

Dictated.

The University of Chicago

*Elective
System*



April 13, 1905.

My dear President:-

You have come back into an atmosphere of battle. The scheme reached by the Junior College Commission has still to go through various bodies.

It is a pity that the hope which you expressed about a couple of years ago, namely that we should hear no more of this question for five years, could not have been fulfilled; *for in that case I think it would not have come up at all.* There are very clear signs of a reaction coming in other parts of the country. We have held constantly thus far the moderately conservative position which you laid down at the outset. We have neither a free elective system nor a system of complete requirements. We have a system which allows a man to choose one of four groups as he enters, then to exercise his own discretion for a part of his second year, and so to attain to practically complete freedom in his third and fourth years, after having obtained a sufficiently wide survey of human activity to enable him to judge with some wisdom.

In the general groups among which our students have thus far chosen, the requirements are such as you believed would give a wide foundation and a breadth of culture. You held ^{to} Greek as a requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, feeling doubtless that that name belonged by right of usage to the older conception of humanistic training. For the other non-scientific courses you

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Handwritten notes:
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April 12, 1905

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It is a pity that the hope which you expressed about a

couple of years ago, namely that we should have no more of this *from what I can see I think it will be done up at all* question for five years, could not have been fulfilled. There are

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far chosen, the requirements are such as you believed would give a

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quirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts, feeling doubtless that

that name belonged by right of usage to the other conception of

humanistic training. For the other non-scientific courses you

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replaced Greek by other things, but left Latin, feeling that it was necessary to any sound preparation for any kind of non-scientific study. For the course in Science, you likewise required the preparatory work in Latin (arranging that a part of it might be done here). Your conception probably was in part that of cultural training, and in part that of giving some power of handling the Latin terminology which plays so large a part in natural science.

The recent legislation of the Junior College has spared Greek and Latin in the course in Arts, because it was held that you would not consent to a change there. It has thrown out Latin completely not only from the course in Science, but from the course in Literature. It has still kept the three degrees, because it was felt that you would not consent to giving them up. But the men who have led in the entire movement (they are mainly men of the natural sciences), have said quite plainly, in private, that what they wanted ultimately was a single degree, with the largest possible freedom.

When Herbert Putnam of the Congressional Library was here recently, and heard of this, he told me he supposed our people thought that they were following the modern spirit in what they were doing; whereas, in point of fact, we were behind the times; *for* in the East, he said, the strong tendency was to return partway to the older condition of things, - in short, to a position very much like that which we all along have held. When Professor Beale of the Harvard Law School was here yesterday, he told me that there was the greatest dissatisfaction and alarm ^{*in Harvard College*} over the condition of things which the

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elective system has brought about there. (You remember what I have for some years been saying to you of my conviction, about Harvard.) He says there are comparatively few at Harvard who would today vote for the elective system which they have. I told him I thought Harvard was at a better point twenty-five years ago than it is now. He said that ^{this} is precisely what a large number of the faculty ~~people~~ think, and that there surely would be a movement backward, though he could not tell how far it would go. He said that he, with many others, believed in a return to the system of required work for ^{all} men in the Freshman year, and that it ought to be substantially what it used to be. He also expressed great surprise at our having thrown out the requirement of Latin in the course in literature.

He thought likewise that great harm had been done to the schools by the large extension of the elective system. With my remark that President Eliot had accomplished two things in this country, viz., the over-development of the elective system in colleges and schools, and the general reduction or disappearance of Greek, he entirely agreed.

Now we, while in all our general conceptions ^{we} are thoroughly open-minded and modern, have constantly ^{held} ~~had~~ the position in these matters to which, as I believe, and as the signs seem to point, the universities of this country are going ultimately to return. It is a great pity if, instead of ourselves standing firm, we must be swept away by the very movement which is now spending itself, and must ^{then} ~~once~~ ^{have to} ~~more~~ find our ~~own~~ way back *again*.

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find our way back again

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So much for the main bearings of this movement. -- Let me add that it is a rather amusing circumstance to me that I have just received a letter from a botanist in another university, consulting me with regard to Latin botanical nomenclature. *our botanists don't want to ask their students to study Latin.*

I understand Professor Burton will soon call us together to study further the plans for the Classical Building. ~~our botanists don't want to ask their students to study Latin.~~

It is a pleasure to know that you are back again and have made such gains.

Faithfully yours,

W. V. Hale

The University of Chicago

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Sincerely yours,

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