

MENTAL FATIGUE

(Originally published December 1963)

One of the persistent ailments for which medicine has yet to find a cure is homesickness. We encountered a galloping case of this earlier in the fall on a trip to New England for Father's Day at the school where our fourteen-year-old son has been discovering that a good education does not come easily.

The young man, accustomed to making As with minimum effort during eight years of local public schooling, suddenly found himself in a different league, competing with ninety-odd other youngsters whose educational capabilities all seemed to surpass his own. In all his previous years, if he ever had to put in one hour of concentrated study at home, it was considered a great imposition. It came as a shock when he realized that there were no sugarcoated classes like speech, band or physical education. He complained that the teachers actually expected him to know his lessons every day. His daily assignments in such dull subjects as history, math, English, French and Latin not only used up the four hours of required out-of-class study time each day, but also whatever other spare time he could sneak in with a flashlight after lights out at night and before breakfast in the mornings. "Life up here is one long, tiresome study hall," he wrote. "I'm flunking everything. They ask me things in Latin and French I don't even know in English."

Our visit for Father's Day did not help his homesickness. It was a difficult experience emotionally for both of us.

Subsequently, after the first six-week marking period, he learned that he had passed all of his subjects, but it was a close squeak—there were no As or Bs or Cs.

Passing did help his morale. Some of his other "smart" classmates did flunk one or two subjects, and at least he wasn't the dumbest in the class. His pride is still shaken, but we hope the homesickness may be subsiding a little. His last letters have sounded more cheerful, but he has not yet adjusted to the studying.

"P.S.," ended the last communication, "I can't wait for the Christmas holidays so I can come home and rest my brain."