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THE PROBLEMATIC GENIUS

AS IF in compliance with the idea that youth has a right to try new things, the University of Chicago is to give a five-year trial to a new system of academic training. The system is a radical departure in education more in respect to its proposed application than in principle. The aim, briefly, is to make over the Chicago institution, its departments, courses of study and methods of testing student ability. The changes made will theoretically at least permit graduation or elimination of students on the basis of actual achievement or the lack of it, and not under the traditional system that depends upon the time spent at undergraduate studies nor the number of "units" attained.

The plan, because of its proposed wholesale adoption, will be an interesting experiment and one that will be watched closely by educators throughout the country. It is said that under the system "A genius may get through in two months, a brilliant student in a year." This is all very well in theory but there are obvious difficulties to be overcome. One of these immediately projects itself into the spotlight by exclaiming "How will the genius be discovered in two months?" There have been notorious instances in which geniuses were not discovered in the whole period of school and college training. Dr. Steinmetz, the General Electric man of unlimited salary was better known in his preparatory and university career for his socialistic ballyhooing than for any electrical wizardry. There are other examples—all pointing out that few men come from college properly labeled and stamped as to the serial number of the niche they are to fill in the world about them. The task of the educators under any system, no matter if it operates in Chicago or Yokohama, is to determine ability as well as to develop thinking processes and with them to modify or accentuate character.

The traditional college system is far from perfect and it is significant that probably the youngest of the large American universities should set out, dead into the wind, through an already turbulent sea of educational endeavors. If it succeeds, a transformation of college methods in America may be at hand. However, it is extremely difficult to see how the system could be applied to all types of higher education centers.

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH X AND Y

WHAT constitutes reality and what is merely incidental or a manifestation of it had been a concern of philosophers long before science was established on its modern basis and before philosophy itself could be bolstered by scientific investigation. It cannot yet be said that an answer has been found. Sir James Jeans, the British astronomer, said in a lecture at Cambridge university a few weeks ago, "To speak in terms of Plato's well known simile, we are still imprisoned in our cave with our backs to the light, and can only watch the shadows on the wall." The shadows, if not wholly convincing or satisfying, are enlightening and no doubt encouraging. Sir James continues by saying that the shadows are best understood when they are considered in a mathematical way and the explanation is offered "in terms of mathematical concept." He adds:

"The universe does not appear to work, as was at one time thought, on animalistic or anthropomorphic lines, nor, as was recently thought, on mechanical lines; it rather works on purely mathematical lines. In brief the universe appears to have been designed by a pure mathematician."

This view of the universe is in close conformity with the conclusions of other physical scientists, Eddington, Millikan, of "Airtight compartments separating ether (or matter, which-and many others. Dr. Millikan notes the gradual breakdown ever you will) from life and mind." And Eddington holds that "We are no longer tempted to condemn the spiritual aspects of our nature as illusory because of their lack of concreteness."



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