

CURRENT MAGAZINES

THE FUTURE OF UNIVERSITIES

- Education in the Melting-Pot—Major Frederick Evans, in the *Quarterly*.
Look At America's High Schools—Mr. D. Stiles, in *Harper's*.
Graduates at Eighteen—Mr. J. R. Tunis, in *Christian Science Monitor*.
The Liberal Arts: An Experiment—Dr. Sidney Smith, in *Queen's Quarterly*
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Among the quaintly suggestive reflections of Sir Thomas Browne there is one about periodic recurrence of states of mind:

“As though there were metempsychosis, and the soul of one man passed into another; opinions do find, after several revolutions, men and minds like those that first begat them.”

One cannot expect the mind in which some old idea thus incarnates itself to be conscious of the reproduction. It is more likely to resent, as a slur on its own originality, the suggestion of even unconscious borrowing. But the unbiassed outsider may be as sure of this similitude as of the resemblance between grandfather and grandson which neither of the two can be made to recognize.

An amusing example is in the current reissue, with portentous solemnity, of much plausible nonsense about education. No doubt those who promulgate it again will hear with amazement that they were anticipated. Evidence of the anticipation is in books, and they don't read many books. It seems worth while, before discussing what the magazines have lately contained on so important a subject, to note how far the same ideas were put forward, and with what results, long ago.

Nearly a hundred years have passed since John Henry Newman published his memorable brochure, *The Idea of a University*. It was written amid circumstances curiously similar to our own, and in answer to proposals that seem a forecast of the present clamor for University transformation. Then, as now, an attack was made on such studies as ancient classics, which did not equip the mind with knowledge for some practical task. Then, as now, ridicule was poured on mechanical preservation of an inherited University System. Then, as now, impatient reformers denounced the lack of vocational guidance, insisted that the curriculum should be re-drawn on principles

of "utility", and traced the tragic blunders of government to the outworn educational methods which had failed to develop civic capacity either in members of the legislature or in the voters who elected them. One seems to recognize the mingling of satire and lament and appeal, so familiar in current memoranda about "reconstructon", as one turns over the pages of an article in the *Edinburgh Review* of a century ago. Though the projects of 1944 come with the glow of freshness from a mind that has bethought itself of them for the first time, they are a little tedious to one with any knowledge of the history of such speculation. Here too the author of *Ecclesiastes* might have found that there is nothing new under the sun.

Just about the same distance separated the generation of 1844 from the Napoleonic War as separates us from the War of 1914-18. Memories and alarms from the French Revolution were not less intense than those now stirred in so many minds by thought of the Revolution in Russia, "Jacobinism" serving the propagandist purpose of social reactionaries a century back as "Bolshevism" serves the same purpose now. The excitement so manifest in records of that past time about "Chartism" shows a public in England very like the public that now awaits there, apprehensively, each new platform adopted at Transport House, and for Canadians at least—with items of the C.C.F. programme constantly pressed upon their notice—it should be easy to appreciate the *Six Points of the People's Charter*. The reckless demagogue, who finds in the troubled waters of the present time his great opportunity to fish for his own profit, had many a recognizable predecessor in that season of England's social distress known as "the hungry forties": then, as now, the ear of a suffering people was open to every glib indictment of national institutions.

Among national institutions the University has held for many centuries an assured place, though not without periodic attack at times of public restlessness. It is now the victim of one of those excited periods again, with strident clamor for immediate measures to transform it into a technical institute or a set of professional schools. How often, for example, are we asked such questions as these—Why should Greek and Latin retain "in this modern Age" so important a place on the University curriculum? Why spend time on learning to compose in "a dead language"? Why include in the Department of English Literature the study of Chaucer, of Spenser, of poets not merely remote in their thought from anything that bears on a successful modern

life, but (as I once knew an irate father complain) using "English words no longer current"? Why bother youthful minds, destined for the struggles of competitive society, with resemblances and contrasts between the dream of a Catholic Florentine about unearthly matters in the fourteenth century and the dream of a Puritan Englishman similarly unverifiable three centuries later—as if either the *Divina Commedia* or *Paradise Lost* were now of any bearing on real affairs? Why concern one's self with any aspects of mathematics except those required for either engineering or actuarial application? And why continue to tolerate—even to encourage!—philosophy, mediaeval history, philology, speculation on ancient drama and ancient lyric poetry? Why not recognize that these are parts of an educational inheritance we should long ago have abandoned—as we have abandoned, for better means of transport, the vehicles which belonged to a like primitive time? "I move", exclaimed an influential University governor at a recent meeting of his Board, "that we economize by dropping the Library appropriation: in all conscience we have more than enough books already".

I have put these complaints with exaggerated sharpness, in order to make their spirit clear. To not a few readers I doubt if they will seem even exaggerated. It is plain, too, that of late much progress has been made by the revolt whose motive is thus expressed. Statistics over a period of years show how fast the entrances for courses in the Arts Faculty have been disappearing. One and the same "utilitarian" mood discloses itself in recoil over many fields—against Hebrew and Greek among students of theology, against chemistry and physics as pre-requisites for students of medicine, against "speculative jurisprudence" for students of law. To quicken the professional supply at a time of shortage, and with the mocking comment that the studies discarded were "never of much use any way", it is now demanded that for young clergymen, young doctors, young lawyers there be far less requirement in these "exercises of mere intellectual curiosity". Thus the cure of souls, the treatment of ailing bodies, the guidance of clients in a puzzle about business commitment or company construction, would be entrusted to those whose native wit, observant of what befell cases *prima facie* similar in the past, enables them to guess more or less sagaciously (but with no reference to ultimate foundations) at the advice safest to give. The word "short-cut" is avoided, but "accelerated course" (due to wartime necessities) has a patriotic ring. Under cover of such temporary character, the change may well secure a hold

hard to shake off afterwards. The day of the mere empiric is coming back, under University auspices!

What is, or rather what *was*, the specific character of this national institution before the name had been applied, with democratic carelessness, to so many different sorts of structure that it ceased to mean anything specific?

II

The basis of the University is belief that for a certain proportion (necessarily small) of the youth of the country there should be means of general (as apart from professional or technical) development beyond what the common school or the high school can afford. For this purpose, custom has long appropriated a period of three or four years, approximately between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one or twenty-two, after childhood's training is complete and before the task of earning a livelihood is undertaken. What of those who have no such blissful interval at their disposal? Those who at eighteen, or even earlier, must earn their daily bread? No country has yet achieved, or attempted, the project of making University education universal. A good reason is that mental aptitudes are different, that the common school or the high school supplies to very many the utmost intellectual training for which their minds are fitted, and that to spend three or four further years at College would be for them profitless—or even worse.

Newman's felicitous illustration from the concept of "Empire" brings out precisely this educational contrast. He compares the studies of the schoolboy, each pursued in isolation from the rest, to so many separate countries, each in respect of its local affairs autonomous, but in respect of fundamental common purpose reflecting the Empire of which they are constituent parts. One thinks of the Russian *moujik* of Tsarist days, acutely conscious of the local landowner or the local land agent, and but dimly aware of a Tsar who, like God in Heaven, seemed "very far off". For the average pupil of common school or high school, the subjects of the curriculum have little consciously appreciated bearing upon one another, and less upon the whole fabric of intellectual interpretation to which they belong. Yet there *is* an intellectual Empire, as there was a Russian Empire, and though its relations are not a suitable field for everyone's study, it is important—indeed urgent—in the one case, as tragic experience showed it to have been in the other, that these intri-

cacies of relationship should be studied, criticized, and from time to time amended, by persons with the sort of mind to tackle that sort of task.

If a University so conceived was the target, three generations ago, of a vulgar abuse like that now so common, it had then the service of defenders with whom few who now defend it are comparable. One remembers Newman's immortal paragraph:

An assemblage of learned men, zealous for their own sciences, and rivals of each other, are brought by familiar intercourse, and for the sake of intellectual peace, to adjust together the claims and relations of their respective subjects of investigation. They learn to respect, to consult, to aid each other. Thus is created a pure and clear atmosphere of thought, which the student also breathes, though in his own case he pursues only a few sciences out of the multitude. He profits by an intellectual tradition which is independent of particular teachers, which guides him in his choice of subjects and duly interprets for him those which he chooses. He apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and its shades, its great points and its little, as he otherwise cannot apprehend them. Hence it is that his education is called "liberal".

And the words of another thinker, herein so similar, though in much else so different—John Stuart Mill, in his great address to the students of the University of St. Andrews:

What professional men should carry away with them from a University is not professional knowledge, but that which should direct the use of their professional knowledge, and bring the light of general culture to illuminate the technicalities of a special pursuit. Men may be competent lawyers without general education, but it depends on general education to make them philosophic lawyers—who demand, and are capable of apprehending, principles, instead of merely cramming their memory with details. And so of all other useful pursuits, mechanical included. Education makes a man a more intelligent shoemaker, if that be his occupation, but not by teaching him how to make shoes: it does so by the mental exercise it gives, and the habits it impresses. . . . Now is your opportunity for gaining a degree of insight into subjects larger and more ennobling than the minutiae of a business or a profession, and for acquiring a facility of using your minds on all that concerns the higher interests of man, which you will carry with you into the occupations of active life, and which will prevent even the short intervals of time which that may leave you from being altogether lost for noble purposes.

Recalling passages such as these, addressed not in vain to the generations of our grandfathers and great-grandfathers, with what a sense of nausea does one make one's way through the reams of recent educational memoranda addressed to governments by our contemporary "experts"!

But it becomes harder and harder to maintain this academic ideal of a Newman or a Mill. The Spirit of the Age is against it: naturally and necessarily in the countries given to dictatorship (for the University at once encourages and illustrates free thought on problems of government as on other problems); but no less naturally, if less obviously, in the democratic countries, because it recognizes an intellectual *elite*, with opportunities which cannot be equally distributed. Against it, too, is the temper of all to whom the idea of valuing knowledge (or anything else) except in proportion to its quick material product seems absurd.

To these old hostilities one must now note a singular and lamentable addition. There is distinct and growing readiness on the part of too many directors of Universities to popularize their institution by compromising its character. It amounts to the same thing whether it is formally abolished or, though kept in name, is devoted to an altogether different purpose. Sabotage inside—what the Communists call, in another reference, "boring from within"—is the academic peril of the hour. Mr. Abraham Flexner's book, *Universities*, provides a great storehouse of illustration. Likewise innumerable magazine articles about what some "forward-looking" American University President is about to make of "the old machine". Mr. J. R. Tunis told lately, in the *Christian Science Monitor*, of how one of these efficiency experts has decided to take students in at fifteen and send them out bachelors of arts at eighteen—something like accelerating the schedule of railway trains! The ground for this is cited in one of those pompous truisms which have made so many recent books on education "tiresome even to laugh at"—as Macaulay once said of the pompous bores in his day. It is this particular President's belief, says Mr. Tunis, that

It is impossible, in these unpredictable times to train students specifically for an unpredictable future.

No doubt such a thing is really impossible. The statement sounds like what Sam Weller used to call "a self-evident proposition". But what has that to do with lowering the entrance age for students to fifteen, and hurrying them through their Arts

course by the time they are eighteen? The difference in mental maturity, on the average, between the ages of fifteen and eighteen corresponds to the difference in type of education hitherto attempted at University and at school respectively. That such sorts of reflection as either Newman or Mill had in mind should be pressed upon an average schoolboy of the age at which this innovating President would welcome him, is a preposterous proposal. Is University teaching, then, to be levelled down to adolescence? Has it been already so levelled? I refer to the programmes of a great many institutions on this continent for a sombre reply.

Mr. Lloyd George, in a characteristic speech, once outlined the reasons put forward for special University representation in parliament. He spoke of the learning, the wisdom, the intellectual calm which academic representatives were expected to bring, as a sort of leaven, into a membership more commonplace. An interrupter called out from the gallery "Carson", Cecil". "Just so", said the imperturbable speaker: "I have sketched the general principle; my friend in the gallery has supplied the particular examples." Mr. Flexner's *Universities, American, English, German*, can thus illustrate Newman's *Idea of a University*. The average undergraduate, like the average elector, may exclaim with Browning, "Fancy strikes fact and explodes in full".

III

Carlyle once said that the University of modern times is a collection of books, and when Hitler—three months after he began dictatorial rule—had his book-bonfire, this might well have been called his attack upon the Idea of a University. The leading agents in that obscene Nazi performance of eleven years ago were students, but its organizers were Nazi Ministers, and what happened in Berlin—where Goebbels delivered the accompanying speech—was but a sample of what was happening the same night in each of thirty German University cities or towns. An advertisement had called for all "dangerous", that is anti-Nazi, literature, and the response came in truck-loads. At midnight on May 10, 1933, 40,000 persons assembled in the great square between the Berlin Opera House and the University of Berlin. An approximately equal number lined the route of five miles over which the procession of 5,000 torch-bearing students conducted wagons laden with books and manuscripts to the crossed logs awaiting them. Burning all that had been written con-

trary to the Fuehrer's mind meant burning the greatest works of German literature. But such was the New Order—a ban on mental hospitality, on the habit of holding judgment in suspense until facts are collected, on that disinterested love of truth which Spinoza so well called "the intellectual love of God". Instead, there must in future be love only of Nazi Germany, refusal to entertain any belief that favored non-German interests, ruthless imposition of every dogma which official scientists might promulgate for German advantage at Nazi command. How can this be better described than as Hitler's war against the Idea of a University?

Three years later, the same motive found explicit avowal at the keeping of the 550th anniversary of the University of Heidelberg. That institution had ceased to be one of free intellectual enquiry. All men of such independent mind as would refuse the yoke of dictated doctrine had been dismissed, while those of objectionable religious faith or objectionable racial descent had been made the victims of a government pogrom. The Minister of Education delivered an address, explaining how the unbiassed search for truth had become obsolete, and how in future German Universities would seek only German truth. A Heidelberg Calendar of the same year illustrated this, setting forth, for example, how a course in "Nordic Supremacy" was binding on all students, and how courses in geology could not be taken except as combined with courses on military science. Representatives of foreign institutions of learning managed to overcome their embarrassment sufficiently to deliver ambiguous, non-committal felicitations. Not one was present from a British University. The deterrent was what Pitt once called unwillingness to join in congratulation upon misfortune and disgrace.

But it is not by Nazis alone, nor in distracted Europe alone, that such Idea of a University as I have above set forth has of late been the object of ridicule. Strange doings, and stranger projects, are reported—as not seldom in previous years, on matters educational as well as on matters racial and journalistic—from the city of Chicago. The President of the University there, according to a report in the *New York Times* of May 28, proposes a scheme of "moral, intellectual and social revolution throughout the world". It will mean, we are informed, "reversal of the whole scale of values by which our society lives." Dominic Sampson's exclamation, "Prodigious", comes at once to one's lips. Perhaps world revolution is an excellent project, but there is a ring about it that sounds rather odd for a University

programme. An ambitious design, too, even for one so confident of his own talent as Dr. R. M. Hutchins! Fifteen years ago, when at the age of thirty he would naturally feel less misgiving about what he could accomplish than he now feels at forty-five, he championed the "Chicago Plan", but this was relatively slight. It was a plan for the University of Chicago only: the new scheme sets one thinking by turns of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* and of Lenin's *Comintern*. Unlike the abatement of purpose in Russia, from the original World Revolution to Socialism for a Single Country, the Chicago Plan seems to have grown with the years.

Press reports intimate that it is being watched with some anxiety in Chicago. The professors there had been working on purposes so much more modest, that the announcement of what was next to be done (made, it seems, in an after-dinner speech by the President) came to them as a shock. One can understand a certain nervousness, at least among the older men, who no doubt felt that "reversal of the whole scale of values by which our society lives" would over-tax their personal capacity. From the quiet extension of knowledge, bit by bit, to this recasting of the fundamentals (with a time-limit, doubtless, for its achievement) would be a tremendous jump. Like the squire in *Robert Elsmere*, they might well plead "You ask too much from an old man's powers of adaptation". Even granting that their President, their academic *Fuehrer*, has the great crusade clearly planned out in his own mind, and that their responsibility would involve mere faithful obedience to academic Orders of the Day, they have no heart for the job, and have presented to the University Trustees a reasoned protest. A "Faculty Bill of Rights" the press calls it. With what mingled amazement and sympathy—amazement that it should be needful, sympathy towards scholars who have had to defend their office against such assault—does one read the words of the memorial:

The Senate respectfully requests the Board of Trustees to assure this body and the Faculty as a whole that the University will not be officially committed to any "purpose" which would tend to subordinate, in reality or in appearance, its essential activities and programmes, and the free choice of principles and methods of research or teaching, to any particular formulation of moral, social, philosophical or scientific values.

There is indescribable pathos in this appeal. A coming historian of American culture will quote its timid deprecatory plea as evidence of the depth to which on this continent higher

education had sunk in 1944. But modest and apologetic as it is, it is quite likely to have been offered in vain. Admirers of Dr. Hutchins predict that he will "win again," in the battle he has so often waged successfully at Chicago against "old-fashioned learning". In such a fight much depends on the place, and the Chicago atmosphere is not propitious to scholars. To the foreigner the name of that city suggests at once race-riots, gangster outrages, and the journalism of Col. McCormick. One is not hopeful for any cause of intellectual liberality and generosity in an environment so tolerant of these.

IV

In these wild times, the conduct of a University is an example of trusteeship, where the trustee must confront by turns the difficulties of external circumstance and the moods of a fretful ward. It is the intellectual values of the future that have to be guarded, those values which enriched the life of mankind during the long centuries before Mussolini or Hitler was heard of, and which we aim to preserve for a time when the miscreants of the present will have passed into their place in contemptuous history, with like miscreants of the past.

The trusteeship is for the average, not for the exceptional, student committed to University guidance. To the undergraduate of remarkable talent, teaching makes little difference, at least after the first stages have been passed. Once he has caught the intellectual vision, he will make his own way, in library or laboratory. He will need no one to explain to him why Homer and Vergil and Dante merit more concentrated attention than the latest *Anthology of Modern American Poets*, why Spinoza's *Ethica* or Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is a more important work than Professor J. B. Watson's *Behaviorism*, why the achievements of Galileo and Kepler were of higher rank than those of Thomas A. Edison—no matter what the picture-paper on the news-stand may tell him of Edison and omit about Kepler or Galileo. The student who is naturally of first-class mind, once he has begun to appreciate Thucydides or Greek tragic drama, Shakespeare or Goethe, can protect himself, intellectually, against the counterfeiters of literature, however these are advertised to him (after the fashion of a milliner's advertisement) as "modern" or "different". But for students of merely average mind the University has a cultural trust which it may fulfil or may betray. It can intervene, in the years when insight is being aroused and

taste is being formed, as at once an incentive and a counter-actant. To do so, it must speak with a measure of resolute authority, careless of popular clamor, at times even indifferent to the caprice of benefactors. Its office is not like that of the lower sort of party politician, with unctuous phrases on the lip, but designs of mere crafty pillage at heart. The true comparison is one very different.

It was no mere coincidence, still less an incongruity, that the Universities began as religious foundations. The dogmatic system set forth in a mediaeval academic charter is far indeed from expressing the faith of many who now serve the institution it describes. But there is still an identity of purpose, disclosed—as such identities often are—by a common antagonism. Contrast, for example, the disinterested love of learning which inspired that greatest of University founders in the Middle Ages, Pope Nicholas V, with the mood of a Universities Conference of the present, at work on some educational stratagem by which the route to a remunerative job may be made attractive (through shortness and ease) to “modern” youth. Consider in turn the statutes constructed by Pope Nicholas five hundred years ago for the University of Glasgow and the account of Universities as now administered on this continent which we owe to the careful search and the merciless veracity of Mr. Abraham Flexner. Observe the yearly presidential pronouncements, so copious in exultation about new buildings and more money, so remote from concern about intellectual progress, illustrating G. K. Chesterton’s jest that practical men now take interest in everything about an institution except what it is for. One effect is to defeat even the ignoble purpose which these contrivers have in mind, losing on one side, while not gaining on another. It is a sombre, but also a humorous, story that tells of effort during the last half-century to conciliate the business world by instituting Faculties of Commerce, with Degrees in Business Administration. The commercial community knows well that for its own work it can prepare youth much better than the University will prepare them, and the result of this experiment has been to lessen respect for the quite different sort of discipline which the University has shown such readiness to compromise. Something like the effect of an appeal to support the local church because “it is the chief industry of the village”, or the advertisement of a “religious” campaign for more endowment, stirring civic patriotism by the reminder that wherever a new church is built there is a rise in the value of real estate!

subsidies, bonuses and guaranteed prices for grain had descended from Ottawa upon the farmers of Saskatchewan, and urging them to show a becoming gratitude for all this. But apparently they regarded this government *largesse* as nothing more than their just due, and were set upon two aims; to terminate the domination of the political machine which the Liberal party had been operating in the province for many years, and to register indirectly a strong protest against what they thought the stubborn adhesion of the Federal Liberal Ministry to an inadequate policy about manpower, distributing unfairly the burden of sacrifice entailed by the war.

There is also considerable evidence that the C.C.F. was helped to its spectacular victory by the widespread admiration of the plain folk of the prairie country for the valorous fortitude and organizing skill of the Russian people, dwellers like themselves on wide plains. It had nurtured the conviction that there must be some virtues in the creed of Socialism, if it could in a few years endow a huge and largely illiterate nation with the real dynamics of a vigorous national life, and that the experiment of a Socialist administration was at least worth a trial. The C.C.F. were also exceedingly fortunate in their new provincial leader, Mr. T. C. Douglas, who combines a strong vein of Scottish shrewdness and caution with an informed knowledge of social and economic problems, notable gifts of platform oratory, and a Lloyd-Georgian flair for the apt and witty phrase, possessed by nobody else in our dull political world except Mr. Mitchell Hepburn. To say that the result has alarmed and appalled the chieftains of both the historic parties is a mild statement. The Progressive-Conservatives can take it more calmly because, if they gained nothing, they lost nothing; but it has dissipated their fondly cherished hope that Mr. Bracken, with his rich fund of agrarian lore, would allure many farmers' votes to his party. Yet they escaped the mournful experience of seeing one of their great party fortresses pass into hostile hands. The Liberal defeat in Saskatchewan, following the party debacle in Ontario last August, and the severe reverses in Federal byelections, is widely interpreted as presaging further doom as soon as a federal election befalls. This ominous prospect has inevitably produced a fierce demand in ministerial circles in Ottawa for the immediate reorganization of the Cabinet, in order to replace tired and discredited Ministers with vigorous young blood. But it is doubtful if any sudden adventures in political surgery can