

What Price the Modern Boy? XII.

2. Untutored Educators.

For a nation of time-savers and efficiency experts we are the greatest wastrels in the world, and in no part of our national life is this more apparent than in our educational system -- with the possible exception of the United States Senate.

Our waste of time in education arises principally from the fact that we are smug. The American system of state education came into being without European traditions behind it; its founders and political backers were bumptious enough to believe that it was better than anything European could be because it was made in America; it has stumbled along for more than a century in a wasteful, because lethargic and blind, attempt to fit together three separate starts in the educational process, the university, the academy and the primary school. The result is that at twenty-one our students are about two years behind the normal students of other countries in mental development. And tradition was discarded partly, if not mainly, because it was Catholic tradition.

The average American boy of fourteen is more or less ready to begin Algebra, while the average French boy has finished Algebra and Geometry. The average American boy of fourteen is about ready to begin the (useless in theory, and often worse than useless in fact) study of Latin, while the average Irish boy has had a little Latin --- meaning a little of such authors as Horace and Ovid. The average South American boy has had much training in "x, y and z" in Arithmetic; he has been drilled very thoroughly in abstract theory; the American boy has worked book-fulls of examples, scattering efforts to "find the answer in the book" and is as innocent of principles as he is of the riddle of the Sphinx. For some fifteen years, when Latin-American students in Engineering were more numerous at Notre Dame than they are now, the medal for four years work in Civil Engineering went to a Latin American whose preparation for the work was two years shorter than that of his American competitors.

The American child is coddled, is kept as far as possible from using thinking and from using his memory. The foreign child is held strictly to business; it is taken for granted that God gave him a mind and expects him to use it. Socially, of course, they are our inferiors. The Seventh Grade doesn't have a Junior Prom.

Is it true that the American child's mind develops more slowly, that by its constitution it reaches maturity two years later than the Latin mind, and that its growth is consequently more solid and its fruit more sound? We have the assertion; but we have no proof. And that the assertion is no longer accepted wholeheartedly we have proof in the various squirming attempts to avoid repetitions in history and English courses taken by the high schools from the colleges.

What is the function of the University? The function of the Catholic university you find admirably stated by Cardinal Newman in his Idea of a University (see the University catalogue). Can the state university take money from the tax-payers for cultural education? Dr. Henry Suzzalo, President of the University of Washington, Seattle; one of the foremost secular educators of the country, says that it cannot; that its function must of necessity be a purely economic one, that it must give a financial return to the tax-payers, that the imparting of culture belongs by right to the private universities. Less outspoken educators have acted on this principle without enunciating it. Yet the state universities are making strong efforts to control the content and standards of education, and century-old Catholic traditions have had a struggle, perhaps not violent enough at times, to hold to their inheritance.