

Catholics and Higher Education

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O the Italian of Rome the dome of St. Peter's scarcely draws a second glance, the ordinary tourist could describe its beauties in more detail than the inhabitant.

To the Parisian Notre Dame is something to be proud of, but not something that he knows as thoroughly as the foreign capitals he visits. So to the American are the facilities for education offered by the United States. Certainly America should be an educated nation; it has been generous in the founding of institutions of learning, in the endowment of professors and courses, and in the promotion of everything that could possibly make for the furtherance of education to the highest degree. Yet from the results it would seem that we Americans, at least a goodly part of us, would do well to think over the advantages of higher education.

It was not so long ago in this country that the college graduate presenting himself to the successful business man was in much the same position as that of the young English nobleman who obtained an interview with Lincoln hoping thereby to further his prospects in this country. After the young man had spent some time enumerating his long line of noble ancestors, he was completely taken off his feet by Lincoln's gentle assurance, "Well, we won't hold that against you." So it was with the college man: he was much better off the less he said about his diploma and medals. But times have changed. Forbes—an exclusively business magazine—under the title "Industry Waits at College Doors," carries an article describing how the commercial and mercantile organizations send their representatives to solicit the services of the most promising students. At Princeton this year, when graduation was still far off, no less than a dozen concerns in New York had their agents interviewing the students.

This is one of the commercial advantages of college education: but statistics have proven that education of every degree plays a great part in business success. Thus it is shown that a

person with no education at all has but one chance in 161,000 for success; with grammar school education, one chance in 41,000; the high school graduate has one chance in 1,606; while the man with college diploma has one chance in 173. It really seems strange in looking over these odds that parents can permit or even encourage their children to give up higher schooling. They would certainly strongly object to their offspring risking the weekly pay envelope in games of dice, of cards, on the race horses, and so on, where the chance would be overwhelming in their favor compared with these figures; and yet they will allow them to take such a risk, not with a few dollars but with life itself.

As a matter of fact it is not only putting the children at a terrible disadvantage in their struggle, it is positively a poor investment. Taking the wages earned by the boys and girls who enter business from grammar school and comparing them with the wages of the high school graduate it is shown that every day at school is worth at least sixteen dollars; any boy or girl leaving school to go to work for less than that is not only forfeiting many chances for success but is really losing money. Statistics taken in 1917, and surely the proportion is as good for today, show that the high school graduate earns two thousand, two hundred dollars more in his first seven years after leaving school than the grammar school graduate earns in his first eleven years at work; and it is only the beginning of many advances for the man with the better education. Their relative positions are much the same as two men who are sent out to cut up a pile of wood; one has a new sharp saw, the other a dilapidated dull one. Though both may do the same amount of work, there is no question but that the man with the dull saw will be required to spend much more time and labor on his work than the man who is better equipped. So it is with the children we send out to cope with the business world. The boy with little education may go as high as his better educated brother, though it is unlikely; if he does he is going to work infinitely harder, will spend much more strength, time and worry than the man who begins with a good education. The objection that may be raised on the grounds of the high salaries of first-class artisans, athletes, etc., really is not to the point at all for their working year is much shorter than that of the men who are not as well paid thus bringing the average of their earnings much lower than would

at first be supposed. In the case of athletes, the length of time in which they earn any considerable amount of money seldom extends over ten years—a term hardly to be compared in its net results with the lifetime of an educated man.

These are some of the purely commercial aspects of education. From the point of view of professional life the uneducated man is even worse off. He is almost completely barred from the walks of life which bring forth our leaders and doomed to the same menial labor his fathers before him had forced on them by the disadvantages they struggled under. But the young man today cannot plead as his fathers: there is no tyrannical government forbidding his education, there is no lack of institutions of learning, there is no rough pioneer work and heavy manual labor to eat up his time and energy. One of the chief causes of his ignorance is his own laziness or lack of ambition. A man who is not a graduate of a high school cannot enter a standard college; he cannot hope to be a teacher; cannot enter a school of medicine, of law, of engineering; cannot enter the military schools of the army and navy; a girl without a high school education cannot enter a nurses' training school, a boy thus unprepared cannot hope to become a priest. Certainly a black outlook springing from so small a cause as four years of high school. It is as though the grammar school graduate were in a great cage from where he could see the success of others but was effectively barred from partaking in it. He is a voluntary galley slave who has chained himself to his bench by refusing the education offered to him, he is the laborer of the community, not by misfortune but by preference.

All this of course, does not mean that every man who does not attend high school is a rank failure, or that every high school graduate is a smiling success; but it does mean that taken as a class that is about how the graduates stand. There are a great many men of superior character and mental ability who have made up in later years what circumstances deprived them of in youth; who were forced to work to support younger brothers and sisters, or to send them to school. There is nothing but praise in the mouth of every one for such men, who later, realizing the need of more schooling, made it up by private study, night school, correspondence courses and so on. This is no argument against the need of education, in fact it is a proof of it; they differ from the ordinary high school graduate in their

manner of acquiring knowledge and they have attained success not because they were forced to do their learning in spare moments but in spite of it and only because of their own strong characters.

For political success men and women must have more than merely a grammar school education. For the higher positions in the realm of politics they must very often be good lawyers, diplomats or statesmen—certainly not pure gifts of nature. Moreover they must have a good knowledge of ethics if they are to guide their fellow men rightly, they must have a good command of the English language if they are to make any impression on those men, and they must be acquainted with psychology if they are to be their leaders—they must know how they are thinking, what effect such and such an action will have upon men, what arguments to bring before them to win them to a certain point of view. Certainly a very big demand to make on any man, but an almost hopeless one to expect from a man who considers his education finished when he leaves the eighth grade.

Socially, and in his own private life, the man of no education stands to lose most of the beauties of life. The treasures of painting, architecture, sculpture, music, the literary contributions of our own and other peoples will be beyond him. He will be handicapped in his intercourse with men and women, bound by his neglect to limit himself to a circle of acquaintances whose fund of knowledge is no greater than his own; he must depend for his material of conversation on the daily newspaper, the weather and family history—a dull drab field made fallow years ago by overwork. He will suffer embarrassment in the presence of those whose minds he cannot follow, whose conversation sounds to him like a foreign language; and the confession of his ignorance will make him regret many times the few years he did not use to better advantage.

A Catholic education, especially a Catholic higher education of which we are now speaking, adds to all these advantages that of a solid religious training and consequently satisfies that universal desire of man for happiness by giving him the only true and lasting happiness, that of the soul. Education in a Catholic school means that a man has a good knowledge of his religion and hence really appreciates it. It means that he has been endowed with that mental and spiritual strength which every man

has a right to, that his character has received that rounding off, that shaping to perfection which will make his life balance perfectly, doing away with any one-sidedness—complete absorption in business, intolerance in his views, or cowardly indifference. A Catholic training not only benefits the individual, it benefits the Church by giving her one more defender of the faith. Catholic education gives society one more man who will not be an easy prey to the sophisms of socialists and atheists, one more apostle who can spread the faith among men by simply giving intelligent answers to the questions that are asked him, by the example of his life, by his exposure of errors and lies against the Church. Catholic education means that the country is materially benefitted by having one more man engaged in its industries who has the principles and the courage to re-establish modern business on the basis of honesty, justice and charity, who will do his utmost to protect and further the true Christian family, and who has intelligent respect for, firm loyalty to and a good understanding of his government. Surely Catholic education does everything to help the individual to become a leader in this country and if there be a lack of Catholic leaders this deficiency cannot be blamed on the system.

The Catholic school, over and above the advantages which it bestows in common with every institution of learning, bestows four things on her graduates that every man needs: a sound body, a sound education, splendid democracy and a foundation on God's law. It produces healthy graduates more so than other colleges by the regularity it insists upon, the restraint of passions that is absolutely demanded, the healthy surroundings—nothing degrading, all aiming to bring out what is highest, noblest in every man. That it gives a sound education is hardly doubted today. Our intercollegiate debates, competitive examinations and a study of the curricula should give a proof sufficient for anyone. Certainly it is proof enough for most of the non-Catholic educators who have any dealings with Catholic graduates. Dean Ames of Harvard Law School once said that "the graduate of a Catholic school could enter his Law School no matter what course he had, and if he forgot his diploma he would take his word that he had one." The Catholic school fosters a splendid democracy because it is founded on Catholic doctrine which is fundamentally democratic, because it has a democratic teaching staff, usually religious who are living on an absolutely

equal basis and who give a wonderful example of fellow feeling by their denial of all things to serve other men. The Catholic college gives a man a foundation of God's law for it does not develop the purely material side of man to the neglect of his soul, being as careful in the training of the religion of a man as in his business or professional training. This of course does not mean that the Catholic graduate alone is virtuous, or that he is always a man of virtue; but it certainly makes him much more likely to persevere in the practise of virtue. Sentimental feeling for the human race, a desire to uplift the generations of one hundred years from now certainly is not enough to help a man through a serious business temptation; he needs something strong, unbending, something that will affect him personally and immediately, in other words he needs the conception of God, he needs God's law, and he needs the knowledge of the sanction behind that law, of punishment or reward.

This nurturing of the soul in man produces an effect that is somewhat unique in present day civilization, that is the power to think. But more than this it gives the power to think sanely; it is a bulwark against the godless doctrines that are widespread in secular universities: "soulless psychology, bestial ethics, spineless humanitarianism, paganism, atheism."

So stands the case for higher education in general and Catholic higher education in particular; what is the decision of the American people in the face of such evidence? It would seem from the figures that have been collected that America is fast becoming a sixth grade nation, in other words, the majority of our people go no higher than the sixth grade; but it is certain that we Catholics have already reached that deplorable condition. From statistics gathered in one of the most populous states of the Union by the N. C. W. C. service it was shown that in every hundred Catholic school children only seven reach the eighth grade; in every thousand, eight reach fourth year high school; in every ten thousand, twelve graduate from college. What we would strenuously contest if it were said by an enemy of the Church, we must admit to ourselves, we Catholics, as a class, are sixth graders. Where now is our self-pitying contention that Catholics are kept from leadership by bigotry alone; that the higher positions are closed to Catholics only because of their religion? Of course bigotry plays its part, but how can we as-

sign it the major part when we will not fit ourselves to fill those positions?

Among Catholics there seems to be an indifference to higher education. The rich among us who have obtained an education themselves or who have won their fortunes by virtue of native ability do not seem to think enough of learning to leave any great amount of their money for that purpose, they bestow no legacies such as those which are being constantly given to secular colleges and universities by those without the faith; what is given is given grudgingly and in pitifully small amounts. Among the less wealthy there seems to be complete lulling of ambition after the first step has been taken up the social or industrial ladder.

We seem to think ourselves inferior to our fellow Americans. Many of us have an immigrant's distrust of education and especially of the education given in Catholic schools. It is in keeping with that sense of inferiority which we nourish for us to conclude that Catholic schools are inferior to secular schools, that the Catholic graduate must ever stand in the background with an apology on his lips for his alma mater. Thus in 1922 only seventeen percent of Catholic children of high school age attended high schools and almost half of these attended secular high schools. In a Knights of Columbus school in Chicago during one of their courses out of one thousand students registering seven hundred were Jews, only a handful were Catholics. No doubt there are very often other influences than just plain laziness or lack of confidence in Catholic schools at work, but if we are to ease our consciences by laying the blame of our neglect on these other influences it would seem that here at least we have found an exception to the proverb "where there's a will there's a way."

The truth of the matter is that we should have just the opposite view of the relative position of Catholic and non-Catholic. The Catholic youth has everything in his favor for reaching the highest peak in whatever line of endeavor he chooses, and this is conclusively shown by the pre-eminence of the small number of Catholics who have seriously studied. Yet Father Fox, S. J., president of Marquette University, assures us that there are more Catholic leaders in the three million Catholics in Ireland and even among the two million Catholics in England than there are in the twenty million Catholics in the United States. The

advantages of Catholic education shown above will clearly explain why so few people can produce so many intellectual leaders; and at the same time show why we have not produced these leaders—namely because we have not the ambition, the energy, the foresight to push our education as far as we possibly can.

The Catholics of America have established an educational system that they may well take pride in, they have laid a solid foundation after years of struggle and sacrifice that they may confidently leave to succeeding ages as a support of their labors. It is not our contention that Catholics have not built institutions, but that having built them refuse to use them; that having a foundation stone they refuse to lend a helping hand in the raising of the beautiful structure of educated American Catholicity. We have seen above what opportunities and advantages are the Catholic's by his very birthright. But the fact is he is not using these advantages. What are we going to do about it?

Certainly we cannot let things go on as they are going or we will soon be forced to accept whatever is thrown to us by those who we must admit are superior to us; we will not have the brain power to think for ourselves, to discover the error in their teachings, to fight for what is right and just. We cannot let things come to such a pass. No. We must awake at once. We must show an intelligent interest in higher Catholic education and let this interest affect more than our speech. It is not a magnificent bit of generosity that some wealthy man give to education out of his abundance; for the Catholic it is a plain duty. This is not the time for the poorer classes to plead that they cannot afford to send their children any further than the grammar school; too many men and women have worked their way through high school and college to allow this excuse to show itself boldly. Besides things have come to a pretty pass when Catholics have forgotten how to make sacrifices for their faith and their children; such are not the traditions that have been handed down by the Catholics of former ages and must not be the story that we leave for the ages to come. It is the solemn duty of every Catholic parent to urge, encourage and help the children to the utmost of his power in securing all the education they are capable of assimilating. If we are to survive in America we must be educated. Let it not be said of us by the future children of the Church that we exterminated ourselves by being too lazy to strive to live.