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ELECTIVE STUDIES IN AMERICAN COLLEGES.

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THE adoption of what is called the elective or optional system of studies in the leading American colleges and universities, instead of a fixed and uniform curriculum, makes an epoch in the history of the superior education. The public has an interest in knowing what the improvements are which may reasonably be expected to result from allowing young men who have reached the age of about nineteen years, and have had a fair training in the subjects usually taught in secondary schools, to select their subsequent studies, with such help in making the choice as their teachers and natural advisers can give them.

The first improvement is experienced by the individual student; but when the gain to the individual is multiplied in the imagination by the whole number of college and university students, who year after year experience it, the total gain is seen

to be quite beyond statement or exact conception. Each student is enabled by judicious choice to avoid studies for which he has no taste or capacity, and to devote himself to those which he can pursue with pleasure and success. Using wisely this freedom, each student will work better, learn more, and gain more power than he would have done if he had been kept upon distasteful subjects. This proposition is just as true proportionally of the duller and lazier students as it is of the more intelligent, industrious and ambitious, and though it may be stated in few words, it contains the essence of the only true policy in university education.

The second improvement is felt by each class or section, considered as a whole, in every subject taught in the university. Let any class in any subject be rid of its reluctant, indifferent or inapt members, and the class is at once lifted to a higher plane of