

*School Sciences.* Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1927, No. 22. 15 cents. (Excellent.)

#### PERIODICALS

*Current Science* (weekly). Looseleaf Education, Inc. 1123 Broadway, New York. \$1.00. Special club rates to schools.

*General Science Quarterly*—W. G. Whitman, Salem, Mass. (Invaluable). \$1.50.

*The Science Classroom*—250 Fourth Ave., New York City. 25 cents.

FRED C. MABEE AND OTHERS.

### NEEDS OF HIGH SCHOOL LATIN STUDENTS AS REVEALED IN COL- LEGE WORK

IT WAS with considerable reluctance that I consented to give this paper when your President approached me on the subject last spring, and as the time intervening between then and now has gone by, I have suffered many misgivings and qualms of conscience as I realized that I perhaps had little or nothing constructive to offer you in the way of criticism. I do, however, relish the opportunity of putting before you some of the absurdities arising from high school Latin as it is apparently taught, which I—and my colleagues in your colleges here in Virginia—are forced annually to face. I do this, understand me, with no sense of superiority, but only hoping that you may be interested in sharing with us some of our experiences.

I personally teach in what I believe is one of the best of the women's colleges in Virginia, one which draws students from all parts of the state—so I may assume, I think, that my knowledge of Virginia college students is pretty typical of the knowledge which other college professors in Virginia have of them. Our freshman requirement is such that the majority of our first year students take one year of college Latin. This is a course in Vergil's *Æneid*, if the student has come on to college with only three years of high school Latin; Livy and Horace if she enters with four years to her

credit. In many instances it is amazing—nay, even appalling—what their three or four years of preparation in high school have failed to do for them, for to be perfectly frank, a large proportion of the students who enter college every year come atrociously prepared in Latin. I am far from being one who credits everything that students say, but when a thing happens repeatedly over a series of years, I do eventually begin to take some stock in it. And in my experience it has been no uncommon thing for freshmen to explain to me that ponies and trots have been countenanced throughout their high school course or that interlinear translations have been recommended. Such students usually flounder for a time and then become hopelessly overwhelmed in a sea of difficulties. They have no fundamentals of grammar. I have honestly had freshmen students who did not know an adverb from a noun, who had never heard of the present and historical perfects, to whom sequence of tenses was not even a name, and who persisted in following up verbs of saying and thinking with *ut* clauses (which to make matters even worse sometimes contained an infinitive instead of a subjunctive). Yet in spite of all this, their high schools have passed them on to us for college work—often even with straight A records. What are we as college professors to do? It is physically impossible for us in the few scattered hours which we can scrape together outside of the classroom to build up a background which a normal student acquires in no less than three or four years.

Every fall as the first freshman Latin quiz approaches, I am greeted on all sides by worried students who maintain that they have never taken Latin quizzes before and that they are therefore at a loss as to how to go about studying for them. Or again, regarding Latin prose composition, I find that quite a universal defense of bad prose papers is the statement that during the last

year or year and a half of the student's high school training no prose composition has been taught. Of course, these are juvenile complaints. The more mature student would strive ahead in silence and suffer the consequences. And yet, as I hear these complaints again and again, I am often led to wonder what the aim of the high schools at the present time is. It certainly does not appear that they are making any very valiant effort to prepare students for college. In the good old days they used to attempt this, at least. And I wonder if it is not still their duty.

Sometimes I wonder if you who teach in high schools are not devoting too much time to the purely pedagogical side of the matter at the expense of the real meat of your subjects. It is a fact constantly to be deplored, that that fad and fancy of modern instruction, commonly called under the misapplied name of "education," has during the past ten years or so made vast inroads upon the curricula of our secondary schools. I sometimes think that it does not matter so much any more what we teach, or whether we teach anything at all, so long as we have a method. And I sadly fear that this is the case with Latin. Education so-called is not content to let the dear, dead classics speak for themselves in dignified fashion as they once did, but it seeks to relegate them degradingly to the realms of the kindergarten in one sweeping effort to make students of the classics out of members of our younger generation who have not even the proper stamina to imbibe them.

Those of us who attend the meetings of the Southern Section of the Classical Association in the spring of the year, know all too well that one must each year sit through the reading of two or three papers with titles like the following: "How to Make Latin Interesting to the High School Student," "Some Devices for Making the Teaching of High School Latin Interesting," "Some Detours in the Teaching of

Latin." The titles themselves are a curious and illuminating commentary on our modern educational tactics. But the contents of the papers are still more so.

It develops from these papers that many of you are setting up so-called Latin laboratories, the chief equipment of which, so far as the uninitiated can determine, appears to be old magazines, cardboard, paste, and scissors, and their chief aim seems to be to construct charts. And it appears that your students weave stories on these charts, in good or bad Latin, around pictures of every conceivable nature. I have even seen these charts when they centered around such idiotically non-classical themes as George Washington and four snow men seated about a table. Is it any wonder that the *Ablative Absolute* and *cum temporal clauses* are beginning to suffer amid such nonsense as this?

I recently spent a half hour questioning some of my freshmen as to their high school upbringing in Latin and I learned some remarkable facts. Perhaps the most interesting was the statement advanced by one of them that it had been a part of her course in Cæsar for each member of the class to dress a doll properly in a Roman toga. So far so good. But it seems that the day the dolls so dressed were due, dolls of all kinds were presented to the teacher and accepted, including Kewpies! Surely this is verging fast on the farcical.

And then there are Latin Clubs—a further device for interesting the high school student. I for one am decidedly sceptical as to their value, especially when the students belonging to them make a point of celebrating a purely American Thanksgiving in some supposedly fitting Roman fashion and sing "Jingle Bells" in Latin at Christmas time.

Where is fled the time honoured respect which has always been shown the classics? Surely such absurdities as these can never be expected to go far to create a classical

background. But just consider, if you please, what the time and energy consumed in these hollow performances would do for the average student if properly utilized in reading Latin itself. I do not say bore your students—for there is a wealth of interest for the youthful mind even in Cæsar and Cicero and Vergil, and if it is properly gotten across to the students it cannot fail to please. But I do say make them know thoroughly first hand at least a limited number of the classics, and don't make a mere farce out of the language in which they are written. It is the elements of a classical background that you ought to be instilling, together with a good working understanding of the Latin language.

I admit that there are two things which make the task more difficult than it might otherwise be. The first is the vast number of young people whom we are at present trying to educate. Our high schools are much overcrowded, and a great many of the teachers (especially in the smaller schools) are handling a far greater number of students than they should. This no doubt—in a measure, at least—accounts for the seeming lack of discrimination in the students whom they are sending on for college work. But it is a condition which must be remedied and remedied soon if the high schools are to succeed in training students for college work.

Secondly, as I am well aware, some of you—perhaps many of you—are decidedly out of your chosen field. That, of course, is in no way your fault, but the fault of our system. It is sad, but true that our school boards do not make a more definite effort to fill Latin positions with Latin majors. It is hard, I admit, if you have specialized in chemistry to find that you must teach Latin, or *vice versa*, but I have known all too many cases where such is the truth. If you will permit me in closing I will give the two most striking instances of this which have come to my attention.

In the early days of my teaching at Hollins I had a student whom I inherited from my predecessor, who had failed to pass our required freshman course the year before I came, and it fell to my lot to carry her through it for a second time. It was no agreeable task. She knew no Latin, but finally when June came, out of the kindness of my heart, I put her through, thinking that she had suffered long enough. Two years later she graduated with a major in science—a mediocre student throughout her course. The following year she came back to college as an alumna on a visit, and meeting me on the campus, she danced gaily up to me with the greeting: "Dr. Smith, I am sure you can never guess what I am teaching." I assured her that I could not. She informed me that it was Latin. In stunned surprise I exclaimed, "My dear girl, how can you? You don't know any." "But," she replied, "it was the only vacancy in our high school and I wanted to do something." I am still wondering what her students learn, for she is still after several years teaching Latin. Fortunately none of her products have as yet come my way.

I have also the converse of this. The best major I have ever turned out is teaching in a small high school in Virginia and is teaching every subject in the high school curriculum, I verily believe, except Latin!

E. MARION SMITH

## A HISTORICAL PAGEANT

THE fourth grade wanted to give some type of dramatization. After reading a number of stories about early Virginia history, they decided to give a historical pageant.

### I. What the Children Did

A. They read widely for information and background material.

1. They read history books and stories relating to the settlement of Virginia.