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## Schools Can't Educate

THOMAS A. EDISON, a few weeks ago, supervised a competitive examination among youths from every state in the Union to find a young man fitted by aptitude, if not by ability, to follow in Edison's footsteps. These boys were required to answer a formidable list of questions, ranging the sphere of human knowledge from geometry and physics to abstract science and ethics. A Seattle schoolboy won the competition and will go through life burdened by the honor of his victory.

Of course, this contest will not serve its published purpose—to produce a successor to Edison. Genius is not evoked by competitive examinations. Edison's wasn't. Neither was Henry Ford's, nor Herbert Hoover's.

But this convention of young scholars demonstrated that standards of American education are comprehensive and practical; otherwise so many immature minds from so many sections could not have made so creditable a showing in a test prepared by mature intellects.

It's easy to cram and coach any bright boy to pass an examination in any given subject. Plastic minds of adolescence can be impressed for good or evil almost as readily as phonograph records. But to give lads in their teens a general acquaintance with culture that enables them to discuss intelligently a dozen different subjects of scientific and human interest, is to approach measurably nearer to the ideal of education—a mind hospitable to all knowledge.

It was said of Isaac Newton, or by him, that the sum of a man's education was the knowledge of his own ignorance—a back-handed epigram that means a man doesn't begin to mentally until he knows his limitations.

Centuries the secular of mankind have expected to produce a system will combine utilitarian or artistic. These experiments

have not been strikingly successful, for in a competitive world, and especially in the United States where there is, at least theoretically, no leisured class, special knowledge must be accentuated to assure the livelihood that may, in time, earn the leisure for general culture.

### True Education

Educational experiments of all kinds are speculative. No two faces are exactly alike; neither are any two mentalities. Systems of study may be devised and standardized, and methods of manual and mental training may be facilitated and made more accessible to young men and women. All such benefits may make training easier without making it better. Multiplication of the means to learn is always progress. The final test of any system of schooling is not what it gives the student but what he takes.

One of the finest minds of his own generation, Herbert Spencer, shocked his contemporaries by declaring that the dead languages, Latin and Greek, should be permitted to rest in peace without forced survival as instruments of mental torture for succeeding armies of pupils. Yet Spencer himself was an admirable example of what the dead languages can do to broaden a gifted intellect in classical knowledge.

Too much can be said, too much has been said on both sides of the controversy regarding essentials and non-essentials in education. The who hold that a man should take all the schools can give may point to an Emerson or an Eliot. Those who declare that intelligence and energy are independent of the schools can always cite the case of Lincoln, who lacked both academic degree and a cultured home.

Whatever the length or lack of formal schooling, education, like reputation, is almost wholly self-made. It is not the stockpiling-up of the mind but the working of it.

A man may win the highest academic honors and still be uneducated, because he can store erudition like a miser without enjoying it in use. Also a man may have avoided books or been denied them, and through native intelligence and steady industry achieve mental assets that make him useful and interesting and successful.

In every human being is the capacity to develop, to educate the faculties of memory, of understanding, and, perhaps most important of all, of will—faculties which may be called all sorts of vague organic reality by the higher psychologists and the lower materialists, but which are united in the ancient and enduring definition of Aristotle—the soul.

The test of true education is not what schooling does for the student, but what the student does for himself. Teachers provide his mental tools, but only he can decide how well he may use them.

