

SHALL WE SEND OUR BOY TO COLLEGE?

By Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D. D.

WHAT depends a great deal on the boy. It might not be best for him to go to college; it might not be best for the community that he should. College can fit a man for life, and, also, it can unfit him. There are styles of education that disqualify the student for doing what he is competent to do, without qualifying him to do that which he might like to do, but for which he lacks, and always will lack, the prerequisites. Agriculturalists tell us that there are soils which, if left mostly to themselves, will bear a very respectable crop of a certain order, but which, if considerably cultivated, will neither bear a crop of that order nor of any other. Soil and brain are not so widely differenced as not to be subject, within certain limits, to the same laws. As a general principle, the more a man knows the better, but so long as the present order of things continues a great amount of very ordinary work will require to be done; and ordinary people will do ordinary work better than extraordinary people will, and be a great deal more comfortable while doing it. Hordes of both sexes are entering college for the reason that they do not enjoy doing commonplace things. The result is that commonplace things are left undone, and uncommonplace things fare still worse.

AGRICULTURE is the material basis of a nation's strength and prosperity. We could dispense with either lawyers, doctors or ministers better than we could with farmers. Probably we should not quarrel so much if there were fewer students of the law; should not be sick so much if there were fewer students of medicine, and should not be so wicked if there were fewer students of theology. All of these could contribute liberally to the ranks of the agriculturalists with advantage to the professions and to the grain and vegetable markets. I am not disparaging anybody, neither am I saying that it would not be a good thing, in itself considered, if every one, however material or menial his occupation, could receive all that the finest school or college training could confer; but that is not practicable at present, and never will be till people get over thinking that there is a disgrace attaching to the doing of ordinary things. I am often called upon by those who are not ashamed to beg, but who would blow out their brains or jump into the North River before they would soil their hands by shoveling gravel. They are frequently college graduates who got just enough Greek and Latin to think that manual labor was degrading, but not enough Greek and Latin to guarantee them against the poorhouse. They illustrate the point already made that colleges unfit men as well as fit them. This is one matter, then, that parents need to think over when considering the question of giving their boys a college education.

I BELIEVE thoroughly in the college, and it is significant that very few college graduates feel otherwise. The disparagement of such institutions emanates almost without exception from those who have not experienced their benefits, and are not, therefore, in a situation to reach an intelligent judgment. It is not safe to claim, however, that every kind of success, even of legitimate success, will be promoted by a college training. There are two classes of result toward which men strive, and two sorts of problem that the engagements of their life will require them to solve. One of these classes could be illustrated by the money-getter. If I had a boy for whom it was my supreme ambition that he should become rich I should not send him to college. So far from helping his prospects in that direction it would probably damage them. Broad-mindedness cannot be counted upon to yoke up easily with monetary shrewdness. Money-making is a trick. The easy acquisition of it is a knack. It involves the condensation of interest and faculty along a particular line, and that a narrow line. There is nothing to hinder a very small man from being a very wealthy one. Some men, whose names will instantly occur probably to the reader of this article, could hardly have become greater except at the expense of becoming poorer.

SHREWDNESS does not imply big-mindedness. I might say with a good deal of assurance that it implies the contrary. And shrewdness has more than anything else to do with the acquisition of gain. I am not defining words here, but trying to use them in the sense usually accepted. Shrewdness among men is a good deal the same thing that sharpness is among knives, razors and scissors, and is less suggestive of largeness than it is of blade thinned down to an edge. This is not disparaging the quality of the material. The sharpest razors can be drawn down only from the best steel, but, nevertheless, the reason they can cut is because there is so little to them at the point where they take hold. Much the same thing can be asserted of other experts as well as of the money expert. There are a great many things that can be best done by the man who does not know too much, or, at least, by the man whose intelligence is concentrated at a single point or along a single line. The mechanic who has come to be known among us as the "Wizard" would, perhaps, have been more of a man if he had gone to Harvard, but it would probably have spoiled him as a "wizard." Genius is presumably always a species of mania, and liable, therefore, to become something very ordinary if successfully subjected to the processes of the asylum. They had better be kept away from college if the design is to make them experts. College will be able to give them a character of "all-roundness," but a knife cannot be round and sharp at the same time; neither can a boy. It is true that there are what are called business colleges, where the monopolizing purpose is to make the students into business experts, money-making experts. It is unfortunate that such schools are called colleges, for to the degree in which they fulfill their advertised purpose they cease to embody the college idea. Such "colleges" do not aim to deepen and expand their students, but to sharpen them for business life, and perform, therefore, only the same part that the grindstone and the hone do in preparing the razor for the cutlery shop.

THIS leads up directly to the second class of results toward which men strive, and for which either of what are called the learned professions would suffice as example. We are now on ground quite distinct from that occupied by the expert. We are quite out of the region of shrewdness, crankiness and mania. In dealing with our physician, our lawyer, or our clergyman we want a man with trained powers and with balanced powers. In that I have combined in a single sentence the two purposes of the college. The object of such an institution is not to fit a man for any specific occupation or calling. College is not a grindstone nor a whetstone. In its true intention it stands in the same relation to mind that the gymnasium does to body. Men do not practice in a gymnasium in order that they may learn how to perform any specific variety of physical labor, but in order that they may be in muscular condition to do anything that may come to them to be done, or, still better, that their body may be at its completest and its best. So if we are going to do large intelligent work the prime condition is the possession of an intellect trained and stocked in the same general and comprehensive way. College training is simply the process of intellectually getting ready, not getting ready for this, that or the other specific mental service, but simply getting ready—planting down a broad foundation of preliminary big enough to support any breadth or height of superstructure that there may be need or opportunity to put upon it. There are two criticisms which ardent and practical young men are likely to pass upon the purpose of college training as thus stated, one of which is that it involves an infeasible expenditure of time. Graduates are themselves the best judges upon this matter. The college course and the requisite preparatory training costs about seven years of the best and most possible period of a man's life. There may be circumstances in the case that forbid such expenditure. Considerations of health, means, dependencies, may necessitate a different mode of life and a pecuniarily remunerative one; but if a young man hopes to do a large, solid work in the world, a work in which intelligence of a broad kind is to play any considerable part, and there is no antecedent obstacle in the way, he makes an irreversible mistake if he considers seven years too much to pay for a liberal education.

IF the practical youngster considers such an expenditure of ten per cent. of his lifetime impracticable it needs to be said that there is nothing more misleading than the "practical" conclusions arrived at by inexperience. The time a man spends in getting ready is never wasted time. The value of a man's work is not determined nearly as much by its quantity as by its quality, and quality is the correlate of preparation. If I may refer to myself, I commenced what may be called my life's work when I was thirty-three. Up to that time I was simply finishing the preliminaries and had no definite purpose for the future. More men scrimp the effects of their life by beginning too early than by beginning too late. If they die young it makes little difference how much time they spend in apprenticeship, and if they live to a ripe age it makes a great deal of difference. It is rather a suggestive fact that nine-tenths of our Lord's life He spent in preparation.

I AM only dealing just now with the general proposition that because it takes seven years to reach the end of a college course is no kind of reason at all why a man should not take a college course. So far from its not being practical it is the most severely practical thing he can do, just as the most practical thing an architect can first do in putting up a building is not to build, but to excavate; and the higher he expects to build up the more time he will use up in digging down. It is safe to say that ninety-five out of a hundred college graduates would take no exception to my statement. Another criticism prompted by the utilitarian spirit, particularly if inexperienced, will be that the college occupies itself so much with what has no direct bearing upon the ordinary questions of life. To any one who has yielded himself vigorously to the discipline of the college curriculum such a criticism appears just about as reasonable as it would for a man to object to certain dishes placed before him at table on the ground that he was unable to follow each crumb and drop to the particular function it discharges in the anatomy and physiology of the body. It is a sad pity that our college authorities are to such a degree succumbing to this shallow skepticism, and that they are so largely allowing the idea that a college is an institution for the comprehensive upbuilding of a man, to be replaced by the idea that it is a sort of whetting shop where dull steel can be ground to an edge, or a kind of cabinet shop where unshaped timber can be worked down and fitted to a particular niche in the business of life. In this way instead of being the fosterer of intelligence pure and simple the college is coming to be utilized to a considerable degree as a contrivance for teaching mind to do specific things and play particular tricks. Still the old idea is deeply rooted, and there is conservatism enough, I hope, to insure its maintenance. The question to be settled is not what particular studies will be the means of securing the graduate quickest admission to the activities of life, but what are the studies that are best fitted to make his mind distinct and vigorous in every direction, so that he will be soundly intelligent and equipped even for uncalculated emergencies.

I can say for myself that those studies which seemed to me when in college least prolific in probable practical result have in the issue shown themselves to be just the ones that have been most practical and prolific in their yield. Those powers of mind which are the most necessary are in many a student the very ones that are least feebly present, and the ones, therefore, to which the most attention needs to be given rather than the least. A student's fondness for a particular branch, and his ability to appreciate in advance the advantages of a particular branch, suggest absolutely nothing as to the desirability of prosecuting that branch. The trouble with hosts of people is that they want to get results without earning them. Young men fix their eyes upon those who have attained a measure of success, and conceive that there is a possibility of their attaining to the same success without squarely and honestly paying for it. We never obtain what we have not except by the laborious exertion of what we have. There are no royal roads; there are no short cuts which do not in the end demonstrate themselves to be the longest and most circuitous routes in existence. College life is long and laborious. It costs money, and other things that are still more expensive than money; but it is the best expedient yet devised for securing in a man that completeness of equipment which will enable him to win his way in the world, where so immense a proportion of the problems have to be solved by intelligence that is trained, balanced and on the alert.

In my next article (in response to a request received from one of my readers) I want to say something as to the means by which one who for any reason is not able to go to college can best make up to himself the loss which he thereby suffers.

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SUBSTITUTES FOR A COLLEGE TRAINING

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MY May article stated some of the advantages of a college training. Some go to college who would have been better off at home. Some, who would have been benefited by such discipline, have the opportunity closed against them by circumstances that are beyond their control. To many of the latter the deprivation is a bitter disappointment, and the earnestness of their own temperament and purpose of life puts them upon inquiring how the loss which they thus sustain can, in a measure, be made up to them by some sort of substitute for college training. The aim of the present paper is to answer, as far as possible, this inquiry.

THE first thing of which we need to remind ourselves is that the particular studies which are taken up in college are not prosecuted for their own sake, but for the sake of the interior discipline which their prosecution is presumed to afford. Let me cite, as example, the Greek and Latin languages. If, now, those languages were studied in order that upon graduation the student might be in a condition to read classic authors with facility and intelligence, it would be difficult to solve my inquirer's perplexity. Nothing but the study of Greek and Latin will acquaint men with Greek and Latin, and there is nothing that will perfectly take the place of a college as an expedient for pursuing those studies. The instant it is allowed that the final object of a college course is to acquaint students with the branches taught in that course there is no longer anything that can be offered as a substitute for such a course. But that, as I attempted to point out a month ago, is not the object of the college. A student may think it is before he goes, but he understands better after he has been out a few years. I studied Greek faithfully when I was in college and read considerable of Homer, but I do not suppose I could read a line of him to-day without a grammar and a dictionary. If anybody says I ought to be ashamed of it, all I can reply is that I am not ashamed of it at all. When a traveler comes to a river he looks about to find a bridge by which he can cross it, and when he gets to the other end of the bridge he leaves it for the next man, without its ever occurring to him to take it along with him. So when a mountaineer is scaling a sharp spur and finds a ladder spiked in for the convenience of climbers, he puts his foot upon it, scrambles up over it, and then leaves it behind him, never expecting to encounter any one who is so much of a fool as to rebuke him for not having trundled the ladder up with him, and for not having capped the summit with all his mountaineering paraphernalia. What I mean by this is that Greek, Latin, physics and mathematics are primarily not the goal of pursuit, but are the bridges, ladders and other apparatus of locomotion by which the goal is to be reached; so that whether we do or do not know how to read Plato and Livy six years after we are out of college, or how to analyze flowers and calculate ellipses, we are still at the apex if we are possessed of the mental keenness and vigor which it is the supreme office of those studies to produce.

UNDERSTANDING, then, that mental keenness and vigor are the final objects proper to be aimed at by a college course it becomes a very natural and suitable question to ask whether those objects are not such that other than college means will suffice to compass them. Because a gymnasium affords opportunity for systematized bodily training, hardly to be obtained otherwise, it does not follow that a gymnasium is necessary to health, and that there are no other means of physical culture that will not answer every essential purpose. If health depended on the swinging of dumb-bells, or the ability to vault, or to exploit parallel bars, then a gymnasium would be an indispensable, and all idea of substituting for it a vagary; but what one man gets in a gymnasium another may get just as well in a row-boat, or on a mountain climb, or a bicycle, or even in the common exertion of every-day exercise. The question in physical matters is not how the discipline comes but whether it comes. So it is in the matter we are considering now. When a man has reached the age of thirty the question to ask is, how much intellectual vigor he is possessed of, not how he obtained it.

I can take another step forward now and say that everything that taxes the mind is in the nature of mental discipline. In every department of acquisition we make progress by trying to be to the utmost the thing that we already are. If our object is to lengthen the reach of our vision we do it by requiring our eyes from time to time to form a distinct image of objects so far removed that it is done only by a little

exertion. That is why sailors have a better eye for distant objects than a landsman has. The gymnast who is intert upon adding to his muscle raises a dumb-bell that demands of him distinct outlay of effort. He becomes stronger by being as strong as he can with the fund of strength he already possesses. The same principle, familiarized to us by the more commonplace acquirements of life, is really the fundamental factor in all processes of mental discipline. The mind also gains in vigor by the taxed exercise of its vigor. As soon as any particular variety of mental exercise has been practiced so long that it ceases to cost us effort its value as a means of mental training has come to an end. Any employment, therefore, that tends to keep the intellectual powers strained is to a degree working the same kind of educational effect that is produced by training in college.

HOW much all this means has been brought very closely home to me by my intimate personal acquaintance with two communities, one of which is devoted to agricultural, the other to manufacturing, interests. One of these two is filled up with machines, and the men and women who tend them become almost as mechanical in their mental processes as are the machines themselves. The efforts required by such employment may be physically exhaustive, but the intellectual activity involved sinks almost to the level of the automatic. The other town mentioned is distinctly agricultural. It is largely in the hands of independent farmers, who work with their own hands, but who form their own plans of work, study the soil, observe climatic conditions, familiarize themselves with the whole matter of the relation and adaptedness of crops, and are well at home with the requirements of the markets. Any man who has undertaken to be either a teacher or a preacher in two communities thus differenced in their occupations, understands very well the unlikeness between the two in point of intelligence. It is not simply that it takes less brain to run a loom than it does to raise a crop, but that there is nothing in the former to strain the brain and stimulate it to become larger. Closely consistent with all of this is the increased attention which is coming to be paid to manual training, and that, too, not simply with the intention of providing the student with a means of livelihood, but for the purpose of the intellectual training which it involves. Neither a boy nor a man can do difficult and painstaking work with his hands without his energies of attention and thought becoming enlisted and strained, and that, so far forth, means education, education in the same sense in which college intends it, *viz.*: the knitting of the mental fibre together in closer compactness. Such a process will not make a man either a linguist or a mathematician, but if wisely selected and maintained will, at least, work in the direction of the results aimed at by the discipline of the college.

IT will be still farther in the same direction, and a more pronounced step in that direction, to say that systems of instruction by correspondence have been developed in a very remarkable degree during the past few years, and while they do not take the place of the college they go quite a way toward it. Probably almost any man who has an earnest purpose to equip himself for effective service would be able to devote an hour a day to quiet and concentrated study. He will lack the stimulus that comes from the rivalries and personal contacts of college, but that will be mostly supplied by his own ambition. The college, too, gives that carefully-considered direction to studious endeavor such as could certainly not be expected from a student who was undertaking to work out his own course unaided and alone. Anything like a balanced education implies a system of discipline whose administration is in the hands of a master who thoroughly comprehends that system. The great fault of private attempts at an education is that the learner is a blind leader of the blind, and therefore runs great risk of never getting anywhere in particular. It is at this point that the scheme of education by correspondence just mentioned comes to the rescue. It lacks the element of direct personal touch between teacher and pupil, but secures the very important feature of intellectual governance. A personal friend of mine recently took up the study of Hebrew in this way. His report of the case is that though his teacher and he were hundreds of miles apart, and the intercourse of question and answer had to be maintained entirely by mail, yet he considered that the progress he made was nearly as great and satisfactory as though the course had been conducted in a college or seminary classroom. And even if he did not in a given time acquire the same amount of

Hebrew that might have been possible in the ordinary method of personal instruction, yet it is presumable that the intellectual tax upon him was just as severe, if not more so, and that, after all, as already intimated, is the chief desideratum. If a man cannot go to college, the college can, in this way in a very wide and true sense of the term, come to him. This is not the place to go into the details of this matter of correspondence schools, although I would be pleased to do so by private communication with any reader who may desire further information. My only object in this allusion has been to show that to any man who has a little time, a fair amount of brain and a large store of energy and patience, there are the means at hand, without much pecuniary expense, of securing a near equivalent of the mental discipline obtainable in college, and an interior equipment, therefore, qualifying for good and effective service. The man who fails of doing large work in the world because he has not spent four years in Harvard or Yale, Amherst or Columbia, has himself to blame for it.

IT involves no abandonment of practical ground to say that an additional means of mental discipline is involved in the laborious contemplation of the great truths of our Christian religion. In making this reference I am not speaking at all in the interests either of morality or of piety. The position here assumed simply tallies with the statement attributed to Rufus Choate that he recommended to his law students a familiarity with the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism. No one will imagine that his suggestion was made in the interests of evangelization; neither is mine. The authors of that catechism may have said a great deal more than they know, but the lines of thought which they laid down feel their way out into the vastnesses of religious reality in such a way that no mind can follow them, or even attempt to follow them, without feeling itself to be developing intellectual nerve and robustness in the process. It is a great thing to think about large matters, even if the accuracy of the thinking cannot be absolutely guaranteed, for it creates intellectual width, and strains the mental tissues in a way that makes over to them push and resolution. It may be well said of the hardy intelligence of the Scotch that it is due to generations of oatmeal and Calvinism. In reading recently the biography of a prominent statesman it was interesting to observe that his training was conducted along distinctly Biblical lines, and that while he did not have the advantage of a college education the loss was in no small measure made up to him by the thoroughness with which he was taught in the truths of our religion. Contact with great truths, whether of the astronomical or of the theological heavens, gets the mind into a large way of working, and the stuff that is in an idea becomes stuff in the mental calibre of the mind that digests and assimilates that idea. It is easy and rather good form to depreciate the tough indoctrination that used to be administered on Sunday to the olden congregations of New England, but a good deal of New England sturdiness of thought was built out of exactly that tough indoctrination; and to-day there would be less mushiness in what laymen think six days in the week if there were more sinew in what we preachers teach them the other one day.

ONLY sufficient space remains to me to say that there is a certain keenness and vigor of discipline that can come to a man only as he lives out in the midst of things and becomes himself a part of the world and of the events with which the world is so solidly packed. Those to whom my words are particularly addressed are young men who are anxious to make themselves felt in the world, and to such it needs to be said that we best learn how to do by doing. A sense of opportunity, a feeling of being a part, even a minute part, of the machinery by which the threads of current event are being woven in, works upon us with the power of a fine discipline and a strong inspiration. The solidity of the burden that is carried helps to solidify the man who carries it. Problems tumble easily apart in the field that refuse to give up their secret in the study or even in the closet. Reality is what educates us, and reality never comes so close to us with all its powers of discipline as when we encounter it in action. In books we find truth in black and white, but in the on-rush of event we see truth at work; and it is only when truth is busy, and when we are ourselves personally mixed up in its activities, that we learn to know of how much we are capable, or win the power by which those capabilities can be made over into effect. Let no young man, then, of spirit and purpose be dismayed by his inability to attend either college or university. Life is itself the oldest and best endowed university in the world, and will guarantee to its pupils all in the way of vigor, keenness and grasp that they have in them the grace and persistency to acquire.

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