

DOUBLE STANDARD OF MORALS.

The Curse of College Communities. Harvard's Attack on Dishonesty.

[From Report of Dean Briggs of Harvard to President Eliot.]

The most anxious disciplinary work of the year was not the closing of the probations, though that is never effected without wear and tear, but the struggle for the suppression of dishonesty in written work. This kind of dishonesty has baffled the authorities. How it undermines the sense of honor in a college community was clearly shown last year by the experience of a neighboring university in its effort to purge itself of this evil; how it dulls the moral perception of what we call "good fellows" in our own college, may be seen in the lightness with which many of them talk about it. That every one of eighteen hundred men shall be honest is too much to expect; but that any considerable part of public opinion should wink at this form of falsehood is scandalous. Two years ago the board undertook to bring about, through conference with students, a gradual change in public opinion; but soon, and with some impatience, it abandoned the undertaking and issued a kind of proclamation in these words:—

"The Administrative Board of Harvard College, holding that the handing in by a student of written work not his own is dishonorable and unworthy of a member of this University, proposes hereafter to separate from the College a student guilty of such conduct."

COLLEGE EXCUSES.

The proclamation was designed, first, to give fair warning to offenders and, secondly, to point out the real nature of the offence. At Harvard College a liar, clearly known as such, is ostracized; a student who hands in as his own writing what he has copied from another man's writing may be, for social purposes, as good as ever. Few students approve of the theme-buyer and the theme-vender (who, by the way, feel a lofty contempt for each other); and few defend the student who tries, with copied work to get scholarships, prizes, or honors; but if a companion is hard pressed by initiations or theater parties or athletics, if his standing with the Faculty is precarious, if he is in danger of losing his degree,—he may copy something now and then in sheer self-preservation.

Looked at critically, he has missed an educational opportunity; but the loss is his only, and need not worry the Faculty; if detected, he cannot expect credit for his composition, but to suspend him is monstrous. He himself affirms that he did what everybody does; that he "had to hand in something," was not well, and was short of time; that his name on the theme is a mere label, quite non-committal as to the question of authorship;—perhaps that he copied from a book which the instructor "could not help knowing," and that therefore he could mean no deceit (he "agreed with Thackeray's ideas and could not improve on his language"). He adds that he learned to "crib" at school. Soon he is reinforced by a father who assures the Dean that the young man is the soul of honor, and that this "breach of the rules" is the thoughtlessness of a mere boy, which will never show itself again.

STANDARDS AMONG GENTLEMEN.

If a man, invited to lecture before a society of gentlemen, reads, without acknowledgement, another man's work, everybody knows where to put him. His offence is not "breach of the rules" but fraud. He may not say in words, "I wrote this lecture;" his very presence says it; and if he did not write the lecture, he is a dishonest man. The motive may be money, or glory, or pressure for time and dread of failure,—no matter. Those gentlemen have done with him.

So with a student who hands in as his own for his own credit, marked with his own signature, a composition copied from another man's work. No matter what his motive; no matter how agreeable he is; no matter how much he is numbed with the ter-

ror of public opinion; no matter whether he is generally upright with his fellows and is going by and by to be upright with everybody;—for the time being and in this particular act he is a liar. If he admits that in one of those weak moments which come to shame all men but the strongest, he has done a dishonest act which he bitterly repents and for which he is willing to bear the penalty he may be respected; otherwise, though by friends he may well be forgiven, he must not, till time and thought have changed him be counted trustworthy.

There is a close analogy between his offence and what is called by a comfortable academic euphemism "ragging" signs. Though men who have "ragged" signs are not now merely at large but in places of trust (and rightly), yet the student who engages in this sport takes another man's property, which has cost money, which money alone can replace. He is, therefore, a thief; and a thief without the excuse of hunger, or of poverty, or of belonging by heredity to the criminal classes,—a purely wanton thief.

THE CURSE OF COLLEGE MORALS.

The curse of college morals is a double standard,—a shifting, for the convenience of the moment, from the character of a responsible man to the character of an irresponsible boy. The administrative officers accept without question a student's word; they assume that he is a gentleman and that a gentleman does not lie; if as happens now and then, he is not a gentleman and does lie, they had rather, nevertheless, be fooled sometimes than be suspicious always (and be fooled quite as often).

Frankly treated, the student is usually frank himself; our undergraduates are, in general, excellent fellows to deal with; yet so much is done for them, so many opportunities are lavished on them, that the more thoughtless fail to see the relation of their rights to other people's, and, in the self-importance of early manhood, forget that the world is not for them alone. Students of this kind need delicate handling. They jealously demand to be treated as men, take advantage of the instructors who treat them so, and excuse themselves on the ground that, after all, they are only boys.

This double standard is seen in both theme-copying and sign-stealing. Its moral effect is probably more insidious in the former than in the latter; for whereas persons more or less mendacious pass muster in all society but the best, no decent community outside of college, will put up with a thief. In college, both offences have been tolerated, through the pernicious doctrine, held by some respectable persons, that the life of every young man,—or at least of every young gentleman,—takes in a period of engaging anarchy during which period every thing short of murder may be winked at as boy's fun. Fun, and not crime, is doubtless the motive; and the fault is no more in the young men than in those staid citizens who boast of their early escapades and are content that their sons should behave no better than they did.

Yet, wherever the blame lies, the real nature of these acts is so plain to any one, however young, who suffers himself to open his eyes, that the usual slow processes of education may perhaps be effectively discarded. Sign-stealing, for example, received a sudden check when the Corporation removed stolen signs from the dormitories, and when Judge Almy, himself a Harvard man, spread widely the announcement that the student next convicted of stealing a sign should go to jail. The rapidly educational effect of this announcement suggests a royal road to the suppression of cheating. What we want is a penalty that educates, and educates not the offender only but the easy-going college public, which in this matter has been persistently blind.

TO EDUCATE THE COLLEGE PUBLIC.

No penalty can educate the public unless known to the public; and college penalties have long lacked educational effect, through secrecy. A man is dismissed from the University; and the student public, which either does not hear of his dismissal or understands that he has gone home for his health, is none the wiser. Accordingly the Administrative Board of Harvard College, holding that the

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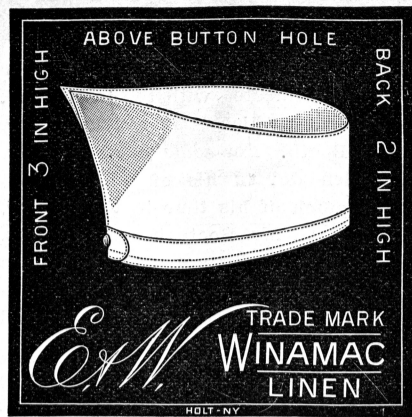
handing in by a student of written work not his own is dishonorable, proposes to separate from the College a student guilty of such conduct, and to post his name on the College bulletin boards."

"To separate" means, in most cases, "to suspend." Suspension though it has been tried and found wanting, is still in favor with the majority of the Board,—especially when combined with the posting of names: whoever deserves the second part of the penalty deserves the first, and will probably be willing to take it; the College may be regarded as a club which publishes to members the names of other members who by "conduct unbecoming a gentleman" have forfeited its privileges. The penalty of posting names has been used now and then in the College Library, when a student, for hiding reserved books from his fellows, or for an offence equally sordid has been excluded from all the libraries of the University. In such cases public opinion is unmistakable; fellow-students, whose rights the offender has selfishly infringed are less sparing than the authorities themselves, whether public opinion will uphold this penalty for dishonesty in written work is not yet known, though a canvass of the large elective courses in English Composition give hope that it will. At the worst, the Board has shown students where, in its judgment, the offence belongs, and has left no excuse for thoughtlessness.

After fair warning, the posting of a name loses that malignity which at first sight seems its chief characteristic. Indeed, the men who dread this penalty most are the executive officers who may be called on to indict it. My hope is that either self-respect or fear will make the offense almost impossible; for whoever cheats will know that he cheats, and will cheat with his eyes open to the result of detection; and my ultimate hope is a higher right for Harvard College to maintain that she stands for truth.

An Academic Difficulty.

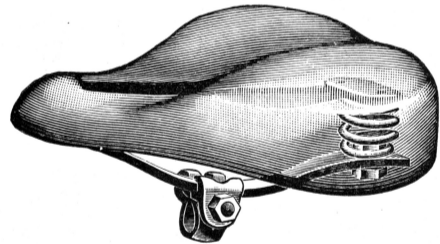
"You look gloomy; are you in debt?" "No; the trouble is I can't get the chance to be."—Yale Record.



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Hon. William L. Wilson, author of the tariff bill which bears his name, and at present the Postmaster General of the United States, has accepted the invitation to deliver the Phi Beta Kappa oration before the members of that society in Sanders Theater, Commencement week. Mr. Wilson will soon assume the presidency of Washington and Lee University at Lexington, Va.