

United States, not to speak of European countries, where most progress is made in these studies, that such a system is adopted ; and it will not do for you, Mr. Editor, to refer to Harvard and Johns-Hopkins as progressive institutions when it suits your immediate purpose and to ridicule the practical methods of their distinguished instructors when they do not agree with your opinions as to the details of their business. That much of what I set forth may be "taken for granted" you have yourself disproved by your complete misunderstanding of the contents of the programme, even after the examination you must have made before committing yourself to writing on the subject. The fact is that, although you have so much to say about the principles upon which the University is conducted, you give no evidence of having any but a very indistinct conception of what a university really aims to accomplish. A university is not only a place where specialists work and teach, but also where students are taught what they need to know in the different departments, what they must know if they are to become specialists, and what they must not seem to know or concern themselves about if they are not specialists. The last matter is fully as important as the others, and one must learn the lesson sooner or later if one would be a critic of any department of real university work. Goethe's pithy saying :—

"Vor den Wissenden sich stellen
Sicher ist's in allen Fallen,"

implies that the *Nichtwissend*, especially when he attempts the role of the "Wissend," is a very *unsafe* person in any position of literary or educational responsibility.

Respectfully,

Toronto, April 5, 1886.

J. F. MCCURDY.

THE CLASSICAL COURSE.

To the Editor of the VARSITY.

SIR,—The letter of Mr. Gibson in your issue of March 27th deserves an answer, if only because it breathes a "sweet reasonableness of spirit," for which, I am relieved to see, there is still a corner to spare in the VARSITY.

Mr. Gibson is disquieted about the condition of the classical curriculum : to me it seems that, if there be any connection between the tone or the style of his letter and the course of study which he has chosen, he is himself furnishing a testimonial to the present curriculum.

Now for the facts. Mr. Gibson suggests that in the final years no authors be prescribed, but a general knowledge of the classics be required. I am unable to agree with him at all, and for the following among other reasons :

(1) Much of the value of the classical course (as of all other courses) depends upon the excellence of the manner of studying. Sound honest work, whether in the shape of the disentanglement of grammatical intricacies, or in the shape of the analysis of a continuous argument, or in the shape of elaborate criticism of the author, linguistic or historical or philosophical, this is one of the chief factors in education, whether the results be worth retaining in the memory or not, whether the author studied be intrinsically valuable or not. I cannot but think that even students—notwithstanding the high moral ground they aspire to take on the scholarship question—would be sufficiently influenced by the character of the examination awaiting them (should the curriculum be altered in the way proposed) to skim hurriedly the whole range of the classics, instead of concentrating themselves on a small and prescribed portion of them. The immediate result would be that difficulties and minutiae would be impatiently ignored, and the net result would be the lessening of the educational value of the course.

(2) The actual degree of knowledge of the two languages would be lessened also. Students cast adrift into the sea of classics with no foothold surer than a knowledge of the books read at school, and in the first two years, would be unable to do justice to any author in the short time which they would be able to devote to him. Even under the present system is not the fourth-year man conscious not

so much of a well-digested store of knowledge and ideas, as of a chaos of isolated facts and fancies, depressing him not seldom with a sense of general mistiness and intangibility? I believe he is ; and I am sure that this feeling would be developed ten-fold by any change increasing the number of authors ; that is, of isolated books and periods. The last examiner's report which touched this question complained of the number of authors prescribed even in the old curriculum as *hindering profitable reading*. The new curriculum has reduced the number of authors, while increasing the prescribed portions of each and making such portions more consecutive. I am confident that all wise change will be on these lines. It is far better to know a few authors fairly well, than a large number very ill. In a foreign language no author is understood cursorily. How many even of thoughtful readers would, for example, appreciate the genius of Pericles or of Athens after one reading of the Funeral Speech? There are some things in which a man must "soak" himself by reading and re-reading if he is to comprehend.

(3) Experience I believe is against such a change. The Cambridge classical course used to be of the character which Mr. Gibson admires : and in England, where the classics are studied to so much greater advantage at school, there is much more to be said for the system. Yet the last alterations in the Cambridge curriculum, if I am not mistaken, have been an approximation to the Oxford method of prescribed authors.

Again, our own metaphysical course has been altered in the direction advocated. But why? Only because it was found impossible to prescribe authors agreeable to all the affiliated colleges.

So far from there being any other reason for the change, it is the opinion of Professor Young that in his department a course of prescribed reading, if well-selected and supplemented by lectures, is better than anything else, and accordingly, in the second and third years he now prescribes certain books, such as Green's *Prolegomena* to Ethics.

Finally, something of the same kind seems to have taken place in the Modern Language course, though not for the same reason. Time will show its wisdom or the reverse. I will only suggest that examinations conducted under such a system might lead to curious results. For example, probably I myself, who have made no study of the English language and literature, and when I speak correctly, speak yet chiefly from ear and acquired instinct, might in such an examination excel carefully trained Germans and Frenchmen, with whom English had formed the staple of education : just because, in spite of their scientific study of the language, I knew by mere familiarity, its idioms better and could express myself in it more fluently. Such a result would be a direct failure of justice, condemnatory of the system which made it possible.

(4) The vein of truth in Mr. Gibson's speculations is, it seems to me, abundantly recognized in the new curriculum when it prescribes unseen passages.

(5) The pre-eminent writers—whom he wishes to see read—are more likely to be read when prescribed than if left to chance and each student's fancy. He only specifies Plato : on the new curriculum Plato appears for the second year pass course, for the fourth year pass course, and for the third and fourth year honour course. The *Apology*, the *Gorgias*, seven out of ten books of the *Republic*, are on the course for this year. I agree with Mr. Gibson entirely in his choice of Plato, and it seems to me that the curriculum only expresses our joint views of the value of his works.

Unrest, uneasiness and vague discontents are of the very air we breathe just now, and I cannot expect even the serener atmosphere of the classics to dissipate it. But I venture to suggest to Mr. Gibson that, with the prospect of eight more books at least of Plato before him in the next two years, and an examination on the *Apology* in the more immediate future,

"τέτλαθι δὴ κρᾶδίη καὶ κύντερον ἄλλο ποτ' ἔτλης."

"Be brave, O heart, worse things hast thou endured."

I am, sir, yours,

Univ. College, April 2nd.

MAURICE HUTTON.