

University of Notre Dame
Religious Bulletin
January 24, 1934

Are College Men Responsible?

Many mature men in the world have their doubts. Employers who hire a college man usually expect to spend some months taming him.

Punctuality, a sober demeanor on the job, dependability in the details of daily work -- these are qualities which do not automatically flow from seeking one's own convenience, but all employers look for, and hardly expect to find them in the average college man.

If it is hard to understand why you must rise and retire at fixed hours, why you must observe other regulations of the University that tend to build into you something besides mere knowledge, read the following article, clipped from a business journal, and entitled "The Real Value of a Degree":

"A rather talkative craftsman was doing a bit of repair work in the Inglenook. As I was paying for the job by the hour I did not encourage his vocal efforts, especially as he used his hands as much in gesture as in the manipulation of his tools. But I pricked up my ears and showed interest when he said: 'It has been hard to keep my boy in college these last three or four years; but I managed it. Now he is home with his B.A at the age of twenty-three, and the next problem is, What will he do with it?'

"The other day he said he was going to one of the near-by lakes to swim. He didn't say which lake or when he was likely to be back. When he didn't show up at dark, his mother began to worry, and this increased as the hours went by and he was still missing. By daylight I was doing some worrying myself. I set out in my car to look for the lad. Late in the day I found him at one of the lakes about twenty miles from home. He was mildly surprised to learn that we had been much worried about him; admitted that he hadn't given the matter a thought, assuming we would know he was all right. And after considering the long hours of grief and anxiety he had caused his mother and myself, just because he didn't think -- for I know he would not deliberately cause us to worry -- I have been wondering just what practical use his B.A. and all his years at college will be to him. I had the idea that the chief purpose of an education was to teach young folks to think, to reason and to act as the result of such thinking and reasoning. I am beginning to doubt the soundness of that idea.'

"I am disposed to share in this man's doubt, but not to lay all the blame for the young man's remissness or lack of consideration on his college years. I can see the father's point of view and understand his disappointment over the immediate returns from his college investment. The flaw in the lad's education may have started in his home. His parents might not have taught him to be unselfish, to be thoughtful, to be considerate of others. Or the lad may be innately thoughtless -- which is just another name for selfish -- in which case, if he is cured at all, it will be most likely in the postgraduate course of "hard knocks" when he begins to fend for himself and to brush up against his fellows. Still I cannot escape the conviction that when an institute of learning confers a degree something of deeper value than academic embellishments should go with it. If the thinking and reasoning, precedent to action, supposed to be taught in our schools and colleges, do not embrace those prosaically human things which bring comfort and happiness to others, then of what practical use is a B.A., or any other university degree? For after all is said and done, the giving of happiness, unselfish consideration for others, is just about the greatest thing that life can bring to any one of us. A college degree which does not include this includes nothing of practical moment, contributes nothing of real value to life."