

THERE is something wrong with the Anglo-Saxon treatment of higher education. It is especially wrong on this continent. It would not be exact to say that our colleges are not educational institutions at all; for some students get a certain amount of education from them. But when contrasted with the Universities of France and Germany, they certainly do not look like educational institutions. Professor Barrett Wendell of Harvard went over to lecture about America in the Universities of France, beginning at the Sorbonne, and he writes in Scribner's of his impressions. Especially does he dwell upon the earnestness of the French students. "They are alertly intelligent," he says, "serious to a degree which shames you into a consciousness of comparative frivolity." This is a professor speaking of undergraduates, remember! We can hardly realise it in America. So deadly earnest are these students that they seemed at first to this Harvard Professor as "a shade inhuman." This, of course, is in contrast with the undergraduate as he knew the species at home. He found himself amazed to the same extent at the marvelous scholarship of the Professors.

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In contrast with this there comes to my mind George Ade's little comedy of "The College Widow." In the last act, the hero says that now he will go to work, having "played his four years of football." This is frankly a caricature; but caricature is not falsehood—it is exaggeration only. In Montreal the other night, two students were injured at a class gathering by some young men of another class breaking into their rooms and flinging ammonia in their eyes. Now that was not a joke. At all events, it was not a particularly refined and scholastic witticism. College life with us is very plentifully punctuated with pranks—it is for many students a jolly, care-free experience kept within bounds by the necessity of attending lectures and "going up" for examinations—for some students it is "a desperate expedient" tried by their parents to see if College may not be a genteel "reformatory"—and by others it is really regarded as the opportunity of a lifetime to gain a trained and cultured mind.

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This latter class, however, are more popular with their professors than with their class-mates. Yet they ought to be the only persons admitted to this priceless opportunity. There is a waste of economic force when we maintain colleges with their scholarly professors, their often costly equipments and their splendid opportunities, and then coerce young men to fill their lecture halls who do not earnestly desire an education. A college ought not to be a place to "pass the time away." It ought not to be asked to play the part of a moral reformatory. It should not be required to expend much strength on maintaining discipline, for all the world like a country school. It should be able to devote every ounce of its energies to satisfying the demands of eager students for instruction—students who are too sincere in their absolute lust for learning to think of wasting a moment in the horse play of a yokel or the insipidities of an idler.

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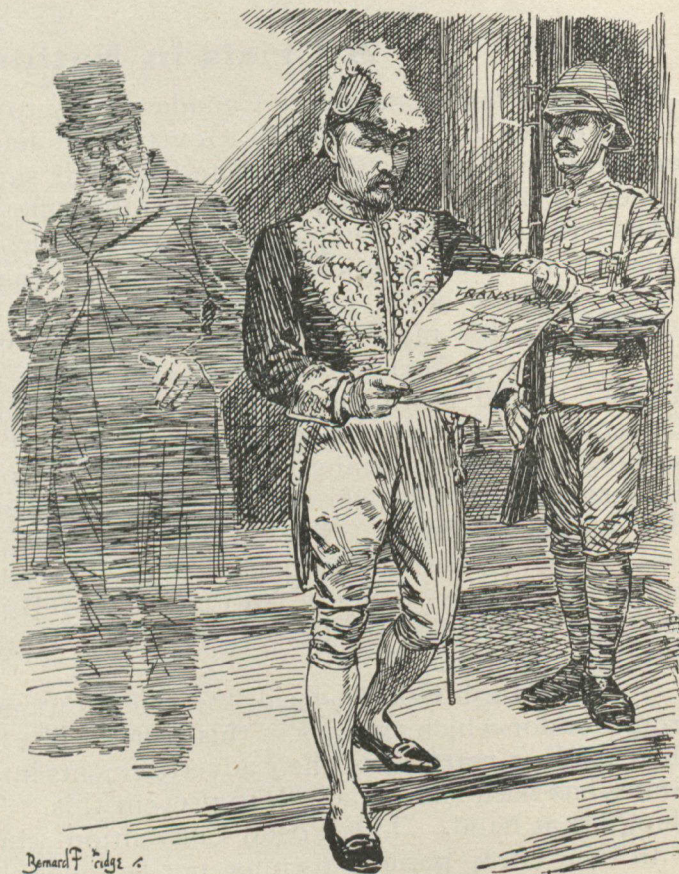
Now I am not blaming the young men. It is the

healthy instinct of youth to make a play-time of life. Then I have been an undergraduate myself; and I know what it all means. There are no better, more ambitious, higher principled, cleaner living young men in the country. The fault is entirely with our conceptions of "higher education" on this continent. We regard it largely as a superfluity. Parents are in doubt whether it does not actually handicap their sons in the real business of life. Professors are "unworldly" in their aspirations; and therefore "more or less foolish"—in the judgment of the great business successes. They contrast a Professor's salary with that of a railway manager—or a professional base-ball player; and think that they have stated the whole case. The best examples of "higher education" earn about as much as a good second-rate man in a thriving industry—somebody's assistant something—and that is the estimate of them with which many a student goes to College.

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It is no wonder that we sometimes wonder whether our institutions of learning are turning out young savants or young savages. The undergraduate would never think of treating his duties as a broker's apprentice or an assistant in a railway office in so light-hearted a way, if he should drop out of college and go in for either of these vocations. This would be the serious business of life. Brokers and railway managers are the heroes of the time. But a spectacled professor! He potters about with his Sanskrit or his science or his philosophy or his musty literature; and what does he make out of it? A clerk's salary—and the pitying contempt of all monied men. To all who think of higher education in this way, the gates of the Colleges should be closely barred. They but profane the sanctuary. They do not know that the "dreamy Professor" is getting a thousand times more out of life, with his wealth of mental enjoyments, his breadth of view, his far vision, than is the mighty financier with his nose to the grindstone and about the same scope of mental enjoyments as is possessed by the tiger.

History Defeats Itself.



Shade of Paul Kruger. "What! Botha Premier? Well, these English do 'stagger humanity'!"—Punch.