and now, in the two dead languages, both in the Universities and at the Schools, no complete author is taken in hand, not even, generally, the complete fairly long work of one author. Also, the Classical Latin and Greek are still taken along with Silver Latin writers and late Greek authors, promiscuously: times and seasons are ill kept. The Decadence is very real in Classical studies still—almost painfully appa-

rent. For fifty years French school curricula had been (perhaps, still are) top-heavy. The nineteenth century opened with Classics, French, Mathematics and Philosophy, Classics being the heritage of the Renaissance specially. History, Science and Modern Languages (badly taught) came in later. Palliatives were sought for the surfeit of study: 'bifurcation, enseignement spécial, enseignement moderne premier modèle and e. m. second modèle.' The new programme has cycles: the first with Latin, and optional Greek; or without Latin, but with Modern Languages, Science abounding where Latin is not taken. The second cycle has: Greek-Latin, Latin-Science, Latin-Modern Languages, Science-Modern Languages. It has taken fifty years to arrive at this, and now the present Minister of Education, M. Briand, has condemned the *baccalauréat*, or examination wherein these cycles were tested in their working. The place of this examination it is proposed to supply by a school diploma, dependent in reality (not in theory) on the favour with his masters, especially form-master, which the pupil may enjoy at the moment of quitting school. There is no University matriculation in France. The University Greek is a continuation and enlarging of School Greek, but with a view to criticism and culture, as against translation of texts, elementary grammar, and circumscribed routine. The older professors, however, before being compulsorily retired at seventy (they may leave at sixty, but often refuse to do so) are absolutely *routiniers*. Yet most of the professors are *agrégés*, i.e. possessed of 'une culture d'esprit ancienne et profonde, qui ait peu à peu aiguisé et mûri le jugement' (M. Maurice Croiset). The priests are not allowed to be *agrégés*, and they are the best teachers of Greek and Latin in France, judging by their pupils—quality and quantity. The Greek they teach is chiefly such as is done up to *licence* at the Universities, or about the level of our Shell or (Lower) Vth. The Latin is not sufficiently pure, of course, but ready and current, even

for conversation, but with ignorance of quantities, as Latin and Greek verse have not been done for many years past in France.

The number of pupils in France that study Greek (and) Latin, either or both, was, in 1902, reckoned at 80,000, or five times more than in England, on the estimate of M. Conyba,—double or more than double the Austrian and Italian averages (*Classiques et Modernes* p. 127). M. Brunetière, lately deceased, thought Latin was still spoken on the Continent, in Hungary, Croatia, and Transylvania. But, *in fact*, Latin conversation was last heard in 1848 in these countries, and then only from Croat lips. By an anomaly, Latin countries have given up Latin, while others that are Teutonic retain it as a written language. In France, H. Estienne and du Bellay defeated its influence; Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, in Italy. The conservative Anglo-Saxon and German keep up Latin. In Germany and England the public orator speaks Latin, the German Doctor's degree thesis is often in Latin (which is optional),—in five years 474 out of 1871, or twenty-five p.c. in a score of German Universities. In Germany, too, theology is Latin first and Protestant or Catholic second, though, of course, Latin owes so much to the Vatican for its propagation. German students are very Latinophile. Our Universities, as well as the Scotch and Irish, keep up Latin: so do the Hungarian. Latin reviews appear in the *Hermes*, *Jahrbücher für Klassische Philologie*, *Rivista di filologia classica*, *Journal für die reine . . . Mathematik*, *Arithmetices principia* of Turin; exclusively Latin are: *Vox Urbis* (Rome), *Praeco Latinus* (Pa. U.S.A.), *Phoenix Nuntius* (Oxford), *Hermes Romanus* (Paris, extinct), *Apis Romana* (Montlieu, Charente Inférieure). Science affects Latin also. M. André, of Lyon University, who gives the above and many other facts in the *revue de l'enseignement (internationale)*, recommends Latin as a universal language *ad interim*.

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