

"GETTING BY"

"The students do not call it cheating. They call it "getting by".

Today is May Day, 1936. Every year, about May Day, hundreds of college presidents go into solitary confinement to work on their budgets for the following year. From time to time they call in their treasurers, purchasing agents, department heads. Finally, sums of money for teachers' salaries, for fuel consumption, and the like, are set up. The budget is approved by the trustees, and becomes a sacred document.

The same general sort of procedure is followed in thousands of public schools and private schools throughout the United States.

In September the schools open. Class rooms everywhere are filled with children, with young boys and girls, with mature men and women. Thousands of teachers; hundreds of thousands of students. On the first day of school the budget begins its manifest destiny.

And, also on the first day of school, wholesale cheating begins!

If the college presidents, the public school superintendents, the high school principals, the boards of education, or the trustees, have, in setting up their budgets, considered that the Way of Honor and the Light of Truth are more to be desired than are athletic victories and student per capita cost to the state, they give no evidence of their concern.

So far as I know, and I have asked the question countless times over a long period of years, no college president, no department head, no class room teacher, no student has ever stated that he believes it right to be dishonest on intellectual work. And yet the youngest student knows, and the oldest teacher should know, that cheating, in general, is the order of the day, and that, in general, precisely nothing is being done about it.

Because I believe that the most serious problem which faces modern education is not lack of money, or poor teaching, or stupid administration, but that it is the business of dishonesty on class room and examination work, I want to set down as clearly and as simply as I know how just what has happened to me. It must have happened to many others. Because I believe that if existing conditions are permitted to continue we should close the doors of our schools and colleges before the walls crumble on their rotten foundations and overwhelm us, I want to state plainly what the situation is and what can and must be done to correct it.

The students do not call it cheating. They call it "getting by".

The fault lies not at their door, but at the doors of administrative officers and the members of their faculties. It is they who have allowed, condoned, and, in many instances, actually encouraged cheating. They alone have permitted the house of education to become a den of thieves. They alone can set the house in order.

I

When I was two months old, my father took me with him to a preparatory school where he has been teaching for more than forty years. Let us call it simply the High School. There I grew up, went to school, graduated, and taught for two years,-- under a Student Honor System. The system really worked. Cheating was about as rare as death, and, in a sense, as final; those who cheated were expelled by their fellow students. The boys were supposed to be gentlemen first, then scholars. And a gentleman did not lie, or cheat, or steal.

One thing I was not told,- that the same happy conditions did not exist everywhere and in all schools.

In the fall of 1916, I matriculated at an institution which we may call simply the University. Here the same conditions obtained that I had been used to at the High School. The Student Honor System was jealously guarded. Men drank whiskey. They played poker far into the night. But they did not lie, or cheat, or steal. The few who did were expelled by their fellow students.

The war broke out in April. I returned to the University in the spring of 1919 and, as president of the academic class, served on the Honor Committee in 1919-20. Before the war, there were sometimes three or four cases of dishonesty a year. That year there were fifteen or twenty. The members of the Honor Committee had all seen "soldiering" in the service, had all been exposed to the spirit of "getting by". During the war we had come in contact with all sorts and conditions of men. But we were not in the army any longer. We were back at the University. So we expelled the dishonest students, including those who thought they were "just getting by". We believed that a crooked education was worse than no education, we thought more of the University than of any man in it, and we did not propose to sacrifice a heritage which to us was synonymous with the free spirit of man.

I staid on at the University for graduate work because I was happy there. But one thing I was not told,-- that the same happy conditions did not exist everywhere and in all colleges and universities.

II

In the fall of 1923, I went, as assistant professor of English, to what we may call simply the College. I was in my late twenties. I had never seen a boy cheat at the High School. I had seen but one man cheat at the University. When I learned that there was a Student Honor System

at the College, I naively put my first quiz on the board and, like an altar-ministrant, departed. Next day one of my students suggested that I would do well to stay in the room during quiz. I asked him why. "Because," he said, "we all opened our books!" If he had told me that they had all committed suicide, I should not have been so disturbed, for man has often preferred death to dishonor. Not even the truth about Santa Claus and the Stork had so completely made a mockery of my Fool's Paradise!

I did all that I could do,- tore up the quiz papers, gave another quiz, and sat in the room like the good policeman I knew I should have to be. I told my students that a dishonest honor system apparently was in vogue, that I would proctor their quizzes and examinations, that if they cheated I would report them to the Student Council and ask that they be expelled from the College.

Shortly before Christmas vacation, the captain-elect of the football team cheated on review quiz. He told me that he thought he could "get by"; that he expected me to report him as I had said I would do; that he would not be fired by a student council that was as crooked as he was! The case caused quite a stir. The faculty adviser of athletics, a close friend of mine, told me I was to be visited by a committee of townspeople who were interested in football victories. He did not tell me their names, nor did he know whether their visit would be in the nature of a threat or a promise,-- my job, or free season tickets. I asked him to tell the group that the man who had preferred charges against the football star weighed two hundred pounds, that he lived at such and such an address, that his wife had bought a heavy antique chair which sat near his front door,- and that he had not fully decided whether to spend fifteen dollars to have the chair done over, or whether to break it over some scoundrel's head. I was mad, and, evidently, still uninitiated. The committee never called. The Student Council refused to handle the case. The captain-

elect was eventually dismissed by the faculty.

I was getting pretty well fed up with the business of teaching school. I did not want to reform the world; neither did I want to work in an atmosphere that was constantly reminiscent of nightmare. So I began an investigation which has covered a period of years. Among other things, I have asked various groups of students certain specific questions and have tabulated the results. One of these tabulations lies before me. It consists of a series of questions asked of 107 students who met with me in five different sections, three groups of freshmen, two of sophomores. One freshman section comprised nineteen unusually stupid boys,- remedial English of the most remedial sort; one sophomore section comprised seventeen unusually brilliant boys, a fast group, hand picked; the other three sections were about average.

Question 1: Have you seen cheating in the College? YES, 105; NO, 2. These questions were asked near the beginning of a semester. A number of students had only recently registered. The two, probably, were newcomers. Even at that, 105 to 2 would indicate that cheating is about as common as is getting up in the morning and going to classes.

Question 2: What percent of the students cheat? Answer: 67%. This average, unhappily, is low. My group of intelligent sophomores says from 90 to 95%.

Question 3: What percent of these cheated in High School? Answer: From 65 to 80%. The College, then, can not lay the entire blame on the High Schools!

Question 4: Of the following causes for dishonesty, which do you consider most important: Desire to stay in school; innate crookedness; too much to do honestly; parental urge; environment; previous training; laziness? Answer: Desire to stay in school leads all the rest. Laziness is particularly prominent. Too much to do honestly proves a student slogan which, when put to a vote, fails dismally. Innate crookedness

is a bad last!

Question 5: Can an athlete get by with more cheating than can a non-athlete? Answer: YES, 47; NO, 17. The reason for such a light vote is that a great many boys say, "It depends on who catches him!" I have asked my students if they understand that their vote points the long finger of dishonesty at the College faculty. They grin,-- and say, "Sure!"

I asked perhaps a dozen other questions, and the answers are all illuminating. "Is the crime cheating or getting caught?" (Getting caught.) "Would an Honor System work at the College"- it had already been thrown out by the students-- (No.) "Do you think cheating less wrong if you are being watched?" (About 50-50. One student offered the charming suggestion that if the teacher had explained the course thoroughly so that the student would know all the answers on quiz, he should not cheat; otherwise, it was all right!) "Does seating students two seats apart, giving alternate quizzes, etc., result in more or less cheating?" (Less,-- by three or four to one.) "Should honesty be graded? That is, should different penalties be given for different 'sorts' of dishonesty?" (No,- by two to one.) "Are the boys who cheat confined to the dumb, or do more of the dumb get caught?" ("The less intelligent get caught"-- by four to one.) "Should different penalties be given to freshmen and upperclassmen?" (The freshmen voted YES by more than two to one,- claiming that they should be given time to learn the ropes before being dealt with too severely. The sophomores voted NO by more than two to one,- remarking, "With cheating as it now is, the freshman has the best chance to be honest.")

It is the answer to this question, however, that goes to the root of the matter: "Is the man who cheats in this college a 'crook' in the usual sense of that term?" Answer: YES, 9; NO, 83!

That nine out of ten students do not regard cheating as crookedness, but simply as "getting by", is a hopeful sign, but it is no compliment to heads of institutions and teachers who have permitted such a feeling to grow and prosper; nor can parents who do most of their children's work and allow them to hand it in as their own be congratulated for the part they have played in the whole sorry business. Be it cheating, or just "getting by", it still doesn't make any sense to give quizzes, examinations, and diplomas,-- and know that grades of A or B or C do not mean what they are supposed to mean. Sometimes I feel that the only answer is that no more quizzes be given anywhere, nor examinations, nor grades, nor diplomas, nor degrees!

III

What then can be done about it? There are a great many things that can be done. In the first place, all educators, from the most humble to the most exalted, will do well to examine their own institutions,-- from the ground up. Nor need they choose to hide behind a holier-than-thou attitude of mind. Conditions such as I have pointed out in the College can be duplicated in many other colleges of the land; they are worse in many others, for at the College something has been done about the situation. What presidents and deans and teachers need to do is to talk to their students and find out what conditions actually exist. Many will find that their students cheat to make the Honor Roll, that they buy examinations in advance, that they pay their more brilliant fellows to take their examinations for them.

Paradoxically, perhaps, students who are confessedly dishonest on school work, will talk frankly with their teachers and will tell them the truth. And students are more aware of the difference between right and wrong than teachers are. This is because they are younger, and the

whites and blacks have not merged into a dull grey. Moreover, they are sterner in the matter of discipline. And they are eager to join with their teachers in any move to make their schools more decent abodes of virtue. Too often they have appealed to the constituted authorities,-- too often they have publically announced that they would welcome a new order of things,-- only to be met with the cold and fishy stare of complete misunderstanding.

As I have indicated, the first thing for those in school work to do is to find out what conditions actually exist in their own institutions. If there is a student honor system, then they must be sure that it really works. If it does not work, it must be discontinued, and at once. In its place must come a system of faculty control. Under a student honor system, the students themselves are obligated to report their fellow students for dishonesty. They can not expect to share the privileges of such a system unless they are willing also to share its responsibilities. And the same is true of a system of faculty control. Faculty members must all follow the same procedure, agree to enforce the same regulations.

If these things are not done, the following hopeless situation exists: An institution of learning where one teacher proctors quizzes and examinations and another does not; where one teacher gives a dishonest student a zero, another tells him he is a naughty boy, another drops him from the course, another has him sent home; where the same penalties are given for cutting classes as for attending classes and cheating in them. When conditions such as these obtain, the student must find out on whom he can cheat with impunity; the whole business becomes a game with him; and "getting by" is the name of the game they play.

Thoreau once said, "If you have built castles in the air your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations

under them." In our schools and colleges it is apparent that we must put foundations under our air castles. In the last analysis it is the high school principal or the college president on whom the responsibility rests. If a system of faculty control is in operation, he can do this much, if he will: Call his faculty together and recommend to them, among other things.....1) That students, wherever possible, be assigned to alternate seats, or else that alternate quizzes be given. This regulation will stop most of what we may call "casual" cheating,-- provided, 2) That teachers remain in the room during quizzes and examinations and proctor them. 3) That all teachers post on their class room doors regulations stating what is regarded as fair and what unfair work in that particular department. 4) That students be not allowed to leave the room during quiz or examination unless accompanied by a proctor. 5) That home work be not graded. 6) That book reports be made orally..... Such suggested regulations can be amended, rejected, added to by the faculty. Eventually, however, a body of regulations is passed by the faculty stating clearly the procedure that must be followed by all teachers and at all times. The principal or the president must then insist that his teachers observe these regulations, or else he must find teachers who will observe them.

As no system is likely to succeed unless it has the mutual respect of both faculty members and students, these regulations should then be submitted to the student body. The students should be encouraged to offer suggestions, amendments, additions. Finally, both faculty and students have agreed to the machinery that is to be used under a system of faculty control of academic work.

The question then arises, "What will be done when a student is believed by a teacher to be dishonest?" It is the teacher's duty (for under a system of faculty control no student is expected or required to report a fellow student for dishonesty) to report cases of alleged

dishonesty to a committee,- preferably a committee composed of both faculty members and students. Three faculty members and three students is a workable number, with a vote of five out of six required to find the accused guilty as charged. Once found guilty, the student is remanded (at the College) to the Executive Committee of the Faculty for discipline. And on this committee rests the responsibility of imposing the same penalty for the same offense on each and every student that comes before it.

IV

And the castles in the air? Well, at least it is possible for us to put foundations under them. Then, and then only, does the building become possible.

Often I wish I were living again under the Student Honor System at the High School or at the University. And yet the job is perhaps a more important one where the meaning of intellectual integrity is yet but little understood by students who have been denied this knowledge by those who should have been most eager for them to have it.

The students call it "getting by",-- and it is our fault. It is up to us to set our houses in order. If we will be honest with ourselves and with our students, we can yet build our castles in the air, we can yet say to Youth, "Enter by this Gateway, and seek the Way of Honor, the Light of Truth....."

We can, and we must. And when we do, they will understand.

Frank R. Reade,
G.S.W.C.
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= "The very definite reason" =

9 April 1936

TO ALL FACULTY MEMBERS:

On last Monday night, Miss Hopper, Dr. Hawks, Miss Ivey, Miss Carter, Dr. Punke, and I were invited by the president of the Student Government Association to meet with a number of representative students, incoming and outgoing class presidents, and others, to discuss ~~various~~ several matters of importance to students and faculty members alike. I wish at this time to ask your most serious consideration of one problem which was discussed,-- the business of cheating on the part of our students, and the business of indifference (or of unawareness) on the part of the faculty. Of course, most students, we hope, are not dishonest; nor most teachers indifferent.

On the following points both students and faculty members seemed generally agreed:

1. That a Student Honor System is out of the question. It would not work because students will not report each other.
2. That any sort of "cooperation" on the part of the students which would involve the reporting of a student by another student is also not feasible,-- for the same reason.
3. That the System of Faculty Control, as presently in operation, is not satisfactory,-- because cheating is wide spread, and nothing is being done about it.
4. That something should and must be done about the existing situation.

On the following points the students seemed generally agreed:

- a) That cheating is ~~generally~~ wide spread throughout the college, but that it is much more prevalent in the freshman and sophomore classes.
- b) That there is very little "premeditated" cheating,-- i.e. bringing notes to class to be used on quiz, etc. That most of the cheating is of a rather casual nature,-- i.e. looking on other papers, asking questions of other students, etc.
- c) That in some classes cheating is general; that questions are asked and answered out loud; that copying is done openly; that teachers must be aware of what is going on; that they do nothing about it.
- d) That identical quizzes are given to different sections -- sometimes at consecutive hours, sometimes at non-consecutive hours on the same day, often in consecutive quarters on the same material.
- e) That little if any cheating occurs on examinations.

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In view of the above, it is my purpose within the next few days to place in each teacher's mail box a mimeographed sheet of suggested methods to be used in all classes and by all faculty members ~~with~~ in an effort to correct a situation which I am sure all students and all faculty members must feel needs correction. I want all of you to study these proposals carefully so that at our next faculty meeting, on Monday, April 20, each item may be taken up separately, discussed, discarded, modified, or adopted by the faculty. I shall then assemble the items that are adopted and issue them as a body of regulations ~~evidently desired by the students, and~~ formally passed by the faculty. I shall expect these regulations to be strictly observed and enforced until such time as they may be rescinded by faculty ~~or~~ executive action. ~~And if any teacher does not choose to observe these regulations, I shall be glad to accept his or her resignation on any day and at any time. And if any teacher does not choose to observe these regulations, and does not offer his or her resignation, I shall request it.~~

April 9, 1936

For a very definite reason, I want to read to you certain extracts from a report which I read to the Georgia Tech faculty several years ago. It has to do with an investigation I made at Tech that covered a period of several years. This particular report was based on 20 questions and the answers to these questions which I asked during a particular semester of the 107 students who met with me in five different sections. Many of these students came from the same homes, and from the same high schools that our students come from. The situation that existed at Tech might well exist here and does in part exist here but on a smaller scale because this is a smaller school.

Of the five sections, two were sophomore sections, and three were freshman sections. One sophomore section was below average; the other well above average. Of the freshman sections, one was average, one above average, and one was made up of 19 unusually stupid boys---- remedial English of the most remedial sort. Of the 107 students, quite a number were unable to answer some of the questions. Some gave opinions that missed the mark and could not be tabulated. I asked the questions as they occurred to me and have made no effort to rearrange them in any special order.