

**THE CHOICE OF A
COLLEGE
FOR A BOY**

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The Choice of a College for a Boy by Charles Franklin Thwing

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THE CHOICE OF A COLLEGE

FOR A BOY.

PARENTS too often choose a college for a son without special thought or knowledge. To many people a college is a college, as a spade is a spade. But the slightest reflection, or the most superficial knowledge, is sufficient to produce the conviction that colleges differ as fundamentally as any other products of human skill. Certain institutions that bear the name of college advance the student to no higher stage of learning or culture than other colleges require for admission to their freshman class.

It is also evident that too many parents do not select a college with special reference to the conditions or the needs of the son who is going to college. It is often thought that a college good for one boy must be good for all boys. The truth is not that the college which is one boy's meat is another boy's poison, but the truth is that a college good for one boy may be something less than good or even something more than good for another boy.

Before beginning the discussion of the elements that should constitute the choice of a college, it is not unfitting for me to say it is always to be understood that to the parent selecting a college for a child the college is a tool and not a product. It is an agent and not a result. It represents a certain collection of men who are engaged in the work of teaching students, and it also rep-

resents a certain number of books and a certain amount of apparatus which are the conditions or the tools which the teaching force uses in the accomplishment of its purposes. The college is so constantly and so firmly regarded as a thing good in itself that one should be put on his guard against thinking of the college as other than an agency for securing certain results.

CITY OR COUNTRY?

One of the first questions which a parent considers in selecting a college for his boy relates to its location. Nearly all the colleges in the United States are, like the Jerusalem of David, beautiful for situation. In fact, colleges have usually been planted in certain spots because of the beauty of the proposed location. It is also evident that to the natural beauty of the location their presence makes additions. The situation is usually one of healthfulness. But the special question that the parent has to answer is the question whether he shall send his boy to the college in the country or to the college in the city. About four-fifths of all the colleges in the United States are country colleges. Whether the country or the city is the best place for a college is one of those questions which educators are constantly discussing. The arguments upon each side are not difficult to state. In behalf of the rural location, it is constantly said that the personal expenses of the student are in the country less than in the city. It is also argued that the country promotes freedom from certain moral temptations. The declaration is frequently made that the country gives larger freedom for certain social recreations and forms of amusement. It is constantly and worthily asserted that the association with nature through the country college is more intimate and precious. In be-

half of the urban situation, it is argued that the student is able to come into association with the best life of humanity of every kind. The mightiest life of the nation pours into the city. Here the best preachers have their pulpits; here the best lecturers bring themselves and their messages; here the best influences of art and of every form of noble enjoyment cluster; here the association of man with man is more intimate and more formative of the best character. It is also said that the enjoyment of nature is more intense to one who spends a part of his energies and time amidst the works of man than to one who is remote from the most active human interests. The contrast between the works of God and the works of man flings man sharply into the profoundest appreciation of natural scenes.

Between these two sets of arguments it is not necessary for me to be an arbiter, any further than to say that in my judgment, for the ordinary boy the college in the city, or the college on the borders of a city, is, on the whole, to be preferred. Probably the absolutely best location is that of a college in the suburbs of a great city. In such an environment the student is able to secure communion with nature and also association with great movements and with large life. But upon the choice of a rural or an urban college, the parent should not decide without a careful consideration of the needs of his child. In not a few instances it is well for one who has been born and bred in the city, and who will probably live his life in the city, to spend four years in a distinctly country environment. For him the country college may be the best, in case he is willing to accept its conditions. But, on the other hand, for one who has been born and bred in the country, the life of the city itself is a very direct aid in giving him the

best education. For a boy, country-born and country-bred, to go to a country college does not represent that change of scene and of influence which it is best for him usually to receive.

SCHOLARSHIP.

A second question which is worthy of most serious consideration relates to the scholarly character of the college. The type of scholarship to which a college is devoted may be of either one or both of two sorts. It may be the scholarship of research, or it may be the scholarship of and for teaching. The scholarship of research is in many ways more important than the scholarship of teaching, but such scholarship belongs more properly to the university than to the ordinary college. It therefore does not fall directly within the circle of our present investigation. But in America these two kinds of scholarship are usually combined. The college that is distinguished for its scientific or linguistic research gains distinction as a worthy place for the teaching of youth. But the scholarship that is devoted to the service of teaching represents an element which is of far greater value to the parent in search of a college than the scholarship of research. It is precisely at this point that American colleges differ from each other by diameters of incalculable length. It is also at this point that most parents are in peril of lacking evidence for making just decisions. The evidence that is usually presented to a parent seeking to know the scholarly conditions of a college consists of the statements found in the official publications of the college, such as catalogues, or in the statements made by the students themselves. Such evidence is notoriously inadequate. There are catalogues that tell the truth, and nothing

but the truth, and I am sure that most makers of catalogues desire and design to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; but the authorities of some colleges allow themselves to be deceived in respect to the relative worth of the scholarly facilities which they are able to offer to students. The college mind is in peril of provincialism. So great is the work which any college accomplishes for its students, and so great is the work which each teacher accomplishes for his individual students, that both the college and its professors are inclined to believe that they are doing as much as any other college in the world can do for its men. Whereas the fact may be that the scholarly character of one college is richer and higher and nobler than the scholarly character of another college by a degree as great as that which divides the last year in the grammar school from the last year in the high school. To illustrate the difference in the scholarly character of colleges let me set down side by side the courses of study in Harvard College in the academic year 1871-1872 with the course of study in the same college twenty-five years after. At the earlier time the titles of the courses of study in the college occupied eight pages as printed in the catalogue for the following year. In the year 1896-1897 the titles of the courses of study occupied sixty pages. In the year 1871-1872 were offered two courses in political science, five courses in philosophy, and five courses in history. Twenty-five years afterward were offered in political science, — including economics and government, — thirty courses; in philosophy, twenty-six courses; and in history, twenty-four courses. Although certain of these courses are designed primarily for graduates, yet this fact does not appreciably lessen the force of the comparison. The simple truth is that