

Harvard Museum Book  
B-cc 18/1430

## Will vs. Brains as Assets to Education

By R. HEBER HOWE, '01.

IN a bold article on the "Feminization of our Schools," Professor Robert E. Rogers of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology states: "But the mind is the last thing our American educational system thinks of cultivating. The emphasis is all on character, almost as if the two were antagonistic. Character first, specific technical training second, brains third. Obviously, if education means anything the order should be turned around. Train the mind first; the others will follow as a matter of course." Though this seems entirely logical, I have wondered if it is so. It is not improbable that I am entirely mistaken, but, though I was fortunate enough to be taught entirely by men teachers, I venture to disagree.

If we can lay any blame on the feminine sex, it would be at the door of the mothers of debutantes who have within recent years used week-day nights, or rather midnights to dawn, in which to introduce their debutante daughters at balls. No college student can carry successfully his work, either mentally or physically, if mid-week balls are regularly attended, and only those boys who have the force of character to refuse such invitations can carry on in their college courses.

It is obvious, in the first place, that today for a boy to become erudite he must at least remain in an educational institution, although there are still perhaps a few who become self-educated, like the Lincolns of the earlier days. Let me here suggest that it took character for the savior of our union to acquire his education, and that without an unusual amount of it he would have remained illiterate.

Schools are today almost universal, and what so-called education the people have is gained largely therein. The problem, then, devolves on what keeps a boy in school and college, not merely in attendance, but able to learn and to profit by the experience. No

doubt there is more than one answer to this question. The old-fashioned, conservative teacher will say it is drill that results in learning, for the Latin word *disciplina* means to learn. The realization of power gained is the appeal such a school makes, the satisfaction of surmounting a difficult task, the inspiration, and the reward. The more modern, progressive teacher will say it is the project method—awakened interest, the opportunity to create, self-expression.

All very helpful, all very important are these considerations, but our discussion so far has been external to the boy. In a recent very clever and very thoughtful oration by a senior in college is this line applied to university education today: "All work and no play makes jack." And yet there is one Jack that I know, not brilliant, but a purposeful fellow, who not only claims, but has proved, that a little more than two hours' conscientious work each day will keep him in college, leaving time for a great deal else, including major athletics and week-end dances. And he will graduate, I am sure, prepared to earn his living. This same senior orator, educated in the oldest of American colleges, has evidently learned what Professor Rogers says is not taught today—"to criticize." This suggests another old proverb that could also be incised: "You may lead a horse to water, but you can't make him." Well, what *does* make him? What is the most important factor in producing a really educated man? Exposure to an educational system is hardly sufficient.

I believe it is his ideals of character, of citizenship. This the schools may emphasize, but do not always successfully teach. It is not a mere matter of training the mind. Is it not more a matter of training the will? The boy's early home environment has undoubtedly been all-important. How to be taught in school and college is,

of course, the question. Again I believe there is only one way—throw greater responsibility on the boy and place him under great teachers, which is not so easy, "because God in His infinite wisdom did not create enough of them." I believe it will not be long before both conservatives and progressives in American education will discern that with any method any school will fail that "finds itself lamentably lacking in teachers, and rather overloaded with authorities" on education.

Too much is done for a boy today, and too much of his moral life in school and in college is regulated for him. Too little trust is placed in him to do the wise and right thing. The Eighteenth Amendment has given him no opportunity to use wisdom in the use of intoxicants, unless it is in relation to poisonous liquor. His games are planned for him, unless he is prevented from taking part in them as a scholastic punishment. Could any practice be more ridiculous and illogical than this? At least one of our oldest and greatest schools has abandoned it. He is given too little chance to discover for himself the value of study. He follows a one-track existence and, therefore, develops a one-track mind; he is given little opportunity to discriminate; he leads a life of attempted external restriction. Even in his summer sailing he races with a class rather than cruising "on his own." Speed has become his fetish on land, on the water, or in the air. It is how quickly he can learn, not how thoroughly. A night of rapid, intensive cramming fits into his life more naturally than nine months of planned, painstaking study. Yet there has never been in the past thirty years greater potential ability or power in youth than there is today.

A wise man has given the definition of genius as the capacity to take infinite pains. When Edison was asked the secret of his success his reply was 10 per cent. inspiration, and 90 per cent. perspiration. A headmaster recently told me that the most brainy boy he ever knew, who entered college with highest honors, was expelled at

the first examinations because of a complete scholastic failure. In his college argot he had the brains, but not the guts. This boy had been educated in a school where freedom to live a natural boy's life was impossible; he was a boat with no rudder of its own, an automaton adrift. Only last week a college sophomore, an honor, high-stand student, was jailed for burglary. Loeb and Leopold were unusually talented and intelligent. All the constructive words of character training, ideals, duties, decisions, responsibilities, purposes, loyalty, generosity, affection ring in the youth's ears as externally applied theories of authority rather than self-appreciated virtues to be built into himself. The adventure of finding these virtues worthwhile, a source of eternal happiness, has never really been permitted them.

I do not believe that the scholastic standard of a college today excludes any earnest boy who seeks an education within its walls. As anyone speaks most authoritatively from personal experience, I cite the record of a school with which I am familiar. In its first four graduating classes it has prepared exactly fifty boys, who have entered seven different colleges, and of these only four have fallen by the wayside. One of these four was an able boy who had no desire to go to college but entered purely to please what proved to be a short-sighted family wish. Immediately after his failure he entered business, which he had desired to take up at the end of his school course. This is the report of his employer: "An entirely satisfactory and capable boy, having done unusually well and having shown enthusiasm and ability, which points towards real success." Another one left because in one subject he was a half-grade below the required grades to remain. The third was in good standing but left because of financial reasons; and the fourth, a victim of the influence of too wealthy and indulgent parents, withdrew, though, so far as the college was concerned, he might have returned. A fifth died in his sophomore year, when in good standing and on the

Dean's List. These represent the average run of independent school boys, and the school is of the average type.

In its four graduating classes there were only three boys not headed for college, two of whom were admitted to the school in spite of that fact because they possessed qualities of fine citizenship. The third boy, too old to continue in a secondary school, has entered college as a freshman at twenty-three, after a program of tutoring to offset a late start. This is frequently the toll paid by boys living in their early youth on farms in the country.

I am heartily in accord with the view "that secondary schools should not . . . reject boys who cannot meet 'college standards,'" and should provide a curriculum fitted to their needs, but I believe ill health, finances, unfavorable home environment, and other such reasons are more likely to be the determining cause rather than lack of brains.

President Hopkins of Dartmouth has recently said to a boys' school: "There are those who think that a higher education is an inalienable right of every American citizen. I do not believe this. I believe that every child resident in the United States has a right to the elementary education which shall give him the tools of learning. However, when the tools of learning have been given to him, the responsibility devolves upon him whether those tools shall be utilized or not. I believe we should hold very definitely to the principle that higher education is a privilege and not a right, and that those to whom a higher education should be given are those who desire it, those who seek it, and those who crave it for the privilege of using it."

A year ago a boy graduated from this school *cum laude*. His accomplishment was due not to exceptional brains, but solely to a carefully self-planned and conscientiously carried out program of life, sustained throughout the seven years he was a member of the school. He is now a freshman in college, having entered with honors. Last week it was necessary for me

to pass through the rubbing room of the field house of this college on my way to see the doctor in charge. More than thirty boys were there, having their injuries treated. Though the care they were receiving was wonderfully efficient, I asked myself, as I always do when I am in that environment, is this the game that brings them their recreational opportunity, and what will be the permanent legacy carried for the forty or fifty remaining years of life? But the point I want to make is this: of all the boys reclining on the tables in that room, only one was using his time to advantage. With an alpine lamp shining on a swollen knee, the boy referred to was deep in his French textbook, which he had not forgotten to put in his pocket for use when just such a moment arose. He was running, as the biologists say, true to strain.

It is the school's and the college's job to develop this sound common sense. It cannot be done by any one educational system. It cannot be done by having masters with Ph.D.'s. "American college authorities have been suffering for a third of a century from the Ph.D. delusion—the fantastic idea that anyone bearing the badge of servitude has at least a presumptive right to be considered a teacher." It can be done, I believe, only by associating youth with such men of my own generation and *Alma Mater* as the Shalers, the Wendells, the Hurlbuts, and the Briggses, between whom and their students existed mutual friendliness, trust, and respect, and deep belief in each other's sound citizenship, and willingness to accept responsibility in all human relationships.

Finally, the opportunity to accept responsibility must not be interpreted as license. If what I mean can be summed up in a few words, it is giving youth the opportunity to develop common, horse sense, which, in my opinion, will not only mean constructive continuity in school and college education but also result in an educated, spiritually-minded man in the most complete and satisfactory sense of the

term, a joy to himself, and a coöperative cog in our more and more complex civilization. His mind is trained, because his will and good sense have kept him continuously on the job of training it.

George Dawson, the famous British non-conformist clergyman, in one of his beautiful prayers, said: "Lift our understandings into Thy light; that we thereby beholding those things which are right, may bring our *wills* and our *understanding together* to Thy service." If this prayer could be answered for every school and college boy his success in life would be established.