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The Study of Modern Languages.

The question of the advantages and disadvantages of making Latin and Greek studies the primary part of education has been discussed in almost all its conceivable bearings, and notwithstanding the eloquence and erudition that have been injected into the discussion, the question remains unsolved, and pagan literature, pagan ethics and pagan philosophy still hold their ascendancy in almost all the schools of modern times. It is not our purpose to enter into this discussion. Our object is simply to put in a plea in behalf of the study of modern languages. The importance and necessity of this study are becoming every day more and more apparent, and yet it does not seem that this fact receives the attention it deserves. No measures are taken to meet the exigency it clearly indicates. This indifference, or delinquency, arises, in part, from the reluctance of our institutions to introduce any change into the routine of an established curriculum. Innovations in this regard are held to be dangerous in principle, and suggestive, not so much of modifications of a system good in character yet carrying

with it very perceptible defects, but a total destruction of the system itself. This apprehension is indulged in to such an extent that it assumes at last all the characteristics of inveterate and morbid prejudice.

The educated, as contradistinguished from the masses of the people, may be divided into two classes: those who seek an education suited to their position in life, and adapted to the pursuits they are compelled, from the influence of circumstances, to follow; and those who, from affluence and leisure, can select a system of education in consonance with their tastes, mental power and intellectual inspiration. The object of the first is to compress within a very limited space of time as much practical learning as can be made available for the attainment of practical ends. To confine this class—by far the larger of those who attend colleges,—to the exclusive duty of studying Latin and Greek is simply to burden them with a labor that can never reach to a maturity of fruition. They learn neither Latin nor Greek; and unfortunately they learn nothing else—not even their own vernacular. But if this result had not its negative side, the evil might be both less conspicuous and less pernicious. But the result has a side of positive evil which it were well to weigh carefully. To almost all boys—the two or three first years of study in Latin and Greek are years of painful drudgery, engaged in without spirit, and submitted to by stress of discipline, not always of the most discreet and paternal kind. In this process there is no taste evoked, no habit of thought cultivated, no power of mental combination developed, no discriminating judgment exercised. The only discernible advance that has been made is found in the readiness with which the memory adopts, without incorporation, meaningless words and useless phrases. Thus armed, at the end of the second or third year at college, the boy of sixteen passes into the active pursuits of life—to the business of his father, or to the more independent movement of shifting for himself. It is not difficult to imagine the stress of intellectual inanity that impels him into that current of sensational literature, which whirls him along with its flow, amid dangers of the most serious character. How many succumb to the danger is only too well known! Now is it, or is not, possible that this serious evil might