

THE VARSITY

A Weekly Journal of Literature, University Thought and Events.

VOL. X.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, MARCH 24, 1891.

No. 21.

Editorial Comments.



At the last meeting of the Senate a statute was passed providing that in the pass course Greek or French and German be required in each year of the course instead of two of the three as now. This change is no less important than surprising; what it involves will be more apparent after consideration of the phases through which this question has passed. Let us review them.

When the first regulation on the subject was made we cannot say, but as far back as 1880 it was felt that pass men should know something of French or German before being granted their degree, for the regulation was then in vogue that in the first and second years some *two* of the three languages, Greek, French, German, should be taken; there was a slight difference in the second, the pass men being required to read the honor work of French or German but to take only a *pass* standing. At the same time there was the option of Hebrew in place of either the French or German, but this is a minor matter and does not affect the question at issue. Thus, a pass man might take Greek and French without the German or Greek and German without the French; he had the further option of taking French in place of the Greek or German in place of the Greek. Plainly Greek was considered nothing more than the equal of French or German in the first and second years. This is the way the matter has stood for the past ten years until last spring when a change was made. Up till then no options had been allowed in the third and fourth years; Latin and Greek were required. The Senate then decided to allow an option in these years and of course the same one that they had been allowing for many years in the first and second. The equality of French, German and Greek having been thus long recognized in the lower years, the same principle was applied in the higher. The regulation was made that in the third and fourth years and consequently throughout the whole course two of the three languages French, German and Greek would be required. This was in no way a question of the equality or inequality of the three languages, for this, as has been shown, had been decided long before; it was merely a question of making the practice in the third and fourth years conform to that of the first and second—a very desirable thing indeed.

But the last enactment of the Senate changes all this and upsets everything that has been the practice for so many years; it takes us back to the position in which affairs stood ten or fifteen years ago. The new regulation provides that Greek or French and German be required. Under the new law, therefore, a man can get his degree without knowing a word of either French or German—a thing no one has been able to do during the past decade. This is undoubtedly a retrograde step, one distinctly opposed to the whole tendency of the age. Can the University of Toronto afford to take such a step? And why take it? What reasons have been shown? When and whence has the new light come to show that the modern languages aren't equally as necessary and as useful to the modern educated man as Greek, or, in fact, the Classics? The significance of such an action and its effects on the courses and curriculum cannot have been thoroughly realised or there would certainly have been some discussion in the public press. True, there has been a one-sided discussion in *The Educational Monthly* of the question of

the equality of Greek, French or German, but certainly nothing has been said on the much more important question of whether the University of Toronto ought to graduate men in Arts without requiring a knowledge of at least one of the two greatest living languages.

Should the question be re-opened, of which there is every prospect, there will probably be a more thorough discussion and this retrograde regulation, it is to be hoped, repealed.

The second year students in all the honor departments except Classics, Orientals and Modern Language have a grievance. They are required to take second year pass German, and they say that the work laid down in the curriculum is very much more than they can do, and they therefore propose to petition again to be relieved of some of it. We cannot but have a fellow-feeling for our brethren in distress, and cannot help hoping that they may be successful; their case certainly deserves to be considered with attention—even with leniency. There are, however, a few points suggested by such an action as the sophomores have taken, to which we wish to refer. There seems to be no question as to whether German should or should not be required of those taking honors in the second year; every one will admit that, in making it compulsory in all but two courses and optional in these, the Senate did what was right. The only question is as to the amount of work required. The petitioners claim that there is too much of it, and that what there is is very difficult. There is certainly more than ever has been on before, and some works that were formerly honor works are now on as pass work; on the other hand, the first year and matriculation work has been increased correspondingly, so that the conditions of these examinations being fulfilled, there is no especial difficulty in the second year work.

But are these conditions fulfilled and can they be? The latter certainly, but the former probably not. It is this fact that gives weight to the petition. To a great extent the petitioners know very little about German; perhaps very few of them, if put to the test now, could take more than a bare pass at matriculation, and yet they have to take second year work. What does this mean? It means that to-day almost the rudiments of French and German are being taught in the University—a most absurd but yet, under existing circumstance, a necessary proceeding. And why necessary? One reason is that a student can matriculate by taking Latin and Greek without the necessity of either French or German. But the real cause is behind this. The fault lies in the Collegiate Institutes and High Schools and in the methods of teaching there. Without wishing to reflect in any way on the good work done by the teachers in those institutions it must be said that to them is greatly due the state of affairs that exists in the University. For the most part the departmental rather than the matriculation examination is made the aim of most students of the great majority of these schools. Boys and girls with no particular aim other than the acquirement of a good education are, immediately after passing the entrance, directed to take third-class certificate work. Passing this they proceed to second-class and then decide to go to the University. Coming up weak in one department of their honor work they are weak students throughout their course; or not having taken the right languages for their after course they find themselves in the position that the second year students are to-day. And