

The Education of An Orphan: “Little Orphan Annie” at School, 1924-1964

Gene E. Hamaker

“Learnin’ is a great thing, Nora,” Dandy Dooley says. “It’ll be a proud day for us when Annie can take her place with the best of ’em—Yes, sir—She must have a swell edge’cation—”¹ In these sentences Harold Gray captures the essential meaning of education for a great many Americans. Among the “object lessons” Gray has brought to the attention of the readers of “Little Orphan Annie,” there have been many dealing specifically with education. It is this aspect of Gray’s running commentary on the American scene that I wish to examine here.

The scope of the study ranges from the founding of the strip in August, 1924 to August of 1964.² Every instance in which I have found an explicit reference to Annie’s attendance at school has been reviewed, thirty-five in all.³ With one exception,⁴ the subjects of school and education are minor asides in the context of a larger episode,⁵ and are usually limited

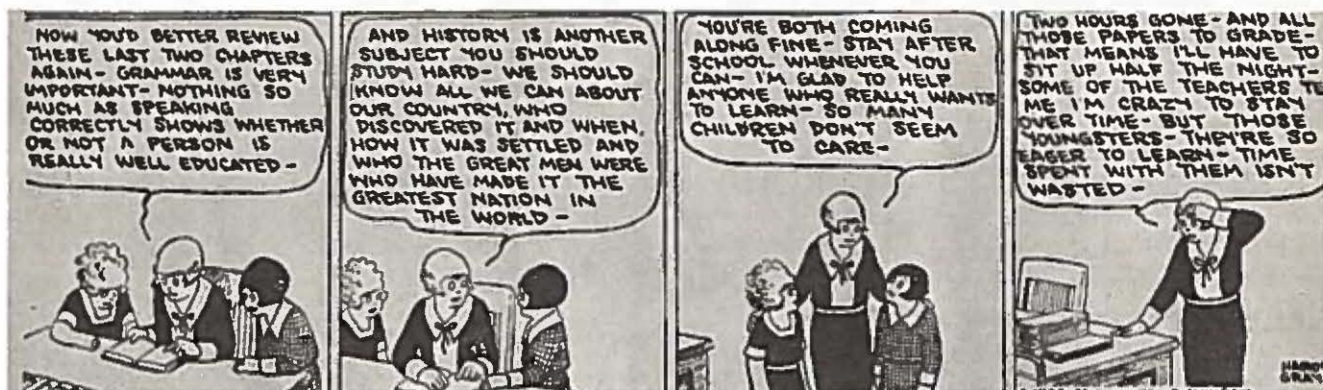
to a discussion of Annie’s enrollment and, perhaps, a few scenes showing the problems she encounters in adjusting to the new setting. Annie has attended school approximately 140 months or something over fifteen school years. In comic strip time, of course, Annie remains in elementary school and in a grade appropriate to a very bright child of about eleven years.⁶

I have drawn the information regarding Gray’s views from the specific incidents that deal with education and from relevant statements scattered throughout the comic strip. Gray, who lived on a farm until a young adult, leans heavily upon his knowledge of rural and small town communities for the concepts of education reflected in the multifarious adventures of Annie. Intellectually, he seems never to have left home. I have chosen to discuss Annie’s education under four major headings: 1) the value of an education; 2) the

school and curriculum; 3) Annie’s experiences; and, 4) Harold Gray and the educational processes.

“I’ll get an edge’cation and can handle really big jobs later on. . . . I intend to ‘mount to somethin’. . . .”

A desire to “learn somethin’” so that she may “get somewhere” appears repeatedly as Annie’s basic motive for school attendance. Hers is a practical objective and a common one. As a wandering orphan, Annie has had to overcome many obstacles in her efforts to gain an education. Work—selling newspapers, in a store, at home or on a farm—study and no play is her usual lot in life while going to school. Annie is undismayed. “I’d put up with ‘most anything to get an’ edge’cation—”⁸ she says. Education is a serious matter for Annie. “Just gettin’ through doesn’t get yuh so far—It’s what you *learn* that counts—and ‘bout th’ only way yuh ever learn is to really get



down and dig—It's hard work that gets yuh there in any game, I guess —"⁹ Experience has taught her to value an education: "Lots o' kids I've known acted like goin' to school an' learnin' somethin' was some sort o' punishment—Oh well—I guess it's when somethin's hard to get that yuh 'preciate it most—"¹⁰ In spite of the rather grim nature of Annie's outlook, she enjoys school and does well.

"Funny thing — but most teachers are o.k.—They're in there pitchin'—tryin' to smart-en up th' kids!"¹¹

None of Annie's teachers are like the first teacher to be portrayed in the comic strip or we would have a different story to relate. In January, 1925 a male teacher stands by helplessly while Annie rescues one of his pupils who has fallen through the ice on a pond. The teacher, however, is up to taking all the credit for the rescue. The incident is un-

usual in two ways: it puts a teacher in a bad light, and it is about a male teacher. Almost without exception, Gray's depiction of teachers is favorable to their image and the overwhelming majority of Annie's teachers are feminine, young, attractive and well-educated. The good teacher does not flaunt her education. She is "so smart she doesn't let it show—Everybody likes Miss Verb—"¹² Gray's pointed use of pun-names (Tidnab, Redips, Knup) is not turned against the teacher. Their names are such as Slate, Robin, Light, Tweed, Theorem and Read—all having pleasant and positive connotations. Even Miss Strick proves to have a heart of gold. After the second world war, when Gray becomes actively critical of the school system, and his attacks upon "modern" education necessarily reflect upon the teaching—in the schools, there is no overt criticism of the teacher. The established image of the

teacher remains unsullied by her association with a questionable system.¹³ There is one major shift in the representation of teachers in the post-war era that is a consequence of Gray's new concern with education.

In March, 1946 Gray introduces the first of five school "episodes" stressing the values of the old-fashioned school where reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, "and especially history, *American history!*" is taught.¹⁴ The reversion to "fundamentals" is followed in January, 1951 by another return—in time—to the rural, one-room, multi-grade school presided over by a male teacher. A man is necessary to keep the "young bucks" from "five-six up to twenty-five—twenty-six" in line. Discipline becomes an integral part of the curriculum in such a setting. Mr. Trams, who "has d'grees all over—even from Oxford—" and who, with equal poise, can comfort a child in her first day of school or turn a "big hunnert an'

eighty pound lug over his knee" and "paddle him good" is much admired by Annie. "Can he teach!" she exclaims.

Dedication to their profession is a principal virtue of the teacher. The teacher Gray portrays is deeply concerned with the progress of her pupils and is shown working long hours after school because "it's worth it," or extending special consideration and assistance to the pupil in difficulty. Albeit, Gray's teacher lives in the real world and is not free from the pressures of life. If they have a weakness, it lies in the degree to which they respond to pressure from influential citizens. Warbucks uses his wealth to obtain Annie's enrollment in an exclusive private school and his friendship with a member of its board to set aside a restriction on pets. Some of Annie's guardians use influence to secure her admission to school. One guardian is on the school board and tells the school principal to enroll Annie. "What's Annie's status to him?" she asks, "She lives in this district—It's his job to see she gets schooling—"15 A wide range of the public's charges against teachers is expressed in an outburst of one of Annie's guardians upon hearing that the teacher has paid a call.16 Overly-protective, the man shouts:

"School teachers! How are they so smart or superior? Teach what they're told to teach—play politics—try to hang onto their jobs same as other folks—What do they care how a kid gets along, so long as the kid is quiet about it?" He is immediately chagrined to learn that the teacher had made a special trip to tell them how well Annie had done on a placement test. Making amends, he says, "It's nice to know the teacher thinks teaching is so important—it is. . . . Why those teachers are smart—" Teachers are human in "Annie" and susceptible to all the human foibles, but, seen through the eyes of Gray, they are among the favored humans.

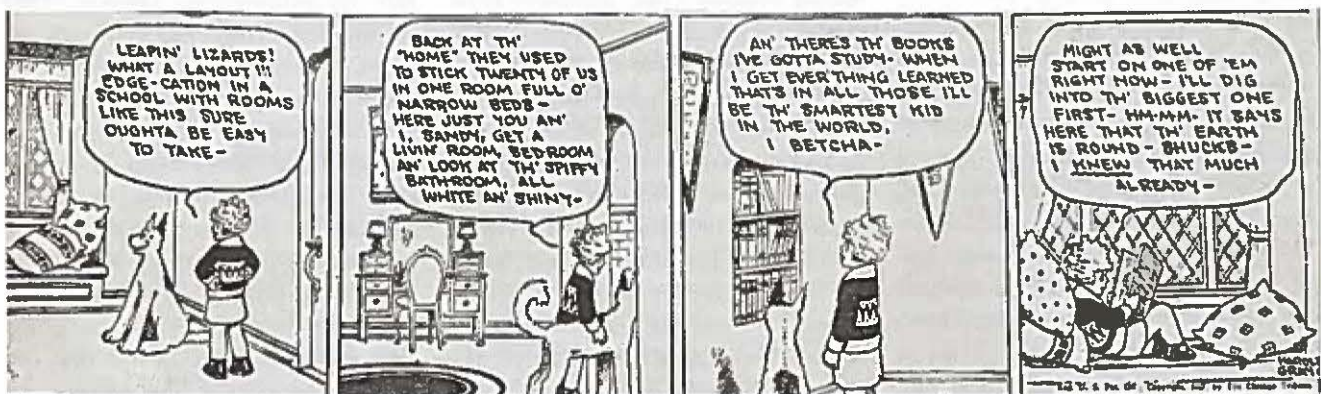
"Public school is good enough for me. . . . When I grow up I'll be one o' th' 'public'—I don't want to have to start learnin' how to get along after I get through school—"17

Only once in her career has "Little Orphan Annie" attended a private school.18 Her association with the billionaire, "Daddy" Warbucks, a man who unashamedly lives up to his wealth, suggests more frequent contacts with private schools, but Warbucks is only present in the strip for about ten of the first forty years

and the majority of Annie's educational experiences occur while he is absent. Too, Warbucks' provisions for Annie's care in his absence most often go awry. Such is the case in Annie's first school experience (February, 1926). The lady Warbucks employs to care for Annie uses the funds set aside for education to send her own niece, Bertha, to private school. Annie's reaction to the turn of events is typical: "Public school's plenty good enough for ordinary folks like me—"

The one instance of attendance at a private school is a disaster. Annie's enrollment in Happy Hollow Seminary for girls was arranged by Warbucks prior to his departure for the Orient in January, 1927. It was to be Annie's second experience with school and she reveled in the whirl of preparations for departure. Elaborately outfitted, ensconced in a luxurious private drawing room aboard the train, Annie, on her arrival, is greeted by the school principal, Miss Brussels, and escorted to a lavish suite of rooms reserved for her in the dormitory. "Edge'cation in a school with rooms like this sure oughta be easy to take—" Annie avers.

Signs of approaching trouble appear early. Miss Brussels, who



"dresses lots like a man," cautions Annie not to reveal to anyone that she is an orphan. And she "said it like bein' an orphan was something to be 'shamed of—Hm-m-m—" Annie's misgiving blossom forth when she meets the other girls. They rebuff her friendly greetings. "Who is that fresh person?" and "evidently no breeding" are some of their comments. The girls, Annie is told, insist of knowing one's family background before according a new student acceptance. Annie does make one friend and is pleased that the girl can be both rich and "gen-u-ine." When the girl who dominates the school attempts to bully Annie, Annie flips the girl over her shoulder and, hands on hip, shorts: "I'll teach yuh t' go shovin' me around—" The girl hurries off to Miss Brussels, who is already having some second thoughts about admitting Annie into the school. Annie, she fears, is a mongrel like her dog and much "too elemental entirely—no restraint—" The downfall of the school snob is celebrated by the other girls and Annie achieves the popularity she has sought.

Rich and Poor Alike

Reviewing her experiences, Annie decides that "folks, rich or poor, are about th' same any place yuh find 'em—" but she prefers the poor to the rich and public school to the private. "I s'pose this sort o' classy school is all right for folks with lots o' money," she reflects, "but me, I always did like *public* school—Course I never went to public school much but had a good time when I did—Yuh don't have to be rich to go to public school an' yuh learn just as much—more maybe—an' yuh meet all sorts o' kids—not just rich people's kids, see? I tell yuh . . . I like poor folks—nothin' put on with them—they're just themselves, see? Nobody tryin' to high-hat yuh or nothin'—Yessir—if I had my way I'd pick

a public school every time—I would—" Miss Brussels overhears Annie's declaration and gasps out her shock: "The idea! That little imp troublemaker. . . . If people believed her where in the world would *we* be? . . . Socialism! That's what that leads to!"

Subsequent clashes with Miss Brussels further undermine Annie's position and the *coup de grace* is administered when the girls learn that Annie is an orphan. Miss Brussels, under pressure from some parents, decides she will have to forgo Warbucks' money and expels Annie. Annie, disconsolate, laments: "Canned! I've failed . . . just 'cause I never had any folks."

So ended Annie's one experience in a private school and, also, the single occasion in the life of the strip when education is the central theme of an episode. The Happy Hollow Seminary is used by Gray to express his commitment to the "ordinary people" as the background for the adventures of "Little Orphan Annie." The public school is the form of that commitment in the world of education and Annie's choice of the public school is a conscious preference. It is the opinion of this writer that Gray's attitude reflects his personal philosophy and is not simply an artistic, logical or practical solution to the problems posed by a comic strip based upon the adventures of an orphan. A personal predilection is also apparent in Gray's choice of what constitutes an ideal school curriculum.

Educational Decline

Gray's growing concern over the decline in educational practices after the second world war is seen in the introduction of the "old-fashioned" school and in the explicit efforts to define a proper school curriculum. Here he has been consistent. From the beginning to the present, the cor-

rect curriculum embraces reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and "history, *American* history—" And perhaps we should include deportment as well.

History and geography are the first subjects mentioned in the strip.¹⁹ "Hist'ry sure is great stuff—" Annie says. "Interestin' to read—like a story—but 'memberin' dates is no cinch—" History is "th' hardest" subject for Annie although she likes "it th' best."²⁰ The importance of the study of history is explained in June, 1929: "We should know all we can about our country, who discovered it and when, how it was settled and who the great men were who have made it the greatest nation in the world—" ²¹ History informs us about the values of American society. It is the fount of nationalism and patriotism. Recent trends in education, Gray believes, pose a serious threat to America's traditional values. A few comments from an episode of July, 1961 will serve to indicate Gray's perception of the problem. Annie's guardian of the moment, the policeman Dandy Dooley, declares: "In our day the 'fourth' meant something! Kids today can't tell you what it stands for!" For that matter, Dooley wonders, "how many *teachers* today could pass a single American history examination!" Annie agrees, "Seems as how 'merican hist'ry is for squares!"

Gray illustrates what is wrong with the "modern" curriculum by introducing the "good" school—the old-fashioned, one-room, one teacher, multi-grade school teaching "the old fundamentals." The curricula of an old-fashioned school sets "a lot of store on our American history—and reading, writing, and arithmetic and geography—" ²² It also includes "teachin' them discipline." ²³ "Modern" schools are not described but we learn about them through comments

on the old-fashioned schools. As old-fashioned schools do not stress "finger paintin' and rhythmic dancin' and such stuff"²⁴ or "cooking or bop,"²⁵ modern schools evidently do. In the same way, it can be demonstrated that modern schools neglect American history, the three "R's" and discipline. The deficiencies of the modern school curriculum in America oblige Warbucks to employ young foreign scientists.²⁶ "Y'mean foreigners are smarter'n we are?" Annie asks. "Perhaps they study harder and to more purpose," Punjab replies. "Many speak three languages—Most are advanced in mathematics, chemistry, biology—" The topics of serious interest in the modern American schools, Annie observes, "are double dating and if the 6th grade is too soon to go steady!"²⁷ Gray's concern with educational trends antedates the popular protest inspired by the orbiting of the Sputniks. His particular views appear to be those of the contemporary conservative critics, some of whom have advocated a return to the McGuffey readers. These critics would probably also applaud Gray's attention to the education values of experience.

*"Maybe life is the best teacher
... a hard teacher, but real
good!"*²⁸

"Practical Education"

Not all of Annie's education is obtained sitting at a school desk. There is much to be learned through living and, in this respect, an orphan has an advantage over the child bound to home and family, albeit an advantage not to be envied. Annie has "been around and seen plenty" and always had "to do her own scrappin'"²⁹ In the process, Annie has fallen behind her schoolmates in "book learnin'," but, she retorts, "I betcha I know lots o' things they don't know, too—But what I know don't get me so far in school—"³⁰

A more positive appreciation of the values of her experiences begins to appear in the mid-1930's. A placement test administered in 1936 did find Annie weak in the "classical" subjects, but it was a weakness more than overcome by the strength of her logical mind and the range of her general knowledge. Indeed, Annie's experiences make her superior to other children of her tender years. "They've never had to hustle to eat—" Annie explains, "They've never had to figger out much o' anything—" ³¹ She concludes, somewhat ruefully, "Guess I've just had more 'van-tages than kids who have never had t'make on their own!"³²

Lessons learned the hard way are learned well. The children who attempt to trick or bully the worldly-wise Annie are quickly taught not "to go shovin' me around—" ³³ The trouncing bullies receive at Annie's hands establishes the tone of such lessons and the bully takes the lesson to heart. Similarly Warbucks, recovering from a sojourn in the prison camp of an enemy, commented on the whippings he received: "Every welt is a complete liberal education, the kind one gets the hard way, and never forgets!" ³⁴ The attitude Gray wishes to define in the instances above and in the character of Annie throughout her career is one of hard-boiled realism. Annie's sometimes harsh life experiences temper her spirit without twisting it. She remains unspoiled and trusting, even naive, ready for new adventures. Each encounter with school is different, yet the same, for a wandering orphan.

*"Oh, there'll be plenty of
questions anyway, I imagine!"*³⁵

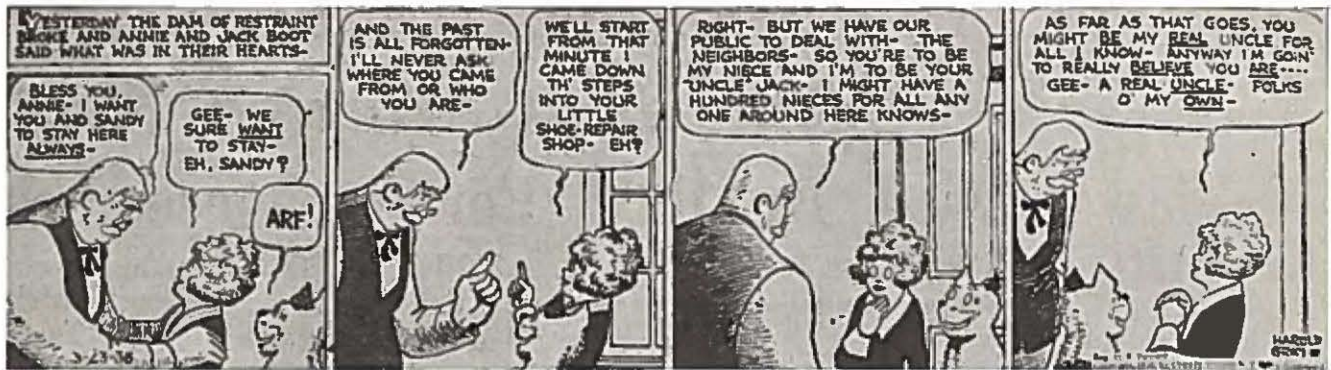
Being an orphan has created a number of novel problems for Annie, revived each time she enters school. One of these difficulties grows out of her mobility. On twenty of the thir-

ty-five occasions which show Annie in school, she has encountered problems related to placement. First, Annie rarely has any record of past attendance at school, a situation that requires improvisation in placement procedures. Second, Annie generally disguises her status as an orphan by adopting the name of, and a relationship to, her current guardians. This "cover" is sometimes broken and Annie guardians. This "cover" is sometimes broken and Annie suffers the full onus of orphanhood. Years of practice at meeting these problems enables Annie to prepare defenses against them and, ultimately, to boast of her ability to circumvent official red-tape.

"Placement Problems"

Placement is a factor in one case only during the first ten years of the strip.³⁶ In April, 1927 Annie was placed in a class on a trial basis. The pattern for the future begins to emerge in February, 1935. At this time Annie is given an oral placement examination by the school principal. She "asked 'bout a million questions," Annie reports, and "then she put me in a class with kids most all of 'em older'n I am—" An oral or written examination followed by advanced placement become standard experience for Annie. The procedure is refined in March, 1936 when the placement examination reveals that Annie is "foggy on classical subjects," while possessing an "amazing" fund of general knowledge. Even more striking, is "the logical way she arrives at her conclusions—" The discernment of these particular qualities in Annie will become regular features of the strip. Minor variations will appear in the placement routine and there are to be instances in which one or all of these difficulties is easily overcome, but a pattern has been established by 1936.

The ways in which Annie's path to



enrollment are eased are of interest in themselves. Four times influence is a factor:³⁷ in February, 1939, March, 1947 and January, 1957 the prominence of her sponsor suffices; but, in March, 1952, the influence is "borrowed." Staying with a beggar, Annie is escorted to school by a policeman friend, Meatball Mac, and readily enrolled. The nature of Mac's contribution to her enrollment is later disclosed by the school principal: "Officer Meatball mentioned Alderman Noodle and Judge Pudding—Such nice men—I'm sure you'll do very well, Annie—" When advised of this remark by Annie, Mac says, "She's a sweet old dragon—Smart, too, fer a school principal—" On three other occasions, when Gray presents his "old-fashioned" schools, the teacher is not concerned with Annie's past. Annie, however, still has to take a placement test. As Gray becomes more critical of "modern" schools, Annie finds placement with an advanced age group more difficult to achieve. In April, 1960 Annie is not put ahead though deserving of it. "Can't do that, I guess!" she says. "Got rules, they say!" Her guardian comments: "Humph! That might embarrass some of the 'retarded' ones that everyone else is supposed to wait for, eh?" "Now,

Joe!" his wife chides him, "The Board of Education must know what's best!" Annie's rebuff here is followed by another in September, 1960. Annie's sponsor then is told that his "niece" is "Amazing! The most alert mind that I've encountered in years! . . . She could hold her own two grades ahead of her age group! But I feel she should be with children only a little older than she is!" Annie guesses that she would "have felt awful out o' place!" with the advanced group. "And none o' th' other kids would have liked me much! They'd have figgered I was a little show-off monster!"

Past Concealed

The same 1960 episode includes a description of the techniques Annie has developed to conceal her past. Dan Drive, her guardian, wonders how to answer the questions the school officials are sure to ask. "Well," Annie says, "My 'sperience tells me I just call you "Uncle" Dan, and Marlene "Cousin"! I don't say you are my relatives! I just call you that!" As for her school records: "Lost 'em! Can't even 'member just what school in th' city it was! Guess I'm sort o' dumb, eh?" Officialdom and redtape have long dogged Annie's steps and cynical be-

havior toward these "unnecessary" restraints is endorsed by Gray whenever Annie is led to meet them. It is acceptable to be a little devious in a good cause and does not detract from Annie's seriousness of purpose. Success in school is a necessity.

*"I go to school to learn—I never had much teacher trouble—"*³⁸

In the American tradition, Annie is work-oriented whether at school or away. Two themes, diligence and ambition, thread their way through her work and study habits. Annie knows without being told that she has to "get down and dig" to learn, and that it is best to attack the most difficult subject, the biggest book, or the hardest task first.³⁹ "Plain hard work" is the road to knowledge, Annie observes. A special problem for Annie results from her irregular attendance at a variety of schools. Different schools emphasize different things and Annie is always behind the other students in her grasp of the formal subjects. Inevitably, Annie has to do "lots o' studyin' to catch up—" Happily, she learns early that hard study has its rewards. In June, 1929 Annie discovers that a group of boys in her class have stolen the final examination questions. "Why

should I care?" she asks. "I *know* more 'n they do an' I'm *honest*—" Nonetheless, her spirits are raised considerably when the boys fail because they stole the wrong questions and Annie passes at the top of the class. Pointing the moral, Annie cries: "Gee, I feel good—I guess it pays to work hard an' play square—" Hard work is necessary for success, Annie knows, but there are limits to what one can learn, no matter how hard you study. "When yuh re'lize yer *never* gain' to learn it all," she says, "but try to learn as much as yuh can, then there's some chance for yuh—"

A new pressure to study arises in the middle 1930s when school officials recognize that Annie's intelligence and fund of general knowledge qualify her for advanced placement. Annie is undaunted by the new challenge and by dint of her efforts remains first in her class. Her achievements are rewarded by pride and confidence in herself and the respect of teachers and guardians. Annie's peers are not always so generous. In a 1936 episode Annie is called "teacher's pet" for knowing the answers and "a scab for studyin' hard and doin' homework—" Annie is advised to ignore the jibes. A guardian says, in an oft-repeated moral: "The lazy and worthless people are always sore at those who are willing to work to get ahead—But success is only for the few who can ignore the jeers of the mass—"40

The second theme, ambition, involves motivation. Annie studies hard without complaint because she knows why it is necessary to do so. The "only future in loafin'," she notes, "is to grow up to be a bum—"41 Those who play instead of studying "never 'mount to much"42 and, as we have seen, Annie intends to "'mount to somethin'." Academic prowess and ambition can be an obstacle to acceptance by her fellow students but

Annie learns the arts of popularity in school and triumphs over all difficulties strewn in her path.

"Ignore 'em—never crowd 'em—never let 'em guess they can get your goat—"43

Like all transient students, Annie, as the new kid in school, has had to submit to a period of inspection by her peers before she is granted acceptance. Annie is able to resign herself to this temporary, if perennial, exclusion because it is temporary. "After a while," she notes, "the kids come to you if you are friendly—"44 Before Annie could become so blase, she had to undergo many snubs, some of which, early in her career, brought her to the verge of tears. In January, 1927 Annie, commiserating with herself, said "where I used to come from folks took an int'rest in a new kid. . . ." She has met isolation in public schools as well as the private and in small towns as well as the cities. "Folks are about th' same any place I guess—" Annie remarks,45 but, "I like th' country lots better" than the city, she concludes.46 The behavior of the country kids, in receiving and accepting Annie openly and freely, supports her declaration. But Annie began her career in the big city and frequently returns there so that a time comes when she can consider the curiosity of the small town a mixed blessing. "Friendly or not, folks here sure get a lot of 'citement out of seein' a stranger. . . . Folks in th' big town may be just as curious, but if they are, they don't let on—It gives me th' fidgets to be stared at—"47

At Home in the City

Annie's regard for the city seems to increase in the 1930s and it is the big city in which she will feel at home, yet, as a resident of both worlds and more often a small town, she takes on the positive attributes

of each. In an episode of March, 1946, Annie is described as a city girl "judging from her poise and manner—but as fresh and sweet as any country girl could be—" Gray appears to have an ambivalent attitude toward town and country which reflects the pull of each upon his own life and is also representative of an ambivalence in American attitudes in general.

Other factors than strangeness have been a basis for ostracism in the strip. Social status measured by raiment and residence is of importance in February, 1935. "What a dress," the children say, and, she "lives over across th' tracks—"48 The depression era also saw Annie's study habits and good grades become a source of friction with her classmates.49 Neither of these problems approach in significance the difficulties that ensue upon the disclosure of Annie's orphan origins.

At Happy Hollow Seminary discovery of her background led to her expulsion. In public school disclosure results in isolation. In April of 1927 Annie is not yet selfconscious about being an orphan in spite of her dismissal from the seminary. Annie holds the kids spellbound with accounts of her travels only to be snubbed the next day. A stricken Annie learns from the experience and determines that in the future she will keep her business to herself: "Keep yer eyes open an' yer mouth shut—That's me from now on—" The children were not at fault for their behavior, Annie is told. They were instructed by their parents to avoid the tramp orphan. Similar situations later are explained in the same way. As there are varied reasons for her ostracism, Annie will also find out there are several paths to popularity in the eyes of her peers.

The most common method to achieve popularity illustrated by Annie's example in the strip is superior

force. Her first three educational experiences set the course.⁵⁰ In each Annie defeats a bully (two boys, one girl) and is immediately rewarded with the friendship of grateful children. Other methods described are heroic deeds;⁵¹ “. . . it isn't who you are but who you *know* that counts—;⁵² and, the advantages of power, “Funny how crazy folks get over yuh all of a sudden when yuh get to be somebody—”⁵³ Gray's worldly-wise orphan may seem somewhat cynical to others but he regards her wary reaction to life's problems as hardheaded practicality born in experience.⁵⁴

*“I wished her to grow up in the traditions of democracy—justice—freedom of thought—and action—She is so truly free—The symbol of America—I knew she faced danger—I wanted her to learn to face and conquer all—”*⁵⁵

Conflict in Attitude

There is a conflict in Gray's attitudes toward education which has its roots deep in the American tradition.⁵⁶ Gray combines a great respect for education with a persistent anti-intellectualism. School, as the experience of Annie exemplifies, is more than a normal circumstance in the life of a child. It is a necessity. It is the basis of success in later life. Gray's portrayal of education in “Little Orphan Annie” is one long admonition to go to school, to study hard, to respect your teachers, and to appreciate the country in which all children have an opportunity for an education. His criticism of “modern” education is another way in which he demonstrates his high regard for education, a regard that permeates the whole of the strip. It is a rare event, for example, when the heroes of the strip's episodes are not well educated.⁵⁷ Nearly all are college graduates, not infrequently

alumni of Oxford, and their formal training is united with military and foreign adventures to give them a background of unusual breadth.

Anti-intellectualism appears in the contemptuous way Gray depicts the college professor. They are ridiculous, opinionated figures in appearance and attitude. A wild-eyed, mangy-haired professor sitting on a jury trying Warbucks is eager to convict the business tycoon who has so much, while the professor's nine degrees return him so little. Gray was taking a swipe at Franklin Roosevelt's “brain trust” in this 1934 episode, but it is not an isolated case. In 1945 a history professor, who has long dreamed of writing the great American novel, but done nothing about it, is satirized. Professor Toggle wants the newspapers to print only the good things that happen and none of the crime or war stories he finds so distressing. Toggle is good-hearted (he accepts responsibility for Annie) and soft-headed, always wanting to think the best of all men. When, with his wife and Annie, he falls into the hands of a murderous businessman, Tidnab, Toggle exaggerates the supposed good points of the man and overlooks the evidences of evil action and intent. “In big business one must be hard and ruthless,” Toggle surmises. Through Annie's comments and scenes in the strip, Gray plainly indicates to the reader just how foolish is the behavior of the professor. Tidnab is working with a Japanese General and a German Baron to steal atomic secrets that will enable the Axis powers to win the next war. Toggle believes the Baron to be “one of the good Germans” and expresses his pious hope that Germany has given up her plans for world conquest. His naivete makes it impossible for him to perceive the true character of the men or situation. With evil all around him, Toggle can't (or won't)

see it, and, when he has an intimation of his danger, he cannot act to save himself. Fortunately for all of them, Annie is made of sterner stuff. Warbucks' scientists come off no better in the strip. Warbucks provides them with the wherewithal needed for their work and they recompense him with marvelous discoveries, still the image of the scientist is that of the eccentric genius, such as Eli Eon in 1935, or of men with a foolish unconcern with worldly affairs, as in an episode of 1964. To one of the latter group, Warbucks says, after inspecting progress on a project he is financing: “Well, for a scientist you're a lot more practical than I'd dared hope!”

The man of action, astute in his judgment of others, knowledgeable and decisive, the man who gets things done in the “real” world, this is the man Gray admires. The intellectual is none of these things. Irresolute, bemused, feckless, impractical, naive dreamer, hapless in a time of crisis and, sometimes, a bleeding heart, bitterly envious of his betters, corrupted by his vanities when in a position of power—these are the traits of the intellectual.

No Pedagogic Aim

Gray has denied a pedagogic aim in his comic strip. “I'm not a reformer,” he has said, “and I'm not using Annie to preach any sermons.”⁵⁸ In the next breath he contradicts himself: “I'm merely trying to teach her the philosophy of being independent, earning her own way, minding her own business, taking care of herself. In my opinion, that's a good philosophy for any kid, especially an orphan.” And elsewhere he has said: “Annie will continue to sell the idea that life is a battle, with victory for the brave and strong-hearted alone.”⁵⁹ What *Time* magazine has called “Annie's incorrigible tendency to climb soapboxes”⁶⁰ has

been an integral element of the strip from its inception. The whole tone of the strip is educative, it is infused with moral lessons for Gray's readers. The content of Gray's didactic approach has often made "Annie" the center of controversy but he has not long been deterred from expressing his philosophy. "There are eternal verities easy enough for all to learn: tell the truth, work hard, save your money to be independent; in short, 'keep your nose tidy!' And that's enough."⁶¹ Annie's philosophy, Gray declares, is "just good, standard Americanism that people are brought up on."⁶² The education of "Little Orphan Annie" may be erratic and peripheral to the major themes of the strip, but the education of the reader is central to the comic and, like Annie's schooling, unending.

¹May, 1929.

²I have read all of "Little Orphan Annie" from 5 August 1924 until the present but have ended this study after forty years.

³Without better guidelines, I have presumed an end to attendance at school when there is a change of episodes; when an episode continues beyond a normal school year; or, when the story line would require the disruption of Annie's education, e.g., a kidnapping or her hospitalization.

⁴The Happy Hollow Seminary episode of 1927, see below.

⁵An episode is herein defined as a period of time in the strip during which Annie resides with one of her many guardians in one locale. Usually this will also involve only one plot or adventure sequence but can, and has, involved two. An episode ends when Annie leaves guardian and locale.

⁶In an episode (January, 1963) Annie's age is given as ten and a half. *Editor and Publisher*, 22 August 1964, 45, says Annie is the "youngest 12 year old born in 1924. . . . She began her career at the age of six." Gray has informed us through an episode in 1964 that Annie was born on the 29th of February, see 28 February 1964.

⁷September, 1940. Similar statements May, 1928; June, 1929; September, 1932; March, 1936; February, 1939; January, October, 1942; January, August, 1956.

⁸May, 1928. June, 1929, see also April, 1927.

⁹May, 1928. The merit of hard work is stressed often by Gray, cf. March, 1932; June, 1936; May, 1937; August, September, 1940; August, 1947; January,

1955; September, 1960.

¹⁰May, 1928.

¹¹September, 1940.

¹²January, 1949.

¹³An exception to this generalization is expressed in July, 1961 when a guardian asks Annie, "I wonder how many teachers today could pass a simple American history examination?"

¹⁴History is mentioned in 1946 but the quotation comes from September, 1957.

¹⁵February, 1939.

¹⁶October, 1939. The quotation, "It's nice. . . it is . . .", is borrowed from an earlier statement by the same character dealing with Annie's enrollment in school.

¹⁷March, 1947.

¹⁸January-February, 1927. On three occasions Annie starts for private schools, but the trip is interrupted, see August, 1932; September, 1935; October, 1950.

¹⁹May, 1928.

²⁰February, 1939.

²¹June, 1929.

²²March, 1946, see also September, 1957.

²³December, 1952.

²⁴October, 1947.

²⁵May, 1958.

²⁶May, 1958.

²⁷July, 1961.

²⁸December, 1953.

²⁹April, 1927.

³⁰May, 1928.

³¹September, 1940.

³²September, 1960.

³³February, 1927.

³⁴October, 1959.

³⁵September, 1960

³⁶In the private school episode, January-February, 1927, it is apparently Warbucks' money that provides Annie entrance to the exclusive girl's school, however there is no specific reference to placement.

³⁷The probable effect of influence on Annie's admission to the private school in 1927 is not included in this total.

³⁸January, 1942.

³⁹See e.g., January, February, 1927 and May, 1928.

⁴⁰March, 1936.

⁴¹October, 1939.

⁴²September, 1940.

⁴³January, 1949.

⁴⁴January, 1949.

⁴⁵September, 1929.

⁴⁶September, 1929.

⁴⁷September, 1932.

⁴⁸A friend of Annie's was criticized on a similar basis in April, 1927.

⁴⁹March, April, 1936.

⁵⁰February, 1926; January-February, 1927; April, 1927.

⁵¹May, 1929; September, 1932.

⁵²October, 1929.

⁵³October, 1929.

⁵⁴An undated publicity release in the files of the Chicago Tribune-New York Daily News Syndicate (Chicago) quotes Gray as saying Annie "had to be hard to survive" and she meant to, but if she "is just a simple orphan kid after all. . . with a heart of gold . . . (and) . . . a wicked left." Similar statements appear in Sheridan, M. *Comics and Their Creators*, (Boston, 1942), 70; Brown, N. L., "America's Favorite Comic Kid," *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, 20 October 1946, (Magazine Section), 14, 27; and "Tougher Than Hell With a Heart of Gold," *Time*, 4 September 1964, 71-2.

⁵⁵May, 1939, see also November, 1942.

⁵⁶cf. Hofstadter, Richard, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, New York, 1963; Learner, Max, *America As a Civilization*, New York, 1961, Vol. II (paper), 732-749; White, Morton, "Reflections on Anti-intellectualism," *Dacalus*, (Summer, 1962), 457-68.

⁵⁷Heroes without formal schooling usually have supplemented the "school of hard knocks" with extensive reading.

⁵⁸*Chicago Tribune*, 1 October 1951.

⁵⁹Undated publicity release from the files of the Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate (Chicago).

⁶⁰"Tougher Than Hell With a Heart of Gold," *Time*, 4 September 1964, 72.

⁶¹Schuyler, P., "Orphan Annie Says: 'Keep Your Nose Tidy!'" *Editor and Publisher*, 24 February 1951, 12, 40.

⁶²"Tougher Than Hell With a Heart of Gold," *Time*, 4 September 1964, 72.

