

## TOPICS OF THE TIME.

## Modern Collegiate Education.

THIS month will witness the annually recurring revival of the general educational system of the country. The machinery of public schools, private schools, colleges, and universities will begin to move again after the summer vacation; and men and women who have for weeks been thinking only of recreation will turn their thoughts again to the great questions which come up in the process of education. The season, then, seems an appropriate one at which to call attention to one of these questions, primarily affecting our modern development of collegiate education, but touching very many other phases of the whole educational system.

One can hardly look at the schedule of studies in the better equipped American colleges without a special wonder at the magnitude and completeness of its machinery, surpassing anything that our forefathers could have considered possible. In some institutions two hundred courses or more are offered to the academic undergraduate students, covering every variety of topic, from Pali to Political Economy. The work of instruction in every department and sub-department is coming more and more to be done by men specially trained, and often distinguished, in their own lines of study, to whom the body of facts in those lines is almost as ready as instinct itself, and who pour out those facts upon their pupils as if from an ever-swelling fountain. In the logical outcome of the American college curriculum the whole body of human knowledge seems to be gathered together and laid before students for their consideration and appropriation. One cannot help feeling a certain further satisfaction as he marks the development of a new and indigenous type of university life, a natural outgrowth of the American college system, as it bursts beyond its original limits.

We are apt to think of the former American college as differing from the present type only in degree, in its smaller number of professors and students, and in its smaller facilities for work. The absolute meagerness of the college curriculum of a hundred years ago needs to be seen in order to point the contrast with the radically different spirit of its modern successor. The materials for such a contrast are easily accessible; and, as a type of the higher education of the time, we may take the four-years' course at Yale, towards the end of the last century, as given by President Dwight. *Freshman Year*: Græca Minora; six books of the Iliad; five books of Livy; Cicero de Oratore; Adam's Roman Antiquities; Morse's Geography; Webber's Mathematics. *Sophomore Year*: Horace; Græca Majora; Morse's Geography; Webber's Mathematics; Euclid's Elements; English Grammar; Tytler's Elements of History. *Junior Year*: Tacitus; Græca Majora; Enfield's Natural Philosophy and Astronomy; Chemistry; Vince's Fluxions. *Senior Year*: Logic; Chemistry; Natural Philosophy and Astronomy; Locke on the Human Understanding; Paley's Moral

Philosophy; Theology. If this course differed from those of other colleges of the time, it was only in its greater completeness and in the thoroughness with which it was given.

And yet it was from such institutions and courses of study as this that the country received its great men of the past—men to whose work not only the students but the instructors of the present still look for guidance. The case is strongest with regard to public men, for the lack of law-schools and of any higher phase of education then made the meager undergraduate curriculum practically the only basis for the future statesman's training. With little or no historical or political instruction colleges then sent out men whose treatment of difficult problems of law and government must still command our admiration and respect. Omitting lesser lights, there were in public life or in training, in the latter part of the last century, from Harvard, the Adamses, Bowdoin, Dexter, Eustis, Gerry, John Hancock, Rufus King, Lowell, Otis, Parsons, the Quincys, and Strong; from Yale, Joel Barlow, Silas Deane, Griswold, Hillhouse, the Ingersolls, Tracy, the Trumbulls, and Wolcott; from Princeton, Ellsworth, Luther Martin, Pierrepont Edwards, Madison, Bradford, Lee, Burr, Morgan Lewis, Brockholst and Edward Livingston, Dayton, Giles, Bayard, Harper, Mahlon Dickerson, Berrien, Rush, Forsyth, and Sergeant; and from Columbia, Hamilton, Jay, Robert R. Livingston, and Gouverneur Morris. Are the institutions named as well represented in public life now? If we leave out of account those men now in public life who represent only the law-schools of Harvard, Yale, and Columbia, and not their undergraduate departments, the contrast would be most striking; and we might almost conclude that the influence of these four institutions on public life had decreased in direct proportion to the increase of their undergraduate curriculum.

The case is much the same in literature. Bowdoin's class of 1825, trained under the old meager system, gave more names to American literature than most of our departments of English Literature have yet succeeded in adding. Similar contrasts might be brought out in other directions; but the rule is sufficiently well established to call for explanation. Medicine and science, however, may fairly claim to have held their own; and perhaps an explanation may be found in this exception to the general rule.

The wonderful development of modern science has been rather one of principle and methods than of mere facts: the accumulation of fact has been a consequence of the change in method, though it in turn has often developed unsuspected principles, or forced a new change of methods. Is it not possible that the modern development of the college curriculum in other respects has as yet gone too largely to the mere presentation of facts? The instructor, tending constantly to specialism, is as naturally tempted to gauge the success of his work by the greater breadth and completeness with which he states the facts embraced within his subject.

If this is the principle which guides or controls him, the increased number of courses will mean merely that facts which were only suggested or were entirely ignored under the old system are now stated in full. That would mean that the student has his mental food chewed and almost digested for him, and may go through a four-years' course in college without thinking ten thoughts of his own from first to last; while the student under the old régime, compelled to do his own thinking on a great variety of subjects, developed principles and methods for himself, and then accumulated facts during the years in which the modern student is engaged in forgetting them.

The contrast already alluded to is perhaps more suggestive in the case of Princeton than in that of the other three colleges. The list of her alumni who became distinguished in public life is quite a long one; but it is noteworthy that it is almost literally limited to the years between the inauguration of President Witherspoon and the graduation of the last class which he can be supposed to have influenced (1768-97). During those years there is scarcely a class without the names of one, two, or more men who became distinguished more or less in public life; after the last-named date, such names become far more sporadic. In this case, at least, it was a matter of more serious import that the *man* had died than that the curriculum should be widened.

If there be any element of truth in the explanation here suggested rather than worked out, there is not the slightest necessity for destroying any of our college buildings, for stopping or limiting the development of elective courses, or for reverting in any point to the meager curriculum of the past. All that is necessary is that the college should see to it that the instructor should not convert the elective course into a machine for "cramming" the student within narrower lines as he never was crammed under the old system; and that the student shall not, under the guise of a wider freedom, be deprived of the license and encouragement to think for himself which the old system gave him. After all, it is from the two or three men out of a hundred who think for themselves, and think correctly, that a college must expect to obtain the reputation which comes from a line of alumni distinguished in public life, in literature, and in all forms of human activity.

#### Individuality in Teaching.

THE criticism that sees danger to the schools in the elaboration of systems and puts forth even the faintest plea for individuality in teaching must meet the counter-criticism of those who point out that genius keeps to the mountains and only mediocrity finds its way to the school-room.

How easily can the names of the great teachers of youth be counted upon the fingers of one hand! Of the great teachers of the common-schools we have almost no traditions. Pestalozzi and Froebel made it possible for mediocrity to reach a child's mind; but without well-learned guiding-lines, the average instructor makes the school-room a chaos where ignorance becomes its own law and shuts out knowledge.

In some such manner the pleader for system might argue. But the great difficulty is that we have not yet

learned the relative meaning of ignorance and knowledge. We do not teach the right things and we do not get the best results. We use examinations as gauging-lines, but our percentages do not show true values. We get bits of information and progressive series of bits, but we have flooded the child's mind, not developed it. Our school-room work too often runs along the line of mere suppression — suppression of teacher, suppression of pupil, suppression of individuality; the apotheosis of ruts. We build up elaborate school systems in our great cities, bind all the schools together in a series of grades, apportion the hours for all work,—indeed, the very minutes,—set a thousand machine-moved teachers in the schools, and then pour in an overcrowded throng of children and begin to examine them. The children are of all sorts and nationalities: some well fed, well cared for, and well loved; some almost barbaric, with generations of ignorance and poverty and indifference to education behind them. But our education of all lies chiefly in our examinations, in which the teachers are examined with them, for upon the results depend the teachers' fortunes. This is one of our proud methods of building up the state. Of instruction, of character-forming, of mental growth, there is scarcely a thought. Often it seems but a great and complex system for wasting the formative years of childhood.

Now it is certain that we must have system and method, but we must have something besides. Train our teachers well, but allow them a certain liberty to work out results. It is not information that we should ask of school-children so much as it is character and mental life. What are values?—that should be a child's first lesson. Make a boy feel the worth of a thing, and the hard road becomes a pathway to the stars. He feels his share in the future; he knows his place in the universe, and is its heir. Character, right ambition, character — get the value of these in a boy's mind, and your road becomes easy.

The power to think for one's self has too little standing in the schools; and we do not insist enough upon the appreciation of the worth of the school work. Too often we try to wheedle our children into knowledge. We disguise the name of work, mask thought, and invent schemes for making education easy and pleasant. We give fanciful names to branches of study, make play with object-lessons, and illustrate all things. To make education amusing, an easy road without toil, is to train up a race of men and women who will shun what is displeasing to them. But there is no substitute for hard work in school if we are to have a properly trained people; we must teach the value of work and overcome the indifference of children to ignorance.

No one ever came nearer to success of this sort than the Rev. Edward Thring,\* who for thirty-four years was head-master of the grammar-school at Uppingham, England. What his methods were, this is not the place to state; but he insisted upon nothing more strongly than upon this, that it was not enough for the teacher to know the subject taught and why it should be taught, but that the child too should feel its value for him and be assured of his ability to absorb the knowledge. He always insisted upon preparing the child's mind for the knowledge to be implanted. The

\* See article on "Uppingham" in this number of THE CENTURY.