

What Price the Modern Boy? II.

1. Sophistication.

The small boy yearns for the time when he will be able to wear long pants and impress the world. One of the cutest wise cracks of four-year-old Cutie that fond papa pees about the office is his "I'm a big man now." It is not long before bigness comes to be measured by badness, and the world is right there to teach him all the tricks. The first cigarette, the first chew, the first pair of dice, the first dirty joke -- these are landmarks in the progress of the little devil. If so be there are factory hands or high school girls in the vicinity, he can gather choice applause for his precocious profanity.

The rapid multiplication of means of communication place worldly wisdom within his grasp very readily, and as he ascends the ladder of sophistication, he blah-blabs very glibly of vice; and when he reaches college, from Podunk or from Harlem, he is the complete College. And it's all so silly. He wants to impress his seniors, and he merely marks himself a mark for their pity. He misses all the real joy of life, because that understanding gradually. He makes his real hit only with the goofs, male and female.

A wholesome, simple boy from a sound Catholic family in a small town, dropped this bit of philosophy one night over in Washington Hall (this was a few years back, before Mr. Carey beat Balaban and Katz to the first runs): "I feel sorry for these boys from the city. They've seen all these pictures, and they've seen so much and known so much that they can't enjoy anything. I get a big kick out of these pictures. At home we only had shows once a week, and papa wouldn't let us go much then."

An overdose of sophistication makes education impossible. Once a man becomes wedded to the idea of precocious smartness, he closes his mind to the lore that backs up real wisdom. Most of our stupid book reviewers in the popular magazines are sophisticates -- garrulous enough, but dumb. Count the "I's" in one of Fanny Butcher's platitudes, for example: "I think," "it is my opinion," "to my mind," and so on ad inf. One H. Broun turned a pretty phrase in baseball write-ups, so the managing editor put him on the music beat to pep up that department; and then he turned his ignorance to literature.

When the history of this period is written, a hundred years from now, how many of the sophisticates will be known by name? Their clamor is so loud now that one would suspect we have no scholars. While the goofs remain in the majority, the sophisticates have a glorious time, but time makes faint the clamor, and common sense endures. In the meantime, if you have thought well of sophistication, hide your high brow magazine, seal your lips for a month, and read in the Book of Wisdom what thought lasts.

2. Mental Inertia.

"Inability to draw an inference" is put down by Professor Meikeljohn as one of the characteristics of the sophomore mind; and anyone who has tried to teach sophomores, whether therein the first, second, third, fourth, or fifty year of college, will understand what he means. Common sense, or good judgment, which means the ability to draw a sound, workable conclusion from facts in hand, is the rare jewel the world is seeking for executive positions. Do college men think? Take a fundamental example. Five times this year the campus has been visited by rather sudden death. Each time multitudes of strange faces have appeared at the Communion rail, only to disappear again within a few days to await the next shock. If a Catholic young man cannot think rationally on the fundamental matter of his soul's salvation without death staring him in the face, there is small danger of his exerting his intelligence on less important matters. Thinking requires the deepest courage; cowards dare not think.

Prayers: John Muldoon's father has been anointed, and Frank Hagenbarth's mother is