

Comment by the Editor

THE COURSE OF EDUCATION

If, as Bacon thought, "*Histories* make Men Wise; *Poets* Witty; *The Mathematicks* Subtill; *Naturall Philosophy* deepe; *Morall* Grave; *Logick* and *Rhetorick* Able to Contend", then the courses of study in the early Iowa colleges were well designed to produce versatile alumni. Fifty or seventy-five years ago educators apparently believed that for "every Defect of the Minde," there is some "Special Receit"—just as physical weakness may be remedied by appropriate exercise. Certainly the institutions of higher education used to provide abundant treatment in the form of plain and fancy mental gymnastics.

In 1875 Whittier College prescribed only ancient and American history for the sake of wisdom, according to the Baconian formula, but included both natural and mental philosophy for depth. Although the students were dependent upon Virgil and Homer for training in wit, subtlety seems to have been a favorite virtue if arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and calculus produce it. Perhaps the courses in physics and chemistry "with experiments" were calculated to develop the power of concentration, inasmuch as the scholar who makes

demonstrations, "if his Wit be called away never so little, he must begin again". Formal instruction in morals was confined to the normal school term, as if teachers needed to be grave. Nor were students at Whittier College handicapped in the art of contention, for they studied debating as well as both logic and rhetoric.

Judging by the subjects taught before 1860, the graduates of private academies and female seminaries should have been unusually astute, profound, serious, and contentious, though somewhat deficient in wit and wisdom. Girls who attended the Lyons Female College studied "general history" only one term, while their knowledge of poetry was officially confined to Cowper and Milton. The academies assumed that mathematics, science, classical literature, and philosophy constituted the best preparation of young men for college or business, while young women were educated both in "useful and ornamental branches".

At the "Mount Pleasant High School and Female Seminary, commonly known as Howe's Academy, but by the especial kindness of its especial friends, frequently known as the Old Steam Mill", students were classified into four groups. The most advanced students, called Aristomachians, pursued trigonometry, logic, Latin, Greek, mental philosophy, moral philosophy, political economy, natural theology, and evidences of Christianity. The Philomatheans, or juniors, studied higher algebra, Latin,

Greek, geometry, rhetoric, universal history, astronomy, American literature, botany, and zoology. Sophomore Philotaxians devoted their attention to United States history, higher arithmetic, physical geography, algebra, English grammar, physiology, chemistry, natural philosophy, and Latin. First year students, the Philagathians, began with such elementary subjects as orthography, reading, object lessons, mental and written arithmetic, geography, English grammar, and Latin. Indeed, Latin was deemed to be "so much clear gain to the student, when properly taught" that it was offered to first year students free in order to induce every one to begin the study of that subject early.

In the mode of teaching, "as in many other particulars", Howe's Academy differed from "all other Institutions in the world." No other school could "accomplish so much in the same time, or do its work so well". Each student was "trained individually and in concert, to do his own work, give his reasons for so doing, and exhibit before the class, how, in the best possible manner, he would impart his acquisitions to others." He was taught that "the moment he begins to talk, or to write on the blackboard, he becomes the teacher of others." If a student could not "perform this duty *well*," he had to step aside and let another take his place. Whatever he knew at all he was compelled to know well, and whatever he undertook to teach he had to teach well; "hence no second-grade teaching" was

“allowed at all in this school.” Thus “the pupil that fails to-day, comes up to the standard to-morrow; and the result is that eventually there are no failures.”

That the hope of success might be heightened, opportunities for adolescent mischief were minimized by careful supervision. Whatever standards of morality and decorum that thorough Bible courses might fail to inspire, pure environment and strict social regulations were supposed to inculcate. Denmark Academy was not unique in proscribing “profanity, card playing and dancing”. The “use of intoxicants and the disturbing of the peace by shouting or otherwise by night” were also forbidden. At the Mount Pleasant Female Seminary “confectionaries and such eatables” were declared to be “contraband as detrimental to health” because they tended to “breed discontent and sickness among the Pupils and bring increased care, anxiety and labor for the Teachers.”

Methods of discipline were not invariably despotic, however. Quaker institutions, like Whittier College, believed that students “must learn to govern themselves if they expect to become useful members of society.” And even coeducation was defended as an influence of the most salutary kind upon both sexes. When the attendance of women at the University of Iowa (the first coeducational State university) declined in 1875, President Thacher was much concerned lest “the proportion

of young women become so small as to render their presence nugatory as a means of promoting genuine manliness on the part of the young men."

Both in object and method, studies used to follow the precepts of Bacon, serving "for Delight, for Ornament, and for Ability." Men had plentiful opportunity for reading, conference, writing, and scientific demonstration that they might become full, ready, and exact; while the avowed purpose of the female seminaries was to cultivate the resourcefulness and poise of practical ladies. But whether the curricula were designed for men or women or both together, education was considered to be a cultural process.

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