

## A FRENCH EXPERIMENT IN EDUCATION

READERS of THE VIRGINIA TEACHER are familiar with French educational theory as it has usually been practiced in the *lycées* and *collèges* of France. They are also aware of the fact that there are a few schools in France which do not fit into the traditional mold except in so far as they follow the study program of the Ministry of Public Instruction. It is the purpose of this little article to sketch briefly the life and daily program of one of these rare non-conforming schools at which the writer, a decade ago, was the *professeur d'anglais*.

The school occupied<sup>1</sup> an old château, two hundred yards from the Seine, some eighteen miles above Paris at Soisy-sous-Etiolles, and was appropriately known as the Ecole du Château. It had been founded by an American, H. P. Williamson de Visme (later founder of the justly famous French School of Middlebury College and of the Institute of French Education at the Pennsylvania State College) and a Swiss, Paul Jeanrenaud, shortly before the World War; but this great cataclysm ended its life temporarily. Its present existence as a private school<sup>2</sup> preparing boys for the French baccalaureate dates from the close of the War. In this period it has been entirely under the direction of M. Jeanrenaud, who has become well known as an educator in France.

The theory animating this school is that while one must retain the scholarly thoroughness of the traditional *lycée*, one should devote definite attention to the recreational and athletic side of the educational process. Such a theory was acceptable in post-War France, but really only as a theory. As a

result, M. Jeanrenaud started with but few pupils, little money, and much hope. In those early years, the boys were almost wholly from the Parisian bourgeoisie, although there were a few young aristocrats and some boys from the French provinces, colonies, and from foreign lands. The writer can say that they were an attractive lot differing only in certain externals, for the most part, from boys everywhere. It is a pleasure to say that the school has enjoyed increasing prosperity and renown with the passing years and that its scholastic record is a good one. The program of the average day<sup>3</sup> in this school will show how the theory was put into practice.

The students slept in groups of from three to eight in unheated rooms. In winter, it was necessary for them to crack the ice in their pitchers to perform their morning ablutions. The writer remembers that in spite of (or because of) this Spartan life there was practically no illness.

The rising bell sounded between quarter and half past seven. Breakfast was at eight and was served, as were all the meals, in the plainly furnished château dining room. The boys and teachers sat at big oval tables seating about a dozen each and there was ample opportunity for interesting conversation. In passing, it may be of interest to say that each boy upon coming down to breakfast went and shook hands with each teacher in order of age and rank in the school life. Classes started at nine and lasted until noon. Lunch was served almost immediately. Next came a recess lasting until 1:30 when classes were resumed for one hour. The next step in the program was the one so radical for the France of that day: it included nearly two hours of athletics, ending with a swim in the Seine. All students were required to take part. The requirement might as well

<sup>1</sup>It is now at Jouy-en-Josas near Versailles and is called the Ecole du Moncel.

<sup>2</sup>Although there are a few day students, the school is essentially of the boarding school type. It will be remembered that the *lycées* have both day students and boarding students, likewise.

<sup>3</sup>Although the hour arrangement was slightly different for a couple months in the winter, the program followed for the greater part of the school year will be given here.

have been omitted, for the man in charge made the work so attractive that no student would have wished not to take part.

The two favorite sports were field hockey and Association football. Track events were staged from time to time. Tennis was popular, too. The writer, simply because of his nationality and inclination, not because of any special skill, helped out when baseball was in order. In passing, from the point of view of psychology, it is interesting to note that French boys could derive no fun from playing the outfield since periods with nothing to do but watch the others play were distressing to them. The result usually was that when a play did come their way, they were gazing in any but the proper direction. Calisthenics and gymnastics received much attention. The writer has seen the boys, lightly clad, on their backs in slush going through their exercises in winter—and enjoying the process!

This period of supervised play ended with a swim in the Seine from which all returned for tea at 4:30. Although nothing but tea and bread were served, this little repast was enjoyed by all and indeed was necessary, for dinner was not served until 7:30. From 5:00 to 7:30 there was a study-hall required of all, although some of the older boys had a certain amount of class work during this period.

The dinner at 7:30 was the heaviest meal of the day, yet it was on the whole, frugal. Wine was served but two or three times during the year, upon some special occasion, such as Armistice Day. In winter all except the oldest were in bed by 8:30, assuring long hours of sleep. During most of the year, however, the boys played in the lovely *parc* of the château until nine. A custom which will amuse, if not interest, the reader is that of the good night greeting. All of the boys sought out the teachers individually to bid them good night and those who were not older than thirteen exchanged kisses with their taskmasters! The writer tried to evidence no surprise at this custom

which was well established and looked upon as perfectly natural, but in practice he limited his good night greetings to a cordial American hand shake.

Contrary to the usual French custom, classes were held on Thursdays, but not, except for special lessons, on Saturdays. Saturday morning was devoted to outdoor work about the grounds and to free play. Saturday afternoons often found the whole group on hikes, and in the evening there were impromptu theatricals, readings, and music.

One can not fail to see that such a program was most conducive to health and that it offered a valuable counterpoise for the heavy scholastic work preparatory to the French baccalaureate. The students were ready to face this difficult and all important examination at seventeen or eighteen, possessing a healthy body plus that culture one expects in the educated young Frenchman. Such a school might well serve as a model even in this country where we have done better than the French in approximating a good balance between studies on the one hand, and sports and athletics on the other.

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## SOME CURRENT PROBLEMS IN BIOLOGY

**B**IRTHDAYS are the fashion this year of George Washington's bicentenary celebration. During the month of January there occurred an anniversary at the laboratories of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, which unheralded to the world at large, was nevertheless of profound significance. I refer to the twentieth anniversary or "birthday," of Carrel's chick heart culture. I have not a record of the exact day in January, 1912, when this culture was started. That is unimportant. The significant fact is that this culture, or to be strictly accurate, the tissue grown from this culture is still alive,