

**POPULAR ERRORS  
CONCERNING HIGHER  
EDUCATION IN THE UNITED  
STATES AND THE REMEDY.**

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Popular Errors Concerning Higher Education in the United States and the Remedy. by George Frederick Mellen

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# POPULAR ERRORS

CONCERNING

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AND

THE REMEDY.

BY

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## INTRODUCTION.

In this eminently practical age there is no toleration and no place for the theorist apart from the practitioner, for the visionary or enthusiast apart from the utilitarian, for the critic apart from the instructor, or for the fault-finder apart from the adviser. All questions of social, civil, religious, business, or educational economy and polity are discussed in the broad light of historical truth, of human experience, of intelligent observation, and of well-founded judgment. Accordingly, statesmen and educators are applying themselves with due care and diligence to investigations into the educational history and experience not only of their own, but of all, countries. Educational systems, methods, management, and support are studied in order that the fruits of experience may be enjoyed, and its mistakes avoided or corrected.

Perhaps no phase or department of education in the United States at present claims the attention of the educated public with more earnestness and interest, than that of the higher education, whether it be offered in a college, a so-called university, or a university proper. The evidences of this widespread interest are noticeable even to the most careless student of college history and to the most casual observer of college administration. Courses of study have been remodeled and adapted to modern needs and requirements, as well as to the highest ends of culture; necessary and important branches of study been added; the scope of many branches already introduced but fettered by insufficient attention has been enlarged; greater freedom in the selection of studies has been allowed; the benefactions for the endowment or the establishment of higher institutions of learning have been

upon a most generous scale; and those entrusted with the administration of all these affairs are, for the most part, men who have been specially trained for such duties and who engage in them with intelligent skill and professional enthusiasm. Such comparatively recent foundations as Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Vanderbilt, Clark, Leland Stanford, Jr., Smith, Bryn Mawr, and others, attest the genuineness of this interest and the confidence and appreciation in which the higher education is held.

Believing that many of the problems affecting our higher education are far from solution, I have deemed it appropriate and timely to specify some existing errors of opinion and policy as concerned with the management, the functions, and the support of college and university education in the United States, to discuss the same from a practical, rational point of view, and to suggest such remedies as may seem wholesome and expedient. The errors indicated have reference to opinions and practices regarding

1. The selection of the college president.
2. The bestowment of honorary degrees.
3. The study of the classics.
4. Collegiate training as a preparation for public office.
5. The granting of free tuition and scholarships.

The pleas urged in behalf of the publication<sup>1</sup> of this treatise are the manifestly increasing interest in the work of higher education, the special interest felt as to those phases of it under discussion, and the necessity of checking certain practices that betoken nothing but evil to the country's future educational interests. In the work of preparation assiduous care has been bestowed upon the collection and citation of such opinions and extracts only as are worthy of consideration because of the influence and representative character of the

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1) It may be well to state that the greater part of this treatise has already appeared in the form of contributions to various periodicals. The favorable reception and commendation of the views expressed encourage the hope that their publication as a whole and in a more permanent form may serve a good purpose.



authors, periodicals, and individuals that have been so freely quoted.

While it is confidently expected that some will dissent from the opinions expressed, a careful examination of these pages, intended to be suggestive and helpful, is invited. My highest hopes will have been more than realized if this attempt contribute anything toward remedying some grievous abuses that mark collegiate administration, toward eradicating certain erroneous opinions that have crept into collegiate life, toward exciting profounder sympathy and respect for collegiate instruction, and toward encouraging a more generous support of collegiate institutions.

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## The College President.

In various sections of the United States diverse, but honest, opinions exist as to what constitute the highest qualifications of the college<sup>1</sup> or university president. The formation and cultivation of these opinions are attributable to certain influences at work, such as ignorance, local pride, religion, politics, and due regard for the best interests of the higher education; and the predominance of sentiment is marked in the character of the president selected by those in authority.

It is sheer ignorance that suggests one as suitable for such a place simply because he is a man of fine character, of high sense of honor, and has been a successful lawyer, a successful minister, or a distinguished soldier. Local pride contends, as prime qualifications, that the president shall be an alumnus of the institution, a resident of the state, and closely identified with its people.

Again, in some instances there is a strong demand that, as the chief qualification, the college president shall be a clergyman. This applies mainly to the denominational college, and arose no doubt from that intimate connection between education and religion so marked in the early history of the country, when the higher institutions of learning

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<sup>1</sup>) The words "college" and "university" are used interchangeably in this treatise. In the United States the distinction between the two as yet is almost nominal, the practical recognition of such a distinction being recent.

were founded chiefly by clergymen, in the interests of the clergy, and for the promotion of religious culture. This demand, which is strongest in the Congregational, Presbyterian, and northern Methodist churches, is gradually becoming a secondary consideration.

The following editorial in the New York "Tribune" of August 1, 1890, referring to the recent election of Dr. Merrill E. Gates of Rutgers College to the presidency of Amherst College, alludes to the error of such a demand, and notes its decadence:

"The traditional college president as popularly apprehended is a minister, strong in theology and metaphysics, but by no means so robust in common sense: the possession of decided and well-grounded views in regard to the life which is to come, but with a limited conception of the scope and significance of the life which now is and with small ability to deal with its varied and complex problems. 'Enit' may be written of this type of educational official. Our age, which has revised and improved a good many theories relating to the function of the college and the university, has not spared the president. It insists — and insists rightly — that in the best sense of the term he shall be a man of the world; that he shall be equal, not only to directing the mental and moral forces of the institution over which he is set, but to promoting its material interests and its general welfare."

The influence of politics insists that the president shall be a man of the people, enjoying their confidence as manifested in his elevation to political office, of intellectual gifts, of excellent character, of fine personal appearance, of magnetic manners, and of executive ability. In most instances, the qualifications enumerated are good, but they do not extend far enough. In saying this, there is no depreciation of the ability, and no impeachment of the integrity of purpose, of him who is selected for such a position; but the practice stands to reason as one of dangerous tendency and contrary to and subversive of every natural law and business principle.