

# CURRENT MAGAZINES

## UNIVERSITIES AND THE WAR EFFORT

**Educational Aims**—Prof. Ernest Barker, in the *Fortnightly*.

**Man-power and the Curriculum**—Mr. W. C. Coffey, in *School and Society*.

**Total War and the Organs of Education**—Mr. A. G. Grace, in *Education*.

**Priorities in Education**—Mr. George Boss, in the *Atlantic*.

IT is often said that this war is being fought to preserve the elementary rights of mankind. A special instance may be seen in the peril to the institution called "University", where certain intellectual pursuits, long promoted as a human birth-right, have been laid under Nazi ban. German University activities have not indeed been stopped: Hitler has devised a method at once more subtle and more effective than that of the veto. Institutions of learning, like institutions of piety, are allowed to continue in the *Reich*, but only on condition that they betray the cause they profess to serve. One thinks of the *Reichs-bischof*, manipulating the German Church in obedience to the Fuehrer; of the distinction between "Christians" and "German Christians"—a distinction far from being merely verbal; of Christmas now kept in Germany only as a winter solstice and in honor of the northern war-gods; of the German New Testament reinterpreted to exalt the sanctities of "blood and soil", to deny human brotherhood, and to restimulate the passion for revenge. On similar terms of systematic prostitution the University may retain its ancient form, seeking and disseminating not "truth" but "German truth", admitting students or excluding them no longer on cultural but on racial grounds, prescribing books or burning them not for their content but for their authorship, producing to official order and investing with the authority of science whatever doctrines will support the Fuehrer's purpose. One remembers the spectacle eight years ago at Heidelberg, whose 550th anniversary was made the occasion for an obscene show unique in modern times. While the Heidelberg scholars sat in affectation of approval, a representative of the Government delivered a speech, setting forth how in future Universities in the *Reich* must suppress the intellectual freedom they had previously promoted. No blame is cast on German professors who were present under Gestapo constraint, and silent under fear of a concentration camp. But it was wanton profanity for certain foreign Universities to have a representative there. Not many, yet an ignoble few, figure in the record, for such gratuitous humiliation in pursuit of the folly known as "appeasement".

It was reasonable to expect that Universities, whose rights had been so outraged by dictatorship, would strain every nerve for the democratic war effort. The manner in which they have done so, and may do so with still greater effectiveness, has been the topic of much discussion in the magazines of the last three months. A rapid survey of this may bring out points suggestive for the future.

## I

From the beginning of the war it was the policy of the British Government not only to exempt but to exclude from enlistment undergraduates at College below the age of twenty. The ground for this discrimination was stated many times in parliament, and was reiterated in instructions to recruiting boards. It was urged that better officers will be found among those whose school course has been followed by a course at the University, because the specific difference between University and school—the passage from direction to initiative—stimulates the sort of qualities that a young officer needs. The War Office took care to explain that the improvement desired was not only, or chiefly, in more knowledge of the sciences which underlie the military art. Not to get better mathematicians and physicists for field engineering, or better chemists for the handling of explosives, should those eager young volunteers be sent back to complete their Arts course. Technicians would be otherwise, and more effectively, obtained. The design, as emphasized in numerous official memoranda, was to secure for the commissioned ranks young men whose minds had been opened by a sound general education, and with this in view high importance was attached to literature, to history, to philosophy, to economic and social sciences.

In this respect the policy of the Canadian Government implied a like principle, but it was not so drastic. At no time since the war began was enlistment by University students under twenty years old prohibited in Canada. But it was intimated that such undergraduates, if called up under the Draft, could obtain a certificate to exempt them from military training, except the training given in their Colleges without interruption of their academic course. Every University President in Canada recalls the warnings from Ottawa that the machinery of higher education must be maintained, and that no countenance be given to a specious plea for limiting this to technical courses in "subjects directly related to the war effort". During at least the first three years of the war, it was impress-

ed upon those responsible for the educational programme of boys leaving school and of young men already in the Arts courses of the University that general, rather than technical, education was valued by the British War Office and by the Canadian Department of National Defence. General McNaughton definitely urged that Arts students should remain at the University until graduation.

It will scarcely be alleged, by anyone who has taken the trouble to examine recruiting figures, or to appraise the effect of the war upon the personnel of academic staffs, that this section of the Canadian people has been slow to respond to the national challenge. Over a very wide area the spirit of youth was too keen for active service to be restrained even by General McNaughton. Laboratories were stripped of their instructors, and their apparatus was turned to military use. But should the academic response develop into such wholesale enlistment as would compel the purely Arts Colleges to close their doors, and would restrict the rest to Departments of Medicine and Engineering? Press articles and platform speeches sometimes appear to assume that it should. At least, however, the blame—if blame there fairly is—for acting on a different assumption does not rest on University authorities. They have fulfilled with the utmost fidelity the directions that came to them from the Government.

We are naturally much influenced in such matters by the British pattern, because the British Universities lie so much nearer to the centre of the war effort; also because their academic experience has been so long and so rich. But there has been a strange delusion in Canadian University circles as to what the British policy has been. Nearly a year ago a memorandum was circulated all over Canada, setting forth—with profession of exact knowledge collected on the spot—what proved to be a complete misunderstanding of the purpose in Universities of the Old Country. It reported that instruction in subjects other than those of immediate technical use for the war effort had there almost ceased, and that it would cease altogether from 1st. June, 1942. Not even for women students contemplating the profession of teacher (according to the memorandum) was a discipline in "the liberal arts" to be provided! It was very startling news: one felt that the emergency which such desperate measures were being adopted to meet must be desperate indeed. But as a picture of the scene in academic Britain of last summer its information was all wrong. I do not presume to guess where, or

how, or with whom the mistake originated. But we now know that at the very time when this memorandum was alarming us about imminent State closing of the British Faculties of Arts, the British Government was still peremptory in its direction to recruiting boards that enlistment be refused to University students under twenty, and that such over-zealous volunteers be bidden to show their patriotism by completing their studies in the Faculty of Arts.

It was an object-lesson on the risks of panic and rumor-mongering. There is notoriously everywhere a section, more vociferous than informed, that detests the traditional academic discipline in "the humanities", and will never miss a chance to clamor (under the cloak of patriotism) for change of the University into a Technical Institute. The lower kind of newspaper will be quick to republish at such a time its vulgarisms about "compulsory Latin". There were those too who, by no means willingly but sorrowfully, felt that this time a sacrifice of higher learning must accompany other sacrifices, and who were ready to follow in Canada a pattern which they were sure that British Universities would not have set except under the strain of extreme need. If only thus the indispensable increase of man-power could be obtained, there was indeed no room for choice. Last December it seemed to the British authorities that further academic sacrifice was needed, and there was yet a further "combing" of the Universities. Our Canadian government has adopted no such view of an emergency here, and fortunately no extreme action had been here taken by the Universities until there was time to discover that the panic which at first suggested it was groundless. Among the academic guides of this country there are those whose earnestness about liberal education is reinforced by a wholesome doubt of the mixed motives behind a professedly patriotic clamor for change.

The academic conservatism of French Canada this time interposed a barrier that the eager philistine could not climb, and the French Canadian lead was quickly followed. At an emergency meeting of the Universities Conference called in mid-winter, it turned out that there was no chance even for a compromise proposal to reduce the Arts course to two years—a change which in truth would have meant elimination of the specific benefits of University as contrasted with High School teaching. Instead, a quite innocuous resolution was adopted, enjoining Universities to exclude from Arts courses students whose work had shown them unfit to be there. The public,

reading of this in the press, must have wondered why a world war was needed to bring home to academic authorities so obvious a duty.

But at least that Universities Conference served to clear the air.

## II

It is not the war alone that has threatened, and that already—in country after country—has lowered, the level of liberal education. Nor is it in the “authoritarian” countries only that the trustees of intellectual culture have made ignoble compromise with power.

Some time ago the principal of a large and well endowed private school for girls in a New England State asked me “Why is it that I have such difficulty in procuring a competent mathematical teacher?” It appeared that applicants for the position sent in credentials otherwise impressive, giving assurance of disciplinary ability, but with the serious defect that they included no evidence of knowledge of mathematics. Another example I lately met was that of a young American teacher fully qualified (by course at the appropriate Normal School) to conduct classes in French—except that her French had still to be acquired: it was only in the *method* of language teaching that the candidate had the requisite credential! Cases such as these, if one had met them a quarter-century ago in a work of fiction, would have been dismissed as monstrous caricature—like the story of the article on Chinese metaphysics produced by combining two encyclopaedia articles, one on metaphysics, the other on the Chinese. But they are not from fiction: they are taken straight from life.

What is the cause of this intellectual decline, so well known to University teachers, that has shown itself and increasingly shows itself in avoidance of the great intellectual disciplines of the past—higher mathematics, composition in the ancient classical languages, study of the literatures (as distinct from the media for commercial exchange) of France and Italy and Germany? Go where you will, the same decline is encountered—in law schools where jurisprudence is tabu, in medical schools whose students complain without ceasing about their burden of prerequisites in physics and chemistry, in divinity colleges where Hebrew has disappeared and Greek is fast disappearing from the curriculum. What is taking the place of these long tried and proved fundamentals of good learning? What is the

earlier preparation, or the present environment, of the undergraduate which produces such fretful demand for fewer "imperatives" and for wider variety in what the undergraduate of the past called with obvious contempt "soft options"? If any reader here objects that the change is a rise rather than a fall, that it is an advantage to the present generation to have escaped "dead languages" and higher mathematics, that time is better spent on "social studies" and "household science" and "handicrafts" than on Homer and Thucydides, Vergil and Tacitus, Molière and Goethe, conic sections and the differential calculus, I have not here either the space or the desire to argue such an objection. One argument at a time! I am here addressing myself to those, not insignificant in number or in competence, who believe in the enormous value of the disciplines which have been so largely lost, and who ask "Is it the war that is making such havoc of higher education?"

We must go back, I think, for answer to a point earlier than this last outbreak in Europe. Surely a key to the puzzle lies in the feverish condition of the period between the two world wars, a fever that spread everywhere. Like that interval during which the ancient Greeks, who had successfully resisted Persia, were developing causes of quarrel for the coming conflict among themselves! The future historian of 1919-1939 A.D. may find many a suggestion from those who have written so discerningly of B.C. 480-430. He will have to describe a time of wild experimentation with social novelties, of readiness for almost anything except faithful reestablishment of habits to which experience had lent convincing sanction and which war should have but temporarily disturbed. The story will include phenomena of the sort always incredible until they have happened: it will tell not only how European dictatorship arose, but also—what is far stranger—how in countries which had long known free institutions this development found writers not ashamed to welcome it, to argue that "after all" democracy had been a great mistake, and that in Britain, in France, in America "we need a Mussolini, we need a Hitler." It will be pointed out that this was by no means a mere expedient of rhetorical exaggeration; so seriously was it intended, that in the very crises of decision—at the time of Japan's raid upon Manchuria, of Italy's raid upon Ethiopia, of Hitler's raid upon Czechoslovakia—the cause of Japan, of Italy, of Germany was supported in leading British and French and American newspapers, with trumped-up complaints against Chinese, Ethiopians and Czechs which one now blushes to recall.

The historian of that shameful period will exhibit also the amazing rebirth of astrology—which won such vogue that our newspapers became strewn with the magazines it is now so humiliating to observe. He will record such mania as created the free verse and pseudo-art of that time, abortions at which all with genuine artistic or poetic taste were in doubt whether to laugh or to cry, but which seemed to not a few an advance of genius beyond the conventional past. British Israel, too, will figure conspicuously, as that strange scene of 1919-1939 is drawn, and Alberta's projects of Social Credit, and Mahatma Gandhi's strategic fasts. The list already begins to remind one of the items included as *fin-de-siècle* phenomena in Max Nordau's book *Degeneration*. It will certainly be still incomplete if it lacks notice of the tragic mess which very self-conscious innovators of the same period made of our University inheritance.

No doubt their intention was, originally, good. Even the "Intelligence Tests", which are now such a laughing-stock, began in a wholesome effort to apply psychology to problems of teaching, and this is by no means the first case of outlandish initial claims for a new idea which, when adequately pruned by criticism, will be found to have a kernel of modest but important truth. Another, whose extravagances threatened to put its merits completely out of sight, was Psycho-Analysis. The determination to make science somehow yield rules, or at least advice, valuable for human conduct started enquiries which might or might not lead somewhere to a goal that was worth the search, and if "social studies" have now so invaded the student's attention as to make him in his haste neglect to acquire the very knowledge indispensable to those studies themselves, one can understand how enthusiasm outran judgment. Is it not pathetic to find a young economist discovering, after long vain effort with his economic text-book, that his handicap is his ignorance of the needful mathematics? Or a political scientist realizing by slow degrees that the literature, the poetry, the social history of the countries with which he is concerned are full of suggestion on the puzzling spectacle of treaties which he thinks should have succeeded but which proved there a failure? No doubt in days long gone by our University courses were too rigid and too narrow. The reformers of half a century ago, with their plea for bringing these courses into more intimate contact with concrete problems of life, especially of the life of the State, had formidable obstacles of conservatism to surmount. But they would have been amazed, and I think shocked, if they could have

foreseen that their enterprise would be so intemperately advanced as to bring the imprimatur of University distinction within reach of those with no genuine insight into either literature or science. Perhaps, indeed, the damage is done at an earlier stage. It is by no means uncommon now to find in our University lecture rooms the student about whom his instructor is in despair, because the sort of school preparation it was reasonable to assume had never been experienced. What is the use of lecturing on "forms of prose style" to a student whose grammar is so uncertain, or on analytical geometry to one who has never acquired any geometry except by committing demonstrations to memory, or on French and German literature to one who can construe the simplest French or German sentence only with such effort and in such doubt? "We can't spend time on these old fundamental things", a teacher said to me mournfully: "they have been pushed out by other things". I asked, by what. For answer I got an amazing list—including First Aid, Morse Code, Internal Combustion Engines, and more items than I can recall under the general heading "Social Studies". This, I was informed, for boys and even for girls fifteen years old!

Is such immolation of the young really requisite? Does it serve any real purpose, beyond "looking patriotic" and "saving face" under pressure of a public opinion more zealous than enlightened in time of war?

### III

There are numerous conventional phrases in which leaders and patrons of University life are wont to express themselves: phrases about the fundamental value of "cultural" studies, about the danger of allowing "the humanities" to be submerged by a tide of practical science, or about the gulf that separates a "liberal" from a merely "technical" education. Such, I fear, are too often but routine formulæ for the pageant at a conferring of Arts degrees, repeated—as George Eliot used to say—with the perfunctory precision of ceremonies to keep up a charter. They must be so when, as Mr. Flexner has so painfully shown, they are combined with a readiness to ignore in action all that these lofty aspirations would enjoin. The real value we set upon anything appears in the strength of our refusal to part with it for something else. Read the calendars of numerous degree-granting institutions on this continent, to discover the facility with which commercial influence or popular clamor can secure profanation of the ideals to which lip-homage continues to be



paid. One is driven to suppose that the academic administrators whom Mr. Flexner portrays make this adjustment among themselves by the method of the ecclesiastic in a famous tale by Mr. H. G. Wells. Confronted by a colleague with a text of Scripture which seemed against his policy, the bishop replied that quoting Scripture had its place, but not there. "Tricks of that sort," he said, "won't do, Scrope—among professionals"<sup>1</sup> There may be a similar modernist method of escape from the academic ideal still acknowledged, at least before "the laity", in words.

A modernist indeed in such tactics is Benito Mussolini. What could sound better than his historic speech at the University of Padua nearly twenty years ago? With a humility which was then thought typical of the Duce's true greatness, he began by explaining how he felt that the honor of his visit was that conferred by the University upon him, not by him on the University, and how although his constant duties rendered him a somewhat "unemotional" man, he was on that occasion "deeply touched." Then we had this passage, by which—when we now read it again in the volume *Mussolini as Revealed in His Political Speeches*—emotion may well rise in us all:

If I look back for a moment to the rolling by of centuries, I recognize in this University a great fountain at which thousands of men of all countries, of all generations, of all races, have quenched their thirst . . .

The Government I have the honor to represent prizes individual, spiritual and voluntary qualities, holds in high esteem the Universities, because they represent so many glorious strong points in the life of the people. It understands the enormous historic importance of Universities, has a respect for their noble traditions, and wishes to raise them to the heights of modern exigencies. All this cannot be done at once, as everything cannot be accomplished in six months. All that we are doing at present is to clear the ground from debris which the rotten political caste has left us as a sad inheritance . . .

My young friends, there can never be for us as individuals the certainty of the morrow, but there is the supreme and magnificent certainty of the morrow for us as a nation and as a people.

Deeply touching, is it not?

Those words were spoken at the University of Padua on 3rd June, 1923. Just three months later, the speaker who had raised the emotions of his young audience to such ideal heights

1. *The Soul of a Bishop*, pp. 153-4.

sent the Italian fleet to bombard Corfu, without declaration of war, blowing to pieces the innocent Greek population, including many Greek school-children, on the streets. And for what? Because three Italians had been assassinated on the frontier of Albania, most probably by Greeks. In vain the Government at Athens invoked the League of Nations, in terms of that Covenant by which Italy had bound herself. In vain appeal was made for an impartial tribunal to investigate the assassination of the three Italians and to fix guilt. Here was the first of Mussolini's great public perjuries, the first link in that lengthening chain whose latest was the one which bound him to Hitler in the spring of 1940 for the attack on France called by Mr. Churchill the act of a jackal! How did it strike his "young friends" of the University of Padua, whom he had reassured in flawless eloquence three months before about his reverential attitude to the "individual, spiritual and voluntary qualities" which the Universities preserve in sacred trust?

There is no danger that in any of the United Nations the conventionalities of academic speech will have any such sequel as this. But mere conventionalities always have their danger, and as Maurice Paleologue used to warn us, one can burn incense as disastrously before a proletariat as before a king. To mean what we say and to say what we mean is a practice which those who direct a University should not merely enjoin but illustrate. In Canada we have still far to go in decline from this before we find a place in Mr. Flexner's academic Inferno. But the warning of Burke is ever memorable—that when one's neighbor's house is on fire, it cannot be amiss to pour a little water on one's own.

H. L. S.