

THE PASSING OF THE FOUR-YEAR PERIOD.

It is not my purpose to put forward in this article set arguments in favor of the reduction of the collegiate course from four to three years, but, rather, to discuss the subject in a dispassionate way, much as I imagine will be done by the future historian of education in America. I shall merely call attention to those facts in the past that have brought about the state of things in which we find ourselves to-day ; show the real character of the concessions we have already made ; and state briefly what I believe the future has in store for us.

In early days our colleges had quite different aims from those they now entertain. They were places for the education of young men who were preparing for the ministry, and to be the intellectual as well as the moral leaders of their respective communities. The college of to-day aims to give our sons and daughters a liberal education ; no matter what is to be their walk in life. The college that had in view the older aim would be an ineffectual means of accomplishing the modern purpose. As this has become more and more evident, the old college has gradually changed. Methods of life, discipline, and instruction have been modified ; new lines of study have been introduced ; and more or less liberty of choice has been granted ; so that the college of to-day is quite a different thing from the college of a hundred years ago.

These changes did not, however, come about suddenly or without resistance. Something of the spirit of monasticism has always clung to college halls and to the study of the professor. Many of the inmates of the colleges held on as long as they could to "the good old ways ;" striving to keep out the great outside world and the innovations that it sought to introduce. There were not wanting in the colleges those who realized that conditions were changing, and who urged that concessions be made to the demands of the times ; but these the conservative element branded as traitors to the cause of education.

When concessions were ultimately made, they more often took the form of the admission of the new than that of the expulsion of the old. There were two ways in which this could be done : first, the student could be required to take the new as well as the old ; or, second, he

might be given his choice between the two. Both methods were adopted. The second led to the offering of various new courses of study and to the establishment of the principle of liberty of election. The other method resulted in increasing the burden that was put upon the student. But this could not be done with impunity ; for only the best prepared students were able to carry the additional load. Consequently, the solution of the problem was found in demanding better preparation ; that is, in raising the requirements of admission. This simply shifted the problem to the schools, which, in their turn, were obliged to wrestle with it.

To these schools two methods were open : first, improved methods of instruction, with the aim of economizing the time of the pupil ; second, the retention of the pupil until he should be able to meet the higher demands made upon him. Again both methods were adopted. To the first we can look for still greater results in the future. The second leads inevitably to the lengthening of the school days of the boy, therefore, to the postponement of the time when he will receive his college diploma. The young man who, at the age of seventeen or eighteen, has completed a good high-school course does not look forward with a keen appetite to four years more of general education before he can direct his attention to what is to be his sphere in life. In the great majority of cases he determines to be content with the education he has, calls the high school " the people's college," and turns a cold shoulder to the real thing.

Of those who do undertake a college course over 50 per cent are forced to give it up by the end of the second year. The attempt has recently been made to disprove this by showing that, taking the country as a whole, the number of college students has increased more rapidly than the increase in population would lead us to expect. A moment's thought will, however, make it clear that we cannot make this prove that it is getting easier for boys in general to attend college, and that they are doing so in greater numbers. We must remember that a very large part of our country is just passing out of its infancy, and that very few of the fathers of the boys now in college ever went to college themselves—to say nothing of their pioneer grandfathers. In certain sections of our country the statistics of the last fifty years show an increase of college students which often runs in a few years from zero to several hundred. To mingle the normal statistics drawn from the long-settled portions of the country with such statistics as these, is, of course, wholly unwarranted, and can serve only to mislead the unwary.

Before leaving this phase of the subject it should be observed, that many of our colleges were not able to impose upon the school, but had to solve the problem chiefly by reducing the amount of Greek, Latin, and mathematics, and by offering only brief courses in the newer subjects. In these colleges, really the majority, the condition is more normal. The graduate of one of our better high schools can enter the sophomore class of such a college, and complete his undergraduate course in three years.

As in the life of a man, so in that of a college, there is not only one current, but there are several ; though two or more may lead to the same goal. Our American colleges were importations from England ; yet the training schools of our professors were not the English colleges, but the German universities. Returning from a course of study in Germany, it was natural that these men should have regarded our higher institutions of learning as younger sisters of those at Göttingen, Leipzig, and Berlin. They introduced German ideas and methods, and tried to develop our colleges into something like German universities. This was made possible by the liberty of election already mentioned. In this way there was introduced into our colleges much of that class of instruction and study that may be properly designated as university work. It exists side by side with the more elementary college work ; and the student who is doing one kind of work with one professor is often trying to do the other kind with another.

We have no longer a true college, an institution that gives a liberal education ; nor have we a true university, in which the specialist can receive complete instruction of the highest kind. At the end of his fourth year of residence at one of our higher institutions of learning the graduate has had a certain amount of real university work ; and, like his schoolmate who contented himself with his "college of the people," he fancies he has had a university education, and is not tempted by the offer of a three-year extension of it, in the form of a graduate course. In other words, the hybrid college-university is hindering the development of the true university.

Let us summarize the two lines of our thought. We have so extended the course of liberal education, that, instead of supplying the wants of the people, we have put it out of the reach of all but a very small percentage of the population ; and, in our desire to hold as long as we can those who do come to us, we make it difficult for any of them to stay with us for the satisfactory prosecution of real graduate work and the upbuilding of a true university. These are the chief difficulties of the

situation, to which we are by no means all blind. Able men, like President Eliot, have repeatedly called attention to the wrong that is being done the young men of the country, and to the danger that threatens our higher institutions of learning if we persist in our present course. But such appeals fall far too often on deaf ears. If the danger appears more or less remote and does not assume a form that is very clear and immediate, the conservatism of the school and the sluggishness of human nature combine to postpone action and to clog the wheels of progress.

In some cases, however, the facts have come home to us in a way that has forced us to action. We have seen that, owing to the vast increase in the amount of knowledge which is necessary to teach the young, and to the fact that the teaching body has been loath to give up any of that which once made up the bulk of what was taught, the school and college days of our youth have been extended. The extension of the world's knowledge has affected not only general education; but, in much the same way, it has greatly increased the time needed for professional training. The extent of the change may be seen from the fact that when I was a student at the University of Michigan a course in medicine consisted of two terms of six months each; while it now consists of four terms of nine months each, or thirty-six months in place of twelve.

It takes but little figuring to show that few can afford to take a four-year high-school course, a four-year college course, and then an extended professional course. This phase of the situation has been met, in a large number of our leading institutions, by granting the professional student the privilege of dropping his humanistic studies at the end of his junior year, and giving him his bachelor's diploma on the completion of the first year of his professional study. In other words, he is permitted so to arrange his work as to receive credit for it in both departments. So far, then, as these students are concerned, the old position has been given up, and the three-year course already exists. The fact that this is not recognized in words is of little account: we are concerned with realities, not with names.

When this concession to professional students was first urged by the more liberal element of the faculty of the collegiate department, it was strenuously opposed by the conservative minority. The latter pointed out that it was virtually the adoption of a three-year course, so far as these students were concerned; that it was "the entering wedge;" and that in a few years, a three-year collegiate course

would be placed within the reach of all. Now that the concession has been made, it is interesting to observe their change of front. They insist that the concession to professional students has nothing to do with a three-year course ; that there is only "a natural and proper blending of the general with the more technical education in the fourth year." They even assert that, as the bachelor's degree is not given until the end of the fourth year—that is, the first year of professional study—it is the professional school rather than the collegiate department that has shortened its course. Well may men sneer at the sophistry of college professors, and smile at the satisfaction with which they glory in the retention of the empty name after they have given up the substance ! But this is not all. The beneficial results of our action in the case of the professional student are being used as an argument against the need of the very thing that we have done. Since we have permitted professional students to get off with three years of general collegiate education, more of them take a bachelor's degree ; thus helping to increase the number of professional students holding such a degree. And this increase¹ is actually cited as evidence that the shortening of the undergraduate course is not necessary.

We may be dissatisfied with the character of the concession that has been made. We can justly call it cowardly, underhanded, and unfair ; for the college yields only where it fears direct consequences, grants to one class of men what it denies to others equally deserving of consideration, and strives to conceal its real nature by a veil of words. Nevertheless, the essential character of the change cannot be covered up, and its importance must not be underestimated. When it was made the real battle had been fought ; and the upholders of a four-year course of general collegiate education had lost the day.

Now that the authorities of the literary, or arts, department have made this concession to professional students, they cannot long remain blind to the fact that they are thereby giving their students a bribe to enter a professional school, rather than remain in the literary, or arts, department and take a graduate course there. The only way around this difficulty lies in granting the privilege also to students who desire to become candidates for higher degrees in the graduate school. And this very step has already been taken by some of the best of our higher

¹ An examination of the lists of students in professional schools will show, that the vast majority of those who hold the bachelor's degree got it by such an arrangement as this, or received it from a college whose senior year corresponds to the junior year of the better colleges.

institutions of learning. For example, in the University of Michigan any undergraduate, at the end of the second or third year of his residence, provided he has done the normal amount of work, including all required work, may devote himself to a major and two minor studies, exactly as though he were a graduate student. While he generally does not receive his bachelor's degree until the end of his fourth year, the fourth year's study is allowed to count as one of the three years usually required for the attainment of the doctor's degree. Indeed, the University Calendar for 1897-98 states :

"The period of three years, however, may be shortened in the case of students who, as undergraduates, have pursued special studies in the direction of their proposed graduate work."

That is, the student who is looking forward to the doctor's degree spends three years on his undergraduate, and three years on his graduate, work. The only point wherein he is served otherwise than he should be is, that he is required to wait for his bachelor's degree until he has finished the first year of his graduate work.

Virtually, then, we are keeping up the four-year period for those students only who do not intend to take up graduate work or to enter one of the professional schools. As I have said, it is easy to show that this distinction is unjust and unwarranted. We have no right to say that a man who does not choose to follow one of a number of paths in life should or must be given a larger amount of general education than one who does. However, step by step, the problem is working out its own solution. Certain schemes are already under consideration that will probably be realized before the century is out. Undergraduates will not only be permitted to enter upon the so-called "university system" referred to above ; they will be encouraged to do so. The normal period of study for the doctorate is three years, and that for the mastership one year. We have seen that the university accepts in lieu of one of the three years required of candidates for the doctorate one year of similar work done before receiving the bachelor's degree. Now, if this one year's work done on the university system is fit to be accepted as one year's work toward the doctor's degree, it is surely fit to be accepted for a like amount toward the master's degree. We cannot long refuse to give equal credit in the two cases. The step we have taken in the one must also be taken in the other ; that is, a student who has spent three years of his college course in general studies, and at the end of the fourth year can pass satisfactory examinations on

work along special lines, deserves of us the master's degree ; and this demand will soon be met. After this has been the practice for a few years, the granting of the bachelor's degree at the end of three years of general collegiate work will be regarded as a matter of course, and will arouse little comment.

As we have seen, it is a mistake to suppose that the entire problem still remains to be solved. It has been already more than half solved. Though the number of persons affected thus far by the concessions is not great, the principle has been conceded, and the application of it to all cases is only a matter of time. In this, as in other movements, certain institutions have taken the lead and their influence has led others to follow, or even to go further. But we must not look for uniformity here any more than elsewhere. Conditions are not the same everywhere, and the concessions made will vary accordingly. In some institutions the change will come gradually, in others with a leap. Moreover, the contemplated shortening of the undergraduate period applies only to those institutions that have unduly raised their entrance requirements. A large proportion of our colleges have lower requirements and bring their graduates to about the point reached by the students of the best colleges at the end of the third year. These weaker institutions, as I pointed out in an article in the "Educational Review," for December, 1897, will not reduce their undergraduate course, but will designate their present freshman work as merely preparatory. All such diversity in details must, however, not blind us to the fact that a great change is going on, which is not likely to cease until our institutions have adapted themselves to the conditions that brought it about.

That the change will be of advantage to the individual young man or young woman who desires to get a liberal education, before entering upon the special training required for his or her calling in life, has been shown over and over again. In the article referred to above I showed that the change will also be of great advantage to our institutions of learning, in (1) that it will increase the number of students doing real graduate work, and that such students will go to the larger graduate schools and thus build up real universities ; and (2) that it will make of the remaining institutions real colleges of a fairly uniform grade. There can be no doubt that a division of our infinitely varied higher institutions of learning into these two classes would be one of the greatest boons that could fall to the lot of education in this country.

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SOCIAL PROGRESS AND RACE DEGENERATION.

IN an interesting passage in one of Darwin's great books he combats the idea that his theory of natural selection must lead us to look on nature as cruel, or to think of the life of animals as one of continual suffering. It is true, he argues, that usually but one out of scores, in some cases only one out of thousands, of the young of any species reaches maturity. Some are destroyed by famine, most of them by enemies. Yet, in general, they know little of the tortures either of hunger or of fear. Death comes quickly and in general painlessly ; whereas the living are maintained at the very maximum of health and vigor by natural selection of the best. The perfect joy of living is theirs in the fullest degree.

There is an undoubted truth in this view, though it may be too roseate. We can at least say that the fight with tooth and claw is not all bad, even for the individual. For the species, for organized life as a whole, it was one of the greatest of the causes of progress. Life is scattered throughout the world in such abundance that only a small proportion can survive to maturity. This was the fact first strongly stated, if not first seen, by Malthus and other writers on economics. It was later made by Darwin the very starting point of his theory of evolution. What Malthus saw was that the superfluous individuals must be crowded out. What Darwin saw was that it was by the survival of the strongest, the most cunning, those best fitted to meet the difficulties of their surroundings, that the general average of muscle, brain, and organization had constantly risen in the animal kingdom.

This is, however, only a partial view of the subject. The other, by no means ignored by Darwin, is in apparent contradiction to it. Even in the earlier stages of animal evolution another influence is present. In low forms of life begins the sacrifice of parent for offspring ; then comes combination instead of conflict between creatures of the same species ; and the growth of sympathies and finer sentiments is shown in its highest form in the evolution of society. Sacrifice favors better than unmodified selfishness the survival of the species. Combination favors progress better than competition alone. Sympathy and benevo-