

Is Education at Fault?

In recent months there have appeared a number of magazine articles, written by prominent educators, in which the curricula and methods obtaining in intermediary and higher schools of learning have been scrutinized.

Characteristic of this self-examination is the admission that our educational systems have not kept abreast of our social requirements. Yet, in none of these articles has there been any attempt to show that our social structure in itself has tended to break down educational standards. If there is any fault to find it is not, in the main, with education; it is with those economic forces which shape the world our young men and women must eventually face. It is this world that determines the courses of study.

The object of education is to prepare youth for life. The kind of life for which educators would like to prepare their charges exists only in the memory of these teachers. A life of culture, in which the greatest happiness comes to those with the fullest knowledge of "the best that has been thought and said," is reserved for an insignificant few of their graduates. Yet, because in times past a considerable number of students could look forward to such life, because such living is the very marrow of idealism, our teachers cling to the fantasy of its existence even in the face of grim reality. Cultural curricula remain not only because of inertia, but also because of hope.

But, the frustrations of former graduates, the complaints of distraught parents, force upon our educators the realization that the life for which they would like to prepare youth does not exist. Reluctantly they change from classical literature to business English, from logic to book-

keeping, from philosophy to agriculture. Instead of teaching the science of living they are forced to teach the art of making a living. The process is difficult and slow. New teachers who understand weaving and printing must replace those who delight in rhetoric and Latin. The scientist must adjust himself to the teaching of applied sciences. A quarter century ago the private secretarial schools prepared our high school graduates for jobs; that is now the business of public high schools, and at the sacrifice of cultural subjects.

The inevitable struggle with poverty so dominates the consciousness of youth that the workshop must replace the ivory tower. The prevailing standards of education do not determine life; it is the other way around. And as the fight for mere existence increases so that education is no longer an effective weapon it will be discarded altogether. For when a high school boy sees the despondent Phi Beta Kappa man eking out an existence no better than that of any W P A worker, his desire for a college education must cool. Indeed, it has already become a prime object of education to merely keep youth a little longer out of the competitive labor market—a sort of high class, charitable sanctuary—an escape.

We must not blame educators for lowering their ideals; they are being forced to it. If any blame is attached to them, it is in not pointing out the cause for the constantly lowering standards of life for which their students must prepare themselves. And the finger of scorn may most justly be pointed at those entrusted with the teaching of political economy. Theirs is a grievous fault.