Book Reviews

Psychology Examines Its Own Habitat

The American College. A psychological and social interpretation of the higher learning. Nevitt Sanford, Ed. Wiley, New York, 1962. xvi + 1084 pp. $10.

Anyone who has served an American college thoughtfully must at some time have despaired at the little help science has given him in solving educational problems. Now comes *The American College,* edited by Nevitt Sanford, casting a bright gleam of hope.

Only psychology among the behavioral sciences has provided more than a trickle of studies useful to higher education. Until recently social scientists devoted more attention to the systematic study of the environments of Australian aborigines and Greenland Eskimos than they did to their own habitat, the college and university. But there has been a change. There are now active groups of behavioral scientists, as well as historians and philosophers, giving imaginative attention to the student, the teacher, the institution, and to the interaction of each with the others and of all with the larger society. *The American College* brings together new work of 30 students of the undergraduate liberal arts college. The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues sponsored the volume and provided an editorial committee. Nevitt Sanford, in addition to editing the book, contributed four important chapters, collaborated on another, and wove the remainder together with introductions to each major section. *The American College* is not an anthology or a mere collection of reports. It is a carefully planned and executed "psychological and social interpretation of the higher learning."

Education, Sanford says, may be thought of as the "inculcation of skills and knowledge respecting the material, social and cultural worlds," or it may be thought of as "aiming at the fullest development of the individual." Neither way of thinking excludes the other, but which way is emphasized is all important to the study of education, as it is to its conduct. The first way is essentially adaptive; the second is developmental, and it is the developmental approach to education that provides the thread Sanford uses to weave the book. Since Sanford and his colleagues are concerned with all the inner psychological and outer social forces that affect the development of the individual student, the materials have the complex texture of real life.

The focus shifts from the college as a whole to the entering students, academic procedures, student society and student culture, student performance in relation to educational objectives, interaction of students and educators, the effects of college education, higher education in the social context, and research and policy in higher education. But whatever the focus, each subject is considered in relation to all others and ultimately to the development of the individual student.

The American College smoulders with dissatisfaction at the imperfection of our liberal arts education. It sees it with its ends ill defined, its means unconsidered, its policies uninformed by theory, its methods untested by experiment. Sanford sums up the dissatisfaction in an epilogue. "It should now be plain to all that our colleges are not doing what they might to realize their potential or even to achieve minimal objectives. It should be plain, indeed, that our colleges, with the cooperation —both deliberate and unwitting—of major forces in our society, and through ill designed social organization and poorly motivated teachers, actually deprive thousands of students of the opportunity to find themselves and to educate themselves." This is not free-swinging criticism; it is the sober summing-up of a mass of evidence.

Though *The American College* smoulders with dissatisfaction, it sparkles with suggestion. Scarcely a chapter ends without seminal proposals for research or practice. If the suggestions of this book were taken, how would undergraduate liberal arts education be changed? First and most profoundly, by viewing itself as a subject of scientific inquiry rather than as a kind of alchemy in which each wizard's formula is as good as the next. Second, the center of attention would shift to the student and his development as an individual. Third, the teacher and his methods would be seen in the light of their ability to further the student's development. At the same time the forces in society and the college that affect the teacher would be given thoughtful attention. Fourth, the curriculum would be seen as a means to personal and intellectual development. Fifth, vastly more attention would be given to the societal and cultural forces that impinge on and play on the institution and that affect the student.

The college, like the university, is the institutional expression of reason. But the college differs from the university in having limited objectives. *The American College* shows how those objectives can be defined and, as far as possible, reached.

It is a happy circumstance that the volume appears in the 100th anniversary year of Vassar College. Nevitt Sanford, now professor of psychology and education and director of the Institute for the Study of Human Problems at Stanford University, was for several years coordinator of the Mary Conover Mellon Foundation at Vassar. The "Vassar Studies" make important contributions to *The American College*— as they will to the American college.

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History of Chemistry

Bruna Boken. Carl Wilhelm Scheele. Uno Boklund, Ed. Sponsored by the Swedish Academy of Sciences and various Swedish research foundations (available from the Editor), Stockholm, 1961. 171 + 424 pp. Illus. $19.

The *Bruna Boken,* according to Boklund, is a collection of the material that was not fitted into the five groups of Scheele papers assembled a few hours after Scheele's death on 21 May 1786. In 1829 this overflow material was bound into a "brown book." As a part