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The English Language, Literature and History in McGill University.

That this University, in some of the branches of knowledge, equals at least any other institution on this continent, no one acquainted with the instruction given will deny. In the Natural Sciences, presided over by one whose fame in this department of knowledge is so well known, it is little, if any, behind the older European Universities. In the Mathematics, both honour and ordinary, McGill is known to excel, as any one who has passed the ordeal will readily testify. The Classical course will compare favourably with that of any college of the kind, both in the amount and thoroughness of the work done; while the Mental and Moral Philosophy Chair has lately become one of the first in the University. But of the English Course, we know of no other first class, nor even a second class, college in which the study of our mother tongue is so sadly neglected as in our own McGill. There is no longer any use in shutting our eyes to this fact—a fact patent to outsiders and severely felt by every graduate as he enters upon the realities of life. Indeed, it would seem as if they were looked upon by the authorities as something of merely secondary importance, and hence it is crowded out by other, and in our opinion less important, subjects. For example, in the first year, three hours per week are given to instruction in English, while Latin and Greek get five hours; and even these three hours are occupied in learning what every student should have known previous to matriculation. In the second year no advance is made in English on the previous year's work, while Classics receive four hours each week. During the third year, one hour per week is devoted to Rhetoric, to Classics three hours; and in the final year the students in the ordinary course meet the Professor of English one hour each week, and the Classical Professor two hours in the same time. Thus any one may easily see how very subordinate is the place held by our own language as compared with the ancient Greek and Latin. Why is this? Why is it that men whose purpose is to spend their lives in an English-speaking country should be permitted, much less compelled, to devote their time and attention so completely to the study of other branches as that an intimate acquaintance with their own tongue becomes absolutely impossible? In answer to this enquiry, we give the following reasons:—First: in England and Scotland, from the time of the revival of classical learning in the Elizabethan age, the opinion that the study of English Literature is far less beneficial to the mind than that of the Classics, has been prevalent; and inasmuch as the greater number of our professors have been educated in one or other of these countries,

they too are of the same opinion. Second: a pampering of the vulgar idea as to what constitutes a polished education, viz: a thorough familiarity with Classics, Mathematics, and Philosophy, while English is so simple that any time given to it would be ill spent. Third: that listlessness even in weighty matters incident to youth and inexperience.

Let us notice for a moment the effects of this indifference on the graduate. When a man receives his degree he enters upon a new sphere. His circumstances are changed; the daily routine of college life is with him now a thing of the past; instead of constant submission to authority he is left free to mark out and pursue his own line of action. In the estimation of the public he is no longer a student, but a man capable of benefiting his country, and bound in a measure to do so. It is now that the theoretical is turned, so far as may be, into the practical. All his college training and culture is only of advantage in so far as they fit him for a life of usefulness. Wherever he goes, whether a teacher, minister, lawyer, or physician, it is his acknowledged prerogative to lead any of the great questions agitating the country or bearing on the welfare of his fellow man. He cannot be listless. Indifference on the part of such would be considered, and rightly too, unpardonable. Now this being a graduate's position, he ought to be able to use his pen and tongue freely. He ought to be acquainted with the History of England in all its wide range and bearing, political, social, and religious, together with a knowledge of her language and literature. Otherwise he cannot discharge his duties properly. But our graduates being ignorant of these things when they leave college, must either be content to remain silent for years, until amid the anxieties and labours of their daily avocations the information is gathered, or else rush headlong into the arena of conflict, and then retire resolved to spend their days in comparative obscurity.

Is it remarkable that McGill turns out neither orators nor writers of more than merely local reputation? Is not this circumstance to be attributed in a great measure to the neglect of the forms and study of elocution, composition in all its departments, and the best models of oratory as presented in the speeches of English worthies? That this is the chief cause there is not a doubt in our own mind, nor could there be any room for doubt in the mind of any who would take the trouble to trace the history of the graduates of those institutions in which the mentioned subjects received due attention.

JERKAF MALDEN.

CORRECTION.—On this page of our last issue, a printer's error made "Berayer" instead of "Bereyer." Our French readers will please note, and pardon our error.