Youth and the Hazards of Affluence: The High School and College Years Graham B. Blaine, Jr.

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A week before publication date of this delightful book, Dr. Blaine previewed it for the Utah chapter of the Harvard Club, to the mutual pleasure of the author and the club. Now anyone with $4.50 or a library card can share the pleasure of hearing a professional person in a high place (chief of psychiatry, Harvard University Health Services) uphold the need for decency, self-control, self-restraint, postponement of some gratifications, concern for the welfare of others, and spiritual and ethical values in religion.

Brevity and a misstatement of title are the principal criticisms. Profound changes in attitudes and behavior are acknowledged, but affluence is implicated only in making the student role the way of life for most Americans between five and twenty-five (as a rite and a right, at least for white children), in making available to youth unearned material goods, in removing family-survival values as concrete, transmissible virtues, and in paradoxical reduction in communication time available between parents and children (moon-lighting fathers and working mothers).

We are inheriting the wind of a generation of progressive educators and misinterpreters of St. Sigmund, who held that a child should not be punished and that encouraging the expression of every hostile, aggressive or destructive impulse would automatically insure the development of creativity, originality, and a healthy personality.

Now we return to the ancient wisdom that the conscience is formed in the first six to eight years, by parents who have a clear sense of right and wrong, a willingness to punish, and firmness. From eight onward, conscience is further developed by example from parents or other models who set limits for themselves, who define and make known their views, who let the child learn by experience, and who reserve punishment and basic limit setting to the major issues. "There is no mechanical substitute for the rewards of parents’ hugs, smiles, glows of pride, nor for the punishments felt from a frown, growl, spanking, or groan of disappointment. Human communication by voice, hand, facial expression, or loving arms is as essential for healthy child development as air and water."
Dr. Blaine views the dropout problem lightly. The majority of high school dropouts go into apprenticeships or trade schools. The college dropout is most likely to return to the same school. Dropping out may be helpful, giving the student experience with direct, simple, completable tasks and a chance to reevaluate the attractiveness of the world of the laborer.

The tragedy of underachievement often masks, from student, parent and school, an underlying adolescent rebellion, usually dismissed as poor attitude, laziness, or lack of will power. Failure to recognize the underlying rebellion usually leads to ways of handling which only aggravate it.

Changing patterns of sexual attitudes and behavior, "the new morality," tremendously concern students, parents and administrators. Ready availability of contraceptive material and information, importation of attitudes from Norway and Sweden, decline in religious interest and fear of eternal damnation, decline in prohibitive attitudes of some churches, encouragement by mass media, drive to demonstrate masculinity or femininity or popularity, and apparent approval in some professional circles, all play some role in the changing patterns. But one factor has been the cruel hoax of confusing maturity with "freedom and license." Parents and administrators have been guilty of not facing the double-talk of youth for what it is—outwardly a demand for freedom, masking a plea for help in control, in setting limits. "Parents as well as authorities in schools and colleges should not be ahead of the times in their attitudes toward sexual morality." Giving up rules has deprived many students of a protection that has been valued highly and needed badly. "College rules and expressed parental attitudes should bolster and protect both the girls and the young men who are not yet ready to adopt for themselves the standards of what appears to be a movement toward greater sexual freedom."

Recent bitter experience at Harvard with drug problems could be repeated on other campuses. Dr. Blaine suggests more firm control over the availability of narcotics, pep-pills, sedatives, psychedelic drugs, and alcohol, and recommends that youth be furnished with enough factual information that they can make valid decisions about not using drugs. The search for a change in personality, escape from feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, relief from anxiety tempt many adolescents to
experiment with drugs. "We must look to the needs of the person who is seeking answers to his personal problems in drugs and help him find these answers elsewhere."

Riotous behavior, the bane of the college administrator, seems to be getting more destructive, more vicious. Search for brutal excitement, deep contempt for law and order, and boiling rage seem to be replacing "high spirits" of earlier student riots. Riots need a cause, a trigger and a climate. Causes are a dime a dozen today. Triggers exist almost every day. The climate is the place where college authorities can concentrate their preventive efforts with firmness and reasonableness. Here, again, students send a double message, a demand for freedom and a need for control. They protest, but they want limits set. They "expect authority to react to their rebellion but to react in a strong and unflustered manner and not to cave in no matter how strong the provocation. . . . They expect their elders to be respectful, concerned, and at the same time wise and resolute."

Dr. Blaine considers religion second only to the family in healthy personality development. He decries current trends of despiritualization, intellectualization, rationalization, and the attempts to amalgamate religion and psychiatry, which should be complementary and not competitive. Adolescent rebellion against the church, profession of atheism and agnosticism are often handled by churches in ways which tend to further alienate the person most in need. Recent capitulation of certain churches to accept the "new morality" abandons youth at a time he needs a firm spiritual and ethical position.

Parental responsibility to youth converges around three areas: being good models or providing them from exemplary persons, from fiction, theater, TV; citing facts out of their own greater experience and knowledge; and providing a challenge so the youth may feel their own strength through constructive experience. The fight for grades is no longer a proper challenge for many, and for these, military service, VISTA, or the Peace Corps may present a suitable challenge. This reviewer would like to add an L.D.S. mission as the best example of meaningful challenge.

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