

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY AND ENGLISH SNOBBERY
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One of the most outstanding differences between English and American schools which I have noted is the attitude of each towards democracy and snobbery. The American is rather carefree and tends to demand his freedom in every possible direction whereas the traditionally stolid Englishman is oppressed by questions of duty and discipline. The American only wants to run his own affairs while the Englishman tries to run everyone else's. Divergence from the traditional line of thought immediately brands the offender as lower class or uncultured. I would be the last one to deny that in Sherborne's American counterpart there is not a ruling caste who set the popular taste in dress and opinion, but there is at least scope for more freedom and individuality.

There is hardly a facet of life at an American school which is not affected by Democracy. Its greatest power is in the school societies, which either every term or every year are convulsed by a general election. Debating societies, music societies, and even model railroad clubs are beset by this scourge. These elections are necessitated by the need to re-elect the horde of bureaucratic officials which each society possesses. There are presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries (corresponding and otherwise) and treasurers, all with no work to do. The larger the club the more vigorous the campaigning. Political machines are formed in order to coerce the unsuspecting student to vote for this or that "big wheel" (equivalent in American slang for school prefect). Ultimately the electorate have their way and the man of the people is elected.

From extra-curricular activities democracy soon spreads to the games field. Captains and managers (an important dignitary who carries out the duties of the games fags) must be elected in each of the eleven sports. Campaigning is not so vigorous as the only prerequisite is industry on the field of sport and a toothy smile for everyone who might possibly vote for him at the elections. The principal organ of democracy is the student congress, composed of exceedingly dim people who have been elected for their popularity rather than for their ability. Legislation is passed which the staff must consider but usually does not approve.

In contrast to this system of freedom and chaos the English public school develops its discipline which in turn breeds snobbery. In the States snobbery would render the culprit liable to a sound beating at the hands of his classmates. I was most enlightened the other day when a member of the house informed me that "Snobbery makes the world go round". Anyone who refuses to accept this tenet is often branded as dangerously radical. Everyone is so concerned with keeping everyone else in their place that the idea of discipline is inextricably tangled with the idea of snobbery. The English schoolboy, however, is not only snobbish, he is also intolerant. A student may easily become an outcast by the whisperings of the senior snob. "You know he's a guineapig, nouveau-riche and all that", or "You know that boy in School House, really quite nice but I have been told his great-grand-uncle was an Eskimo" and so it goes, everyone suspecting everyone else of unsavoury connexions.

It is interesting to note the different ways in which leadership is determined in England and America. At an American school leaders are always chosen by the students on the basis of popularity and ability. In England on the other hand, ability is always the criterion regardless of popularity but the leader is imposed on those who are to be led with the result that he often fails to command the support and respect of the house without the creation of the various privileges which he possesses. It is erroneously supposed that dignity is essential to leadership, whereas in fact, all that is really needed is confidence in his ability.

There are undoubtedly disadvantages in both systems, but there are also advantages. The Americans cultivate freedom and independence in the belief that school is as good a time as ever to learn how to run your own affairs. The English believe that only by creating a habit of virtue will the schoolboy remain virtuous. I can certainly feel thankful to Sherborne for attempting, with doubtful success, to teach me the principles of discipline. Although I may give up the cold bath and the buttoned coat, I shall always respect the "system" for turning out such high-quality material in spite of its occasional snobbery and intolerance. Both sides of the Atlantic may receive their share of ridicule but I am firmly convinced that both have their own intrinsic merits which may seem amusing to the other but which are in fact based on sound and tested principles.