

Why spend four years and the money it costs to obtain the kind of training that is unavoidable the moment one starts to earn his bread and butter? If this is the kind of defence to be offered for college activities, it is time to recommend passivities, in all conscience.

Perhaps the most defensible of these extra-curriculum activities are those connected with college journalism. But this is largely because they are most in touch with the studies that properly make up an indispensable part of college work proper. The daily theme in an English course involves a training not essentially different from reporting some college event, or writing an editorial comment on the news uppermost in the college world. But from this point down the absorbing interests that mortgage the time of the college boy range from the relatively indifferent to the positively harmful. The name scholar implies leisure, not hustle. Schools have always required isolation and segregation. Business ability must develop in a crowd, but scholarship requires quiet. A recent graduate of Brown University is quoted who compares the Oxford student with the American college youth. He believes that our system makes for "robust enthusiasm as opposed to gentlemanly dilettanteism." This verdict displays at once an utter perversion of the proper object of a sound college training. In the opinion of most competent educators, the English university man has acquired a facility in the field of thought which our American graduates lack. If put among books, he is not lost. He has a sense of touch and a sureness of apprehension that only our best students display. Instead of making college life more "practical" in the sense of burdening it with alien tasks, the first step in reform is to relieve it of just such extraneous burdens.

Not even Mr. Stanton contends that all of these "activities" are free from censure. He intimates broadly that the fraternities, in which he admits the "activities" have their mainspring, need reforming. But it is safe to say that they will never be reformed until the proper business of the college is made central in the life of the student body. Revolutionary as it may sound, we are of the belief that the proper activity of the student is study. Not until the extraneous organizations which have fastened their tentacles upon the time and ambi-

tions of the student body can be cut away, and a free course can be offered for the play of mind upon the abundantly engrossing interests of the intellectual world will our undergraduate life be free from the reproaches that now fasten upon it.

PITFALLS OF BIOGRAPHY.

The theory has been advanced that, eventually, the novel will be supplanted by the biographical form. This is unlikely, for one thing that endears fiction to the reading public is not merely the consciousness of the interesting tale and characters, but the sub-consciousness that this is fiction—that story and characters are merely figments. The biography, on the other hand, has no such ally. It is stripped of glamour. It is simply a beam of dry light which plays more or less gracefully upon an isolated specimen of humanity. Theoretically, the task of writing biography is simple; in practice it demands, like poetry, absolute perfection. Of poetry, a certain college instructor remarked that "a pretty good poem is like a pretty good egg." The same holds true of biography. Indeed, Carlyle has said that "there is no life of a man, faithfully recorded, but is a heroic poem of its sort, rhymed or unrhymed." Small wonder, then, that he who attempts biography should often attain merely the mediocre.

Mr. Edmund Gosse has recently been lecturing upon "The Pitfalls of Biography." Perhaps his most piquant comment is that modern biographies often present too great a wealth of detail. He avers that the biographer, through haste, is often unwilling or unable to winnow his material. This extrusion of details should, in this critic's estimation, be regulated by a law that nothing is to be used except what vitally illustrates the character or career of the subject. But the screening process may easily lead to distortion more serious than a mere chaos of incidents. For if once the biographer regards himself as anything but an impersonal mouthpiece, pure biography will suffer. If he allows his own personality to intervene like a lens between subject and reader, though a charming or stimulating image may be formed, it will be something other than biography. An author of this sort is likely to fall into the pitfall of writing from a thesis of his own. Such a result

is to be observed in Mr. G. K. Chesterton's book on Dickens which, though it makes no definite claim to being a biography at all, is illustrative of the adroit—perhaps unconscious—suppression of facts for the sake of predetermined conclusions. The lesson of a man's life is a task, not for the author, but for the reader.

Of course, the greatest and most insidious temptation to one who writes enthusiastically of another is to place his subject upon a pinnacle. In so doing he thinks himself actuated by the noblest of motives. It is phrased by Fielding:

As it often happens that the best men are but little known, and consequently cannot extend the usefulness of their examples a great way, the biographer is of great utility, as, by communicating such valuable patterns to the world, he may perhaps do a more extensive service to mankind than the person whose life originally afforded the pattern.

Fortunately, Fielding did not apply this theory to his novels, else we should have been deprived of "Tom Jones" as it now stands. The impersonal attitude of the author of that novel toward his characters is of a type which is the greatest desideratum in biography. The life of any man, however good or great, is a welter of acts which range all the way from nobility to actual misdoing. The true portrait gives both sides. We are reminded of Sir Roger de Coverley's commentary when he showed to his guest a certain portrait in the family gallery:

The next heir . . . was this soft gentleman whom you see there. Observe the small buttons, the little boots, the laces, the slashes about his clothes, and, above all, the position he is drawn in (which, to be sure, was his own choosing): you see, he sits with one hand on a desk, writing, and looking, as it were, another way, like an easy writer or a sonneteer. He was one of those that had too much wit to know how to live in the world; he was a man of no justice, but great good manners; he ruined everybody that had anything to do with him, but never said a rude thing in his life; the most indolent person in the world, he would sign a deed that passed away half his estate with his gloves on, but would not put on his hat before a lady if it were to save his country. He is said to be the first that made love by squeezing the hand. He left the estate with ten thousand pounds debt upon it; but, however, by all hands I have been informed that he was every way the finest gentleman in the world.

The good knight, in his desire to cover both good and bad and in his unwillingness to lay down a definite verdict unwittingly touched the right biographi-

cal note. For, after all, the greatest quality of the true biographer is his self-effacement. He is not the frame which enhances the picture, but merely the easel which holds it up to view that all may see and judge.

Correspondence.

PERSONALITY IN POLITICS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: Your article of July 22 upon personality strikes at the root of most of our political difficulties. In a great democracy, by the terms of the case, there must be some force which shall induce a majority to work together, and that in spite of a multitude of incessant, disintegrating forces always at work to split it up. No conceivable measure or set of measures will do this. The mass of units, in smaller or larger groups, will always want different things and want them in different ways. Nothing will reach the desired end except individuality so striking as to command the reason of some, the imagination of more, and the senses of all.

Perhaps the most concrete and visible instance in history is that of France from 1789 to 1800, but it is only one of many. But startling as it may seem, it is hardly rash to say that the condition of the national and legislative assemblies up to 1797 was scarcely worse than that of our Congress to-day. Of course, there is no such ignorant and suffering population, but in the framework of government there is not very much to choose. And if we consider that it is repeated in every State and substantially in every city in the country, it is evident that explosive material is not wanting. We have had one warning which might seem to be severe enough. Those who followed the years 1850 to 1860 will remember that the scenes in Congress and the agitation through the country were much the same in kind—though, of course, not in degree—as they are as to the tariff to-day; and that up to the firing upon Fort Sumter neither side had hardly more suspicion of an impending war than they have now. If we consider, again, the growing strife between capital and labor, and the condition of our banking and currency systems as manifested in the last two years, it points to an imperative necessity for some kind of governmental reform.

It is another curious analogy that the French resorted to the same kind of remedy as we are doing. The executive directory and the consulate were merely forms of government by commission. They failed, as this must fail, from the want of personality. In our great crises we have had two men, Washington and Lincoln, to be set off against Napoleon and Bismarck in Europe. The country is visibly ready and eager for another man. How can we insure that he will be of the same kind? Certainly not by the multiplication of battleships or the spectacle of colonial dominion, by leaving an increase of the standing army at the discretion of the President, or enrolling the State militias under the Federal control, to be called out at his discretion. It was his early victories in Italy which gave

Napoleon his imperial crown. The destruction of civil liberty almost always finds its beginning in foreign war.

The true defence against abuse of personal executive power is personal executive responsibility. The framers of our Constitution wisely saw and provided for the necessity of the former. They did not see—having little or none of the light which we have—that its control must rest with public opinion, and so they gave that control to the representative body, which experience, then already foreshadowed and since made abundantly clear, shows was certain to be abused by that body. The conflict of the future is not to be as to details either of legislation or administration, but as to the relation of the two branches. President Taft said the other day, in an interview with a committee, that he must view the tariff question from his position as representative of the whole nation and not from that of any Senator or Representative. That is the secret of the whole matter. But it cannot be done in such conferences or even at dinners. It must be done in the open arena of Congress by his secretary of the treasury, speaking on behalf of and under the instruction of the one *personal* chief of the whole nation. If, no matter what may be the result of this session, he will open the next with a demand to that effect, he will have placed his foot on the first rung of the ladder leading to the temple of fame—and peace—and to the third niche, which is awaiting him—or somebody—by the side of his illustrious predecessors.

G. BRADFORD.

Boston, July 27.

EVOLUTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: Notwithstanding the centennial celebration for Darwin, there seem to have arisen various defections from his system, of late years. First, the secession of Huxley, who renounced his former strong faith, before his death, as set forth in his "Romanes Lecture," and in "Ethics and Evolution." Now Darwin's own son, Francis, has renounced the main posit of his father's theory, Natural Selection; and there have been various criticisms, showing a trend of doubt and questionings.

It is a curious thing that Darwin's own doubts and misgivings, as expressed at the close of the first editions of his "Origin of Species," have been ignored and concealed. There he sums up his latest readings, with a strain of doubt and uncertainty. He says that sometimes the evidence *against* his theory seems so overwhelming that he is tempted to throw up the whole thing. He then gives some of these objections. He says, first, that the geologic record is wholly against it; also the fact of the sterility of hybrids; also the missing link, and the simultaneous appearance of new species in various remote parts of the world. He notes the unanimous rejection of the idea by all the scientists of the day. He might have added a fact stated by a noted Scotch scientist, viz.: that, although the evolution theory necessitated that each species should reach its highest and most perfect condition at its end, so that a higher species might be evolved from it, exactly the contrary was the fact. Every species distinctly degen-

erated towards its end; lower, deformed, and imperfect forms increased, and it ended in imperfection instead of rising into a superior species. This noted fact would be enough to disprove it.

Yet it seems to have taken possession of the whole world. One of its latest developments is noteworthy. Bernard Shaw makes a new statement of evolution, which is very significant of its trend. He states the original force behind the universe to be bodiless and impotent, without executive power of its own; after innumerable tentatives, experiments and mistakes, this force has succeeded in changing matter into the amoeba, the amoeba into something more complex, until finally there has been a man evolved, with hands and a brain to accomplish the work of the will. Man is not the ultimate aim of this Life. It will go still further, and produce something still more complex than man—the super-man; then the Angel, then the Archangel, and last of all, an omnipotent and omniscient God! This is the climax of the evolution theory.

Of course, Bernard Shaw is not a great, or an authoritative, man. But straws show which way the wind blows; and it is a fact that no consistent evolutionist can escape his conclusion. The fundamental principle of evolution is that *every* higher is evolved out of a lower, and this necessitates the belief that God is evolved out of the highest creature, the Creator out of His creation, the First Cause out of the last effect. Now this is not rationalism, but irrationalism—insanity; and yet it is the logical and rational end and conclusion of the evolution theory. It is a complete inversion of the self-evident law of cause and effect; of the axiom that a cause must be higher than, and prior to, its effect. It is a complete inversion of the fundamental principles of philosophy, and can result only in falsehood, instead of truth.

A SUBSCRIBER.

Cambridge, Mass., July 27.

THE EARLY COLOGNE PICTURES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: In reference to the article "Art Experts on the Defensive" (*Nation*, July 8), allow me to state that, being rather familiar with the pictures of the early Cologne school, I can only consider as wanton extravagance the suspicion thrown upon them by Dr. Poppelreuter and his followers. The style and technique of these paintings, in Cologne, Darmstadt, Nuremberg, and elsewhere, are closely connected (1) with those of French paintings of the fourteenth century, dating from the reigns of Charles V and Charles VI, an admirable example of which has been recently purchased for the Louvre; (2) with the style of the Parisian miniatures of ca. 1400, so well known, thanks to the Belles Heures of Chantilly. Now, in the early part of the nineteenth century, when it is asserted that the forger or forgers exercised their craft, nobody knew or cared about early French pictures or early French miniatures. Moreover, as Dr. Bode has remarked, the museum at Cologne possesses only too many samples of the odious German romantic painting from about 1830; not one of those pictures offers the slightest analogy to the so-called forgeries.