

TEACHING OF PSYCHOLOGY IN THE PRESIDENCY COLLEGE

20th November, 1875

[File 165-1] No. 4865, dated Fort William, the 20th November 1875

From H WOODROW, ESQ., Offg. Director of Public Instruction,

To - The Offg. Secretary to the Government of Bengal, General Department

I have the honor to enclose, for the orders of His Honor the Lieutenant-Governor, a proposal made by Mr. Sutcliffe to abolish the option between Chemistry and psychology in the Presidency College for second year students. It is right that, as supplementary to Mr. Sutcliffe's statement, I should add Dr Duff strongly advocated that it should be taught as part of the First Arts' course; for many students leave college after passing that standard, and he was of the opinion that they ought not to terminate their studies without learning some portions of the subject of mental philosophy. The University having accepted the arguments of the Scotch Professors and allowed psychology to stand as an alternative subject in the First Arts' course, I do not think it proper to argue the case on its merits. I therefore send up Mr. Sutcliffe's proposal for the orders of the Government. I support it only on practical grounds. It is very troublesome to manage several options, would be enough for two classes. The difficulty also of arranging a time-table where options are allowed cannot be imagined except by those who have attempted the task.

[File 165-2] No 2016, dated Presidency College, the 12th November 1875

From - J SUTCLIFFE, ESQ, M.A., Principal, Presidency COLlege,

To - H. WOODROW, ESQ., Offg. Director of Public Instruction.

On the opening of each session it has hitherto been the practice at this college to allow First Arts' candidates the option of taking up psychology or chemistry to the University examination. In the mofussil colleges, where there is a lecturer on chemistry, this option is not allowed I believe, and at this college only a small percentage of students have hitherto availed themselves of the option of taking up psychology. In the present session, out of 84 candidates presented for the First Arts' examination, only 12 have elected psychology, and the preparation of this small number of candidates involves the same demand on a professor's time as a class containing three of four times the number of students. It is not, however, on account of the smallness of the psychology class that I wish to see it discontinued, but on account of the greater advantages from every point of view which an elementary course of chemistry holds out to students in this stage of their career. Psychology and philosophy form very properly a part of the course which students for the B A degree may take up, and I should regret to see any change which would debar students, after passing the Frst Arts's examination, from taking up these important subjects for the degree' but the case of students before passing the First Arts' examination is wholly different. In their case the time both of professors and students might be far more profitably employed upon a subject more within the reach of the capacities of the class, and I would ask your sanction to my

proposal to withdraw from the students of this college the option of taking up psychology at the First Arts' examination from the opening of next session, and to compel them to take up the elementary course of Chemistry laid down by University regulations. The Professor, Mr. Parry who has had charge of the First Arts' Psychology Class, fully concurs in my views, and in support of the change I advocate, he says: - "Precocious as native students are generally supposed to be, the majority of them, as is well known, and indeed it would be unreasonable to expect it to be otherwise, are not ripe enough when they enter the college for anything beyond the most elementary stages of the least abstract of the higher University studies. It is idle to say, in justification of beginning with one of the most abstract and difficult of all (and that, too, by the way, with one of the most unsuitable of text books), that it trains the mind to deep thinking. The first and most important requisite of mental training is accurate and systematic thinking. Nature itself clearly points out to us what should be our course. Left to itself, the mind prefers facts to abstractions, and the more tangible they are, the more readily are they comprehended. What addresses itself to the senses naturally makes the deepest impression; and the first step in mental education is to educate the senses, since they are the inlets to the mind. Accordingly, the experimental sciences are, at the outset, the most suitable and effective means of education, The more abstract studies should follow. Without a suitable basis of observation, to construct theories is like building a pyramid upon a point.

"Again, of all the mental faculties, the memory is the earliest developed; and although I would not be partial to a system that cultivates this faculty solely at the expense of higher faculties still as youth is the best period for storing the mind with information, seeing it is then fresh and quick to catch impressions, though not to reason from them, it is our best plan to fall in with the natural courses, and no to force on the mind subjects that it is not, except in very rare instances, ripe enough to grapple with. Accordingly, a training in the experimental sciences and those sciences of observation which deal with the natural world is, I deem it, the best suited for that class, as it more accords with the natural development of their minds, and is decidedly the best preparation for the abstruse studies of their more advanced course."

It would be convenient if the students could be informed of the decision to which you come on this question before the college closes for the vacation, and I beg that you will take it into early consideration.