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Magnacum Confusione

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MAGNACUM CONFUSIONE

Compelled to oppose nature or our social institutions, we must choose between making a man and a citizen, for we cannot make both at once.

ROUSSEAU, *Emile*, Book I.

“——And I carried away from college a suit case of clothes and a packing case of notebooks. These were all I had left after paying my commencement bills, for the notebooks had no commercial value, nor any other, so far as my use of them has shown, as I have never looked in them since. And is n't that a fair allegory of your college education?”

Jones was speaking, a little bitterly for him, for usually he was the most sunny of high-school principals. We had been exchanging reminiscences during the last courses of an excellent luncheon served by a domestic science class in a large city high school. There were three principals present, and I. But I was there on sufferance; for I had once been a teacher in the self-same school, and as such might as easily have aspired to a seat on Olympus as to a luncheon with the principals. Now I was a guest of Nevius and the Arnold school; and he had invited me to a part of the principals' conference.

The last part of the speech was aimed at me. “I wonder if you really know what the aims of a college education are,” I began lamely enough. “Now these much despised notebooks——”

“Notebooks,” snorted Jones. “You college professors are obsessed by the idea of notebooks. You take our poor graduates, who with us have learned a little of orderliness and obedience, two of the cardinal virtues in a community as well as in a school, and you herd them into undifferentiated classes; come into contact with them an hour or two a day; turn them over to inexperienced assistants; talk to them at random on this subject of antediluvian interest or that; assign them vague, impossible, and at best useless tasks; do not inquire if your assignments have been met. You plunge these unfortunate novitiates into a vortex of whirring notions, throw them a notebook as life-preserver, and call the result education. I say you are sticking the cause of true education under the fifth rib. You're as mad

as a mob of hatters, only there is no one among you to tell you of it."

The attack was not a new one, nor from a novel direction. I had long known Jones, that he was a man who nursed no illusions, that he was the most plain-spoken of principals, so much so that his superintendent was not a little afraid of him, and made the necessary supervisory visits as brief and formal as possible. Yet Jones had ideals and hobbies; just now they meant having the Roosevelt the most orderly and efficient school in the city—and it was.

Besides I liked him hugely; so I was carefully selecting the words of my reply. "I wonder if you secondary school men are any more sure of the aims and ideals of secondary education." But I saw that Maxwell, the principal of the Morgan school, was nervously tapping the table with his fingers, somewhat as he would call a class to order—I knew the sign, so left the question unasked and turned to him.

Maxwell was a dapper little man with an excessively polite, almost affectionate manner, which did not inspire confidence, and at times was irritating. It might almost be called obsequious. Yet it made him popular with the many rich patrons in his district, the wealthiest in the city. He was a model in manners, they said. I never knew him to disagree with any one directly; yet he had a way of gaining his ends. "I am afraid," he said smilingly to me, "that Mr. Jones is very near the truth. Now in England"—(Maxwell had just returned from his first visit abroad)—"where they have the lecture system, they have also tutors who help the students individually in their reading, they call study by that term over there, you know; and thus bridge the gap between student and professor. While in Germany—" I leaned back to cover a yawn. As though the question had not repeatedly been threshed over in our many faculty discussions. It was maddening.

"While in Germany," he went on, tenderly almost caressingly toying with his coffee spoon, "the professor often gives his lectures to empty benches, but redeems it all with a stiff examination. Does n't it look a little as though the colleges had copied all the vices of Germany without the virtues?"

"I know, I know," I broke in hurriedly, "there everything but higher education has the taint of socialism. The individualism in their universities is the leaven which energises the lump,

the one lost sheep which gives the ninety and nine orderly ones in the fold some recompense for their nice lives and keeps them from stiffening with *ennui*. Now weak and irresolute as we are, is it not true that our effort, if we show any, is directed toward scholarly independence?"

"Yes," muttered Jones, "you take away the ground from under their feet—the ground we have been so careful to make firm, while we have had them in the preparatory schools—and you call the result independence." Jones was from Amherst, and it was one of his delights to attack our overgrown universities of the middle West. But this was a new direction. He usually pointed his scorn at our lack of traditions, our bourgeois ideals, and above all at our miscalled Colleges of Agriculture, but not at our ideals of scholarly independence.

I could see, however, that in one way he was right. But he was not going to let me off without the whole of it. His school-directing experience had made him almost downright and pedantic in his courtesies as well as in his logic—a striking contrast to the young Amherst graduate I had first known fifteen years ago. But secondary schools and progressive platforms are alike in this at least, they require of their leaders an easy mastery of the obvious. So dropping into a tone of voice he might assume before a parents' guild, or a class of belligerent pupils, he went on dispassionately: "True independence or individualism in its best sense, is an impossibility in this country, even were it something to be desired—as it is n't, for we have no body of tradition and culture which any considerable number of us recognises, or desires to recognise. There is no such thing as an American tradition, save the one we are trying our best to suppress, general boorishness and lust for personal prosperity, the two evils which grew up in Puritan New England, and which alone we have cherished, letting go of all its many admirable traits, which we to-day cannot understand. This Jack London animal surliness or equally animal affection, both blind and utterly unreasoning, is at the very antipodes of independence. It is social and individual suicide. It is as deadly to the individual who glories in it as it is the utter bane and negation of society.

"For true independence consists not in the throwing aside of every tradition and convention, making of oneself naked before the world, but in a respect for tradition and culture founded upon a thorough understanding of the logic of their continuity and

progress. And this is what I say you university men are not giving to your graduates, and this, moreover, I say is quite impossible in this country to-day. You boast your independence of scholarship, and your students learn to despise tradition, because they see it only in its narrow, musty, Wagner-like, parchmentsy archives; and that too only from afar off. They are given no opportunity for guidance in the morass of courses, which, like German measles and whooping cough, beset their innocent paths. They rarely see and never come into personal contact with a real man. They think in terms of credits, diplomas, parties, co-eds, and bull-dog pipes, and you would name the result the independence of scholarship."

Maxwell was again drumming on the table. We turned toward him. "I am not so sure," he began, looking with a polite and deprecating smile at Jones, "I am not sure that I quite get your point that true independence is not desired in this country, even were it possible. Certainly the tendency now is in the direction of a close solidarity. Everything is being unionised, all that remains is to affiliate all the unions, and then legislate for the body corporate through representatives from all the various unionised interests. The proposal has been made, not once, but repeatedly; and the experiment is being tried in places. I like to think of the beauty of well-recognised and practical fraternal relations.

"But what interests me most now is my school and the effect of the education we are giving upon its graduates. And I am afraid so long as we of the primary and secondary schools and you of the colleges and universities work at cross-purposes, so long will our education do as it is now doing in the progress of this country—nothing. The people who are thinking on social problems, and whose thinking is bringing about the revolution in our civil life, are doing it in spite of our educational confusion. Now if we were to crystallise, if we were to have an educational brotherhood, as it were——"

"God forbid," broke in Nevius. He had drunk deep of the well of German philosophy and romantic idealism, and had been battle-scarred in a struggle with scientific materialism. His soul now had two windows one which looked up toward the absolute, the other which admitted the reflection of matters of everyday life and interest. He was not a man to take a second place in any conversation, and it had excited my wonder not a

little that he had restrained himself so long in the presence of his guests. "God forbid," he exclaimed yet more heartily. "An educational union would mean, as it has meant in every industry, a standard of efficiency, and before that bar you, Maxwell, might be brought, for keeping too good a school. But seriously, standardisation is the most serious evil that can beset any industry, and worst of all is it for us when he have, strictly speaking, no product at all, but capacities for living, young people who are to be taught how to live. I agree perfectly with all the strictures we have made against the universities and colleges; and nearly all thinking university men will say what we have said. The difficulty with us, the difficulty with our whole scheme of education, is that we have two and perhaps incompatible ideals. There are two varieties of studies more or less clearly marked, studies which train for future manhood, and studies which train for effective and productive citizenship. And because the line between these has not been clearly drawn, and the significance of each clearly pointed out, we have all this uncertainty to-day, uncertainty which is not so much greater in the colleges than in our own well-managed and disciplined high schools."

He waited a moment, looking at me. But I shook my head. "I quite agree with Jones," he went on, "that independence as he defined it, or barbaric individualism, as I should prefer to call it, is the bane of our age and country. But I quite deny that true individualism, the individualism which involves a respect for tradition and culture, is impossible; and it is because I see in the colleges and in them alone a blind and probably weak and staggering attempt to preserve this tradition, that I say they are nearer the true education than are we."

"But they don't do it," insisted Jones. "They don't see any light themselves—not many of them—and they still less desire to point out the light to others. For, you see, the ideal of education is changing. It was all well and good in the old days, when we still had the ideal of a cultured and leisured aristocracy, to give an education which taught, as you say, how to live, how to get the most out of life, how to see the meaning and worth of life, and all that. It was excellent then, I say, to drink great draughts as you and I did of the classics. But how much good did these same classics do us in our work?"

"More than you and I can ever know," quickly interrupted Nevius.

"No," went on Jones, "they kept you for fifteen years from getting the position you now have. The school authorities, I imagine, felt not at all sure that you would favour those new departments which make education more practical, more efficient, which bring education out of the skies to put it to spreading butter on workingmen's bread. But the classics now have nearly disappeared from our curriculum. We retain them out of a blind respect for tradition; but we are slowly getting our eyes. That mental opaqueness to new ideas which comes from too great a respect for Latin and Greek we are slowly getting rid of."

"And the result," broke in Nevius impatiently, "will be a race of well-dressed and well-fed Barbarians."

"No," replied Jones patiently, "but a race of men and women who will first of all be efficient, and then have a sense of social solidarity, the greatest desideratum in our country to-day. For the first we have our courses in the mechanical arts both for girls and boys, and then our courses in the commercial or business field. Why, our graduates from these two departments are snapped up immediately by wide-awake business firms. The city to-day has a fair sprinkling of expert workmen and clerks who got their first training from us, and were thus saved the wearying apprenticeship which others must submit to. Why, with well-organised technical and commercial courses we could put every boy in a position where he might at once begin the work of life."

"Yes" snapped Nevius, "but he can get no farther than his training."

"In the second place," went on Jones, ignoring the thrust, "we have our courses in civics, practical ethics, elementary economics, and sociology, which teach the duties that each individual owes to the community. So we train for citizenship, the exercise of the ballot, moral responsibility, and all the manifold duties which go with our modern complex social conditions. It would be a great dereliction in duty should we, when the public demands that we make our schools drill grounds for efficient citizenship, abandon that ideal, and strive to store the mind with useless lumber, or with things which might be well for the ancient Romans and Greeks but are quite out of date in this progressive age."

"All this sounds plausible enough," Nevius again broke in, "but the number of our so-called educated men who stay away

from the polls is increasing every year. Your theory may be excellent; but in practice it breeds callous citizens."

"There is at least one thing," interrupted Maxwell as he toyed with his ring, "that we can get from the Greeks which might counteract this slackness Nevius has called attention to; and that is education through art, a thing, too, which Goethe saw in his *Wilhelm Meister*. To them art was the means by which they sought and did achieve, for a while, social solidarity. The Pan-Hellenic exhibitions and contests were primarily artistic in essence. Now it seems to me that some of our school men are right in stressing the ideal that by means of our music, painting, literature, dramatics, and gymnastics—yes, even athletics—we shall do more to teach social sympathy and social service, the beauty in human life and human relationships, than in all of our ruder and more purely intellectual courses. In all of these the ideal is the value of team work and the appreciation of the beauty of sympathetic co-operation, and sympathetic understanding. For this reason we have our mass singings, our painting exhibitions, for a painting is made solely that it may carry the message of the painter to the man who sees and enjoys it. Thus we have our literary society meetings, and are turning our classes in literature into debating and programme clubs. What, too, is more important in bringing out all the latent social spirit than a well-conducted play on a school stage? Why, my manual training teacher spends weeks of his time painting the scenery and making the furniture for our plays. Athletics call out perhaps the ruder virtues at times, but we soften them by talks on the essential solidarity of both contesting teams on the gridiron, insisting that the purpose of the team work is not to win the game but to co-operate in the spirit of brotherly love.

"All these things will go farther, I believe, to do away with our crass materialism, our rude manners, our extravagant individualism, the ugliness in our lives, in our cities, in our architecture and institutions, than any other force we can wield. Europe will have nothing on us in the way of social beauty, if we can but learn the lesson of the ultimate worth of art in all its forms. And we are doing it to-day. The number of art schools in this country has increased by leaps and bounds. Art is taught in all public schools of any size. The students who specialise in it are numbered by the thousands. I am considering the advisability

of recommending that it shall be made a requirement for all pupils in our schools."

"But don't you see where it might lead?" inquired Jones. "Art is, at least in its higher manifestations, essentially individualistic. A great book, or a poem, or a painting, while it may raise the hearts of thousands, will also raise that of the artist still higher. And the lesson which history teaches, is that artistic states have ever been individualistic states. The social solidarity of Greece is a figment of the imagination.

"We need not blind ourselves to the truth, either, you, Maxwell, with your æsthetic ideals, and Nevius with his love of tradition, much as we might like to we cannot direct the real work of our public education in a large city. With our divergent views we should bring quick shipwreck to the system; and system it must have if it is to go anywhere. For this reason we may deliberate here to our hearts' content on methods of management and variations in the courses of study; but let us lift our hands against the principle that education is to promote first of all technical efficiency and secondly train for a certain kind of citizenship, the kind which will permit the least of inefficient government, political economy in the narrow sense of the word, and we should be lost. We might as well be frank with one another at least. What these workmen and business patrons want is more first-class workmen and better government, that is, less graft and less disorder.

"Beyond these they do not care that we go. Your notion, Maxwell, that Art will make for greater social sympathy and social understanding, that literature will soften our ruder manners and give our life the graces that now are seen in Europe, that our institutions, our architecture, and art will in consequence become more like those in the old countries, is all so much fold-erol. The average business man is afraid of art and literature. He sees in them a new force that he does not recognise. The only beauty to him is the sensual, the other he fears. And as for the labourer he has no time or inclination for it, for it has no 'cash value,' and interferes with his trade. They both tolerate your pretty exhibitions of paintings and plays, and literary pyrotechnics; but were they to see that through them you were leaving undone the things that should be done,—why the Morgan school would be looking for a new principal.

"That is why Maxwell's suggestion for a union of educators

is quite impossible to-day, for we are the servants of the two otherwise hostile groups, the business men and the labourers. They are our masters, they are the educators. Should we try to oppose their ideals and to form a union—were such a thing possible in spite of our conflicting theories—we should at once be crushed between the upper and the nether millstone. No, the thing is doubly, trebly, impossible; impossible because of our differences, impossible because of our helplessness, impossible because of our masters.”

We were silent for a while. The thought was not a pleasant one for any. Nevius pushed back his chair noisily and half rose. His face was drawn, for he had long nursed the thought that the teacher was the intellectual leader in a community. He sat down again, pulling savagely at his moustache. I could hear him muttering, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth . . . ”

Finally Jones went on dispassionately: “It was precisely for this reason that I said what I did of the impossibility of our having an individualism based on culture in this country. You know I come from a college where the tradition is still strong. God bless her. She is one of a very few lights in this wind-blown darkness. I hope, too, that I still carry about with me some of her ideals. But I recognise only too clearly now their utter futility and real danger. This is a democracy, and a democracy always has been and always must be built upon the principle that the health of the whole body is more significant than that of any of its members. Its death, when it has come, has always come through the rise of individuals who place their welfare above that of the mass. For this reason it was but following the law of self-preservation that led Athens to banish Aristides, the Just, as well as Themistocles and Miltiades. They were individualists. And her fall came quickly when she permitted Pericles, Plato, Socrates, Sophocles, and Phidias to reside for one day within her borders. Much as I love culture, I love my country still more. And when culture, individualistic culture, for the highest culture is individualistic, comes to this country, the social bonds will be loosened, our solidarity will be gone. In times of stress our men of power, instead of obeying the voice of the demos, will, like Goethe, be writing *Fausts* and *Meisters*, and fraternising with the French.”

"How many men were left in your college," inquired Nevius, "when the call to arms came in the sixties?"

"That is hardly a fair question," replied Jones. "First, the spirit of individual culture had then sunk no deep roots anywhere in America; and then the fight for both the North and the South, was one with a lofty ideal. It might almost be called a conflict of two ideals of culture, however badly they were understood. But the fact still stands, that no truly cultured state has been long lived. I have already pointed that out in art. Only I would go farther and say that art not only does undermine true social solidarity, but also when misunderstood, as it usually is, by uncultured people, brings in its train a thousand weak-kneed principles that endanger the very morals of our state. Dilettanteism in art usually is followed by dilettanteism in morals. Not that I do not respect art. But art is not a plaything. It is a serious thing, more serious than anything in the world. For it touches the hem of the garment of religion. There is really no place for art in a democracy that would endure."

"And no place for religion?" I inquired.

"That I am not ready to say," said Jones. "At least, I should say that there is no place for the ecstatic, or personal forms of religion, such as we usually associate with the term oriental, for they are essentially individualistic."

"Thus we are forced to the belief, are we," Nevius inquired slowly, "that a democracy must have a quiet impersonal unemotional religion, no art, no culture? It must be a place for material and social progress, for business men and labourers, and nothing else?"

"At times I feel that way," replied Jones, shaking his head, "at least the logic of the case requires it."

"And our teachers are to be disciplinarians," went on Nevius, "and experts, who minister to the physical, social, economic, and political needs of our people, with just as little stirring of mental, moral, and spiritual waters as possible?"

"You put it a little extravagantly," said Jones, "but barring that I believe you are not far from right. You see we want to endure; and to endure we want as little volatile energy as possible. We must be as nearly static as our normal progress will allow."

"But the people are spoken of as the *mobile vulgus*, the most volatile thing in the world," put in Nevius.

"Not when they are untouched by the windy doctrine of some

individualist. Alone they are as content as the peasants of India. But we have gone a long way from our point of departure," went on Jones. "Let us get back; all this sounds a little lugubrious. We are school men, you know, and not philosophers."

We sat silently wondering if such a democracy were after all the only possible one; and if it were worth our affection. Finally Maxwell turned with a smile. "Jones," he exclaimed, "you are the only social propagandist I have heard of who despairs, till despair creates from its own wreck the thing it contemplates. Is n't it a double rôle, and an unfair one to yourself, you are playing, this mingling the logic of Karl Marx and the tears of the weeping prophet? It is your Amherst training still clinging about the neck of the heart which your socialising logic would deny."

"I have allowed the dark side only of the picture to be painted," went on Jones after a time. "Have we thought of the possible progress in industry and science which such a condition would allow, with its trained experts? And we are hired to train these experts. And we do so by taking over entirely or as nearly so as possible the whole of their training.

"All of us have doubtless noticed the pretty general breakdown of the home as a unit in society. With it goes the last stronghold of individualism. Discipline of the children at home is pretty nearly, in the cities at least, an unknown thing. The father is busy in his office, the mother has her clubs. The modern labour-saving inventions have reduced housekeeping to a routine in many homes. The children have literally nothing to do in the home. The chores that used to keep us busy after school, are now all done by mechanical devices. Hence has come a gradual breakdown in home solidarity. The children are on the street if not in worse places. It is a great relief for parents when children are in school, for then, at least, they are not in mischief; while at home they must be watched, if they are to be kept straight; and you know there is nothing worse than an idle child.

"You see what we are coming to. The state is taking over the complete education of the child. We have already our supervised playgrounds. We have our compulsory education laws, and officers for looking up delinquent children. We are studying the causes of retardation in children who seem unable

to take an education. Thus we make children over. Many of our grade schools are equipped to feed undernourished children, and to sleep those who are not strong. In other words, we are stepping in to supply the manifest deficiencies in the family. Naturally that gives us a long lever to raise the children to the levels for which their natural aptitudes fit them; for we are wiser and more disinterested than the parents.

"But we are going to do more than that. We are going into the actual formation of their minds. Home study, because of the difficulties found in many homes, is already a thing of the past in nearly all grade schools, for it involves waste of time and energy, as well as a certain amount of unpleasant difficulty on the part of the children. We want the school work to taste well in their mouths. So we are going to do away with home study entirely in the high schools also, only we shall lengthen the school hours and thus keep the children a little longer off the streets. Thus we shall not only feed their bodies, when they require it, but shall also feed their minds—in our own way. With the children kept under our discipline and under our mental guidance for thus long each day, what may we not hope to accomplish? Where will there be room for the refractory child? Instead of the loafer, the criminal, we shall turn out the expert workman, the clerk, the stenographer, the man or the woman who shall take his place as a producer in this world of business and industry."

"Yes, and nothing else," snorted Nevius, who had with difficulty restrained himself during all this discussion.

"We need nothing else, now; do we?" quietly replied Jones. "It is this old and quite out-of-date theory of education for a class, that has worked such confusion in all of our ideas and practice. I say again, public education, given for the people, and by the people, must take into consideration the welfare of the people; and that in a democracy is nothing more nor less than training them to earn a decent livelihood and to co-operate in the state."

"But why," I asked, "did that form or ideal of education, as you call it,—training I should call it,—not find its way into our older academies and high schools say, of fifty to seventy-five years ago? It was never even whispered in the old New England before the Civil War."

"Because we were then a republic and not a democracy. There is all the difference in the world between the two forms of

government. You have read Montesquieu. A republic is a government of the people by its chosen representatives who are its leaders, men in whom the people have a confidence, and who have a respect for tradition, and who are usually elected to office term after term, the people contenting themselves merely with the right of franchise and choice of leader. A democracy distrusts and hence dispenses with leaders, with representatives who are given any real initiative, and keeps men in deliberative assemblies merely to record its will. The Civil War settled the question whether this is to be a republic or a democracy. For the past fifty years, since the days of Lincoln, there has gradually been the growing conviction that if this country is to endure it must be in fact as well as in theory a government of the people, by the people, and for the people; and that every check that once was set up against the immediate assertion of the popular will, must be removed and direct action and direct legislation encouraged. Hence education must respond to the popular demand, and let the people rule. Though we may not like it, the fact still stands, the people are our educators, we are mere instruments."

"What a pitiful profession then is ours," exclaimed Nevius, "if all you say be true. We are mere recorders of the popular will in the training of children, not teachers or the propagators of an educational tradition. If the people demand eugenics and efficiency, or postum cereal and prohibition, or Theodore and 'trust busting,' it is good, and we must hear the music and join the parade. To be a good educator, or trainer, we must cast off as far as possible any claims we once might have had of originality or individuality. You say democracy must abandon art, literature, religion, tradition, culture, everything that makes life worth while, and now to be consistent we must also cast away the only means by which these undemocratic ideals, as you call them, can be attained, and throw overboard education. In its place we shall set up what, as you say, the democracy for its health demands, training for efficiency and citizenship or social solidarity."

Then after a long pause, for none of us seemed to care to continue the discussion: "And I went into this profession, because I saw in it the only means of checking the wave of barbarism and socialism. And our Arts or Literary or Academic Colleges, them I regarded as our strongest and last strongholds— I wonder if

you are right. Are we the victims of the great confusion; or is it, as you say, that the way before us is only too plain?"

He was the son of an Episcopal dean and as we rose he was murmuring, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat."

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