

WAR AND LIBERAL EDUCATION

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THAT the war is raising several important and difficult problems in the field of higher education, must be recognized by everyone concerned for the future of education and the future of the universities in Canada. There is the problem of decreased attendance at the universities during the war years; the problem of accelerating the university course in the cases of immediately essential technical training and of still maintaining high quality in that training; there is the problem of combining military training in the case of men—and for women, other types of war work—with the regular university course. Other problems arise when we look forward to the years of reconstruction which must follow the end of the war. Will those whose higher education has been interrupted be able to continue it afterwards? Will the war create a new order, apathetic if not actively hostile to traditional means and methods of education? Will there be a post-war decrease in the amount of the public funds available for the universities? All these problems must be of immediate concern now, and require active, constructive thinking for their attempted solution. If our statesmen and political thinkers are demanding—as they are demanding, especially in Britain and the United States—that we give thought to post-war reconstruction in the political and international scheme of things and to the reorganization of democracy, surely it is of paramount importance to consider the future of the liberal education of the English-speaking world, the education which is the backbone of the democratic way of life.

The problem to which I wish to draw attention briefly here is one which has been in evidence for a number of years, and with which educators, especially in the United States, have been much concerned. It is the problem of the rivalry between the "social sciences" and the "humanities" on the one hand and natural or physical sciences on the other. In Canada the difficulty has not, until very lately, assumed large proportions, chiefly because our educational connections have been fairly closely in harmony with English ideas, which kept the values of the liberal arts education well in the front. But before the war began, and especially during the last two war years, science has been competing very strongly

with the liberal arts, and large numbers of students have been gravitating towards scientific and practical courses, until now there seems to be definite indication that "arts" subjects are going to have to take second place in the university. The reasons for this are, of course, the supposed greater practical value of a scientific education, the greater income attached to positions which men trained in science can obtain, the increased demand for men so trained in the rapidly expanding war industries, and the greater practical value to a casual observer of such occupations in winning the war. We must add to this also, I imagine, the desire of some students to get into an "essential industry" which will free them from the demands for military service.

"Fighting on the home front" and patriotic feeling about the part of industry in war—to say nothing of the higher salaries paid—cast a glamorous spell over the first and second year university student, a spell which the social sciences and the humanities cannot by any means obtain; and however interested a student may seem to be in the so-called "cultural values," yet choosing a career in Canada generally resolves itself into the question "What income am I likely to get, and how soon?"

This was a natural development in the first two decades or more of the twentieth century when, despite the decrease in the western boom, the increasing applications of science to industry and business were supplying a spur to growth and optimism more widespread than ever before in Canadian history. Canada was more than ever the land of opportunity. In other words, Canada was, and still is, a young country, and its industries run along practical, financial lines; there is still a wide field for the development of natural and industrial resources; incidentally, these practical aims did actually encourage rational thinking and genuine wider ideas and interests when they were concerned with practical occupations. What has been lacking has been educational perspective:—development has been so rapid that there has not been sufficient leisure to gain perspective even of the significance of the practical sciences and scientific research. The narrow aims of social display, financial wealth and immediate pleasures—all these now in greater degree than ever before—have prevented rational thinking on a wide perspective. What is needed, especially at present, is the development of "inclusive aims", in fact a new idealism in education.

It had for some years been recognized in the United States that the great bulk of American scholarship, with such big financial resources behind it, was in narrowly restricted fields or research

projects, and that such education showed little perspective. The barriers between one department of study and another had risen so high, and specialization had crept into the lower and earlier years of the college education to such an extent, that the old liberal education with its aims of broad scholarship or "culture"—a perfectly good word, unfortunately become odious in the ears of the professional educator—and the building of citizenship and character had practically disappeared. Many of the larger universities were forced to abandon the older inclusive aims, and instead assumed the secondary *rôle* of teaching as much professional and departmental knowledge as possible; they had to admit that they were no longer giving a liberal education but a professional training; while the state-aided colleges were forced by the public demand and the compulsion of those who controlled the sources of the colleges' funds to emphasize professional training, training for some particular practical skill. The next step was the introduction into the university curriculum of purely technical courses hitherto belonging to technical schools, such courses as stenography, home economics, librarianship, salesmanship. Such courses attained a new respectability, and the result was the spectacle of colleges giving a variety of strange and exotic degrees and diplomas in technical subjects in which a year's practical experience would have taught as much as a four-year university course. This is surely not the function of a university, at least according to the standards which have dignified the university tradition for centuries.

With interdepartmental barriers so high and professionalism rampant, many excellent efforts have been made in recent years in the United States to break down these barriers, and to try to get back to the older, obscured ideal of liberal education by the introduction of synthetic studies which crossed the bounds of several departments and which tried to synthesize the various isolated studies into a unified education in the liberal tradition. This was done by the introduction of "survey courses" covering a wide field in such subjects as contemporary civilization, the mediaeval or ancient world, and by a reclassification of studies into "the humanities," "the social sciences," "the physical sciences," "the biological sciences." At the same time, specialization has been advanced to the later years of the undergraduate course, or even restricted to the graduate school. This means that, as the founders of our universities intended, nobody should be able to obtain a university degree without a liberal, well-rounded education as well as a training for a profession.

To appreciate the ideals of a liberal education, one need not be one of the group whom President Angell of Yale describes as those "who indulge in harsh language regarding whatever or whoever suggests vocationalism, and especially who shrug the academic shoulder and lift the academic nostril at any mention of the school of technology or the state university or the state college of agriculture and mechanic arts." Nor need an institution regard itself as set to keep alive in a philistine world the torch of pure learning. But everyone who appreciates the significance of liberal education agrees that its aim is higher than mere professional training. If an objector should reply that Newman's *Idea of a University* is out of date for Canada, or that the educational ideals of Lord Tweedsmuir's university addresses savor too much of England and Oxford, there is a twentieth century American authority, Dr. Flexner, for a number of years in charge of the Rockefeller educational funds, who says that the content of a university course must be based upon the conception of the "main concerns" of scholars and scientists. These major concerns are three in number: "the conservation of knowledge and ideas; the search for truth; the training of students who will practise and 'carry on'".

To explain what knowledge, ideas and truth he means, he points out that the university and college because of changing social conditions should concern themselves, among other things, with important contemporary problems and broad humanitarian aims:

If some sort of cultural equilibrium is to be attained, the humanistic disciplines, in which philosophy is included, necessarily become of greater rather than less importance; and by humanistic discipline I refer not only to the humanities as such, but to the human values inherent in a deep knowledge of science itself We can become so infatuated with progress in knowledge and control—both of which I have unstintedly emphasized—that we lose our perspective, lose our historic sense, lose a philosophic outlook, lose sight of relative cultural values. Something like this has happened to many, perhaps to most, of the enthusiastic, clear-headed, forward-looking, perhaps too exclusively forward-looking and highly specialized young votaries of science Philosophers and critics, therefore, gain in importance as science makes life more complex.

There are also, says Dr. Flexner, other things which the university should not teach:

A university seeking to be modern, seeking to evolve some theory, seeking to solve problems, may thus readily find itself

complicating its task and dissipating energy and funds by doing a lot of inconsequential things.

Finally, he defines the collegiate function of the university:

Education . . . should concern itself primarily during adolescence and early manhood and womanhood with the liberation, organization and direction of power and intelligence, the development of taste with culture.

To these more inclusive aims of education there is, from the point of view of Canadian universities, the objection that our universities are all state-supported, that they must be most immediately concerned with the requirements of their students, and that few Canadian students have the leisure or the money for idealism in their education. Many of them work their way through their college course either partly or completely, and must find a remunerative career as soon as possible.

Again, comparatively few students come from homes where there has been either leisure or sufficient income to encourage cultural interests and a wider attitude towards the objects and aims of education. If the parents have had leisure and sufficient income, they have generally had to work hard for it in their own youth, and, whether they have college degrees themselves or not, they have generally had no impression of the real purpose and value of a university education beyond the fact that it guarantees or used to guarantee a vague *aura* of respectability, better business connections, and perhaps a higher income than the non-graduate could expect. In fact, this problem goes back finally, as most of the problems in the university go back, to the home and the background there.

It does not require a high degree of idealism to protest against the intellectual blight which comes upon many graduates soon after graduation; nor does it require far-reaching vision to see that this tendency is going to increase with the increasing trend towards the practical sciences. The inevitable result in the post-war years will be a shortage of civic and constructive leadership, a shortage apparent before the war, but now evident in a much greater degree because of the lack of inclusive aims in education. If such a shortage, with the dire consequences which must attend it, is to be avoided, colleges and educators must accept the function of encouraging interest in inclusive aims for education, aims concerned with the various phases of living, private, community, national; and only incidentally in the study of departmental knowledge or vocational courses.

It is true that some educators are emphasizing study in the liberal tradition; but they have not encouraged wider aims to assure that these studies and interests are continually beneficial to the individual and to the community. The university should not only provide and encourage a thorough liberal education, but should endeavour to propagate and instil into its students at least part of the background for living and some of the wider ideas and aims which they did not obtain in their home life. It is the problems in the various phases of *living* which must be solved: not primarily technical problems, but human problems; only then can the greatest and most balanced growth and justice be attained. Only then, too, will student and teacher alike tend to be soundly intelligent in all aspects of living.

To sum up, then, only if educators and universities are active in encouraging now an interest in the humanities—the humanitarian studies and the social sciences—especially in the case of students who have ability and the advantages of an educated and more leisurely home background, only then can the post-graduation intellectual blight be impeded and constructive, far-seeing leadership, more necessary now than ever before, be obtained.