

MODERN AGE

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The End of the Old Education

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*A report of the first battle at nineteenth-century
Yale between "classicism" and the social sciences.*

WHEN HARVARD UNIVERSITY went over to the Charles Eliot system of completely free electives in the decades after the Civil War, it was a portent of the end of the old compulsory classical education in all our colleges. As Robert Hutchins was to suggest at a later date, Eliot proved all too successful in "robbing American youth of its cultural heritage." Even Eliot's well-wishers were frightened by the thoroughness of his action. Nevertheless, to an age that was suddenly confronted with the need to prepare its young men for positions of responsibility in the strange new world of the railroad and the steel mill, the constricting effects of

four years of concentration on Latin, Greek, mathematics and "natural philosophy" seemed to demand some change.

Accordingly, among those educators who felt that Eliot "had something" but had gone "too far," a compromise theory of the curriculum took shape. The leaders in the compromise movement were Andrew D. White of Cornell and William Graham Sumner of Yale. White, though advocating free choice among areas of specialization, insisted that separate "schools" of science, modern languages, history and the classics be planned by their several faculties in order to guarantee the student a well-rounded

command of his chosen field. And Sumner, who was willing to concede the desirability of a standard freshman-sophomore curriculum which would include the classics, felt that the upper class years should be freed, not for random choice, but for intensive work in the "newer" subjects including his own specialties of modern history, economics and sociology.

The laudable attribute of the White-Sumner type of compromise was that it proposed no sacrifice of the idea of "coherence" in education. It did not invite picking and choosing among "guts," cafeteria style. But in pushing for "equality of the subjects," both White and Sumner set in train a movement that was ultimately to prove even more insidious than the planless fragmentation which Eliot's ideas encouraged. It was all very well for White to insist that physics and chemistry should be considered on a par with Latin and Greek, and that English and the modern languages should be made fully as respectable as philosophy. These were all disciplines of a "generalist" nature. But the day would come when the doctrine of "equality of the subjects" would elevate such things as hotel keeping and home economics to an equivalence with Greek and calculus. The day of the B.A. for bee keeping was implicit in the White-Sumner theory.

Since Andrew D. White dominated the scene at his university, there was no particular attempt to save the day for the old order at Cornell. But at Yale, when Sumner was beginning his campaign for modern upper class "schools," the old order had a lusty champion in President Noah Porter.

For at least three generations Porter has been dismissed by "moderns" and "progressives" as a fuddy-duddy who refused to see that colleges should be something more than trade schools for Congregational parish ministries. The academic histories deal with him as an obstruction which had to be

blasted out of the way. But if one actually takes the trouble to read Porter's ideas on education, one is surprised by the breadth and freshness of his defense of basic "generalist" subjects. He had his cogent reasons for wishing to retain some compulsion in the ancient fields of Latin, Greek, mathematics and metaphysics. But he also had a modern view of the possibilities in other fields, psychology in particular.

The truth of the matter is that Porter and Sumner each had right on their seemingly opposed sides. Porter was correct in fearing that a sudden sanctification of the newer social sciences as "generalist" subjects would lead to a waste of many a good man's time on diffuse conjecture. But Sumner, for his part, was equally correct in his feeling that Latin and Greek, *as they had come to be taught in the post-Civil War college*, did not accomplish the results which Porter claimed for them.

As President of Yale in the Seventies and early Eighties, Porter liked to hark back to his own time as a student and teacher. He remembered a day when the subjects of the old curriculum had been imparted with passion and conviction. But what went on under his nose as an administrator was not always apparent to him. A man who acted as if he believed there was good in everybody, he was, as George Wilson Pierson has said in his *Yale College: An Educational History, 1871-1921*, "in many ways a sympathetic and winning product of old Yale." But Yale, in the Seventies and Eighties, though it retained the shell of the pre-Civil War times, had lost its old sense of mission.

Porter, in effect, was a leader whose army had vanished from behind him. Even without an army he believed in keeping his face to the sound of the guns. Considerably more than Yale had gone into the nurture of this gentle and affectionate man, and no

more than the next man could he shuck off his training. He had grown up in the bucolic world of the early century, passing his boyhood in Farmington, Connecticut, a town that still answers to Malcolm Cowley's description of it as "New England under a bell-jar." His grandfather, the first Noah Porter, had fought at Ticonderoga (the family's furthest venture from home) and had returned to Farmington to meditate upon the Bible as he followed his plough. The second Noah Porter had studied theology at Yale and had taken the Farmington church pastorate in preference to becoming a college tutor. The third Noah was drilled in the old classical Latin culture at Farmington Academy. But, like all boys in an age that lived close to the soil, he was at home in the blacksmith and carpenter shops of his neighborhood, and he learned the cause and effect rhythms of nature in the garden and by taking care of the family cows.

As the son of a Congregationalist minister Noah Porter was destined for Yale and, subsequently, the divinity school—in other words, for Latin, Greek, mathematics and metaphysical speculation. His class of 1828, however, was hardly an ingrown or sheltered class: it drew students from Virginia and the Carolinas, from Alabama and Louisiana, as well as from Yankeeland. To the cosmopolitanism fostered by a mingling of accents and attitudes there was added the ferment of the Romantic Movement. Greece was struggling to be free, the Bourbons in France were about to be toppled for a second time, England was on the verge of accepting the Reform Bill. Byron was a favorite undergraduate poet; Wordsworth was growing in reputation; the sciences were gaining favor, with the older Benjamin Silliman attracting many students to the new studies of geology and chemistry. And, in a college community not yet given to formal athletics, it was an al-

most universal relaxation to study "natural science" in long walks into the country.

Far from being a victim of pedantry, of the "textbook and recitation" squirrel cage, Noah Porter had plenty of time for Coleridge, not only Coleridge the poet but Coleridge the stimulating conservative thinker. It was Coleridge, a farsighted man who saw through the illusions of the French (as distinct from the American) Revolution, who made the most "modern" impression on Noah Porter's mind. As a divinity student, Porter was a "liberal" in terms of his day, i.e., he took his stand on the anti-Calvinist view that man, while he suffered in consequence of Adam's sin, did not automatically share the guilt of it. But disputations over Original Sin rather bored Porter—what really interested him was psychology, particularly as it related to the nature of the deliberative mind. He was not interested in taking New England back to the debates of Jonathan Edwards.

When he went to New Milford, Connecticut, after his marriage, to become the local pastor, Porter addressed himself faithfully to the duties of overseeing the spiritual life of a community that still lived in almost frontier simplicity. His own memoir of his pastorate is filled with a strong worldly sense of "sinewy, horse-taming young men and healthy matrons." He speaks of individuals with almost a novelist's appreciation of their salient characteristics (of the "Gaylords, self-reliant, courteous and strong," of the "brothers Hine, abundant in enterprise and intelligence"), and his eye for the old rural life of New England before the drain of population to the West and the cities had begun—the life which was "fairest just before it began to wither"—was keen. Later, as pastor of a church in Springfield, Massachusetts, when the old river town was springing to life again with the coming of the railroad, Porter encountered entirely new problems.

Noah Porter, then, had had his experience of men and the world before he became a professor and, later, the President of Yale. If, after the Civil War, he criticized the new philosophies which developed in the wake of Darwin's 1859 *Origin of Species*, he at least criticized them after reading them. He disliked struggles involving personalities, but he loved the cut-and-thrust of philosophical controversy. His own book on psychology—*The Human Intellect*—has an antiquarian flavor today simply because the names with which it takes issue are of interest primarily to literary and scientific archaeologists. But Porter had the true scientific spirit. Holding with the Baconians on induction, he believed that psychology was an inductive science. As such, it must precede any metaphysical speculation about the meaning and destiny of man.

Contrary to other fact-grubbing psychologists, however, his own induction led him to take a position against the passive school of Mill and Locke which taught that the human mind was a *tabula rasa* on which impressions were scribbled in a heterogeneous manner before anything could be made of them. He argued from common-sense premises that without the control of the rational will nothing whatsoever could be made of impressions on any clean slate. Even as the impressions were recorded, so it seemed to Porter, the rational will was already at work. A *gestaltist* ahead of his time, Porter argued that "in knowing we are not so much recipients as actors." As actors, we perceive things in combination—as "wholes"—before we begin to pull them apart. In other words, knowledge "begins in a judgment." It is the judgment that permits analysis to begin its reduction of complexity to simpler elements.

Since no one has ever seen a "mind" or a "soul"—or, for that matter, a Freudian "psyche" or "id" or "superego"—the argu-

ment between the *tabula rasa* school of the two Mills and the rational-faculty school of Porter will probably never be definitively settled. There are things that don't yield to the dissection of the brain anatomist or the student of conditioned reflexes. But any painter can tell any psychologist that the eye itself is a physiological "whole" that is built to focus immediately on an object in its formal space relationships, and any dance choreographer knows that movement in time is experienced as a "whole" before the spectator can split it up into the entrechats and arabesques of different performers. It must seem obvious to common sense that many kinds of knowledge begin with the "sizing up" of situations at a glance. The hand grasps an object in its contours before detecting subtler aspects, the ear accepts sound as melody before it recognizes sharps and flats.

There is much more to Porter's common-sensical psychology than this—but there is enough here to make it plain that he thought of human beings as volitional and design-perceiving animals of a high order. Freud would have seemed to him a student of sick people who had let sexual associationalism proceed to the point of disintegration of the personality; and as for the behaviorists, they would have seemed false describers of behavior. Like Alfred North Whitehead at a far later date, Porter asserted that induction itself is impossible without an intuitive feeling that order and design are the basis of the universe. Cause and effect need design in which to form a chain. If the ultimate end did not inhere in the first cause, then like conditions would produce entirely random results. "Law" would be impossible to discover if, lacking an inbuilt pattern of fulfillment, an apple seed might produce a sunflower one day and a pine tree the next. But "laws" are constantly discovered—and design is thereby indicated. Porter, no fatalist, felt

that there is nothing automatic about the fulfillment of design—a forward impulse, amounting to volition in man, is needed to accomplish results. The mystery of free will within predestined patterns was accepted as a mystery by Porter, who was humble enough to leave some things to God.

It was as a mind that Porter tackled the subject of the Yale curriculum when he became the eleventh president of his alma mater in 1871. He had thought it all out as Clark Professor of Moral Philosophy and Metaphysics in a book, *The American College and the American Public*, which was first published in 1869 and added to in subsequent editions. Porter's argument against State domination of education—that the teachings of a State university would inevitably be called into question on every point where they touched upon current shibboleths of science, or religion, or finance, or health, or education itself—remains as cogent today as it was eighty-odd years ago. For Yale, a private institution, Porter held to ideas and ideals that were already crumbling when he assumed the presidency. Along with McCosh of Princeton, Porter was doomed to fight a long rearguard action against the free elective system already in bloom at Harvard, and against the system of early specializing that had been tentatively pioneered at the University of Michigan before it had been picked up by Andrew White and Sumner.

Above all, Porter wanted to keep Yale primarily a college. Science, in its ramifications, could be left to the Sheffield Scientific School; graduate work might be welcomed after the full four-year instruction had been completed. But the college itself must be inviolate. To Porter's mind, the cafeteria-style system championed by Harvard's Eliot gave Harvard students university privileges of choice long before they were sufficiently mature to handle them.

The object of college, said Porter, was not to treat the student as a man, but to "make him a man." As for pushing elective specialization—the ancient mark of the university—too far down into the college years, this might be done with impunity at European centers of learning. Secondary education in Europe was far more thoroughgoing in its disciplines than happened to be the case in American high schools and academies, and the European student consequently entered the university with a one- or two-year jump on his American brother.

Optional courses for juniors and seniors did begin early in Porter's regime, but they were rigidly limited to a very few hours. Porter defended the old required curriculum on the ground that it was specially designed to make up for the irregular and spotty high school performance of the average boy who matriculated as a freshman. As he saw it, it took up the slack in short order, and after four years of it even the most delinquent student might be assumed to have developed the power to generalize. But it was the "whole man," not the generalizing intellectual, that was Porter's chief concern. He inherited a Christian college that had been condemned as "sectarian." But far from being a narrow theologian, Porter had a concept of Christianity as "Hebraism Hellenized," and he taught his students in accordance with his feeling that it was a Christian's duty to "mediate between Judaism and Hellenism."

He liked a compact Yale where everyone could test his character in direct competition with all of his fellows, a far from ascetic ideal. He gloried in the "capstone courses" of mental and moral philosophy presented in senior year by himself, and he wanted everybody to take them. The combination of discipline, exact knowledge, the power to generalize and the inculcation

of good morality was calculated to prepare a "man for the most efficient and successful discharge of public duty." Formed on Latin and Greek republican models and Porter's own work on *The Human Intellect*, the Yale graduate would know himself "in his constitution, his duties and his powers." He would know "society in its history and institutions, its literature and art," all of which came out of Graeco-Roman-Christian antiquity. And, by the addition of mathematics and the upper class courses in "natural philosophy," he would know nature in its "development and scientific relations." Thus equipped as a "gentleman," the Yale student might go forth into the world to take up any public position, as "legislator or magistrate, diplomat or soldier." Or, if graduate study loomed, he was ready to plunge into professional training for the Church, medicine or the law.

Specifying more exactly, Porter praised the classic languages as conducive to increasing one's power of subtle analysis; mathematics because it strengthened the continuity and rigor of attention; physics (the main concern of "natural philosophy") because it provided power over nature and enabled man to "predict her phenomena and enforce her laws"; ethics because it led to correct direction of the springs of action; the "science of religion" because it justified "our faith to the instructed reason"; and political science because it taught us to know the State as to the ground—and limits—of its authority. As for the small amount of more or less modern history that was permitted to invade the curriculum, it was supposed to teach the development of man and "the moral purpose of God."

If, in all this, there seemed little room for cultivating the imagination or for refining the esthetic impulses, or for the free play of simple curiosity, Porter did allow

for the development of pleasing and forceful exposition. He left plenty of scope for logic, rhetoric and literature in order that the powers that had been "enriched" by the classical-mathematical regimen might "express themselves aptly and skilfully."

What was wrong with all this? Nothing at all, provided it was taught with the comprehension that Porter had brought to it in his own lifetime as a student. The fact that such subjects as political science and English and American constitutional law were all crammed into two-thirds of the senior year would not have been an insuperable drawback if the years of Greek and Latin had incidentally schooled the student in Aristotle's and Cicero's politics, which are more or less repeated in John Locke's essays on civil government and in the thinking of James Madison and the rest of the Founding Fathers. In a sense, the ancients had boxed the compass in most things of a basic nature. Even John Stuart Mill, described by Porter as "that steady-going wheel-horse among the reformers," had had good words to say about the all-purpose utility of the old classical training.

Properly taught, the classics as praised and defended by Porter had done considerably more for whole generations of students than provide them with intellectual chess games to sharpen their wits and to develop their retentive powers. Indeed, the "disciplinary" arguments in favor of the classics are hardly conclusive if taken alone—discipline, after all, can be had from carrying out the quarterback assignments of an ingenious and tyrannical football coach, or from mastering old Slavonic or modern Dano-Norwegian, or from pretending that the social sciences can be reduced to algebraic formulae. But when, in addition to their disciplinary value, many other values emerge from the classics without doubling or trebling the demands upon a

student's time, then the case for teaching the ancient cultures becomes irrefutable. As Porter said, "it brings the mind into familiar acquaintance with the literature, the history and the life of the two most important nations of the world." The argument has been well put by Albert Jay Nock, who insisted that no perceptive student of old Rome — or old Athens — could ever be beguiled into thinking that the State can become an adequate stand-in for the *paterfamilias* in taking responsibility for the conduct of life. Rome under the edicts of Diocletian is certainly no argument for the good intentions of an economic dictatorship, a socialist party or a charismatic Franklin Roosevelt. And Athens, in the years after Pericles had drained it of individual will, is an eternal warning that great men with a "do it all" complex are paid for in the subsequent coin of weak citizenship.

As a fledgling professor in Porter's college the young William Graham Sumner might originally have agreed with official views about the values of the old curriculum. Indeed, it was only by chance that Sumner returned to Yale in 1872 as a teacher of political science instead of the classics. When the faculty seemed evenly divided on Sumner's name and that of Professor John Lewis Diman of Brown for the newly created chair of political science, Porter himself wrote to Sumner that "some . . . think it practicable to secure another post in Greek for you." It was not until the supporters of Diman desisted, for reasons that are unknown, that Sumner got the political science post instead of a professorship of Greek.

Bidding farewell to the ministry, Sumner spoke of the "true revelation of spiritual and universal truths" in the Bible, whose text comprised a "record of doctrines won by men of the purest spiritual insight . . . and ratified again and again

in the experience of families and individuals." Porter couldn't have asked for a more pious certification. In the years to come Sumner never retracted these words, nor did he ever resign from the Episcopal church in which he had grown up. But if Sumner never recanted, he did lose interest in his religious past. A believer in "keeping school," he sprang at once to the task of making his new subject one of the more solid and rewarding parts of the curriculum. Prior to Porter's presidency, political science had been handled in an offhand manner by President Woolsey, who took it on in addition to his many other duties. Sumner proposed to make a lot more of it than had ever been made before. Under its elastic heading he managed to combine the subjects of history (mainly American), economics, political science proper and sociology—or, as he later preferred to call it, "societology." Before he was through whole departments had blossomed from his single chair of the early Seventies.

If he had been provided with plenty of upper class elbow room for his own new specialties Sumner would probably have been willing to follow a course of "live and let live" insofar as compulsory freshman and sophomore classical routines were concerned. But when the elbow room was not forthcoming Sumner made forays on his own. He and Porter were fated to clash. The new professor of political science had studied theology, philosophy and church history, and he could have taught Hebrew, Latin, Greek or even mathematics fully as competently as anyone on the faculty. But his whole background predisposed him to secular and contemporary interests. As a minister in Morristown, New Jersey, he had come to think of sin as having a very ascertainable locus in the behavior of economic and social men. He wanted to have his say on the dishonesty inherent in cur-

rency inflation, or on the thievery that he deemed inseparable from the tariff. ("There was a good deal of political economy in that sermon," said a banker to Sumner one day when he came down from his pulpit.) The classical curriculum of the mid-century college had obviously not taught Americans that the laws governing economic transactions do not admit of the same loose exceptions that can be found to most rules of syntax or grammar. To those who took a whimsical view of law in economic and sociological matters, Sumner would have responded that inflation, for example, cheats people of their savings without any "ifs" or "buts," that bad money invariably drives out good and that foreign trade is always maximized if nations follow the law of comparative advantage.

Sumner tangled with Porter not on theory but on the fact that classical students were frequently illiterates in practical matters. He carried his fight to the public in a muscular article, "Our Colleges Before the Country," which was printed in the *Princeton Review* for March, 1884. Where Porter had lamented the lack of good college preparatory work in the high schools and academies, Sumner snorted that the lower schools were doing their duty far better than the colleges, which had succumbed to "mandarinism" in education and were encouraging the view that whatever was useful was vulgar. The whole topic of education, so Sumner insisted, was swathed in "cant and humbug"; students, subjected to four years of a supposedly liberalizing curriculum, ended by becoming a "caste" that was no better prepared for American life than the non-college man. As a result, college education was held in popular contempt in many quarters. The whole rigmarole reminded Sumner of a day when the only learning judged fit for a "gentleman" was heraldry,

and the only polite accomplishments were "arms, music and gallantry."

Sumner's sardonic words about conspicuous waste in college education undoubtedly had their effect on the young Thorstein Veblen, who studied briefly at Yale before going on to develop similar views of traditional education in his theory of the "leisure class." As for Sumner's own comparison of the classically trained young college flaneur and the Siamese belle who let her fingernails grow inches long so she would never be able to dress herself, it had the Veblenian touch.

Sumner's irony had its parallel in a popular verse of the day about the lad whose father had kept him from becoming a plumber:

. . . nine dollars a day I'd be getting,
For half a day's work, it is said.
But alas, in his blindness,
He thought it a kindness
To send me to college instead.

The officers of the American college, the "mandarins," were, in Sumner's opinion, "unfit for college management." They were exposed to the "vices of dogmatism, pedantry, hatred of contradiction, conceit and love of authority." Each came to "love his own pursuit beyond anything else on earth." Each thought the "man who is ignorant of *his* specialty is a barbarian." "Rarely forced into a fight or into a problem of diplomacy," the teacher who ran the nineteenth century college had "little contact with active life." "Such men," said Sumner, were dupes of "a priori reasoning," helpless in the face of any "practical undertaking."

Relenting a bit for a moment, Sumner admitted that the classics, even as taught by "mandarins," might offer good training for literary men and some kinds of journalists; probably they needed not less Latin but more. As for Greek, it made for "delicate power of turns in the phrase,"

and "subtle shading in synonym and adjective"; and knowledge of the life and polity of the Greek State (if any rubbed off on the student of Greek) would always be of value to the political economist.

For most students, however, Sumner thought the classical curriculum was "rubbish of the schools." In place of this "rubbish," he offered such things as biology, physics, constitutional history, anthropology, economics, sociology and archaeology—subjects which depend on a study of causes, consequences and relationships in the real world. Sumner sniffed at "big doses of 'moral science,'" inferentially accusing Noah Porter of "wearing armor." He argued that science taught its own morality when it disciplined the student to weigh evidences and to seek for truth in fact, word, character and motive. At the end of his long indictment of the nineteenth century college, Sumner said "no one proposes to do away with the classics." But he had certainly done his best to put them in a very low place.

For all the deadly talk about "rubbish," however, it should be quite obvious to us that Sumner's animus against the classical curriculum derived not from the contents of Greek and Roman literature as such but from the way the ancient literatures had come to be taught. Comparing the college generations, Sumner noted that older college graduates seemed to know more about classical life and history than the newer classical students. When Sumner remarked that "classical studies, having sunk to a perfunctory character, now stand in the way of faithful study of anything," he implied that they had once been far more vigorous. The decline, presumably, had already set in when Sumner was himself an undergraduate, for he spoke of the trouble he had had "to emancipate my mind from the limited range of processes in which it had been trained." When "history was still

only a record of curious and entertaining incidents in war and diplomacy . . . when no notion of law had yet found footing in the conception of society," the classics had served as educational pabulum *faute de mieux*. But read with a "pony," they developed a superficial scholarship that trained students in "tricks of speech and memory." The student who had spent years in sweating out grammar "hardly ever knows what a 'law' is in the scientific sense of the word." Such students envisaged "law" as "like a rule in grammar, and they are quite prepared to find it followed by a list of exceptions." There was no precision or force or muscularity to the classical student's thinking—"things do not fall into order . . . in their minds."

Sumner's *Princeton Review* article was written at the climax of a bitter faculty struggle to put a memorial to the Yale Corporation on the need for revision of junior- and senior-year education, and it had its revolutionary impact. Despite Porter's noble defense of the classical curriculum, it was quite obvious that the contemporary reality of Greek and Latin teaching made little contact with Porter's idealized memory of the brave teachers of old. The old curriculum—Yale's adaptations of the *Trivium* of Latin grammar, rhetoric, and logic and the *Quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music, followed by upper class physics, ethics and political economy—still boasted a few good teachers. No doubt Professor Thomas Anthony Thacher, the "great-hearted Tommy," brought everything to Latin that Porter had claimed for the subject. Thacher was a disciplinarian, but by all accounts he not only helped his students to increase their "power of subtle analysis" but to know also that civilization had deep roots and that the world was a wide and ancient place. Unfortunately, a great gulf obviously yawned between the likes of

Thacher and the tutors who were hired to support him.

The ideal that had been outlined in Porter's book was one thing; the pettifogging nature of Latin as imparted by a tutor of the Seventies and the Eighties was quite another. Sarcasm was used pedagogically not to prick the mind but to alienate the tender student and to push the ingenious to complete reliance on "trot" and "pony." The hazing of tutors was a common thing—in one class the students even set fire to the instructor's notes when he turned to put something on the blackboard. Far from bringing the student into prolonged and discriminating contact with the virtues and foibles of men, the classics, as taught in the Seventies, had all the deadening effect that Sumner had revolted against. Though Porter had insisted that classical authors should be taught as "living and breathing men," not as "stiff and swathed mummies," there were few to carry out his bidding. He was against teachers who had never read Virgil and Homer for pleasure, but the Yale budget was such that he had willy nilly to accept them.

The testimony to bad teaching is almost universal in the memoirs of Sumner's day. Andrew D. White, the founder-president of Cornell, was apparently quite aware as a Yale undergraduate of the famous Yale Report of 1828, which had extolled the classics as "employing" every faculty of the mind, "not only the memory, judgment, and reasoning powers, but the taste and fancy. . . ." But White's own instructor in Greek had ignored the student who concentrated on giving a smooth and sensitive literary translation. It was the day of the so-called gerund-grinder; as White observed in his autobiography, the academic awards went to the person who could go through moods and tenses with his "tongue rattling like the clapper of a mill." The few bright students were held back by those

who "dreamed" or "ponied" or "smouged through" the courses.

To White, a member of the Yale Class of '53, the "traditional" college had become as "stagnant as a Spanish convent, and as self-satisfied as a Bourbon duchy." Far from "imbuing" the student's mind with "the principles of liberty," far from inspiring "the liveliest patriotism" or exciting "noble and generous action" (all phrases from the Yale Report), the curriculum functioned as a sterile introduction to the professions of the ministry and the law. The students of the old American college, on the evidence of White and others, went through four undergraduate years without reading a single play by Shakespeare or learning that there were modern literatures in French, German and English.

Even those who loved the classics found themselves chewing on husks. When William Lyon Phelps entered Yale in 1883, just prior to the great anti-Porter revolution, the college had, as we have noted, surrendered to a few "optionals" for juniors and seniors. But Greek, Latin and mathematics were still compulsory for Phelps in his freshman and sophomore years. Phelps, a young man from Hartford, Connecticut found it "wildly exciting" to be away from home—and he was not unwilling to sweat out declensions as part of the price to be had for an education. But a Phelps who was already in love with literature wanted more than technical proficiency from his Latin and Greek.

"Most of our classrooms were dull and the teaching purely mechanical," he complained years later in his *Autobiography With Letters*; "a curse hung over the faculty, a blight on the art of teaching. Many professors were merely hearers of prepared recitations; they never showed any living interest, either in the studies or in the students. I remember we had Homer

three hours a week during the entire year. The instructor never changed the monotonous routine, never made a remark, but simply called on individuals to recite or to scan, said 'That will do,' put down a mark; so that in the last recitation in June . . . I was surprised to hear him say . . . 'The poems of Homer are the greatest that have ever proceeded from the mind of man, class is dismissed.'

Phelps's instructor in Homer might, of course, have been an exception. But the evidence is that the exceptions ran the other way. Phelps did have a Greek professor, Horatio ("Limpy") Reynolds, who got him to read Grote's *History of Greece* outside the classroom. And he managed to get something out of the course in Sophocles with the reserved and fastidious Frank Tarbell, who was later dropped because of his independence. Phelps even had a freshman instructor who made Latin interesting—young Ambrose Tighe, the father of a future treasurer of Yale. According to Phelps, Tighe tried to combine the teaching of Latin grammar with a course in Roman history that was well spiced with revealing remarks about Latin authors. "He talked about Horace," says Phelps, "as though Horace was a man about town, and he himself looked and acted like a man of the world. . . . The older members of the faculty looked upon Mr. Tighe with suspicion. . . . They got rid of him." It was not until Phelps's own generation had come of teaching age that men like Tighe—or Phelps himself—were welcomed to the humanities departments of the Yale faculty.

With the teaching of the classics in such widespread decay, Sumner and his group were destined to win more of a victory than they had counted on. Yale continued to prescribe some subjects, but, as modification succeeded modification over the decades, random choice became the

rule after one had satisfied certain fairly limited "core" requirements. The "core curriculum," in turn, became softer and softer; eventually both Greek and Latin were made electives which competed even-up with French, Spanish and German for the favor of candidates for the A.B. degree. Eventually the pendulum came more or less to rest with the modern major-minor selections, with electives permitted only after a certain basic coherence had been satisfied.

In producing the final result Sumner may have played more of a part than he had originally intended. In his less contentious moods he admitted he had "profited fairly by a classical education." What was to give solid value to his essays and to his more formal works in sociology was his ability to draw on a vast reservoir of information about the ancient world. His ability to learn modern languages during his summer holidays surely profited much from his early immersion in Latin, Greek and Hebrew—and if he could so confidently plunge into the study of Russian in his old age it was because of a habit of linguistic discipline which he had learned as a young man under the compulsion of the ancient order. Sumner never quite realized how much he owed to what he decried.

He himself had taught Greek as a "living language" when he was a young tutor at Yale in the Sixties, and he had used Plato as an introduction to the whole world of ancient and modern philosophy in a course that was well remembered in later years by Professor Henry A. Beers. But he happened to be a genius at teaching among a lot of routine job-holders. In the period after the Civil War, when industry offered high prizes to young men, the candidates for Yale's tutorial posts were not known as a rule for their intelligence. Most of them were mere interim time-

servers. These time-servers, as Sumner observed, were actually responsible for half the teaching of the college.

The "Puritan theological crowd" around Sumner in the Sixties seemed quite complacent about the tutorial system. They disliked Sumner's Episcopal affiliations; they were suspicious of his smartly groomed appearance; they were afraid of his opinions about the value of the scientific spirit even in the Greek classroom. Moreover, his habit of mixing direct personal teaching with the recitation method was not in the tradition.

The curious thing about it is that when Sumner launched his attack on Porter, he confused poor methods of projecting the classics with the content of the old curriculum itself. If the teaching at Yale improved rapidly in the late Eighteen Eighties and after, it was not because the courses were changed. It was because the old methods of teaching were modified. Personalities were welcomed, both in the old classical subjects and in the newer scientific and social studies which Sumner and his group sponsored. The recitation system was mixed with lectures, reading and the personal approach; and Homer, in common with Tennyson and Browning, was no longer considered merely as a text for parsing.

In talking with his successor and disciple, A. G. Keller, Sumner contemptuously dismissed Noah Porter as a man who couldn't tell truth from falsehood. He bitterly resented Porter's attempt in 1879 to keep him from using Herbert Spencer's *The Study of Sociology* in the classroom. Porter had complained about the "cool and yet sarcastic effrontery" with which Spencer had assumed "that material elements and laws are the only forces and laws which any scientific man can recognize." But this was another fight, one which did not call into question the curriculum

as such. The truth is that in the battle over the curriculum of the Eighteen Seventies and Eighties, neither Sumner nor Porter was entirely on the side of truth. Porter thought the teaching of the classics was better than it was; Sumner thought that a change in the subject matter offered to the undergraduates would automatically result in a better education.

Yet Sumner himself had said, in 1871 in the *Nation*, that what Yale really needed was better teaching regardless of subjects. This demanded new money that would permit the elimination of the creaking tutorial system, not any specific change in the courses. He offered a prophetic solution: let the alumni fund be swelled annually by small contributions as well as by big donations from captains of industry. In presenting his "business plan," Sumner made it clear that he had no animus against the officers of the college, Porter included.

Because Sumner would not admit there was something to be said for Porter's defense of the old curriculum, the movement toward "equality of the studies" went too fast and too far; because Porter could not recognize that the recitation system had become lifeless, he was eventually bowled over by a committee dominated by Sumner. Sumner failed to get his "schools" within the college; half of the junior-year and practically all of the senior-year courses were made elective, which meant that Yale had gone some of the way toward the Eliot system. When it moved back toward Sumner's idea of "schools"—in the form of linked majors and minors—it was too late to retain Latin and Greek as compulsory preparation for the years of specialization. Depth was lost. And Sumner's own science of society, which had its beginnings in Aristotle, was thereby cut off from its fountainhead before it had a chance to grow.