

# THE REFORM OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN FRANCE

I. L. KANDEL



Studies of the International Institute  
of Teachers College, Columbia University

# THE REFORM OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN FRANCE

BY

I. L. KANDEL, PH.D.

PROFESSOR OF EDUCATION AND ASSOCIATE IN THE  
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE  
OF TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Published by

**Teachers College, Columbia University**

New York City

1924

## PREFACE

One of the most difficult questions now confronting those who are interested in the readjustment of secondary education to the new needs of modern democracy is to reach a satisfactory definition of the terms liberal education and culture. The accompanying account of the Reform of French Secondary Education initiated by M. Léon Bérard is presented in some detail as an attempt to answer this question made by one of the leading cultural countries of the world. This answer was not framed over night but is the result of vigorous and impassioned discussions lasting over three years. Because the whole field of secondary education was so thoroughly canvassed from every point of view, the International Institute of Teachers College, Columbia University, hopes that a summary and documented account of the progress of the reform will not only be of interest but will be of assistance to the American educator in analyzing the same problems.

I. L. K.

MAY, 1924

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. THE FRENCH TRADITION . . . . .	5
III. THE SYSTEM UNDER CRITICISM . . . . .	10
IV. THE BERARD REFORM . . . . .	13
V. THE NEW SYSTEM . . . . .	24
VI. SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR GIRLS . . . . .	29
VII. CONCLUSION . . . . .	30

### APPENDICES

I. REPORT OF M. PAUL CROUZET TO THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION AND FINE ARTS ON THE PRESENT STATE OF THE PROPOSALS FOR THE REFORM OF SECONDARY EDUCATION . . . . .	33
II. REPORT OF THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION AND FINE ARTS TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC . . . . .	68
III. THE DECREE OF MAY 3RD, 1923 . . . . .	78
IV. THE NEW TIME-SCHEDULES AND PROGRAMMES OF SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR BOYS, DECEMBER 3RD, 1923 . . . . .	81
French . . . . .	86
Latin . . . . .	92
Greek . . . . .	96
History . . . . .	98
Geography . . . . .	109
Modern Foreign Languages . . . . .	113
Mathematics . . . . .	118
Natural Sciences . . . . .	126
Physics and Chemistry . . . . .	129
Philosophy . . . . .	134
Drawing . . . . .	137

V.	APPLICATION OF THE NEW SECONDARY COURSES OF STUDY . . . . .	139
VI.	THE CERTIFICAT D'ETUDES CLASSIQUES . . . . .	140
VII.	ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL COURSES IN LATIN . . . . .	141
VIII.	SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR GIRLS . . . . .	143
	Report of the Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts to the President of the French Republic . . . . .	143
	DECREE OF MARCH 25TH, 1924 . . . . .	144
IX.	FRENCH HIGHER ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS . . . . .	152
X.	THE BÉRARD REFORM AMENDED . . . . .	156
INDEX	. . . . .	157

# THE REFORM OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN FRANCE

## I

### INTRODUCTION

It would be difficult to find in the history of education a period that has been as rich and many-sided in the discussion of the problems of education as the first quarter of the present century. Not only has the world in general become more sensitive to its needs and to the demands that can be made on education, but the increasing complexities of modern life have only served to intensify the preoccupation with educational questions to an extent that is unparalleled in any other era. This intensive interest in education was in any event the natural outcome of the extending boundaries of democratic institutions throughout the world. The Great War not only helped to bring to a focus all the questions that education was to solve, but conducted to a clearer recognition of the meaning of democracy, of human worth and of nationalism, and, if with less clarity and precision perhaps, has added another question, that of the relation of nations to each other. It is because each nation brings to a consideration of these problems a different tradition, different temperaments, different social organizations, that the study of education has acquired a new interest and a new significance, for in the varying answers that will be brought to the solution of these questions lies the hope of the century. The development of a science of education, widely accepted in the United States, and to less extent in other countries, holds out promises and dreams in which the educator of other centuries could not indulge with any degree of confidence. At the same time it is only by a study of the efforts made by leaders in different countries and under varying social, political and economic conditions to solve the pressing problems of education, that the possibilities of a science which

sets out to deal with the human element can be recognized and defined.

The question that has overshadowed every other question in education during the past twenty-five years is that which covers the education of the adolescent period. The nineteenth century was largely concerned with the elementary school; how to bring every child within its scope, what to teach, and how to teach were the chief preoccupations. The first two of these questions have in general been answered; if there remains some doubt about subject matter the question is on the whole intimately associated with questions of method, which hold the first place in all educational discussions. But in the field of post-elementary education nothing has yet been answered with any certitude. So long as secondary education was regarded as the education of an élite of brains or social class, the problem was simple; so too was it simple during the three centuries when, in spite of periodical protests and conflicts, the classics were regarded as the proper and sole content of a higher education. The unrest in secondary education came to a head at almost the same time—in the last decade of the nineteenth century—in most of the leading cultural countries, in Germany, France, England and the United States. The questions (that remained to be solved in the twentieth century) were ably summarized by Sir Michael Sadler in his analysis of the causes of *Unrest in Secondary Education in Germany and Elsewhere*<sup>1</sup>:

Thus, all over the world, wherever education is being seriously studied, the fundamental issues are being raised. At first sight they may seem simple, and only capable of one kind of solution. But, on closer analysis, they turn out to be extraordinarily difficult. Every kind of education, like every kind of manufacture, must have an aim. What, for example, does a "secondary" school aim at, as distinguished from a "public elementary" school? For what kind of life do you purpose to educate this boy or that? And are girls to be educated for the same kind of life as boys? Are you going to educate all children alike, whatever the position of their parents, and whatever their own probable occupation in later life? If the answer be Yes, how long is such a common education to extend? How much will it cost the local community or the central State? Who shall decide what the "common course" is to be? Must everyone alike contribute to the cost of it? Will you allow parents, if they so pre-

<sup>1</sup> England, Board of Education. *Special Reports on Educational Subjects*, Vol. ix, p. 14. London, 1902.



fer, to bring up their children outside it? If so, at the parents' own expense? And what control should the State exercise over the course of studies in such outside institutions, and over the spirit and temper of their management? Above all, for what kind of social order do you propose to prepare the children? This is the most fundamental and necessary question of all, and, it must be added, exactly the question upon which the central mass of moderate people seem to have least made up their mind.

Partial answers had been given to some of these issues in the reform of secondary education for boys in Germany in 1901 and in France in 1902, in the reform of secondary education for girls in Prussia in 1908, in the extension of facilities for secondary education in England following the Education Act of 1902, and in the United States in the rapid expansion of the public high school, declared a part of the common school system in the *Kalamazoo Case* of 1874 and made possible by the acceptance of the principle that any subject competently taught for the same length of time is as good as any other subject. But these solutions are not complete answers for all the issues raised in the above quotation. The increase and improvement of elementary education everywhere have produced a more enlightened public more insistent for further education. The intensification of international competition both before and since the War has aroused national ambition everywhere for better educational preparation, while the broader conception of democracy as affecting not merely political but social and economic organization and as placing greater responsibility on the individual as a citizen and as a producer has increased the demands for further education both as the right and the duty of the individual. At the same time the catastrophe of the Great War everywhere directed criticism against the traditional culture imparted in the secondary schools.

Were the issues of secondary education to be restated it would be in the following terms: At what age should secondary education begin? How should elementary and secondary education be articulated? Should there be only one type of secondary school as in the United States or only one type of secondary education as proposed in France, or should there be several types of secondary schools as proposed in Germany, or should there be substitutes for secondary education as in England? <sup>1</sup> Should sec-

<sup>1</sup> Tawney, R. H. *Secondary Education for All*. London, 1923.



ondary education be for all or for an élite? Can there be an excess of secondary education?<sup>1</sup> If secondary education should be for all, can all pupils be expected to remain the same length of time or should there be a convenient break in its organization? What is the meaning of liberal education in a democracy? What should be the nature of secondary school studies, general or partly general and partly vocational, and, if general, what should they include? What are the place and meaning of character formation, social activities, training for citizenship in secondary schools? Finally, what should be the relation of secondary to higher education?

To none of these issues have definite solutions been found, but at no time since the Renaissance has secondary education been viewed from such identical points of view. France alone of the leading countries has attempted in the reform of secondary education, which was decreed on May 3rd, 1923, to find a solution to most of these questions. Because in one form or another these questions came to the front in the impassioned discussions in the public press, in professional journals, in debates in the literary and scientific societies and academies and in two protracted debates in Parliament in 1922 and 1923, the reform cannot be ignored wherever problems of secondary education are discussed. Further, France has exercised for many years such a profound influence on education in the countries of Eastern Europe and in Latin America that the repercussions of this reform will be felt there. And in other countries where all those conditions that affect education are different, and where French educational influence is neither deep nor direct, a study of all the conditions surrounding the reform will not be without significance in clarifying thought, in bringing the issues to a focus, in defining aims, and in simplifying the attainment of solutions appropriate to the different environments.

<sup>1</sup> See England, Board of Education, *Special Reports on Educational Subjects*, Vol. ix, pp. 168ff.; and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Annual Reports*.

## II

### THE FRENCH TRADITION

In no part of their educational system have the French justly taken such pride as in the secondary schools and about no branch have they been so sensitive as about secondary education. From the time when Richelieu established his courtly academy at Tours, when the Port Royalists and the Oratorians endeavored to give new vitality to the classical schools down to the present, secondary education has always been the subject of discussion and amendment to meet the constantly new demands of time. Indeed, as was stated in the most recent debates on the subject by a member of the French Parliament secondary education has been overhauled and readjusted about once every ten years during the nineteenth century and only the outbreak of the War in 1914 postponed a revision of the system established in 1902.

The greatness and strength of French secondary education has always lain in the sincere devotion to the classical tradition. In spite of the numerous attacks levelled against this tradition from the Revolutionary period to the present day faith in the educative value of the classics in general and for France in particular remained unshaken. As early as 1852 an attempt was made to set up a modern course parallel with the classical, but it was premature and failed. In 1865 Victor Duruy succeeded in establishing a special modern-scientific course, which was gradually lengthened by decrees passed in 1880 and 1886, but which did not lead to the same privileges as those that followed the completion of the classical course. The gradual encroachment of the modern course in the field of secondary education was met in 1872 by a rearrangement of the programme of the classical course to find time for modern languages, and in 1880 to find time for science subjects. In 1890 the classical course was again revised and modernized by the elimination of many elements that had accumulated with tradition.

The gradual introduction of modern subjects into the classical course, and the extension of the length of the special modern courses led in the last decade of the nineteenth century to a demand for a complete review of the system of secondary education. As in Germany there was a demand for a coordination and equal recognition of both the modern and classical types. The unrest culminated in 1898 in the appointment of a Parliamentary Commission under the chairmanship of M. Alexander Ribot to enquire into the whole situation. Opinions were solicited from administrative officials in the educational service, from teachers in universities and secondary schools, from distinguished leaders in public life, and from such public bodies as Chambers of Commerce and local administrative boards. The results of the enquiry are embodied in six large folio volumes (*Enquête sur l'Enseignement Secondaire*, Paris, 1899).

The trend of the depositions and evidence offered before the Commission was in favor of the equal recognition of both the classical and modern courses. It was generally admitted, almost as an axiom, that French secondary education without the classics was inconceivable, and that the development of French culture depends on their survival, but that they should be reserved for an élite only. Equally general was the view that a modern course is essential as a general preparation for those who would become leaders in the economic and commercial life of France. The only point on which there was no unanimity was whether both types of courses could with profit be offered in the same institution. Two quotations from M. Ribot's summary of the findings of the Commission will indicate the basis upon which the Minister of Public Instruction proceeded to build his reform. The majority of those who gave evidence, according to M. Ribot,

see in the abandonment of Latin the beginning of the decline of the French spirit. To form a directive élite, such is the rôle of secondary education. It is in a way the depository of the traditions of the race. The French genius includes what is more substantial and universal in the Roman genius, and at the same time the vivacity, the irony, the gaiety of the Celtic spirit. Let us beware, they say, lest we lose that which, in spite of disturbing weaknesses, still gives her her superiority. In divorcing herself from Latin culture, France divorces herself from her origins; she goes counter to her traditions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Enquête*, Vol. vi, pp. 26f.

## On the other hand

For an élite able to attain the reading in their texts of the masterpieces of the ancients, nothing can take the place of direct contact with these masterpieces. But is it necessary to declare as incapable of deriving higher culture all those who have no taste or ability for ancient languages?<sup>1</sup>

It was on the basis of these two principles, the retention of the classics for an élite and the provision of other types of general education for others, that M. Georges Leygues, as Minister of Public Instruction, prepared the reform of secondary education in 1902. Other considerations were, however, involved in the administrative side of the reform. An attempt was now made to articulate secondary with elementary education by beginning the former at the age of eleven, and with higher elementary and technical education by dividing the whole course of seven years into two cycles, the first to be completed at about the age of fifteen, when the graduates of the higher elementary and technical schools would be prepared to enter the second cycle and continue to the *baccalauréat*.

This system, introduced in 1902, provided for a course of seven years divided into two cycles of four and three years respectively. The first cycle permitted a choice of two sections, one with Latin and the other emphasizing French and science. Those desiring to specialize in classics could add Greek in the third year. In the second cycle four options were permitted in order to render the system more flexible and to permit of transfers: (1) Latin and Greek; (2) Latin with a more advanced study of modern foreign languages; (3) Latin with a more complete study of sciences; (4) modern foreign languages and sciences without Latin. The duration of each course was two years, at the close of which students could present themselves for the first part of the *baccalauréat*. In the last year a further option remained of specializing in philosophy or mathematics, followed by the second part of the examination for the *baccalauréat*. The system may be represented by the diagram on the following page.

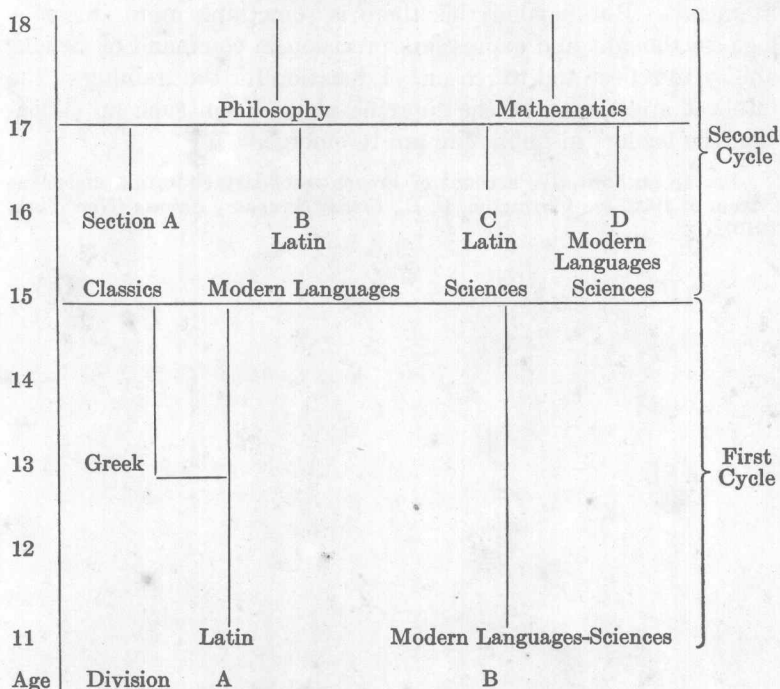
This form of education was limited to boys. Girls continued to be educated under the system established in 1880 by Camille Sée, a system shorter in length by two years than that for boys, eschewing the classical languages entirely and aiming at the

<sup>1</sup> *Enquête*, Vol. VI, p. 28.

## 8 SECONDARY EDUCATION IN FRANCE

training of girls as future mothers and intelligent leaders in their homes. A small minority might through special effort pursue special courses leading to the *baccalauréat*, but in general their number continued to remain small and the courses more or less fortuitous and unorganized.

### ORGANIZATION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR BOYS, 1902-1923



The new system at once placed all courses on an equality since all equally led up to a single *baccalauréat*; it recognized by implication the equal value of all subjects offered in the secondary school, whether lycée or collège; it introduced flexibility which permitted adequate options in which the pupil could find himself; it attempted by the adoption of new instruments to cultivate the French ideal of education. For in spite of the claim that modern courses should be introduced as a general preparation for



economic and commercial careers, the development of general culture was recognized as the sole aim of all courses.

While the whole world understands somewhat generally and appreciates superficially what French culture stands for, it is difficult to analyze the qualities which make this up and which French secondary education aspires to attain. Concretely expressed the French secondary schools strive to cultivate, as the schools of no other country, the ability to speak well and to write well, to develop an appreciation both of language and of literature. But beyond this there is something more elusive—logic in thought and expression, precision in command of details, ability to reflect and to reason. Education for the training of the intellect appears to be the supreme aim. From such an education the leaders in public life are to emerge.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For an authoritative account of French secondary education under the system of 1902, see Farrington, F. E., *French Secondary Schools* (New York, 1910).



### III

#### THE SYSTEM UNDER CRITICISM

The system adopted in 1902 had scarcely been under way for ten years when it again became the subject of criticism. There were those who professed to recognize a decline in the French language; Frenchmen were departing from the rigorous standards set up by the purists; foreign words were creeping in without being properly assimilated; solecisms were introduced in affecting originality; slang, dialectical peculiarities, professional and scientific terms were tainting the pure stream of French literary expression. Such innovations while dangerous in themselves were the more dangerous as symptoms of failure to think clearly and with precision. This *crise du Français* was attributed by those who professed to recognize it to the contamination of the traditionally accepted principles of a general education by the admission of modern subjects on a parity with the classics.<sup>1</sup> The remedy, in their opinion, is a return to the classical humanities as the simple sources of French language, culture and civilization.

The outbreak of the War not only intensified the criticisms of the existing system of education but deflected them into other directions. The secondary schools, it was objected, had become diploma factories and the encyclopedic curricula, due to the attempt to cover ancient and modern subjects, had only led to cramming (*bachotage*) for examinations. The professedly modern-scientific course was not preparing leaders for the economic walks of life but was looked upon as an easy path to the *baccalauréat* for those who could not succeed with the classics. Further, the teaching of modern languages, largely because of the employment of the direct method, while successful in giving mastery of the foreign languages, failed to introduce the pupils to an appreciation of foreign culture and civilization. At the same time the

<sup>1</sup> See in general, as representative of these criticisms, (1) Lasserre, P., *Cinquante Ans de Pensée Française* (Paris, 1922); (2) Thérive, A., *Le Français, Langue Morte?* (Paris, 1923).

so-called practical subjects, the sciences, were taught in such a bookish and academic fashion as to fail to meet present demands. Hence the modern subjects could not be claimed to be educative either as modern humanities or as mental discipline. Accordingly, they could not be compared with the classics as the basis of a sound liberal education. There thus emerged a strong body of opinion in favor of a return to the classical humanities as the best basis for developing taste, judgment, and appreciation of French culture.

Another group condemned the entire system and demanded the more general provision of trade and technical education partly to retrieve the losses of the War, partly to prepare for the economic competition at its close. This group was met with the arguments that the function of education is not to produce engineers, technicians and operatives but to develop men and women, and that all citizens need a common background of general ideas and a culture that stresses human values; the best preparation for practical careers is specialization on the foundation of a general education.

The real issue appeared to centre in France as elsewhere around a satisfactory conception of general education. The claims of the classicists were contested by those who argued in favor of a more general and extended study of the sciences as essential in a scientific era, and by those who supported the claims of modern humanities as better suited to modern requirements than the ancient cultures. Finally, there were those who attempted to reconcile the ancient and modern humanities by including elements of both in a single curriculum, and recognizing at once the relative claims of each, while remaining true to the traditional association of classical and French cultures. By implication of this last group the Latinless course would be relegated to the higher elementary schools.

The question of a general education was complicated by the introduction of another, the relation of secondary education to democracy. It was felt that under the existing system, in spite of the attempts to articulate the secondary with elementary and higher elementary schools, a large number of boys were debarred by poverty from the opportunities for a higher education. The problem involved here was whether secondary education should be thrown open to the masses or whether it should be reserved

for an élite drawn from all classes of society, the poor being assisted by means of scholarships and maintenance grants. On the whole the majority of opinion was in favor of retaining secondary education for the training of an élite. This position was accepted even by those who advocated the introduction of the common school (*école unique*), with the reservation that suitably diversified types of schools be established to meet the needs of different types of abilities.

Such was the situation when M. Léon Bérard, who had been Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts in M. Clemenceau's cabinet at the close of 1919, was again invited by M. Briand to fill this position in January, 1921, which he continued to hold in M. Poincaré's cabinet until March, 1924.