

Without A “*Sordid*” Foundation, The Building “*Collapsed!*”

1890s

The chaos in the secondary schools can be demonstrated in a variety of ways. First, the elementary schools were not by any standard supplying the secondary institutions with trained scholars, and without prepared students the high schools could not perform their intended role.

1930s

AMONG the patrons of the public schools there has grown up a conviction that something is vitally wrong with our system of education.

The American system of education ought to be the best in the world. It is universal. Every child not only *may* attend school, but is *required* to do so.

.....
These statements are not guesses. Any teacher who works with high-school or college students knows that they are the sad truth. The many tests given to thousands of college students all over the nation verify these observations. If our elementary schools do not succeed in teaching these fundamental skills, how can we expect the young people to use them with intelligence and accuracy in the higher schools?

E.A. Cross, “*Painless Education*,” Atlantic Monthly, Dec 1935

Passing the Educational "Buck": *A Domino Effect!*

William H. Maxwell, Superintendent of NY City: "..... 'the professional schools are filled with students of grossly defective scholarship, and the learned professions are choked up with men of inferior education and training.' If this is a true statement of the facts, it is certainly worth while to examine with the closest attention to President Eliot's proposals for reform." (Eliot, President of Harvard Univ.)

1906

You know the criticism of education all along the line. It begins with the college. Did you ever sit in a college association and listen to the criticism of the public schools? What is the burden of it? The poorly prepared freshman that comes from the high school. Well, now, I have no suggestion to make to the college professors other than this, that it would be good for them to take a vacation once a year—and I wish it came oftener than that—and spend a good part of it in visiting some good primary school, and there sit at the feet of some woman who knows how to teach, and learn something of the sympathy that actuates the heart of a great teacher. Again, I have often thought that, if some of our college friends would look at some of the seniors they graduate, they would complain less about the freshmen that come up from the high school. I believe that the trouble is that the average college man is thinking only of college education, and forgets the rest of the educational problem.

Now, we public-school teachers are just as big sinners as they are. Go into the high school when it opens in September, and what is the burden of the complaint? Oh, the poorly prepared boys and girls that come from the grammar school! And yet there is not a high-school teacher that does not know that the year before he has urged the promotion of boys and girls that were not any better prepared for promotion than those that come from the grammar school. If we are honest with ourselves, we will all admit that we have to push along these boys and girls in the different grades. If we did not, they would all get in one place, and form a sort of educational drift-wood that would dam up the whole educational stream, and there would be absolutely no hope of any progress. I don't care how much you superinten-

dents talk about your systems of promotion; I know what you do. You have a boy in school that can't make his grade or group. If he is reasonably faithful, and you think he will hold out to the end, you simply keep him two years in a place, and then push him on for somebody else to work with him two years longer. Now, be honest with yourselves and tell the truth about this problem. That is what you do. It is done in all the schools all over this country. We have to do it.

Have you ever heard the grammar-school teacher talk? The school opens in the fall; the boy comes home from a happy vacation; frequently he has forgotten a great deal of what has been taught previously; and he finds himself in the presence of some unsympathetic teacher who prides herself on her individuality, who begins to complain of the poorly prepared boys and girls that come up from the intermediate grades. If any of you are here that have ever done that, just think of the sins you committed last spring when you recommended a half-dozen boys to the high school who you knew were not ready for promotion. The fact is, we have to meet these problems and deal honestly with them, and do the best we can.

And then the intermediate teacher complains of the primary. A boy has been promoted who can't read. Well, suppose he can't. You can teach him to read in half the time you are complaining about it. I always feel so sorry for the primary teacher. She has nobody to complain about, unless it be the parents or Deity; and neither one will pay any attention to the complaint.

1950s

Confusion became worse confounded through the delegation to the school by the family of much instruction that would seem properly to be the business of the home, and by the tendency in the schools to pass the educational 'buck' from the lower to the higher grades, till finally it has been handed on to the universities, which find themselves compelled in some cases to take on the jobs not only of the grammar and the high schools but almost of the kindergarten.

Colleges Catch All....

Taken from Albert J. Nock's lectures delivered at University of Virginia in 1930.

Example 1

Some years ago I visited an old acquaintance in the Middle West, who was teaching English in a huge swollen institution that went by the name of a State university. I looked in on one of my friend's classes in "English composition," and found him engaged on a kind of thing that by the very handsomest concession was only eighth-grade work; and his students were dealing with it in a manner that an educable eighth-grade pupil would regard as disgraceful. These students were not eighth-grade pupils; they were adult persons, ranking *bona fide* as part of a university population, and eligible for a degree authorised by a university.

Unless a college sets up an effective method of screening applicants, it is likely to spend most of the freshman year doing what the high schools did not do. Colleges pay more attention to the dull students than to the brilliant students. Several years ago a wise dean, on the eve of retirement, made a significant proposal. Since the weak students caused

Example 2

Not long ago I visited an undergraduate college—not one of those connected with Columbia University—and on casually looking into matters there, I told the president that I was surprised to see the college doing so much work that belonged far back in the grade school. He said it was unfortunate, but it could not be helped; students came there with these holes in their preparation that had to be filled up. I observed that the undergraduate college was perhaps hardly in a position to afford these diversions from its proper business, and that it seemed likely to suffer from them. "Yes," he said, "but don't you think we ought to do *something* for these poor fellows who come to us so imperfectly prepared?"

"Certainly I do," I said. "Fire them."

"Ah, yes," he replied, "but then, you see, we should not have any students and would have to shut up shop."

I hinted as delicately as I could that this might not be in the long-run an absolute misfortune; as I remember, I may have quoted Homer's pertinent line on the death of Patroclus. He admitted the force of this, but said, "We are doing a poor job, I know, but we are doing something as best we can, and I think a little better than most institutions of our kind; so we hope it is worth while."

1950s

most of the "busy work," he thought they should be charged extra. His formula was: Charge the average student the regular tuition, charge the dull student five times the regular fee, and pay the bright student a good salary for attending college. The plan had too much merit to be put into practice, and the dean who proposed it sailed for Europe the next week.

What You See Is What You Get!

Taken from Albert J. Nock's lectures delivered at the University of Virginia in 1930s.....

Why, then, is it that "courses in English" should hold so large a place in the newest type of institutional organisation? They do so for a very simple reason. Under the conditions that we have been describing, great masses of ineducable people come into our institutions. They must be kept there, and must nominally be busy with something or other as a *pro forma* justification for keeping them. Therefore something has to be found for them to do that they can do, and this is a hard matter because they can do almost nothing. One thing they can do, albeit after a very poor fashion, is to read; that is to say, they can make their way more or less uncertainly down a printed page; and therefore "courses in English" have come into their present extraordinary vogue.

Well, here is a small garland of wind-flowers culled by an instructor from the work, not of primary-school children, but of university students, chiefly upper-class men, who were busy with "courses in English":

"Being a tough hunk of meat, I passed up the steak."

"Lincoln's mind growed as his country kneaded it."

"The camel carries a water tank with him; he is also a rough rider and has four gates."

"As soon as music starts silence rains, but as soon as it stops it get worse than ever."

"College students, as a general rule, like such readings that will take the least mental inertia."

"Modern dress is extreme and ought to be checked."

"Although the Irish are usually content with small jobs they have won a niche in the backbone of the country."

The instructor who reported these efforts went on to show how Shakespeare fared at the hands of their authors:

Edmund in *King Lear* "committed a base act and allowed his illegitimate father to see a forged letter." Cordelia's death "was the straw that broke the camel's back and killed the king." Lear's fool "was prostrated on the neck of the king." "Hotspur," averred a sophomore, "was a wild, irresolute man. He loved honour above all. He would go out and kill twenty Scotchmen before breakfast." Kate was "a woman who had something to do with hot spurs."

Also Milton:

"Diabetes was Milton's Italian friend," one student explained. Another said: "Satan had all the emotions of a woman and was a sort of trustee in heaven, so to speak." The theme of *Comus* was given as "purity protestriate." Mammon in *Paradise Lost* suggests that the best way "to endure hell is to raise hell and build a pavilion."

AN ORDINARY DUMB-BELL OR POOR TEACHING?

A little girl offered the following composition on anatomy:

"Anatomy is the human body. It is divided in three separate parts, the haid, the chest, and the stummick. The haid holds the skull and the brains, if there is any; the chest holds the liver and the stummick holds the bowels, which are a, e, i, o, and u, and sometimes w and y."

(Source Unknown)

1993

Low academic expectations in American elementary and secondary schools go on to create problems when top students enroll in college. Many of these students must struggle to keep up with the demands of their courses, and, in some cases, they drop out of college or avoid tough classes because of insufficient preparation. Colleges and universities may respond both by providing more remedial instruction and by lowering their academic standards.

2016

Yahoo, 4-6-2016

Higher Ed

Taking High School Courses In College Costs Students And Families Nearly \$1.5 Billion April 6, 2016:53 AM ET Anya Kamenetz

..... When is a college course not really a college course? When it's classified as "**developmental**," or, less euphemistically, "**remedial**." These courses cover material considered high-school level, typically in **math or English composition**.....

They typically **pay tuition** as for any other course. **But often, these courses don't count for credit**.....

This was what Michael Dannenberg, a co-author of the report, calls a "whoa" moment: "realizing that students from all income backgrounds are suffering the consequences of **mediocre high schools**."... (Highlight added.)

1980s

Correcting the problems of American elementary and secondary education will not, however, be quick or easy. Our educational system has, in many cases, suffered from shocking past neglect, misdirection, and deeply entrenched practices that are difficult to alter. Inertia, as well as often sincere opposition to many needed reforms, must also be overcome. Great change is required.¹⁰

“Reform!”... “Change!”... : Good Luck!