

# WHAT THE VETERAN STUDENT IS TEACHING THE UNIVERSITIES

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CANADIAN Universities, working with the Department of Veterans' Affairs, have now proceeded sufficiently far with post-service training to permit a fair estimate of their accomplishment and to suggest some lessons that can extend beyond the temporary period of rehabilitation. By comparison with its own efforts after 1918, or with those of Britain and the United States today, Canada can take pride in her achievement. Shocked by the ignorance and incompetence of a great proportion of allegedly trained personnel, as reported by the armed services, all of the allied nations resolved that University training should be given rather to those who had proved their right, than merely to those who had the money. Self-preservation as well as gratitude prompted generous schemes for advanced educational benefits, following war service, for those best fitted to use them. The praise that has been given to the "veteran" in college, and the superiority of the Canadian scheme, may too easily be discounted as excusable sentiment and patriotism; but the observed facts are that the "D.V.A." plan, for so immense an undertaking, is working amazingly well, and that the ex-service students are bringing back to higher education something more nearly approaching the Idea of a University.

For post-war education Canada had several advantages, which she exercised to the full. Her experiments after the first war, tentative and incomplete, were yet sufficient to show her the need for a complete plan, and something of the means to bring it into effect. The old expedient of allowing a year "off" a course because of war service had been condemned alike by the Universities, by the graduates who were supposed to have benefited, and by the professions whose standards they had lowered. Education, not a substitute, was to be provided if we were to avoid, or if necessary effectively to meet, another world conflict. Policies were shaped and plans for rehabilitation were being drafted long before the end of the war could be predicted. Higher education was placed as a first essential, so that Canada might train and keep the best brains from among those who

had proved their willingness to give service to Canada. Before the war was over, or there was a Department of Veterans' Affairs, training had begun in the Universities, some guidance and a certain amount of training were being given in the services, and experiences gained there, notably by Colonel William Line and Group-Captain S.N.F. Chant, were being incorporated into the working plans that were later to crystallize under the management of D.V.A. As a result, although the rate of repatriation and discharge was far ahead of expectations, men and women from the services were selected and registered for University training with the minimum of confusion, and with amazingly successful results, in terms of both teaching and administration. There is every reason for hope that this costly experiment (D.V.A. has by far the heaviest of our Federal budgets) will pay for itself to the satisfaction of any but the most nearsighted of taxpayers.

In the United States, the "G.I. Bill of Rights" conceived in the same pattern as Canadian "P.C. 7633" and its successors, is characteristically generous, but appears, relatively, to lack discrimination in selecting personnel, universities, and courses. In such an enormous organization, paper-work is months behind, and falling back all along the line; and since this includes permission to register and the payment of allowances, G. I. Joe is not always completely satisfied. Great Britain, faced with incomparably greater problems of reconstruction, is doing a magnificent job, but her educational benefits are, understandably, selected and restricted by somewhat narrowly academic standards. Neither Britain nor the States can compare with Canada in placing selected "veterans" in the Colleges: with the peak registration to come in 1947 and the peak of admissions in 1945 and 1946, Canada has managed to register in approved University courses practically one hundred per cent of those selected for training; comparison would be invidious, and perhaps unfair. Where the Canadian veteran has been sometimes left high and dry, along with even more of the normal student population, is in Medicine and Dentistry. Pre-professional students were admitted in numbers ranging from three to five times the maximum for the professional schools. With leftovers reapplying from year to year, this situation—for which in spite of warnings some blame must be shared by D.V.A. and the colleges—will continue for some time. Although change and delay in course is not encouraged, D.V.A. is showing as always a fair and reasonable attitude towards men thus stranded,

while some may hopefully continue in side-paths or blind alleys, the veteran seldom chooses to stay in college unless he is sure of reaching a definite goal. His attitude, while not mercenary, is necessarily realistic; and he cannot afford to ape the seemingly large proportion of pre-war students who went to college to fill in time or to take up space.

Nothing in actual fact could be more remote from the fears expressed that educational benefits would encourage the "lazy old soldiers" to continue in peace to live comfortably at the expense of the taxpayer while enjoying the freedom of privileged clubs and campus festivity. The present writer began with the hope to encourage him to look favourably upon an increased burden of administrative work or on business with another government department, his previous experience being limited to certain dealings, not likely to diminish through D.V.A., with the collectors of internal revenue. From close experience with both the administrators and the beneficiaries of the University G.I. Bill plan, it is a pleasure to testify that it is one of the best short- and long-term investments that any Government, whatever its political colouring, could be asked to make. And with credit to the skilled and devoted work of Department officials, and to the active if not always disinterested support of the universities, the chief praise, it would appear, should go to the service students themselves. They are not trading on their service; they are not enjoying the amenities of college life even to the extent that is good for them; if they are growing rich or if it is not on the government bounty. In terms of the rising cost of living, the allowance of sixty dollars a month, during the war, is just barely sufficient to support a single man, without providing for extras or emergencies. During the vacation he must earn more than sufficient to carry him over until next month. For a married man, the statistics are less definite, but indicate a situation generally more difficult, especially if there are children, or if a childless wife is not gainfully employed. Those who complain at the generosity of the allowances in terms of 1919 or 1929 should compare the costs of living. Examples of hardship, courage and self-sacrifice are many; of easy living there are few: not many student-veterans made much out of the war or live on anything but their D.V.A. grants and their own earnings.

The typical beneficiary is serious, mature, conscientious, and working hard towards a definite goal that has the appeal not only of social and financial security, but of better living

and better knowledge of how to live. He is inclined to be over-modest concerning his fitness for the privileges that have come his way, and he is—or was—more than sufficiently impressed with the erudition of his instructors and the brilliance with which he fears he will be outclassed by boys and girls from the High Schools. He is tolerant of frivolity in others, but has no time or energy for it himself, especially if his grades are low, and if he has to work to support himself and his family. The small percentage of playboys and drifters prompted a question, after the first influx, as to why the scheme was less attractive to those who had learned, in the lush war years, to expect pennies from Heaven. The answer was revealing. "The smart boys aren't going to College. They are taking the good jobs that are going begging, while they last. In four or five years, when we graduate, there will probably be a depression. We shall have to take what jobs we can get; but just now we are getting an education."

How well they are succeeding in getting an education can now be measured, so far as academic records permit, with some degree of accuracy. Early observations in the 1945-46 session were unanimous that veteran students had settled in well, and were working hard. The first mid-term results brought enthusiastic reports from the length and breadth of the continent on their superior quality, industry, and achievement. Some of this can be discounted, and it should be noted that it came from the Universities, which had for five years been generally below even their pre-war level, and not from the G.I. and D.V.A. Administrations, which were concerned with the men whose absence on other business had produced the war-time slump. The actual records—and for better or for worse we must be guided by results of examinations—are striking but not spectacular, and they may too readily lead to wrong conclusions: for example, that war and war-service are in themselves an aid to higher education; and that since the ex-service student is doing so well, any faults in the Universities were attributable to the students and not to the faculties or curricula.

Actually, records show almost unanimously that the ex-service students are leading the field by a definite but not extravagant margin. In the writer's personal observation, they average about five per cent higher marks, about ten per cent fewer failures, and more than ten per cent increase in the higher divisions of the class-lists. Similar advances are reported across Canada, and they are confirmed by two papers read at a recent

conference of University officials concerned with the direction of veterans' studies and liaison with D.V.A. Professor F. L. West presented a thorough and comprehensive statistical analysis of records at Mount Allison University both pre-war and post-war, and his findings were accepted as being representative. He said that while he was surprised that there was so little difference in marks between the two groups of students, "there is no question that the veterans are a conscientious, hard-working group, endeavouring to obtain as much as they can from the opportunity offered; and that no college teacher can ask for, or expect to find, a finer group of young men and women." There was no particular field or subject in which superiority could be noted; the number of failures, and especially of failures in more than one or two classes was noticeably less; the veteran has made a bigger improvement than the civilian over pre-war standards. Professor Chant of British Columbia, both on his own campus and through close association with D.V.A. from the inception of the training plan through all branches of its operation, gives the weight of authority to his confirmation of the general opinion. With standards at least not lower than those before the war, the veteran students are "doing exceedingly well in their examinations." This in spite of crowded class-rooms, a shortage of instructors, deficiencies in text and reference books and laboratory facilities, which suggest in part that Universities before the war were not too strenuously extending themselves to make the best use of what facilities they had.

The Conference discussed the general agreement that the spread in marks was less than was expected from more personal estimates of knowledge and ability, and that the superiority to civilian students was less marked in the second than in the first post-war year. Reasons brought forward in discussion were: that the veteran had begun to lose his enthusiasm, and that having taken the measure of college standards he had lowered his sights—sometimes because he was attempting too much, sometimes because he was satisfied to meet competition with less than his best; that condensed sessions and family responsibility added an unfair strain; that civilian students were being more carefully selected, or were screening themselves, and that those admitted had risen to the occasion and were doing better work than they or their teachers had been in the habit of expecting. To these, the present writer would add: that while examinations are the only objective and reliable test of achievement and progress, our present systems of teaching and testing have

been designed mainly for schoolboys, and have been conditioned in practice by the needs of adolescents; that what the veteran has gained in experience and maturity he has partly lost in the tricks and techniques of "getting by" an examination; and that finally, for the most part, even in subjects apparently foreign to his vocational goal, he is more concerned with learning and understanding than with acquiring credit marks. He is desperately concerned to pass, and to qualify for future training; beyond that, he wants to learn, rather than to show how well he can recall what he has memorized. The writer will not soon forget a class conducted under every conceivable disadvantage, which consisted entirely of long-service veterans from all branches of the three services, all taking English as a compulsory part of some technical or professional course. The marks were in the middle range; but there was not one student who did not contribute something valuable from his own thinking and experience, of a kind that might have been expected only from a selected group of honour students. Of two students who placed in the lowest marking bracket, one formulated for himself almost the exact words around which a distinguished critic built his interpretation of the Book of Job; another wrote a summary in passably heroic verse of Milton's life and thought, which was published at length in the undergraduate paper and used for purposes of study by some members of the regular class.

What then, apart from slightly better marks and grades, distinguishes the ex-service student from his civilian brothers and sisters in the lecture-hall? The most striking quality is decision. It is generally agreed that the average quality of students admitted in 1945 was higher than that for 1946, and a further decline is predicted for entrants in 1947, who have less initiative and decision: the first crop consisted of veterans who knew that they were through with the army, with service pay and allowances, and the chance of drifting easily towards a deferred demobilization, and who had decided that they wanted higher education with everything both spiritual and material that went with it. Later there was less certainty, less drive, a suggestion of going with the crowd for want of something better to do, of putting in time and hoping for something to turn up; in short, the ex-service attitude is coming closer in many respects to that of the typical ex-high school student who is in college because he doesn't know where else to go. But the earlier attitude of decision persists; there is a goal and a plan and a purpose; the veteran has a clear-cut objective

and his eye on the ball. He has learned to manage his time and energy, and to devote them single-mindedly to the things that matter. He has experience and maturity, and has found out not only how to learn and to think, but also how to judge and decide for himself. What he has lost in the ability to absorb he has gained in the power to assimilate. What he has lost in the ability to memorize, he has gained in understanding; what he may lack in dexterity, he makes up for in grasp. When deficient in examination technique, his absence of bluff stands by him: he knows what he knows, and wastes little time in betraying what he doesn't know.

The veteran student's ability is often best revealed where it is least expected: in the so-called "cultural" subjects, which were too readily assumed to be foreign to his abilities and interests, or to the purposes of D.V.A. in training him. It is of course true that the high policy was to prepare the veteran to take his proper place in the Canadian economy, with proper repayment in money and services for the cash investment to be made in him. And it is equally true that the veteran's own choice of course or faculty is almost invariably made with a definite vocational goal. How, for so many of them, of five or ten or more years beyond the normal college age, could it be otherwise? But in pre-professional classes, it is not the veteran who is impatient of literature or history or political science, or who is less gifted in appreciation, or analysis, or the ability to write. Discipline, which seems almost everywhere to have been carried over from the services, is partly responsible for his willing acceptance of a curriculum. The common high-school objection to Latin for Law or Medicine was seldom heard from veterans, who asked not "Why?" but "How do I learn it?"; and many of them put it out of the way, competently, as a necessary chore. But there were some who found Latin stimulating, others who wanted more than the minimum for professional purposes, who carried on in competition with Arts students. In English, in the present writer's experience, the veteran, even when professionally-minded, has shown that the decline in the ability to read and write with intelligence is due less to poor teaching in the High Schools—the constant excuse of the defeated professor—than to our taking in too many of the wrong products of the High Schools, and at the wrong time. The veteran's writing may at times be limited in vocabulary, and faulty in mechanics, and his habit of following the rules for service reports and correspondence may lose in fluency

what it gains in strength: but as compared with the usual vague diffusion of ignorance that envelops the typical lazy sophomore, he is organized, positive, emphatic, and precise. In literature, he is more surprised than his teacher to find that his judgment is good, and that the great writers are great because they have something permanent to say to him. Modest, appreciative, slow sometimes in the uptake and lacking in fluency, such students make their judgments on experience of men rather than of text-books, and since they wish to carry to their vocations the best of all that they meet in the University, they are a joy for even their most "useless" preceptors to teach.

The veteran cannot afford to bask in an Arts course until he can relax in an ivory tower as a one-man mutual admiration society; but while preparing to train himself for professional work—whether as an engineer, a doctor, a barrister, a teacher, or a merchant—he wishes to acquire all that is best and most broadening in his course, so that he may become, in the best sense of the word, useful to the fullest degree as a citizen of the world.

Besides his acquisitions, the veteran must have some driving force that makes him put them to use, and outrun his civilian competitor. From his own report, these would seem to be first a desire, in one word, for independence: freedom from dependence on a meagre income, on the chances of an open market for labour; freedom from the tyranny of bosses; freedom from the trivialities and prescribed substitutes for thinking that mark the unambitious. With this there was, too, the release of a spring of waiting that had been tightly wound during the years of war, of which the curse is as much the unproductive waste of idleness as the destructive waste of combat: there was a rush to make up for lost time; to repair loss and damage to their own lives, with something extra to compensate for irreparable loss to others. Finally, there was, as Professor Chant has pointed out, a very genuine sense of gratitude and responsibility to the generous fairy-godmother who provides the very necessary fees and allowances. Even if there were grounds for the cheap suggestion that students under D.V.A. work harder in order to save their government grants, we may ask whether it would not have been better for the Universities if more rich fathers had cut off supplies for their lazy and incompetent sons who failed to make the grade. It is not that the D.V.A. grants, being in effect scholarships, carry with them the demand for a higher standard than that imposed by the Universities; it is the veterans them-

selves who for the most part feel that they must make a better than passing record to show themselves worthy of privileges granted and benefits received.

After every allowance has been made for generosity, political expediency, and administrative errors in the Universities and in the Government, all observers are agreed that the higher education of Veterans has been successful beyond the most sanguine expectations either of its first sponsors, or of its most sympathetic friends. It was a wise if somewhat costly provision to remove any ground of complaint from the Universities, whose perpetual cry is an operating deficit, by paying in the first year a bonus, over and above his fees, of \$150.00 for every veteran student enrolled with benefits, and in the second year to meet any proved deficit, up to that amount, incurred on behalf of each veteran in good standing. To continue beyond the number of months in the service a student must stand high in his classes: and graduate and post-graduate work, regardless of service, is permitted only to those whose advanced education is proved to be in the public interest. Most difficult of all to obtain is advanced education outside of the Dominion. Behind the whole plan is a desire to train and save Canada's best brains for the service of Canada, and it is not intended to allow a repetition of New Zealand's mistake after the first war, when a selected group of University men from the expeditionary forces were trained in the United Kingdom under contract to return to their native land, and then turned loose upon the world because they graduated in a depression and were not immediately needed in New Zealand. A large proportion, the present writer being one, have not yet been repatriated.

To make a sudden post-war spurt, and then return to the old days of lethargy and special privilege, will lead nowhere for either the Universities or the Dominion. Pressure has shown the Universities what they can do; the principle of government assistance has been extended; the vast reservoir of untouched "college material" has been indicated and partly tapped. Ironically, the Universities are raising their standards to the level set by a government department, and self-appointed students are exerting themselves to match ex-soldiers, sailors and airmen. It is no longer so necessary to consider a budget before deciding whether to admit a student, and for some students, almost too late, has come the opportunity to attend a University on grounds of scholastic aptitude rather than the limits of their fathers' pocket-books. True, there have always been good students

from financially poor homes, and rich homes will always help to supply the Universities, not always with their poorest students. But Canada has not offered opportunities to the needy lad of parts that have been open in Australia and New Zealand, where scholarships and state aid are generous and the average income high, or in Scotland with its tradition of the frugal student life, or the United States with free state education and organized facilities for student self-help. Even the aristocratic traditions of England have been broken to allow more opportunities for a bright lad from a country school, eager to attend a provincial university, than he would enjoy in a corresponding situation in many parts of Canada. We have catered to the rich; to the boy from the University town; to the socially inclined who have found no definite or serious goal. And we have been too ready to say that these are in the majority of those alleged to be "prepared" for a University.

Even before the war, it had been noted with growing concern that the Universities were getting only a small proportion of the cream, and far too much of the skim-milk from the High Schools. A large number of superior students, for example, took short Normal College courses for reasons of economy, while others, less able, industrious and ambitious, were idling in the colleges, and yet going on to more remunerative and responsible positions. The same thing was revealed in business and during the war in the specialist divisions of the service, for example in the extremely rigorous selection of Air Crew by the R.C.A.F. Those familiar with both high-school and University enrolments were becoming increasingly alarmed. Not ten per cent of the students leaving High School go on to the University; nor should they. But of the small percentage that does go on, the great majority consists of those less fit. Simple observation placed the number wasted for want of funds, or proper direction, at well over half; but in Alberta—which should be fairly representative of most outside the metropolitan areas—Professor A. J. Cook, after a careful and exhaustive survey, placed the wastage at over 80%. The harm that is done both to the Universities and to the intellectual future of Canada can not be exaggerated. Nor can we dodge the plain fact that too little attention has been paid to the difference between the student of University calibre and the play-boys and girls who are merely following the crowd in their particular social and economic stratum. A student with diplomas that meet the official requirements of the University Calendar

(the American term "Catalogue" is often more appropriate), and with cash to meet the schedule of fees, is enrolled and then herded into run-ways to march in lock-step at the pace of the slowest. Courses are determined in the Registrar's Office, on administrative and statistical grounds, and the superior student, if he is able to come to college at all, is seldom distinguished from one of the herd: the procedure is simply one of entering credits, making up deficiencies, working off "conditions," and "getting by" in compulsory classes. When this is done there may still be room for training adjusted to the needs and the abilities of the individual. This is one respect, too large for discussion here, in which D.V.A. has given a lead to the colleges. The applicants for University training were well selected and well guided before they came to the University, and provision has been made for giving them advice and assistance in matters not only academic, but financial and personal. This has not produced paternalism, and it has shown what can be done to improve the training of all students under normal conditions.

Obviously, however, the great contribution of D.V.A., and the great need for all worthy students in Canada, is what is in effect a system of bursaries or scholarships. The rehabilitation plan is necessarily limited and self-terminating; by its nature it is more generous than could be expected of a permanent plan for national education; but it has shown that the economics and the mechanics of providing a higher education for every qualified boy and girl in Canada are within the bounds of practical politics. With the rising cost of living, more and more of the middle-class will be excluded from the University by a diminishing balance in the family budget. Soon again the Universities will be clamouring for students; and the only solution if higher education is to survive is to ensure, at the public expense, that they are provided with the best. Fortunately plans are already under way, before it is too late, to make a study of the achievements and the mistakes of veterans' education in Canada, Great Britain, and the United States. The investigation will be directed by an Advisory Committee which has been working throughout in close touch both with the Conference of Canadian Universities and with D.V.A.; and its past success and its continued interest are one of our most hopeful signs for the future.

Finally, something should be said of the reasons for the outstanding qualities of the ex-service student. Sentimentalists at first had too much to say about readjustment, about what the veteran had lost by reason of his war service. Then when

veteran excelled, a more rugged group began to praise the hardships of war, the harsh realities that had brought these men to face with fundamentals, and so on. The simple elementary truth is that war is not a good thing even for those who are lucky enough to come through in one piece; and that experience is a good thing that can be obtained in better ways than by killing and taking the chance of being killed. Occasionally before the war it could be noted that a student who had been compelled to interrupt his course for personal reasons, or even by reason of failure, would return after a year or two in the outside world and show an entirely different attitude to his studies, with amazingly improved results. Some of the best students now under D.V.A. were at best indifferent in pre-war classes, and not all of them were engaged in active warfare. But they had learned to appreciate both the freedom and the responsibility offered by the University; more important, they had been so placed that they had to decide for themselves whether or not they wished to study; and they knew now that their continuance would depend upon their own efforts.

There is no good reason why the same general conditions could not be made to apply, with advantage, to University entrance in normal times. High School leaving has long ceased to be college entrance; our students, we say, are immature, undecided, frivolous, unaware of their privileges. If the age of matriculation were raised, from sixteen to say eighteen or nineteen; if a general test of ability were substituted for provincial certificates, at least for those over twenty or lacking formal secondary training; if tuition and allowances were provided for those—regardless of family means—who reached the highest standards; if fees as well as standards were increased for those to whom the Universities are merely a pleasant place of recreation then the lesson of the veteran student will have taken effect, and rehabilitation will have become, as its sponsors intended, not a limited and temporary expedient but a means of restoring the Universities to their rightful place in shaping the future of the nation.