

THE FREE ECONOMY OF STUDENTS



By A. WHITNEY GRISWOLD

From elementary schools to universities, says President Griswold of Yale, American education is in a dangerous tailspin. How we can pull out of it is the subject of this article, adapted from the President's Annual Report to Yale alumni for 1953 and included in his recently published volume entitled "Essays on Education."

IN AMERICAN education today we find trends that threaten not only its institutional security but its very mind and spirit. It is high time we took note of these trends. If they are allowed to continue they might easily produce an educational collapse and cultural setback from which no university could escape.

At the moment the trends show up most vividly in our schools in acute shortages of schoolrooms and teachers. But the estimates are constantly being revised upward. The latest I have at hand may be summarized as follows: In 1952-1953 our total elementary-school enrolment was 25 million and our secondary-school enrolment 6.6 million (including in both cases, both public and private schools). If the present rate of increase continues as expected it will give us an elementary-school enrolment of between 30 and 32 million by 1960, which would project itself into a secondary-school enrolment of 11 to 12 million by 1965. We can imagine how this in turn will swell our pres-

ent higher-education enrolment of around 2 million.

These trends have already created a shortage of classrooms which, despite our best efforts to date, stands at 325,000 and is expected to increase by another 425,000 by 1960. The results of this shortage are overcrowding, double and often triple sessions, fire and health hazards, and consequent deterioration in discipline and instruction. Far worse is the shortage of teachers. Here we discover the alarming fact that in face of the rapidly increasing enrolment of students the supply of teachers is actually declining. The projected need for properly trained and qualified elementary-school teachers this fall was 160,000, against which our colleges produced last year only 36,000. To provide for a secondary-school enrolment that is on its way to doubling itself we turned out 86,000 secondary-school teachers in 1950; 73,000 in 1951; 61,000 in 1952; and 55,000 in 1953. "The public has been repeatedly advised," declares the 1953 Teacher Supply and Demand Re-

port of the National Education Association, "that the American school system is rapidly moving into a new era. The facts have been literally shouted from the housetops. . . . Yet scarcely anywhere is there evidence of adequate steps being taken to meet this crisis." This arithmetic affords us only a quick barometric reading of conditions which would take another Dickens to depict and will take the best wisdom and energy this country is able to put forth to correct. Their immediate result is a nation-wide depreciation of educational standards accompanied by an inordinate waste of human resources.

Our colleges and universities depend upon the schools for their most essential raw material, and if the schools cannot or do not send them properly qualified material the whole fabric of higher education becomes a bridge built upon rotten pilings. Students who have been hustled through overcrowded and undisciplined classrooms, taught by overworked, underpaid, and improperly qualified teachers, and nurtured on subjects that do not constantly stretch their minds and expand their vision are poor material for college or university. The results of such education cannot fail to undermine the standards of both the liberal arts colleges and the graduate and professional schools of the universities. Nor have they failed to do so.

It is true that the worst effects of the trends cited above should not be felt in higher education for another

decade. It was my own recent experience as a teacher in Yale College to find in my classroom each year a growing number of students who, though they might (and did) score high marks for their knowledge of the subject of the course, might have failed it altogether if I had graded them in rhetoric. Before me as I write is the annual report of the dean of one of Yale's professional schools which complains of "widespread illiteracy among college graduates . . . want of competence effectively to read, write, and spell the English language and even more to read, spell, or write any foreign language . . . accordingly . . . want of capacity to acquire and apply intelligence." Beside it is a letter from a professor of economics, the distinguished graduate of European universities and former member of their faculties who has taught at both Yale and Harvard, expressing dismay at the "near illiteracy" of his graduate students in both institutions. "Few of them" he says, "know how to write, and some don't even know how to read. The main trouble undoubtedly lies with our primary and secondary education, and I am not sure how much of it could still be remedied by appropriate reforms in our undergraduate curric-

ulum. I am afraid it may be too late by then to make up some of the deficiencies in the students' earlier training. Still, it has to be attempted. . . ." With half our undergraduates now entering professional schools and nearly all undergoing some form of professional or quasi-professional training after graduation, the urgency of the attempt is indicated.

I have selected this evidence from Yale's faculty at random. I could multiply it many times from business and industrial as well as professional and academic sources. It proves, I think, that in education as in commerce when bad money gets into circulation it drives out good, and the process is only intensified as the latter is hoarded.

I HAVE cited the two most obvious causes of these conditions: the shortage of facilities and the shortage of teachers. The criticism I have quoted points to a third cause, less obvious perhaps, but certainly no less important. This is the decline of the liberal arts as a force in our national educational system. These studies are disappearing under a layer of vocational and other substitutes like the landscape in the ice age, only this glacier reaches from coast to coast

and border to border. With all due exceptions, and all honor and power to those exceptions, the attitude of most educational institutions toward this trend varies from mild concern to indifference and cheerful acquiescence.

Alas, no substitutes have been found for reading and writing. The practice and enjoyment of these skills in an ever-widening orbit and on an ever-ascending plane are both ends and means to the liberal arts. If deficiencies in these skills show up in colleges and even in the highly selective graduate schools of universities, do they not betray a comprehensive deficiency of the parent discipline? At a meeting of the Association of American Universities last October a distinguished dean from another institution, deploring the phenomenon, attributed it to the failure of the schools. I have heard schoolteachers blame it on the colleges. The argument moves in a vicious circle leaving untouched the central fact that both schools and colleges and through them American civilization are denying themselves the benefits of studies which for two thousand years, throughout Western civilization, have been esteemed as the key to the good life as well as to all true academic achievement.

The point is substantiated by more disturbing evidence. While over half the nation's youth finishes high school and a fifth (of the whole) goes on to some form of higher education, this group includes less than half of those best qualified for such education. Of the top quarter in intellectual ability 20 per cent do not continue for financial reasons, and 40 per cent—a proportion exactly equal to that which does continue—for lack of motivation.

That so large a proportion of our best college material eschews higher education for such a reason is a fact that requires much interpretation. It is a composite of environment, chance, social status, geography, and other elements and influences. Is it not, too, further proof of our neglect of the liberal arts? The whole impulse and tendency of the liberal arts is to encourage the individual to make the most of all educational opportunities within reach and constantly to seek new ones. If the parents and teachers of these "unmotivated" young men and women had themselves been steeped in the liberal arts would they not have communicated this impulse to their children and students? If their schools had afforded anything like proper introductions to the liberal arts would the impulse have been lost? The voluntary rejection of higher education

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Your Literary I. Q.



Conducted by John T. Winterich

MORE DISTAFF SIDERS

Helene Nitzsche of Maquoketa, Iowa, submits the names of twenty British women writers and a list of book titles. You are asked, in each instance, to match the title to the non-writing name and to supply the name under which each writer writes. Eight correct identifications can be regarded as good, nine as highly commendable, and ten or better as distinctly admirable. Answers on page 28.

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| 1. Lady Turner | () "The Strange Life of August Strindberg" |
| 2. Lady O'Malley | () "Francis Thompson and Wilfrid Meynell" |
| 3. Mrs. Eric Reeve | () "The Emperor Constantine" |
| 4. Mrs. Mark Napier | () "The House of Strangers" |
| 5. Mrs. John Dallyn | () "The Great Corinthian" |
| 6. Mrs. F. N. Betts | () "The Shelbourne Hotel" |
| 7. Mrs. David Davies | () "Mrs. Tim Flies Home!" |
| 8. Mrs. Peter Luling | () "The Candle's Glory" |
| 9. Mrs. Oliver Onions | () "Quartet in Heaven" |
| 10. Mrs. Ernest Milton | () "The Echoing Grove" |
| 11. Mrs. T. Penrose Fry | () "Fantastic Holiday" |
| 12. Mrs. Wogan Philipps | () "A Place to Stand" |
| 13. Mrs. Arthur L. Long | () "Beyond Euphrates" |
| 14. Mrs. Clare Robinson | () "The Hidden Land" |
| 15. Mrs. James R. Peploe | () "To Bed at Noon" |
| 16. Mrs. Stewart Perowne | () "Troy Chimneys" |
| 17. Mrs. J. B. Priestley | () "One Fine Day" |
| 18. Mrs. Alan C. Cameron | () "The Signpost" |
| 19. Lady Fergusson-Hannay | () "The New Rich" |
| 20. Mrs. Atherton Fleming | () "A Woman as Great as the World and Other Fables" |