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THE LIBERAL ARTS IN CANADA*

EVERY CANADIAN who gives thought to the subject today must be concerned with the need for bettering education in Canada. The conditions so necessary to make the Arts flourish are, in many ways, identical with the conditions that would be optimum for the Sciences. Indeed there should be no separate consideration.

In these times it is the output of higher education in a nation, its capacity for intellectual leadership, that makes the nation strong or weak among the nations of the world. This output depends upon what I should like to call the country's intellectual climate. The problem of education in Canada is to produce here a healthier climate for the Liberal Arts and the Sciences.

Of course, I should not pretend to speak for Prince Edward Island. The Island is different. Progress, at times, has been made here in spite of conditions, not because of them. The excellent history of the Government of Prince Edward Island, written by your Principal, Dr. Frank MacKinnon, recalls the fact that the government of Prince Edward Island came into existence by mistake. But, like many another mistake, it got to its feet and it has had a lusty and adventurous manhood.

When the original grant of academic land was made in Charlottetown, Lieutenant-Governor Fanning spoke as follows: "This grant of land is for the purpose of laying the foundation of a college thereon, for the education of the youth in the learned languages, the liberal arts and sciences and all the branches of useful and polite literature . . ." What a happy phrasing that is! That was in 1804. Here in the welter of the struggle for existence and amid the preoccupations of pioneer building, scholars were directed to found a college, a home for English and Scottish and New World culture. Here, the knowledge of the past was to be taught to the youth: "the learned languages, the liberal arts and sciences and all the branches of useful and polite literature."

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Science, as we know it today, has developed into something quite new. Its growth was certainly not premeditated in 1804 by any Governor. The studies that Fanning had in mind are still called the Liberal Arts. Moreover, if he were alive today he would be proud of the achievement of the Prince of Wales College in the teaching of the Humanities. The College has played a most important role training men and women to see what Frecker has called the "wholeness of things."¹ The liberal arts colleges "with humanistic and spiritual traditions" have a special contribution to make to culture in our time.

When the conference of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund was held recently in New Delhi, Mr. Nehru, Prime Minister of India, addressed the delegates at the opening of their conference. Communist and capitalist countries, he said, might have different political beliefs, but "in the final analysis they worship the same god—the god of the machine, the god of industrialization." We may not welcome such judgements. But the peoples of the far East are looking at Western nations with candid eyes. The people of India, after centuries of seeking God along the paths of mysticism, are looking abroad at last. What is it they see? And what, after all, are we worshipping?

We may not welcome the verdict of the Chinese people as they consider our civilization. They know, what we are apt to forget, that they are potentially the mightiest nation on the earth. If they would speak out, we might hesitate to accept the opinion of the Japanese, who burst into a feverish westernization when we shook them so rudely from their age-long isolation. We could hardly fail to resent the recent official opinion of us so often expressed in the Soviet Union. I assure you that the Russian people are far more friendly and less adverse in their criticism. But, if that government is hostile and threatens our way of life, other nations on the other side of the world may do the same before long.

Is it true, in Nehru's words, that we "worship the same god" with the communists—"the god of the machine, the god of industrialization?" No, you might well exclaim, that is false. The God of our Bible is not a god of machines and industry, of gadgets and speed. Most of us, I am sure, are basically loyal to the Christian ideal of the fellowship of man. But many, no doubt, have forgotten. Many, alas, never knew its meaning. It is true that, in recent years, we have drifted with no chart and no compass on the rushing flood of scientific invention and economic change. We find ourselves in a new era, bewildered by the overproduction of the unnecessary. How often we mistake self-indulgence for the greatest good!

We have hoped, perhaps, that modern prophets would rise up to lead us back to simple faiths—prophets who could carry our religion to

the other peoples of the world in some new form that would be acceptable to them. But these prophets have not risen up; or, if they have, we are deaf to their voices. It is obvious that we should speak to other nations in clearer accents of better things.

So, what are we to do about all this? Granted that what the world needs is a common religion of good will to all men—how can we come to it? We know that we face a crisis. It is evident that the armaments race can bring no lasting solution, no permanent superiority that will ensure wise peace. What are we in Canada to do?

Perhaps it would be presumptuous for a physician to attempt to spell out the answer. Some, I am sure, would suggest that medical men, like myself, should return to bedside and laboratory at night-fall, for fear they may be lost in the limitless forest of speculation that crowds so darkly about the little clearing they have made for applied science. But the problem that faces you in the Liberal Arts is the problem that faces us in the Sciences. General learning, research, and teaching are different aspects of one thing.

I would like to approach this situation by the scientific method. In medical science, and in other branches of basic science, when a baffling and apparently insoluble problem presents itself, the best procedure is to survey the situation critically and to plan a new approach that may lead to a truth not presently perceived.

What has happened to education during the half century that has followed the close of the Victorian era? All too little. In some areas, it is softer, more diffuse, less respected. The teacher of the young grows comparatively poorer while the man who tends the machine or the assembly line grows richer. Labour is organized to make demands; teachers are not. Financial support of school and college has fallen far short of the need of modern education. Horse and buggy methods of instruction are still to be seen jogging along the byways of education while industrialization is rushing by on the high road.

Look back to ancient Greece. That point of view is familiar enough, I am sure, to you in the Prince of Wales College. In all history there is no comparable period of intellectual advance. The pure light of their learning shines on us still. The teaching of their scholars guides us. Their example makes our efforts seem confused. Perhaps we might be able to imitate the essential features of that intellectual climate in which they lived.

Ancient Hellas was made up of many independent city states scattered around the shores and islands of the eastern Mediterranean. They were held together by a common tongue and common ideals, and by

common gods who set no commandment against free thought. The chief formal bond, curious though it may seem, was a system of pan-Hellenic competitions in athletics. This began at Olympia probably as early as the eleventh century, B.C. The Olympic Games were well organized by the eighth century and by the fifth the competitions had been enlarged to include music, dancing, and all the arts in which man might compete. By that time there were many different inter-city festivals and countless local competitions.

During the fifth century, B.C., professionalism had begun to lower the tone of the athletic contests, but competition in the arts—in music, poetry, drama, dancing, and public readings—continued both formally and informally. Contest and competition had become a Greek habit and an unfailing source of stimulus. What was happening in the other arts may be guessed by what happened in medicine. There was a centre of medical teaching on a small windswept island in the Aegean Sea, the Island of Cos. There disciples came to the physician Hippocrates, and paid him a fee for complete tuition in medicine. A few miles away, on the coast of Asia Minor in the city of Cnidus, was a still older centre of medical training headed at that time by Euryphon. The leaders of these two schools were famous. They were summoned in consultation by the kings of Persia and Macedonia.

Hippocrates scorned the current belief that gods and devils take a hand in our afflictions. He also refused to accept, from the philosophers of that day, their hypotheses of the meaning of life. Physicians, he said, should observe man and record the evolution of his diseases and disabilities critically, dispassionately. These words do not seem remarkable here and now, but this was the beginning of scientific medicine. He described those methods of treatment which had been proved to be effective. Beyond that, he taught his followers to wait upon the healing hand of nature, to comfort the sufferer and support him with a wise regimen. But he introduced into Medicine something more than science. It was a new ethics for physicians. Young men who wished to train in the Hippocratic school were called upon to take a strange oath. "I swear," it began, "by Apollo, the Physician, by Asclepius, . . . by all the gods and goddesses . . . to lead my life and practise my art in purity and holiness." Here was something new indeed; the beginning of altruism in medicine, the beginning of the medical science and the start of a natural science. These schools of medicine did not, of course, spring up over-night. They were evidently the culmination of progressive study and teaching among the Asclepiad physicians of that area. There were differences of opinion between the two schools, a contest in the search for truth.

The dawn of Greek medicine was remarkable, but it was not unique. It was only one aspect of what was happening in other Greek cities. All the arts had come alive: philosophy here, mathematics there—astronomy, sculpture, painting, music, poetry, drama, political philosophy, oratory, history. Aphrodite, goddess of love, they said, rose in all her naked loveliness from the foam of the sea. She was endowed from the start with every feminine charm. But her sudden appearance in Grecian myth seems no more of a marvel to us now than the sudden appearance of genius in every field of endeavour throughout that single nation.

In July, a year ago, I stood in Westminster Abbey in London, and watched as the ashes of Professor Gilbert Murray were deposited there, under a stone in the floor. His contribution to his people, and to his time, consisted in his studies of ancient Greece. As Professor of Classics in Oxford, he translated and interpreted the thinking of the Greeks in that time when Arts and Sciences were born. These things then, as now, he wrote, have a "stationary and eternal value, like the beauty of the dawn, or the love of a mother for a child, or the joy of a young animal in being alive, or the courage of a martyr facing torment—there they stand like light upon the mountains."

The Greek, Gilbert Murray said, had a "peculiar instinct toward temperance and beauty." Greeks looked on art as a form of *Sophia* or Wisdom, a *Techné* with rules that have to be learned. The question that must interest us most is—what led to this astonishing flowering of the intellect? Why should Pythagoras and his followers, living in a Greek colony on the coast of Italy, be able to state the principles of arithmetic and geometry in a form that is acceptable today? How did it come about that Thales, a citizen of Miletus in Asia Minor, broke with mythology and constructed his hypothesis that the world swings free in space with other rotating bodies? Who taught Phidias his sculpture? What led Socrates to the concept of God and of the soul of man, and Plato to draw the outlines of a new society with such lofty insight? How are we to explain the writings of Aristotle?

These questions are not to be answered in a word. All cities did not contribute evenly or equally. Ionia led the others early, Attica late. Sparta gave little or nothing to the arts, unless baleful war should be listed among them. Athens gave much. In each case there was preliminary local growth of ideas and skills, during one or many generations, before great heights were reached. One must conclude that the climate and soil that suits the germination and flowering of genius in one of the arts was suitable to all the arts.

But the end of it came suddenly, with the loss of their freedom and a change in their way of life. Alexander the Great conquered the world. Empires followed. Laws and standardization came with the Romans; but inspiration was rarely heard and little honoured. The Greek chorus that had been chanting eternal truth in every art had been stilled forever. In the new city of Alexandria, a new Pharaoh built something new: it was a library. The medical schools of Cos and Cnidus had fallen into silence; but the papyrus writings of Hippocrates and Euryphon were apparently gathered and brought to Alexandria. Scholars, of a new sort, argued whether the teachings of Cos were superior to those of Cnidus. They debated the meaning of Hippocrates' terminology, as we discuss the words of Shakespeare.

When I was an undergraduate at Oxford, I heard the great Canadian, Sir William Osler, speak at the opening of a Shakespeare exhibit in the Bodleian Library. The title of his address was "Creators, Transmuters and Transmitters—Shakespeare, Bacon and Burton." Although Osler was talking about creation in the time of Elizabeth I, Shakespeare was a creator like the Greeks I have mentioned, and I have always remembered the contrast that Osler drew between Creators and Transmitters.

Turning back to ancient Greece, one may say that with the loss of their freedom, the great Greek *creators* disappeared. The *transmitters* went to work, lesser men living in another atmosphere, a climate that had lost intellectual stimulus. The writings from the original Greek medical schools, under the title of *Corpus Hippocraticum*, served the world as a textbook of medicine for more than 1500 years, just as the writings of Euclid did for geometry. During that time, men seemed to have lost the capacity for independent constructive thinking. Conditions were wrong. Surely the human brain had not deteriorated as an organ for thought. No; it was the background and the intellectual climate that had changed.

Great empires rose and fell, but they failed to produce the proper environment. The good intellectual climate did not come again until the time of the Renaissance of Learning. Then, small independent city states appeared in Italy. Universities were born. The conditions that produced the excellence of Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael and Galileo bore a striking resemblance to those of classical Greece. The Italians of the Renaissance lived in small independent principalities, each developing in its own way. There was rivalry and competition among them, and intellectual excellence and artistic skill were admired and rewarded.

What conclusion, you might well ask, are we to draw from all this talk? Canada's educational system is not perfect, but the results compare pretty favourably with the average in most other countries. My answer

is that we should compare what we are doing with what we could be doing, rather than comparing ourselves with others and taking comfort in a hopeless mediocrity.

Changes are coming fast in education. If the changes are wisely made, it is my opinion that Canada, even with her existing resources and her native stock, could quite well create a climate as well suited to intellectual growth as that of classical Greece. Canadian wit, when selected by scholarship support, would be found, I have no doubt, to be as good as the Greek. We would be different from the other friendly nations of the world, not all at once, but in time; for we would excel in those things that educated men most admire.

But Canada cannot do this, even though she should spend a great deal more money on education, unless she does it in the right way. She will never succeed if she continues to imitate the bad as well as the good in the life and education of the U.S.A., Great Britain, and the U.S.S.R. It cannot be done by weakening the discipline and diluting the scholarship of the secondary schools, as has been done in the United States. It cannot be accomplished by imitating the central control and support of education in force now in the Soviet Union. The Soviet system makes free competition between multiple semi-independent centres difficult or non-existent. It cannot be done by following Great Britain as she moves in the same direction. Her universities are being supported more and more by repeated grants of money from the national government. Formerly, those institutions were supported from local sources and from the endowments which each university held in its own right.

Few would deny that in the past the endowed universities and colleges added intellectual strength and stability to national life because of their very independence. I refer, for example, to Oxford and Cambridge, and at a later time to Harvard and Johns Hopkins. You might add, too, Laval University and McGill and Trinity College of Toronto and the University of King's College on the Dalhousie campus. That was in the days that many still remember with nostalgia, when endowments were adequate to support institutional operations (adequate, but with respectable deficits, of course!).

I am not discussing Communism or Socialism. I am discussing the conditions that would create a favourable climate for intellectual growth in this country and the urgent need for creators in non-scientific thought.

The Rector of Laval University, Monseigneur Vandry, said at the conclusion of his Robertson Lecture³ here, in 1951: "Let us look for truth and build a Christian nation which could serve as a lesson to the world, a nation where Christ will be at home, where His teachings will be laws,

His teachings will inspire the laws, where all men will be brothers." I agree with him. Devout Protestants, Catholics, and Jews alike should pray for that. But we have work to do. There must be new leadership to make this come true.

Recently, the Federal Government in Ottawa decided to rescue Canadian universities from their approaching financial ruin. This was perhaps to be applauded as an emergency procedure. But the method chosen, if it were continued, would be wrong for this country. By giving annual grants for current expenses and by increasing them, as it is doing, the Federal Government will inevitably take over the support and the control of the universities. This is following the pattern that is being adopted in England as a part of the process of nationalization of industry. It is following the fully established pattern of support in the U.S.S.R.

It would be far better for education in this nation of sprawling provinces, where the needs and the traditions of the people vary so greatly, that the provinces themselves should retain control of the universities. To do so they must, themselves, supply the funds required for annual expenses, and the people of each province must be taxed for it. It was the failure of the provincial governments to do this that produced the crisis in university finance.

Although too little is said about it, there is also a financial crisis in the schools. Who will step in there? It must be the provincial governments. Confederation placed the responsibility for education squarely on the provinces. Their contributions to institutions of higher learning and to schools must be vastly increased in order to meet the rising costs and the inevitable expansion.

There are aspects of education, however, in which the Federal Government can and should take the initiative, and it can do this in a manner which will not end in nationalizing the institutions of higher learning. I may point out that there are three aspects to the broad field of higher education: (1) teaching, (2) research, and (3) general learning. The primary concern of the provincial governments is to support and produce a healthy climate for teaching. The Federal Government should adopt research as its special field of responsibility. (1) Under the first heading, then, the primary concern of the provincial governments is to support teaching. They must take general supervisory control of teaching institutions, utilizing to the best advantage the help of the churches, the homes, and every element in local society. Stability and freedom from politics are as important to education subject to Provincial support as they would be with Federal support. (2) The Federal Government should promote research. This is a primary responsibility in which the strategic

needs of the nation should be considered. The Federal Government has already made a start in this field in the establishment of the National Research Council. (3) General learning is a responsibility that both provincial and federal governments should share. Learning covers the study and improvement of teachers and independent workers through provision of libraries and laboratories, and by means of travel, meetings, and fellowships. It covers adult or extramural education. The establishment of the Canada Council by the Federal Government is a most welcome beginning in this direction.

This, however, is no more than a beginning. Let the national government take our education out of the field of politics. Let it create a Commission, or Commissions, charged with (1) capitalized grants to educational institutions and research departments, (2) establishment of a national scholarship system effective in every province, and (3) strategic aid to research. Under capitalized grants university buildings could be financed, land bought, strategic endowments placed to restore the independence of the Universities; even land grants could be made for the purpose of future revenue. This is the way to promote research and to establish it over the years in our country. This is a field in which I can speak from experience.* To help every aspect of education, let the Federal Government imitate the Soviet Union in the establishment of a broad scholarship system that will favour the able students. But let our government avoid the evils that will follow central control of the individual and the locality. Leave liberty as it is. Promote free contest and competition. Establish a greater independence of the colleges by endowments.

The Provinces, for their part, must above all increase the pay of teacher and professor until it exceeds that of workers who have put less time into the learning of their trade. With that, the rewards of public recognition and admiration will return to those who teach, as their just due, and they will deserve it.

Douglas Le Pan, in an address to the Canadian Conference on Education at Ottawa in February of 1958, called on education to demonstrate its worth: "Canadian education will not lack for public support," he said, "if it shows itself, . . . a profession, a craft, a mystery for fashioning and fastening the wings with which human creatures can soar up to the

*Whatever the Montreal Neurological Institute has been able to contribute to research, and much of the practical application of that research to the treatment of the sick, is due to the fact that it has had a basic scientific endowment as well as occasional grants. The endowments came originally from the Rockefeller Foundation and from private citizens of Montreal. For years I have been begging Ottawa for capital establishment instead of recurring grants to research.

dazzling sun." I like the mystical flight of his fancy, but we must be realistic. Some of the best teachers with the best minds have been starved out into industry. Much of the young talent will not enter the profession until a comfortable wage is restored to it, a wage to support a family with dignity.

What more suitable place than Charlottetown could be chosen to propose a working formula for federal and provincial cooperation—a plan to rescue education and give educators the tools to fashion education's wings and to fasten them on? It was here in Charlottetown, in 1864, that delegates gathered to consider Maritime union. Here, the larger plan was visualized that led, at last, to Federation and to the creation of Canada as a Dominion.

When a cathedral is to be built, many architects present their blueprints, but only one set of blueprints is chosen. Sometimes the cheapest is chosen because it is cheap. It may be that the finest cathedrals, the loftiest and the strongest structures, were never built! These are my drawings. They may be discarded, but they are based on civilization's history and on personal experience in scholarship and research.

In proposing a formula for Federal-Provincial cooperation, I make no claim to originality. Many men, especially in my own Province of Quebec, have asserted the right of the provinces to support and supervise provincial education. But the time has come to couple with that assertion a call upon the Federal Government to provide much greater assistance for the Arts and Sciences in its proper field. The people pay for some things they are not aware of wanting! They should demand of their members in Ottawa support of research on an ampler scale, and a national system of scholarships, and endowments of educational institutions.

Such support might bring a new era of intellectual growth, but it would not interfere with the provinces in the discharge of the responsibilities that are theirs. In this formula the provinces themselves must really support the costs of teaching the children of their citizens, directly or indirectly.

This, for Canada, is the strait gate and the narrow way "which leadeth unto life." But it would be so much easier to drift along the broad way toward world destruction, as we are drifting now. The atom bomb could end it all so easily, without any effort on our part. Let "the god of industrialization" have his way with us and our children. It would be such an efficient, easy way to end it all. The time has come when we must choose whether to drift or to strive.

The intellectual climate in which the Arts and Sciences would flourish as never before is a climate like that of ancient Greece. It could be

created in Canada by plan. In it we would discover, in time, our own leadership and salvation.

There never was a time in the history of the world when "creators" were needed in the humanities more than they are today. We must have answers which the "transmitters" of the wisdom of the past can hardly hope to give us. The people of every nation are looking out to new horizons, and there is desperate need for understanding and wisdom.

Here, in Charlottetown, where Federation was first formally discussed, it seems appropriate to call for constructive cooperation of the Federal Government of Canada with the Provinces, a cooperation that will create a stimulating climate for the Liberal Arts and the Sciences. How else can we in Canada hope to raise up wise leaders and inspired prophets?

NOTES

1. G. A. Frecker, *Education in the Atlantic Provinces* (Toronto: Gage & Co., 1956).
2. Gilbert Murray, *The Legacy of Greece*, ed. Sir Richard Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921).
3. *The Dalhousie Review*, Summer, 1951.