

With student enrollments moving toward new highs each year, the U. S. educational system requires a proportionate increase in teachers. But due to lack of public esteem the teacher is becoming

# The Vanishing American

BY DAVID BURR, '52BA

*"Why teach?" the young professor repeated the question. "I think you've come to the wrong person. I can give you a great many reasons for not teaching, but it's hard to give positive reasons for doing so."*

*A colleague joined the discussion. "You will have difficulty in getting good reasons for teaching from those of us who are teaching. Oh, you can get the usual answers: 'We teach because we love it.' 'There's an inner satisfaction to developing minds.' 'It's a secure occupation.' These things are true but they represent only a rationalization. They're a sop for those of us who are teaching to continue."*

*The question was raised because the U. S. school system, grade school through college, is experiencing a great enrollment boom, but without accompanying increase in the teacher supply. It is essential that an*

*argument for teaching be offered America's youngsters that will convince them they should prepare for a teaching career. If teachers cannot provide the argument, then who can? The answer is suggested in the following report.*

**I**F YOUR CHILD is to receive an education in the next ten years, who will teach him? The answer may be, "No one." The teacher, long the Forgotten American, rapidly is becoming the Vanishing American. Perhaps the two terms are synonymous, for it was when America forgot her teachers that the exodus began.

To call an important segment of our society "forgotten" and "vanishing" is to invite ridicule. Yet there is nothing ridiculous about the end result of too few teachers for too many students. Nor about the chances







## Three Distinguished Citizens View Teachers and Teaching

“We have given too little attention . . .”

By SEN. MARGARET CHASE SMITH

In some ways, the teacher is the forgotten American. We have given too little attention to our school systems. We expect teachers not only to teach efficiently—but also to carry on the campaign for better equipment and facilities for our school children. Yet sometime ago it was taboo for the teacher to speak up for himself or herself. If they did they were charged with violating rules and engaging in politics. Public education is a public interest and . . . the salary of the teacher is a public responsibility. Yet because the school sessions are for only nine months out of the year some “penny pinchers” say that teachers should be paid on a nine-months basis . . . We look to our teachers to strengthen, sustain and promote what we rightly call the American way of life. Yet these people to whom we entrust so much are among the lowest salaried people of . . . the world’s wealthiest nation.

of our children receiving a second-rate education, for that matter.

There was a time, not too many years ago, when a teacher was a first class citizen, respected in the community, seen as a positive influence on the general society. Gradually the picture changed. Though 30 years ago a former school teacher was in the White House, today his profession is regarded as fostering only the man-chasing Our Miss Brooks or the timid Mr. Peepers.

The public acceptance of the teacher as the bumbling, timid, “Those who can, do—those who can’t, teach” prototype has justified public apathy toward them and their job. To determine how clearly this picture is stamped on the mind, ask any bright student in your own neighborhood if he has any interest in teaching. The answer may make you understand why teachers are vanishing.

An example of how critical the problem has become was blue-printed in recent years by several educational reports. The National Education Association conducted a survey of 1954 graduates qualified for teaching and discovered that only two-thirds were employed as teachers. The entire number would not have been sufficient to fill existing vacancies that year. Also, colleges in the spring of 1955 graduated only 87,000 teachers, a smaller number than the 95,000 who left the teaching ranks that year because of retirement, death or change to better-paying jobs.

At a time when the school systems are rocked by enrollment increases, the teacher supply is on the downgrade. It’s as simple as that.

If the case of the vanishing teacher is as black as it is being painted, then how are our school systems operating to date? Another educational report states that we are employing 220,000-plus teachers who have less than a college education. The U. S. Department of Labor is backing an idea, already in practice in some communities, to train housewives with college degrees for teaching assignments. Too, Dr. Raymond Walters, President Emeritus of the University of Cincinnati, has reported that teachers’ colleges are noting an increase in enrollments. The encouragement from such a report is offset by the National Education Association’s statement that only about 56 percent of those trained for high school teaching posts will actually go to work teaching, while only 78 percent of those trained for grade schools will accept teaching employment.

**W**HAT CAN BE DONE to stop the dissipation of the teaching force and to stock it properly?

The answer may be found by a look at the causes. Would you expect a college student to choose teaching for a career with the following concepts before him?

A teacher is a second class citizen. He must be a paragon of virtue, grounded in the high ideals of America, but he must

have no political convictions. He must be brilliant, but careful to hide that brilliance; few school boards want a teacher to appear more intelligent than themselves.

A teacher is a flunky. He’s a ticket-taker at a football game, a chaperone at a dance and other social functions, a sponsor of several extra-curricular activities.

A teacher is “different.” He is because his patrons say he must be so. He’s an idealist in a day when practicality rules. No one must ever guess he has a practical side or he may be fired for wanting too much money.

A teacher is poor. And, somehow, it seems *right* to the tax-payer that a teacher should be poor. After all, isn’t the minister poor? The teacher had best prepare himself for a life of modesty. His beginning salary probably will range from \$2,000 to \$4,000, and slight increases are all that can be expected. Most professions hold some hope for the Horatio Alger success story; teaching does not in the financial sense.

A teacher must be all things to all people. An overload does not lessen his responsibility or his myriad roles. He must be a baby-sitter for some parents, an intellectual giant for others. To his students, he must be Daddy, Mama, Big Brother, Mother Goose, Mr. Chips, and any other individual they are determined to see in him.

A teacher must “get along.” In the community he must originate all cooperation. He must be a born leader and a born fol-





“A good teacher can be of inestimable value . . .”

By MRS. ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

I wish that the teachers in our country had the influence they ought to have in the community, but we find too often that they do not. However, a good teacher can be of inestimable value in any community. She can create the intellectual influence over the children in her care and develop a curiosity to read, which is essential to the beginning of all education. The raising of salary is only an outward token we should make to recognize the value of the teacher, but the consideration due the teacher and the position she should be placed in, in every community, goes far beyond the mere raising of the salary. That is, I think, a question of paramount importance in this country as well as the increasing of facilities . . .



“So as to produce . . . virtue.”

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

Teach because the mission of a teacher is the prolongation of the missions of the Word of God, namely the communication of Truth in all forms. The second function of a teacher is the stirring of the will so as to produce Truth in action, which is virtue.

lower. People expect him to participate, to attend—it hardly makes any difference what he participates in or attends, as long as he does it.

A teacher is faceless. In a crowd he must not stand out; otherwise, he's a pusher. He must not suggest; otherwise, he's teaching the parent instead of the child.

A teacher is something of a social outcast. It would be unthinkable to include one in a bridge party. Somehow caste is involved. Invite the teacher to the wedding but don't include a reception invitation.

These are some of the concepts many patrons of every school district have held about the people who train their children, and rarely do such patrons look beyond to see the values that a teacher holds dear.

Why does the teacher engage in a virtually thankless job? There are many good reasons. The moment a bright mind has been moved to inquiry is an unforgettable instant for a teacher. The development of students into better citizens and trustees of their inheritance helps. The fact that a teacher is in a position to give his students encouragement and direction is a powerful prize. Teachers realize that only the home and church have more opportunity to establish permanent values in a child.

A young student has his decision to make. Should he enter business, law or engineering where the monetary expectancy is great and the prestige that money buys from the public purse is high? Or

should he devote his life to a job which will help a society that doesn't really seem to appreciate his efforts? Certainly if society wanted him to become a teacher, this nameless mass of citizens would be doing something to make the profession more inviting.

Only those bright young people who are strongly compelled to a life of service without regard to reward would decide to become teachers today. They are not enough.

The teacher shortage is a matter of society's indifference to one of its most important parts.

President George L. Cross has stated: “Educators will provide precisely the type of education the patrons demand—no better and no worse.” And they will have the kind of teachers they demand.

AS THESE AMERICANS have begun to vanish, many organizations and publications have given the alarm, at the same time searching for the significance in such a turn of events. The main cause surely is low salaries: in a 4-year study the Ford Foundation verified it. It has become trite to say that teachers aren't paid enough, but see what the lack of money has brought about besides a flattened pocketbook.

In the existing social structure money has become the symbol for success. If a teacher doesn't make much, then he isn't a success; hence, a lack of respect and prestige follows from patrons and students.

Without adequate financing, teachers are expected to work with poor equipment in

crowded classrooms, and with a killing paper-grading load. More money would provide both extra classrooms and the teachers to fill them. The students are already available.

As research began for this article, two young professors were asked, “Why teach?” Their answers were negative with excellent reason. “Why teach” is not a question to be answered by the teacher.

Quite simply, it is a question the citizen must answer. If no more effective answer is forthcoming than has been given to date, the truth will be that there is no good reason to teach. If the citizen decides he must afford an answer, then there will be reasons enough for the best equipped minds to enter the profession.

But the answer must not be long in coming. Already the teacher shortage is evident, and it requires four years to prepare for elementary or secondary teaching and from eight to ten years for a college professorship.

In the September, 1956 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, Oscar Handlin in “The Crisis in Teaching” summed up the case for public action:

“Most important of all, we need a new attitude toward the teacher, who is central to the work of the school in a democratic society. Only if we value his services will we receive the services we value. That calls for a fresh consciousness of the dignity of his calling and the respect due it . . .”