

WHAT ELSE CAN WE EXPECT?

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There has been a tremendous hue and cry about the quality of instruction that our young people have been getting. Critics of our educational system have blamed this on the baneful effects of the Japanese occupation, on the lack of school space and equipment, on the inadequacy of Government support, on the commercial spirit among the owners and administrators of private schools and colleges, and on the economic insufficiency of teachers.

What these critics have failed to consider is that, in education as well as in all other aspects of life, people get only what they deserve—or want. In other words, our heaven is only as high as our reach. The deplorable results of the prodigious expenditure of time, money, and effort that our educational activities entail, may, in the last analysis, be ascribed to the confused conception that the majority of us have of what we expect to get out of education.

A great many pedagogues and educationists have pontificated that the years a child spends in school should give him the necessary skills and knowledge and social attitudes by which he can become a good citizen, capable of discharging his social obligations as well as of asserting his individual rights. These men of learning have said over and over again that education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge, but also the implementation of that knowledge towards self-sufficiency and social service.

These are big words, noble sentiments, lofty ideals. But have the men and women who have made this pronouncement in various forms ever gone beyond what one of the pedagogues themselves have called "verbalism"? Has there been any attempt—or even a desire—to translate this wondrous principle into action?

What do the children and the youth themselves as well as their parents expect to get out of school?

The sad truth is that young people as well as their elders are concerned more with the outward manifestations of having stayed in school or college than with the acquisition of knowledge and social attitudes as well as skills. They are concerned more with grades and diplomas and degrees than with what these stand for.

They are satisfied, for example, with the six-grade elementary curriculum, because it enables them to "graduate" within six years. It does not matter if they leave the elementary school without even the rudiments of learning that would enable them to acquire more knowledge independently—much less make their own way in the world.

This state of mind also explains the intense general preoccupation with what are known as "minimum requirements" in the higher institutions of learning. It is enough for a student to spend so many hours on, and to earn so many credits in, a certain subject.

Take thesis-writing as a specific example. A thesis, particularly a master's thesis, should show that the writer of it has mastered the technique of research; that he has acquired the ability to marshal and integrate his thoughts on a certain subject; and that he has developed the power to express these thoughts with clarity and force, fluency and grace.

Strange as it may seem, however, the majority of the students working for their master's degree fail altogether to acquire even a modicum of proficiency in these requirements of thesis-writing. Worse still, they do not care. Thus it is that their theses are incoherent jum-

bles of quotations from various books of reference—a clear indication that they have not even attempted to “digest” their materials. Certainly, they have not realized that what they read should simply serve as the jumping-off place for their intellectual explorations; that they should not tie themselves forever to the apron-strings of even the greatest masters of thought; and that their worth as cultured men and women can be measured only in terms of what they themselves can contribute to the sum total of human knowledge.

It seems enough for these students—some of them, in fact, have said so in so many words—that their theses are approved, that they are allowed to march up the commencement platform in all their finery to receive the long-coveted diploma amidst the plaudits of their well-wishers; and that they become entitled to affix the magic “M.A.” to their names. But, when they go forth into the world of affairs, they are harrassed by doubts and uncertainties whenever they are confronted with the necessity of rationalizing a certain problem and of expressing their opinion on, or their solution to, that problem in such a way as to enlighten, convince, or persuade other people.

This puerile—not to say, distorted—attitude towards serious scholastic application is not surprising; for those who hire young men and young women from among high school and college and university graduates, lay special emphasis on what they euphemistically call “educational attainments”—not on tested abilities. And the deep discontent among employees, both in government offices and in private firms, is due to the tendency of their superiors to disregard merit altogether in giving promotions either in rank or in salary.

Because of this, some employees have developed the vicious habit of casting aside any sense of propriety, delicacy, and decency that they may have pos-

essed in their frantic scramble for promotions. Thus the average office becomes a veritable hotbed of intrigue, where it is considered perfectly legitimate for a man to undermine the reputation of his colleagues, as long as he can reach the top of the heap.

This is a disgusting spectacle, indicative of the general breakdown of human values. Young people who are taught in school that honesty, dignity, integrity, and a profound regard for the rights of others, are sterling virtues that must be cultivated if they are to be worthy of their humanity—these young people are shocked to find out when they sally forth into the world of adults that these virtues have no meaning and no worth, even to those who pretend to inculcate them into the minds of the young.

Obviously, what is needed more than anything else is a re-definition of our conception of “success”. As long as we think of success in terms of power and wealth, we can expect to continue witnessing the mad scramble for advantages and privileges, the shameful disregard for decency and dignity, and the hankering for the symbols rather than for the substance of education.

Some people may say that, since this is a competitive world and these are parlous times, it is excusable to resort to any means by which a man may put one over on his fellows. If that be our philosophy of life, however, if that be our social faith, then we should stop harping against our present system of education or against our “educational mills,” whether private or public.

Education as a conscious social attempt to attain an ideal, can only mirror—it can not go beyond—that ideal. In other words, education is merely the expression of our social philosophy; and, from it, we can hope to get only what we deserve.