

BOARD OF EDUCATION.

MAY 16, 1849.

The following Report was submitted by the Executive Committee for the Care, Management and Government of the Free Academy, and, after the adoption of the accompanying rule, additional to those already established for the admission of students, was ordered to be printed under the direction of the Committee.

JOHN A. STEWART, Clerk.

THE Executive Committee for the care, management and government of the Free Academy, at the close of the year for which they were appointed, beg leave to present a brief view of the progress of the institution, and offer a few observations as to the future. There are some subjects connected with the admission of students at the next examination, and the means of instructing them when received, that should receive the attention of the Board at an early day.

The scheme of instruction in the Academy, and the distribution of the hours, have been arranged in accordance with the authority heretofore given by the Board. The students assemble at nine and remain till three o'clock, with a half-hour's intermission at 12 M. An hour and a half of this time is available for study; three hours are devoted to three daily recitations, and the last hour is employed alternately in an exercise in drawing, or phonography. On Saturday there is no recitation; an hour is employed in drawing, or phonography, and one and a half to two hours in declamations.

It was thought desirable that the main labor of the scholars should be devoted to three distinct branches of study at the same time—in the department of history and belles lettres, mathematics, and languages. Accordingly, they have a recitation each day in

ancient history, algebra, and French, or Latin—ninety-six of the class having chosen the former language, and forty-seven the latter. If they possess sufficient intellectual development to prosecute these three prominent studies at the same time, there seem to be advantages in imparting a character of completeness to the course as it advances, instead of giving it a narrow direction. The general education of the student is thus going on symmetrically.

Considerable study is required in order to prepare for the recitations. The subjects are of a character to demand the close application of good minds. Without diligence no scholar can keep pace with the class. The best students devote several hours at home each day to study. The opportunity has been offered to those who should choose, to remain in the building till a later period of the day for the purpose of study. At present, none avail themselves of this privilege. In arranging the length of the lessons, particular attention has been paid, so to regulate the amount of study to be performed as to meet the ability of those of fair capacity and industry. The advantages of the Free Academy are for those who possess these qualifications, and the most rapid progress is to be aimed at that is consistent with the health of the students and their fair average ability. Those who excel in talent or power of application may distinguish themselves, as some in the institution are now doing, by the thoroughness of their preparation and the accuracy of their recitations.

In addition to the daily recitations and exercises above enumerated, the students are required to prepare written compositions, in a rotation which occupies three weeks, and to perform exercises in declamation, which recur to each individual at a little longer interval.

No instruction has been given during the term in chemistry. The reasons for this have been stated in previous reports. It was deemed advantageous to delay instruction in this science until the minds of the students are better prepared to pursue it. The aim will be to teach chemistry in a thorough scientific manner. It must be taught in a way to make it valuable to those who acquire it, for purposes of practical use in the arts. Professor Gibbs has been engaged in preparing a plan for the laboratory, which it is designed to fit up very completely, and he will superintend the work while

it is going on. He is also employed under the instructions of the Committee in selecting philosophical and chemical apparatus, and in preparing orders for such articles as are to be manufactured or imported.

The students do not seem to be overtasked. They are, for the most part, laboring very diligently, and are animated by a laudable ambition. They are in general, youth of fine minds, and their progress is such as to reflect credit upon them, and upon their very able and devoted teachers. The discipline maintained in the institution is admirable. The Board will be enabled to acquire more complete information, and form a more satisfactory opinion as to the progress of the class and the results of five months instruction, by attending, as far as may be in their power, the examination at the close of the term.

A very exact system of registration is kept up, of the merit of each individual's recitation, in every department. And as each scholar in all the sections is examined every day in all the studies prepared, a complete record is kept of the progress of each individual. The quality of each recitation and performance while he is in the institution, is noted down and preserved. There is no mode of escape from the demand upon each student, that he shall be prepared in all his lessons. The absences are thus brought to view, and cases of disorder are noted. These records will furnish the most complete evidence as to the competency or inability of each student to maintain his position with the class in their progress.

There are a few of the students who lack the capacity, or maturity, or industry, to continue on with the rest of the class in the prosecution of their higher studies. It is unfair that they should be a drawback upon those who have done well, all that has been required of them. It is necessary to have a standard all the way through the course that is to be pursued in the institution. Those who fall below the standard must, at the end of the term, be left behind. Some will have the opportunity offered them of passing over the same subjects again with a succeeding class. There will be cases no doubt, where it is not worth while for the student to make the attempt, or where the privilege is not deserved. Youth who are in either of these positions must remain contented with the

education they have acquired, and direct their energies to such occupation as they may be fitted for.

At the examination in February, the Professors were guided by the principle of interpreting the rule for admission according to its terms, and at the same time with liberality. It may have been thought by some in consequence of the large number who were not admitted, that a higher degree of perfectness was exacted, than was necessary or desirable. The committee are satisfied that the admissions were quite as liberal as they ought to have been. The Professors have found that on the whole they were rather less strict in their requisition than it would be desirable to be at future examinations.

There are two considerations to be taken into view in connection with this subject. First, the Free Academy is not to interfere with the schools, nor to usurp their province. It should receive no pupils who have not reached, in the branches designated as the subjects of examination for admission, the highest point that can be attained in the common schools. It would be doing them injustice, and defeat the aim of improving the character of the instruction in them, which is one of the great advantages anticipated from the establishment of the higher seminary. In the second place, unless the scholar has had his understanding developed and cultivated in the prosecution of his studies in the school in a thorough manner, and attained the full measure of the standard, he is not prepared for the difficult subjects that are to be pursued in the Free Academy.

The examination must be directed towards ascertaining the degree of discipline that the mind of the student has undergone. The mere ability to work examples in arithmetic does not exhibit his comprehension of the science—he must explain the rule and the reasons of his process. The examination in grammar must establish the fact of his acquaintance with the structure of language, or he is not properly qualified for pursuing such a scholar-like and vigorously moving course of study in ancient or foreign languages, as should be maintained in the Free Academy. The examination in history must show that the scholar has really reflected on the facts and treasured them in his mind, instead of merely committing to memory from time to time the paragraphs and sentences of

his author. In the examinations in writing and spelling an amount of exercise must be required that will test thoroughly the pupil's acquaintance with orthography, his command of language, and his ability to construct sentences.

The question of the propriety of fixing a limit of age under which no scholar shall be admitted into the institution, has been carefully considered by the committee. They are of the opinion that it is expedient to fix a limit. Several of those admitted are under twelve years of age. One or two are only in their eleventh year. They have not as yet maturity of intellect sufficient to pursue advantageously the branches that are to be taught in the institution. Quickness of apprehension and facility of acquisition do not suffice for some of these subjects. Without a certain maturity of mind a boy will prosecute them to great disadvantage. Even if he pass through them creditably, he will receive comparatively little lasting benefit from them. It may be a permanent injury to the future growth and expansion of the understanding. It is a dangerous experiment, both as regards the mind and the body, to stimulate a precocious intellect. The latter of these considerations is one that should never be lost sight of in the process of education. If the school does not furnish physical training in connection with its cultivation of the mind, it must at least in its management take care that the body sustains no injury from the over exertion of the active spirit that dwells within it. The younger boys received into the Academy do not appear to have the development of constitution requisite to sustain the labors of a course in the institution.

It is recommended that for the present no student be admitted who is less than twelve years of age. This limit will not exclude all who would be benefitted by delaying their course in the institution. It may be deemed expedient hereafter to raise the limit, in case the standard of admission should be raised. It is certainly not an unreasonable requisition. It is for the advantage of those who would be kept back by its operation. They need not let their education be suspended, while waiting for the limit of age that has been fixed. They can lay again more thoroughly the foundations, on which hereafter the solid structure of a complete education is to

be reared, and may acquire a variety of diversified knowledge of a character not tasking so severely the strength of the understanding. By means of this delay, they will be more likely to reach that grand consummation of the training of a youth, *a sound mind in a sound body*, and to become better scholars and abler men, than by a more rapid advance and earlier termination of their educational career.

It is proposed to assign the month of July to the examinations. The examination of the class in the institution will probably occupy the greater part of two weeks. The examination for admission will commence by the middle and consume the remainder of the month. It is deemed every way desirable that this examination should occur before the August vacation. As regards the candidates, the interval of a month's absence from school would cause them to appear to great disadvantage. The ensuing term would commence without delay, and the knowledge beforehand of the number to be instructed would afford the opportunity of maturing the organization and making all necessary arrangements.

Some attention has been given to the subjects of study that should be prosecuted during the next term by the present class, chiefly with the view of determining in connection with such estimate as should be made of the number who will then be in the institution, the additional teachers that will be required to conduct the instruction. It is not necessary at this time to arrange precisely or to decide definitely the studies to be pursued during the ensuing year. This may be properly left to the next Board to organize after careful deliberation. The subjects of instruction will naturally, for a period, be chiefly in the same departments, and of the same character, as those which are introduced.

There are no data on which to base a satisfactory estimate as to the number who will be received at the next admission. The teachers cannot themselves yet form any very definite opinion as to the number who will wish to enter for the examination from their respective schools. The prevailing impression is that the number who will apply in July, will be less than at the February examination. They will probably be, as a whole, more accurately prepared, but then the rule requiring a good examination in all the branches designated will be interpreted rather more strictly than before. It is to be expected that the present class will suffer some

diminution. There may be some who cannot continue in the institution with any credit to it or advantage to themselves. Others will probably be withdrawn at the close of the present term. Four have left already to enter upon some occupation.

Assuming then that the number of the class to be admitted in July will not exceed that now in the institution, and that but a small portion of the latter will leave, we have a basis on which we may estimate the number of teachers that will be required.

It seems proper here to introduce a few observations as to the proportion of teachers to the number of students to be instructed. The class in the institution has been divided into sections, averaging twenty-four each. This allows each student to have a recitation at each lesson, tests his preparation, and brings him constantly under the training influence of the teacher's mind. His rapid advance is secured, and his understanding rapidly expands under the process. It is the way to bring up all the pupils to a high standard, and to turn out thorough scholars. With larger sections the advantage of daily recitation would be lost, as it now requires close attention to hear them all within the hour. It is particularly important during the first year in the institution—which is the year of probationary discipline, and decides the character of the scholarship during the rest of the course. It may be that the advanced classes can be profitably instructed in somewhat larger sections, when they do not daily require the immediate drill of the Professor. And there are subjects which can be pursued without disadvantage in large classes.

It is to be observed further that one of the Assistants engaged in the institution has been employed in duties of instruction that are independent of the daily recitations of the class. His time is entirely occupied in attending to the compositions and drilling in declamation. Both of these branches of education are the subjects of special teaching in the Free Academy. The process of marking the composition of each student with various signs, indicating the character of the errors, or suggestive of some mode of reconstruction, is one involving great labor. The composition has to be recast by the student after undergoing this scrutiny and again submitted to the teacher. Careful training in declamation is also believed to be an important subject of education.

On careful consultation with the Faculty in regard to the whole subject, the conclusion has been reached, that the following additional instructors may probably be required at the commencement of the term in September :

An Assistant in the Department of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy.

An Assistant in the Department of the Latin and Greek Languages and Literature.

Two Assistants in the Department of History and Belles Lettres.

It is not expedient to take any action at this time with the view of making these appointments, or deciding any thing definitely in relation to the matter. More precise information may be obtained as to the requirements of the institution before it is necessary to act. But it seems desirable that some notice should be given of the view of the case entertained by the present Committee on the Free Academy, in order that those desiring such situations may make application for them. The Board have had the advantage of selecting the Professors and teachers already appointed from among a very large number of highly qualified candidates. It is a matter of fairness in itself, as well as one of great importance to the institution, that applications should be invited for such positions as may be established, or become vacant from time to time.

The Committee respectfully recommend to the Board the adoption of the following rule, additional to those already established for the admission of students into the Free Academy.

Fourth. No person of less than twelve years of age shall be entitled to admission.

All which is respectfully submitted.

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NEW YORK, May 16, 1849.