Meditations on Education in a Colonial Setting by an Early Third Republic Pedagogical Reformer: Gaston Valran and the Dépêche Coloniale

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Education and colonialism constituted two major preoccupations of Third Republic France. Historians have shown how pedagogy and the teaching profession were brought into the service of colonialism. As Pierre Singaravélou pointed out, faculty professors were “teaching colonialism” to form future colonial administrators.¹ Spencer Segalla has shown that Georges Hardy seconded the work of Hubert Lyautey in Morocco by elaborating pedagogy for the protectorate.² An examination of early twentieth-century Provence reveals that members of the teaching professions were in the forefront of the colonial movement. Active in various learned societies such as the Geographic Society of Marseilles and the Société d’Études provençales, they organized the colonial expositions of 1906 and 1922 and colloquia and ensured publications.³

Prominent among these teachers was Gaston Valran (1857-1940). A teacher of history-geography in the lycée of Aix, Valran was active in local learned societies and local and national associations involving a wide range of activities including social reform, pronatalist propaganda, adult education, international trade and commerce, and French colonialism as contributor to the Musée social (the “social question” research center in Paris), as chair of the regional branch of the Association of Large Families, of the Popular Universities

for his arrondissement, and of the Aix Municipal Office for Information on Agriculture and Commerce, as representative for the Chamber of Commerce of Geneva, and as a member of the editorial staff of the *Dépêche Coloniale*. To a certain extent, these functions were complementary. Historians have used the metaphors of laboratory or mirror to describe the relationship between colonies and metropolitan in the field of social reform. Janet Horne has examined the interest in colonial affairs shown by members of the *Musée social*, including Valran. The fact finding missions to Tunisia and Algeria which he conducted on behalf of the *Musée social* formed the basis of reports published by the *Musée social* as well as articles that appeared in the *Dépêche Coloniale*. In the image of these activities, his contributions to the *Dépêche* were wide ranging. The work of a generalist of impulsive temperament, his articles were not necessarily deep. But they were revealing by their spontaneity of the contradictions in the colonial


6. According to the entry “Section de missions” posted by the secretary of the association, André Lichtberger, in the Annals of the *Musée social*, Valran was granted at least three research assignments: *Le Musée Social. Annales* (1905), 258; Ibid. (1909), 78; Ibid. (1911), 77. At the time of Valran’s acceptance as member to the Academy of Aix, the president of the society evoked his numerous assignments from the Ministry of Commerce as well as the *Musée social* which had taken him to Algeria, Corsica, Switzerland and Belgium. Jauffret, “Réponse au discours de réception,” *Annales de Provence* 22, no. 3 (1925): 136. There is no similar indication of Valran’s having travelled to Indochina.

7. The principal of the Lycée Mignet in Aix used the term “primesautier” to describe Valran in his evaluation signed 20 May 1897, that of the lycée in Alais where Valran had been posted previously, remarked in 1892, that Valran had a tendency to spread himself too thinly. F/17/22462, Archives Nationales, Paris.
discourse, especially pertaining to education, a subject for which his career path provided him a degree of competency.

Almost unique among teachers with permanent positions in a State secondary school, Valran had begun his career in 1878, in a village primary school, possessing only the elementary school certificate. Through unstinting work he upgraded his qualifications, obtaining his baccalaureate in 1879 and his doctorate in 1898. The first opened the doors to the secondary schools, the second to a permanent position at the lycée of Aix. His social and cultural activism, which led to his obtaining the Legion of Honor in 1923, represents another aspect of a drive for social recognition. His beginnings as a primary teacher served as a myth of origin and a reference point by which to appreciate the success of his social ascent. “A modest primary school teacher in 1878,” Valran had “become somebody,” commented the president of the Academy of Aix at Valran’s reception to the learned society in 1925. At a time when, as lamented Durkheim, knowledge of pedagogy was considered unnecessary for secondary school teachers, Valran could also use these origins to explain his interest and competence in pedagogical questions: “Almost forty years ago,” he wrote in 1913, “I taught in a primary school. Since then, … I have followed with curiosity and sympathy the evolution of an institution of which I was a modest collaborator; I have retained with my first colleagues ties thanks to which I have acquired a sense of pedagogical realities.”

Even before Valran could translate this interest into publications, the government had instituted the teachers’ assemblies by which secondary school teachers throughout France gathered monthly in their schools to discuss possible reforms in education. Secretary of the assemblies of the municipal high school of Apt (Vaucluse) during much of the duration of the experiment (1881-86), Valran could ensure that his contributions to the discussions were duly recorded. Valran’s first publication, dating from 1886, constituted an appendage to the

assemblies’ minutes.\textsuperscript{13}

Through their educational reforms inspired by the work on child psychology undertaken by A. Binet and F. Buisson,\textsuperscript{14} and incorporating Kantian morality emphasizing the role of “self-government” and “will”,\textsuperscript{15} the republicans sought to foster the creation of an autonomous reasoning citizenry suitable for a democratic society while also ensuring the pedagogical effectiveness of their schools.\textsuperscript{16} To carry out their project, the reformers turned to the intuitive method which, in the words of Michel Bréal, “was based upon the examination of objects rather than that of words, upon intelligence rather than memory, the spirit rather than the letter, spontaneity rather than intellectual passivity.”\textsuperscript{17} At the heart of the intuitive method was the object lesson, “the basis and soul of elementary education.”\textsuperscript{18}

Often goaded on by Valran, who took a resolutely reformist stance, the teachers of the high school of Apt, itself barely more than a superior primary school, examined the means of implementing the new program, paying special attention to the object lesson.\textsuperscript{19} They suggested the organization of excursions to quarry sites and to workshops following which students could create their

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collections of objects, proposed the integration of experiments in the teaching of science courses, and stressed the importance of practical or applied sciences.\textsuperscript{20} Calling upon teachers to make their classes intuitive and practical Valran and Laugier encouraged prospective teachers to incorporate visual aids such as charts, maps and images in their classes and to use the object lesson for the teaching of subjects such as French grammar and composition.\textsuperscript{21}

Although anchored in the concrete, object lessons were anything but rote. The ideal of the reformers was resumed in the program on which Morel, candidate for the Higher Council of Public Education in 1880, campaigned: to “develop fully in the child the ability to think and a sense of initiative and of responsibility in freeing him from all mechanical tasks done unconsciously.”\textsuperscript{22} Buisson foresaw that the teacher would habituate children to generalize and to draw out from their observations of objects, the underlying abstract ideas. They were “to progress from the intuition of the senses to that of the intellect.”\textsuperscript{23} Valran and his colleagues followed suit. They denounced rote learning, and while still recognizing the utility of memory, they insisted upon its subordination to reflection.\textsuperscript{24} Valran suggested that geography and history be made more dependent upon reflection than memory by adopting the methods of science. This implied assimilating geography to natural history and using a comparative method in history to draw out laws or causal relationships while also incorporating institutional and economic realities.\textsuperscript{25} He stressed the necessity of appealing to the sense of responsibility of children and the difference between education and instruction.\textsuperscript{26} He did praise books and reading as a source of knowledge and as an antidote to boredom and advocated the formation of school libraries.\textsuperscript{27} In keeping, however, to the philosophy of Pestalozzi whose method implied observing “the world through objects (rather than books),” he warned against excessive book learning.\textsuperscript{28}

Rooted in daily life and action, the object lesson was totally compatible with vitalist notions. The same may be said of the disciplinary concepts

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\item \textsuperscript{20} Minutes of the meetings of 22 May 1885, 20 December 1882, and 27 January 1885, 1T64, Archives Départementales de Vaucluse, Avignon (henceforth ADV).
\item \textsuperscript{21} Valran and Laugier, 50, 45.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Cited in Edgard Zervort, \textit{L'enseignement secondaire de 1880 à 1890} (Paris: Paul Dupont, 1890), 36.
\item \textsuperscript{23} “Leçons des choses.”
\item \textsuperscript{24} Meeting 11 January 1883, 1T64. ADV; Valran and Laugier, 92.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Meetings 11 January 1883, 1T64, and April 1886, 1T65, ADV; Valran and Laugier, 68, 69.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Meeting June 1882, 1T64, ADV; Valran and Laugier, 50.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 51, 52
\end{itemize}
formulated by Valran and Laugier and the study of the biographies of strong individuals that they recommended, both of which sought to develop “will” in the pupils and forge solid and resolute men. 29 Such a purpose also underlay the hygienist preoccupations of the teachers expressed in their decision never to punish pupils by depriving them of excursions or recess. 30 One could see the influence also of Herbert Spencer, listed in the bibliography of Valran’s study guide of 1886. The hygienist preoccupation with excursions and recreation can be found in numerous other works included in this biography. 31 Recalling the examples of the Greeks and the English, Valran insisted on the importance of games for the psychological and physiological development of the children. 32 “Fresh air and hygiene” were advantages that he associated with agricultural life. 33 The statistics on the physical development of children from Marseille brought at the end of the nineteenth century to the summer camp at the agricultural school of Valabre could only confirm Valran in his views. 34

In agreement amongst themselves over most of the pedagogical reforms, the teachers in Apt were divided over the question of reducing the importance of Latin in the curriculum. The question was an important one in the reform agenda since Latin served to mark the frontier between secondary and primary schools; that is, theoretically, education for the elites and for the masses. Valran led the charge against change. He did support a proposition to create a “French classical” secondary program without Latin, just as he suggested that Macaulay (“pure, easy and modern”) replace Milton (“weighted down with archaic usages”) in the special education program. 35 Valran’s attachment to, and identification with, Latin was, however, too strong for his modernism to be anything other than illusory. He favored the restoration of a prize for Latin speech, a chief target of reformers. 36 In discussing the place of Latin in the faculties, Valran claimed that the study of Latin was indispensable to that of “high literature, history and law.”

29. Ibid., 33, 42
30. Meeting 2 March 1882, 1T64, ADV.
32. Meetings December 1883 and 31 January 1884, 1T64. ADV. See also Valran and Laugier, 40, 64, 65. See also Valran’s end of year speech of 1890 summarized in the Mercure Aptésien (27 July 1890).
33. Valran and Laugier, 100.
34. Valran, Assistance et education, 175f.
35. Meetings, respectively, March 1886, 1T65, and 20 December 1885, 1T64, ADV.
36. Meeting 3 February 1882, 1T 64, ADV.
Knowledge of the literature of antiquity was necessary for that of French literature since, “as everyone knows,” the latter was mostly an imitation of the former. Translations could not bring out the “subtlety of thought or the exquisite style” of Latin literature, nor could they allow one to appreciate “the remarkable precision” of Roman law texts. Valran’s suggestion to replace Milton expressed, in fact, his poor opinion of the students in special education who lacked the necessary “insight” to understand Milton. The creation of a French classical stream would “empty the Latin and Greek classes of a large number of pupils without any aptitude”; purified of their weakest elements, these classes would “constitute a genuine elite from which the highest civil servants of the country will be recruited.”

Incapable of imposing his views on his colleagues, Valran would, himself, soon retreat from this position. With Laugier he examined the contribution that teachers could make to check rural depopulation, held partially responsible for the contemporary social crisis. The authors proposed the modernization of agriculture through education so as to restore pride in a profession which should be understood to be as honorable and as capable of leading to success as any other. Taking the reasoning to its logical conclusion in Préjugés d’autrefois (Prejudices of a Bygone Era) of 1908, Valran denounced the prejudice in favor of classical studies, the liberal professions, bookish studies, and officialdom. Adopting the vitalist discourse rampant at the time according to which “education [should be] oriented to action and struggle,” he argued for modern, practical studies, for the integration of manual work in the curriculum and for careers in the productive sectors including agriculture, industry and commerce which all could lead to success. No longer looking to Latin to define the elites, he held for a multiplicity of elites: “The force of a nation resides in having not one but a multitude of elites.”

Underlying Préjugés of a Bygone Era was a vision of a world torn apart by economic warfare, one in which, according to Valran, the German Kronprinz, Frederick, could boast that as “we have conquered in the field of war, [so] shall we win on the battle fields of commerce and industry.” Forming the young for the

37. Compère and Chervel, however, point out that this long held opinion had become discredited by the 1880s. See Marie-Madeleine Compère and André Chervel, “Les humanités dans l’histoire de l’enseignement français,” Histoire de l’éducation 74 (May 1997): 10, 23.
38. Meeting May 1886, IT65, ADV.
39. Meeting March 1886, IT65, ADV.
40. Valran and Laugier, 100.
42. Préjugés d’autrefois, esp. 54.
43. Cited in Ibid., 222.
productive sectors was a necessary measure to confront the danger emanating not only from Germany but also the United States.44 Another measure was colonial expansion. Since 1901 Valran had been contributing to the newspaper of the colonial party, La Dépêche Coloniale. His focus, as mentioned, was on education. He believed that “education has a crucial role to play in the colonial and civilizing enterprise.” Thanks to the advance achieved by the colonial and “pedagogical sciences” education could ensure the preparation of the inhabitants of France for the colonies and the transformation of the indigenous populations into loyal Frenchmen.45 Bringing his expertise in pedagogical matters honed during the period of pedagogical reform in the early Third Republic to the pages of the Dépêche Coloniale, Valran would demonstrate how education, as a science, could accomplish the task of furthering the colonial enterprise, made palatable by its identification with the extension of civilization.

Education’s role in the preparation of the French for colonialism was multifaceted and varied according to the target. It entailed the amassing and dissemination of information on the colonies, a task to be undertaken ideally by the Colonial Institutions, responsible also, with the faculties, of the education of future senior colonial officials.46 It also included the dissemination of propaganda, through colonial education in the schools, to create support within the population and the electorate for colonialism and to incite colonial vocations.47 And such education would also prepare the future colonists for colonial settlement. The colonies, wrote Valran, needed at the head, “men of initiative”, and among the settlers men who had learned “to observe rather than to read,” who were “of practical sense, imbued with a taste of action, and accustomed to search more for the application of science than for science itself.”48 The upper primary schools, and also agricultural schools, would best respond to their educational needs.49 This vitalist rhetoric applied equally strongly to women.

44. Ibid., 175.
45. “La rentrée scolaire,” Dépêche (9 October 1905).
46. On the Colonial Institutions, see for example: “L'Institut colonial de Marseille,” Dépêche (8 June 1908); “Préparons l'avenir: Sciences et carrières coloniales,” Dépêche (10 October 1919). For education of officials, see: “Préparons l'avenir”; “Pour l'enseignement colonial: Une mesure d’organisation qui s'impose,” Dépêche (14 October 1919). See also Singaravélou, “Professionnalisation de la carrière coloniale,” especially chapter 2, 87-136.
49. “Pour former nos colons. C'est dans l'enseignement primaire que doit se trouver la base de l'enseignement colonial,” Dépêche (22 October 1919). Valran also insists upon the importance of agricultural schools, both in France and in North Africa: “Apprenons à cultiver,” Dc (17 March 1908); “Ingénieurs d'agriculture coloniale,” Dépêche (29 January
for whom life on the homestead was depicted as an antidote to the sterilizing perspective of prolonged studies and the stifling life of the bourgeoisie. The presence of these “angels of the domestic hearth” in the colonies was, moreover, essential for fixing the settler on the land.\textsuperscript{50}

Education was an essential instrument and a defining element of the civilizing mission. Education served to secure the acceptance by the indigenous peoples of their colonial status. Representatives of France, polyvalent agents acting as doctors and administrators, teachers contributed to ensure “by their example that France would be better understood and loved.”\textsuperscript{51} Vocational and practical, the education envisaged for these populations would be transformative, acting as an instrument of modernization and civilization by inculcating the value of work and creating the necessary conditions for the enrichment of the indigenous populations. “Let us teach the indigene how he can, by us and with us, enrich and free himself from his cramped and hideous poverty.”\textsuperscript{52} Their attachment to the colonizing power would, consequently, be assured.\textsuperscript{53}

Although the obstacles were daunting, they were surmountable. The advances in the pedagogical sciences, the pedagogical precepts developed in the 1880s and refined since, with the publication of Buisson’s \textit{Dictionary} of 1911, would provide the tools to address the question of colonial education, understood both as the education of colonial matters to the French and as the education of indigenous children. Foremost among these tools, edified as the “norm of primary schooling,”\textsuperscript{54} was the object lesson. Especially in its variant as vocational schooling emphasizing experience, experimentation, and objects it was perfectly suited for this education based upon concrete reality.\textsuperscript{55} The real or projected object lessons envisaged by Valran varied according to the objects – mineral, artisanal, and agricultural objects from the colonies, and sewing samples and toys obtained by the children from indigenous correspondents\textsuperscript{56} – and to the media or

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\item \textsuperscript{1909).}
\item \textsuperscript{50. “La femme et les carrières coloniales,” \textit{Dépêche} (31 January 1908); “Rôle colonial de la Femme”, \textit{Dépêche} (30 November 1912).}
\item \textsuperscript{51. “Une œuvre scolaire en Tunisie, I,” \textit{Dépêche} (19 March 1910); Valran and F. Nicollet, “Algérie,” in \textit{Les Colonies françaises au début du XXe siècle}, 175.}
\item \textsuperscript{52. “Le problème scolaire au Maroc,” \textit{Dépêche} (18 May 1912).}
\item \textsuperscript{53. \textit{Ibid.} See also “L’enseignement technique en Algérie,” \textit{Dépêche} (31 July 1905) and “L’enseignement professionnel en Tunisie,” \textit{Dépêche} (20 November 1909).}
\item \textsuperscript{54. The pamphlet of 1903, \textit{L’enseignement colonial,} gives a thorough overview of the way object lessons could be organized. See also “L’école coloniale primaire, I,” \textit{Dépêche} (4 February 1903).}
\item \textsuperscript{55. “Comment enseigner les colonies. Pour inculquer l’idée coloniale à la jeunesse, trois conditions sont nécessaires : formation des professeurs, adaptation de la méthode, organisation du matériel,” \textit{Dépêche} (4 July 1922).}
\item \textsuperscript{56. “Education coloniale, échanges scolaires,” \textit{Dépêche} (26 January 1905). For the}
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the means of their display – images and collections put together by the children or by museums. In this regard, Varlan considered museums “the most powerful and useful auxiliary of all systems of teaching by means of object lessons,” such as the school museum created by a primary school teacher, Poujol, in Paris.\(^{57}\) The possibilities of teaching through images, following the example given by the Berlitz Schools in its “oral teaching by the image,” photos, and cinema (“a source of ideas and energy”\(^{58}\)), seemed almost limitless. Valran also liken school trips to the opposite shores of the Mediterranean for French and indigenous student-teachers, reminiscent of the more modest excursions proposed for the students of the school of Apt, to object lessons. Having “seen” and obtained concrete knowledge of the colonies, the future French teacher would be able to talk with authority of these areas.\(^{59}\) Similarly, the indigenous student who had viewed the enterprises, monuments and public edifices in France would be able to understand the country and its institutions and become ambassador for the center.\(^{60}\)

No less interesting than the catalogue of possible object lessons was the explanation of the psychological functioning of the each lesson. For Valran, it involved exciting the senses and consequently impelling the student to action. The visual aids that accompany the teacher’s lesson are “so many impressions that act on several senses... and so doing give birth to ideas, sentiments, and action.”\(^{61}\) The object lesson was thus considered especially effective as an element of colonial propaganda. In seeing objects of a colonial collection, students “would feel the sensation of reality and recognize in the object the effects of a will that fulfilled itself... It is by the object lesson that the notion of the duty to contribute

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57. “Pour la plus grande France. Un enseignement des choses coloniales,” *Dépêche* (16 April 1920).\(^{59}\)

59. “Comment enseigner les colonies.” See also “L’initiation et l’éducation coloniales,” *Dépêche* (13 June 1925).\(^{60}\)

60. “Les caravanes scolaires indigènes,” *Dépêche* (25 March 1906); “La bonne propagande. Education indigène et coloniale,” *Dépêche* (12 January 1922); “L’éducation coloniale par la propagande indigène,” *Dépêche* (17 February 1922).\(^{61}\)

to the economic expansion of the country can waken the consciousness and transform itself into action.\textsuperscript{62}

Admittedly the object lesson did not seem to address the higher intellectual functions. By speaking “to the eyes and senses” the method was appropriate for children “endowed with a naïve and simplistic imagination”\textsuperscript{63} and attuned to the level of intellectual development of the indigenous people whose “intelligence was somewhat primitive” and who “were still big children.”\textsuperscript{64} To “see, understand, and express themselves through images and crave for concrete things,” should be the ultimate aim in the development of the intellectual faculties of the student.\textsuperscript{65} Valran, nonetheless, reminded his reader that the object lesson did not mean “routine” or rote learning.\textsuperscript{66} Colonial studies, taught ideally as an object lesson, illustrated by their search for generalizations and laws the methodological affinity between the object lesson and science.\textsuperscript{67} Valran made a similar rapprochement with practical vocational studies. He qualified the pedagogical method of the farm school for indigenous children of Smydnia “an object lesson by its form […] inspired by the scientific method.” The approach, as a consequence, was “experimental” but not “empirical.”\textsuperscript{68} In accordance with the scientific method, practical vocational studies, such those given in the School Emile Loubet or in the Colonial Agricultural School in Tunis, incorporated both a practical component and theory and thus avoided “being only empirical and routine.”\textsuperscript{69}

As in the 1880s, the terms “routine” and “empirical” were of utmost derision for Valran. He advised prospective candidates for careers in the colonial administration and French and indigenous students at the Normal School of Aix to pursue the development of reflective faculties, to acquire general culture rather than specific training, to value method over information and understanding over knowledge, and to seek education rather than instruction.\textsuperscript{70} This advice echoed the adage from Montaigne: “better a mind well made than one totally filled up.”\textsuperscript{71} These were, he said, the precepts that prevailed in the

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\item 63. Préjugés d'autrefois, 393.
\item 64. “L'Alliance française,” Dépêche (14 February 1907).
\item 67. “Pour la plus grande France. Un enseignement des choses coloniales”.
\item 68. “L'apprentissage agricole indigène,” Dépêche (15 November 1918).
\item 71. “Notre politique”, “L'initiation et l'éducation coloniales”.
\end{itemize}
educative philosophy of the Normal School. Illustrating the “advances in the pedagogical sciences”\textsuperscript{72} realized in France, they contrasted sorely with the prevailing values of the mentality and the educative philosophy of the indigenous populations. Simply put, “the Orient… neglects reason; it practices the cult of memory”.\textsuperscript{73} Along the lines of educational minister Georges Hardy’s notion of rudimentary psychology, Valran explained this cult by reference to a developmental process in which the indigenous populations occupied an early stage. This was illustrated by the Syrian peasant for whom “thinking… constitutes a rare and difficult effort… He has more memory than capacity to reason, a feature that one finds with children as with all primitive stages of the personality.”\textsuperscript{74} For urban dwellers, including members of the indigenous bourgeoisie, the dependency on memory was inculcated by their education organized by the Mosques. Rote learning “is the tradition; it has become part of the psychological heritage of the… Muslim mentality. Consequently thought is fossilized in a formula and critical thought is reduced to verbal gymnastics divorced from reality.”\textsuperscript{75}

The appropriate education for indigenous children was, thus, vocational education, and since Valran considered “the intellectual diet” of French schools to be “too rich for their coarse brains,” he had probably in mind a watered down version of the French schooling.\textsuperscript{76} Complete assimilation, consequently, was out of the question; Valran supported, instead, association. His avowed intentions, as formulated, were generous, and he rejected the idea that he sought to “subjugate the indigenous working force to capital.”\textsuperscript{77} Nonetheless, in numerous articles Valran wrote that vocational education was necessary to form workers for industry and agriculture in the colonies.\textsuperscript{78} Described as associates or as collaborators of the French, indigenous workers would occupy subaltern positions, while the positions of foremen and engineers were destined for

\textsuperscript{72} “La rentrée scolaire,” \textit{Dépêche} (9 October 1905).
\textsuperscript{73} “Education des Chinois,” \textit{Dépêche} (15 March 1905).
\textsuperscript{75} “La France éducatrice en Syrie,” \textit{Dépêche} (10 May 1924). For a discussion of Hardy’s psychological approach to ethnology and “intuitive generalizations,” see Segalla, 172.
\textsuperscript{77} “Un préjugé indigène,” \textit{Dépêche} (23 May 1913).
\textsuperscript{78} Valran and Nicollet, 130. Segalla (172) states that Hardy’s rough ethnology led to his proposing a pedagogy for the protectorate that was a “restricted version” of the schooling offered the masses in France.
\textsuperscript{78} “L’agriculture dans notre Afrique du Nord,” \textit{Dépêche} (15/16 April 1922); “Apprenons à cultiver”; “La main-d’œuvre en Tunisie,” \textit{Dépêche} (18 February 1909); “Matières premières et machinisme,” \textit{Dépêche} (20 December 1924); “Produits coloniaux et techniciens,” \textit{Dépêche} (7 February 1919).
Europeans. Valran, however, did encourage the orientation of members of indigenous elites in Morocco towards technical training, stating that the protectorate “requires engineers more than sophists.”

The challenge resided in overcoming obstacles posed by indigenous “mentality” to entry into the productive economic sectors. Characterized as “thriftless and lazy,” Arabs were considered averse to manual work. This aversion, attributed to a preoccupation with social status and a fear of losing rank by dirtying one’s hands, supposedly explained the tendency, a trait of “mentality,” among these populations to seek government employment. The attraction of such employment was especially strong for those who had received a first education at the mosques: “used to learning everything by heart … defiant of modern reason,” they were better formed for languages and law than sciences, whence the gravitation towards law or classical studies. Valran, however, feared that they would be ill prepared and lack the requisite talents for such studies. They would be, he continued, at best “half” educated, “nourish[ing] illusions about their education.” Forming a bureaucratic proletariat, rather than an elite as dreamed, they presented the menace of being drawn into political or revolutionary agitation.

The perceived danger of social and political instability posed by elite dissatisfaction was compounded by the movement of the masses from the countryside to the cities. As early as 1905 Valran was expressing his concern about the rural exodus in Algeria. Before 1914 the problem consisted in the rarefaction of labor in the countryside and oversupply of workers in the cities leading to ethnic tensions. The First World War and conscription not only intensified the movement toward urbanization of the labor force, but also added a potentially unsettling political element by facilitating contact between French working class and political activists and Arabs. Authorities felt that it was necessary after 1918 to take measures, including agricultural education, to

82. Such ideas were widespread among French education administrators: see “L’apprentissage aux colonies devant le Congrès de Lyon,” Dépêche (30 September 1921), which explicitly incorporates ideas expressed by Hardy; “L’école et la vie aux colonies,” Dépêche (28 May 1919); “En Cochinchine, l’enseignement professionnel,” Dépêche (22 August 1903); “Congrès de Tunis, II,” Dépêche (9 April 1903); “Un préjugé indigène”; “L’enseignement technique en Algérie,” Dépêche (21 July 1905).
maintain these populations, whose “mentality… is rather rural and agricultural”, on the land.  

Such rhetoric is closely akin to that of nineteenth-century social commentators decrying the danger posed by the déclassés.  

Expert in pedagogy, although in reality more or less self-proclaimed, Valran provided a scientific imprimatur to this discourse. Like his other prescriptions or observations on colonial education, his injunctions against classical studies for indigenous students demonstrate the similarities between the educational question in France and in the colonies. Valran seems to have recognized this similarity or parallelism implicitly by his admission in 1903 that the aversion for manual work that he had criticized in the educated Annamite was also a “prejudice held by students in France which can be resumed in one word: the superstition of the liberal professions.”

Attacking this superstition and advocating the pursuit of a practical education was central to Prejudice of a bygone era that appeared in 1908.

Had Valran, himself, broken free from this prejudice and did he believe in the existence of a multitude of elites as was suggested earlier? Five years after his publication of Prejudice, he argued in favor of a humanist, rather than a technical or vocational, education for those embarking upon a colonial career. The humanist education presented numerous advantages. It epitomized the goal of the educational reformers to stress education over instruction and provided those occupying positions of authority the general culture deemed necessary for the exercise of their function. The study of the languages and literature of antiquity presented its own advantages. On the one hand, it provided psychological insights permitting the mastery of men and on the other, the study of Latin, in particular, constituted unparalleled mental gymnastics that facilitated the learning of Oriental languages. “Let our future Orientalists,” he concluded, then be foremost humanists.

With the war, his partiality for Latin fully reasserted itself. The attachment to Latin served as a rallying cry at the time of the Ludendorff offensive of 1918: “We are born, we have grown up Latins; we want to remain Latins. Our Latin culture has given us a superior civilization” and a more humane one. In the post-war period, Latin remained a defining feature of French identity or “personality” justifying, thus, the revival of “the humanities; this would be our

86. “Pour les arts et les métiers indigènes,” Dépêche (21 January 1924).
88. “En Cochinchine.”
89. “Pour les langues orientales,” Dépêche (3 May 1913).
victory over ‘Germanism’ and ‘Kultur’.”91 The good taste, subtlety, and sense of balance and moderation that were constituent elements of classicism had permeated the French language and determined its superiority with respect to both German and English.92 And at the same time that he was denouncing the political dangers stemming from the production of déclassés in North Africa, Valran was calling upon the government to organize classical education in the “factories” of India as a means of favoring the rapprochement around classical culture of the elites of the different communities, Hindu and Creole, and of forestalling the effects of the Bolshevik propaganda that he claimed was inundating the colony.93

Valran’s writing was, in fact, ridden with contradictions and rife with reversals of positions. The most striking was his attitude to the indigenous populations of North Africa. Capable, as seen, of depicting them in a most negative manner, he also demonstrated a fascination and sympathy for numerous aspects of Arab customs and life, including the poetry, artifacts, architecture, and religion of North Africa.94 Valran continuously urged the French in North Africa to learn Arab which he justified by citing the economic and commercial advantages and the administrative necessity of such knowledge. Knowing and speaking Arab, he also argued, was a mark of honor bestowed upon the indigenous populations and a means of creating ties of affection with them.95 What Bowd and Clayton have said of the geographer Pierre Gourou, we can say of Valran, all the while substituting North Africa for tropical: he “romanticized as well as demonized the tropical world.”96

91. “Pour une éducation nationale,” Dépêche (19 October 1921).
95. “L’enseignement professionnel aux colonies,” Dépêche (15 October 1902); “Congrès de Tunis, II”; “Langues vivantes,” Dépêche (7 November 1904); “Pour les Moueddebs,” Dépêche (6 March 1906); “Une œuvre postscolaire indigène en Tunisie,” Dépêche (1 July 1907); “La jeunesse algérienne,” Dépêche (31 July 1907); “Apprenons l’arabe,” Dépêche (7 January 1908); “Pour les langues orientales,” Dépêche (27 September 1911); “Un conseil de sagesse. Apprenons l’arabe,” Dépêche (3 April 1920); “La politique musulmane et l’enseignement de l’arabe,” Dépêche (8/9 August 1926). Valran makes a plea for the teaching of Arab in France and French in the Arab countries as means of developing mutual understanding in “Pour les langues orientales,” Dépêche (21 May 1919).
96. Gavin Bowd and Daniel Clayton, “Tropicality, Orientalism, and French Colonialism in
To the inconsistency inherent in journalism and pamphleteering, one can add Valran’s impulsive temperament. The varied nature of his articles – commentary on events, reports of meetings, book reviews – and the numerous activities that exposed him to different influences – from the members of the Young Tunisia movement to the representatives of the settlers’ lobby centered around the Dépêche Coloniale – also help explain these contradictions. Valran, of course, was not unique in holding conflicting positions, especially in relation to colonialism. A classic example is provided by Albert Sarraut whose colonial discourse, infused with humanitarian considerations, was in total opposition to the colonial policies he implemented during the interwar period. Beyond questions of individual personalities, these conflicting attitudes illustrate the tensions crossing through and the contradictions inherent in each of the two activities that are at the center of this article: colonialism and education. Valran’s ambivalent attitude towards Latin, or rather towards the practical studies that he at times purported to advocate, reflects the difficulties encountered by the republicans of the Belle Epoque in their efforts to modernize and, at the limit, to democratize French education. His later praise of classical humanities may very well represent a rearguard action; it belies his claim of the equality of classical, modern and, even, vocational, studies and of the intellectual and manual professions. As well, his belief in the superiority of humanities elucidates the sense of the term “associate” and the gulf between the indigenous associates, whether members of the elites or the masses for whom classical studies were deemed beyond reach, and the elites of the French colonial power. The idea of the civilizing mission, which so appealed to liberals or republicans, was itself based on a monolithic concept of progress tied to the development of “more contemptuous notions of ‘backwardness’ and a cruder dichotomy between barbarity and civilization.” As such, the underlying justification of the civilizing mission made the gulf between colonized and colonizer more difficult to cross and the establishment of links of affection between the two chimerical.

98. In 1911 Buisson called for a melding of the cultures of primary and secondary schools, as well as the lowering of the barriers between them. See Savoie, “Education et démocratie,” 119.