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DEMobilIZATION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

UP to the time of writing, no pronouncement has been made by the Government in regard to the release from the Armed Forces of university teachers, or of students to resume their interrupted studies. The national importance of dealing with this matter without delay was discussed at some length in an article in *Nature* of December 23, in which we emphasized the necessity of arriving at a satisfactory solution of the problem of the demobilization of students, and one which would ensure that the Government would not have to face misguided criticism of giving favoured treatment to a particular class of men.

The resumption by the universities of a large part of their normal activities in October 1945—if the military situation permits—is a matter of vital public interest; for there is abundant evidence of the difficulties which are likely to arise from the continued interruption of the supply of university graduates, especially in the faculties of arts and economics. The number of trained men likely to be available from these faculties, in the next few years, for the public services, for commerce, industry and for the teaching and other professions, has been reduced almost to the vanishing point. The question of the release of university teachers from temporary war-time posts in the Civil Service is already being dealt with by means of the committee appointed under the chairmanship of Lord Kennett to consider and decide applications from universities and colleges for the release of such of their staff from Government employment as they consider to be more urgently needed at the present time in their academic posts. It is to be hoped that arrangements for according a high degree of priority of release—in suitable cases—to university teachers now serving with the Forces will soon be made, for the re-staffing of the universities must obviously precede the acceptance by them of additions to the student body.

It seems to be generally agreed that in releasing students from military service, the national interest would be best served by giving the first opportunity of completing their university education to students of the highest intellectual ability. The test of intellectual ability by success in an examination is admittedly not infallible; but it is no doubt generally the case that the best and most promising men are to be found among those who have gained such awards as open scholarships or exhibitions at universities, State scholarships, or certain other scholarships awarded on a highly competitive basis. In the national interest, these are the men who should be sent back to their studies at the first opportunity, so that their services may be available to the nation in the early post-war years.

Before deciding on any scheme for the release of men for university study, its effect on the universities and colleges should be carefully considered. Many more scholarship holders go to Oxford and Cambridge than to the newer universities, and a scheme for

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giving priority of release to men who have won scholarships would set free considerable numbers of students already entered at one or other of the older universities, and relatively few already accepted by the universities of the provinces. If we take the figures for recent pre-war years published in the returns from universities to the University Grants Committee, it appears that the average annual intake, by all the universities of Great Britain, of men students (exclusive of those entering faculties of medicine, which class will doubtless continue to be reserved) was in round figures about 9,000. In view of the destruction by enemy action of university and college buildings, including libraries, laboratories and hostels, and of the difficulties of getting together, in a short time, adequate and competent staffs, it seems unlikely that the universities could manage to provide in their non-medical faculties for a larger entry than 9,000 men (together with the normal proportion of women) in the initial year of peace. An estimate of the number of students who would be eligible for release, in view of their having won scholarships or other high awards in open competition, is not easy. Some will have become casualties or prisoners of war, or perhaps be unwilling to return to academic study after an interval of several years; but it seems probable that there might be about 2,000 scholars wishing to return to their studies at Oxford or Cambridge, possibly 1,000 for the colleges of London, and about another 1,000 who have gained admission and open awards to other universities of Great Britain. If these men were demobilized in time to enter their universities in October next, they would provide Oxford, Cambridge and London with about two-thirds of their normal annual entry of non-medical students; but the average entry from this source to the other universities would be only about one-fifth of the normal pre-war number. The total number so released from the Forces for university study would be about 4,000, and it is perhaps unlikely that, with all the claims which will be pressed upon the Government for Class B releases, a larger number of university students could be spared in time to enter upon university courses at the beginning of the Michaelmas term. But it is certainly desirable that the number should be sufficient to enable the provincial universities to approximate to their normal activity by starting the coming session with a reasonable number of students in each of their faculties.

If the military situation should allow of a greater total number of releases for October next than can be satisfied from the open scholarship class, it would appear to be reasonable for any margin to be filled by the release of other men who have completed part of their university course before entering on their war service, and concerning whom the universities have some information and grounds for discriminating relative merit and ability. Clearly the selection of individuals as suitable for immediately taking up their interrupted studies could best be made by the universities themselves; but the final selection from those judged to be qualified should be decided by considerations of age and length of service in each case.

In addition to the desirability of arranging that the universities should be able to open for the session 1945-46 with a reasonable number of students, there is the necessity that they should be assisted to organize themselves so that, if war in the European theatre has ended, they may be ready to deal with a normal number of students in all faculties in the Michaelmas term of 1946. Most universities are only able to deal with students who join their courses at the beginning of a session, and releases for university study should be arranged so that the men will be ready to commence work by the end of the month of September. Clearly, a generous allocation of Class B releases might be made to university students in August 1945 on the ground that it would be inexpedient to make any further releases for university study until August 1946. In this respect the problem of the demobilization of students is quite different from that of arranging for the release of men who can return to civilian employment at any period of the year.

The advantages which students gain by residence in a college or university hostel during their academic courses have been strongly stressed in many quarters recently, and universities are rightly pressing upon grant-giving bodies the need for increased residential facilities. From the national point of view, the scheme of releasing from the Armed Forces and from other national service, in the first instance, those students who are in the open scholarship class, has the advantage of making use of most of the available university residences in the country; for a large proportion of the men so released would already have gained admission to one or other of the colleges at Oxford or Cambridge. But it should be stressed that the primary qualification for early demobilization would be proved ability to profit by advanced education, and the promise of becoming qualified to play an important part in the national life, not that the man would be returning to a particular university.

In considering the question of demobilization from the point of view of its effect on the universities, it must be remembered that the number of places available for men released from national service depends on the number of students allowed to enter universities direct from school, and on the number of those at present in residence to whom deferment of military service is granted. If the arrangements for granting deferment to students entering the universities in October next should prove to be less generous than those now in operation, the effect may be that, in spite of releases from national service, a considerable reduction in the total numbers of men in attendance at university courses will occur. This reduction would be most marked in those universities which have large faculties of science and engineering, and which have been assisting the national effort by concentrating on the training of technical specialists in subjects in which the acute shortage a few years ago was a hindrance to the effective prosecution of the War. It may now be right to reduce the output of trained scientific men and engineers in favour of an increased supply of specialists in other branches of university study; but the problem is complicated

and difficult, and involves a nice balancing of the probable future requirements of the nation against the military needs of the moment. The latter will doubtless change in the course of the year, and the best method of dealing with the matter would seem to be by keeping in being the existing joint recruiting boards at the several universities, and using them to direct the activities of all male university students, not only those of technical and scientific subjects. This would provide a ready means of adjusting periods of deferment to suit changes in the national situation. But in thus controlling the numbers admitted to university courses, and the length of course permitted in different subjects, it should be borne in mind that for the production of a trained scholar or technician, a long period of uninterrupted study is most desirable. It would appear to be in the national interest that all the more able students should now be directed to follow the full normal university courses in their subjects.

When Germany has been defeated and demobilization on a larger scale begins, the universities may find themselves flooded by applications for admission from men released in Class A, as well as those in Class B whom we have been considering. All would desire that as many men from the Forces as are suitable should be given the opportunity of further education at the university level. To provide for this it may prove to be necessary to delay the entry of young boys, direct from school, by sending them first to do a year of national service in accordance with a deliberate national policy on the lines suggested in the Norwood Report. It is certainly undesirable that such a congestion of students should occur in universities as would necessitate the continuation, even for a few years, of the inelastic organization of courses which has been necessary in many cases in dealing with the inflated numbers of students reading certain scientific subjects during the last few years.

WELSH FARMING

The Agriculture of Wales and Monmouthshire

By Prof. A. W. Ashby and I. L. Evans. Pp. iv+300. (Cardiff: Press Board of the University of Wales, 1944.) 15s.

IT was a very happy arrangement that Principal Ifor Evans and Prof. A. W. Ashby should combine to prepare a book on the agriculture of Wales. They have confined themselves mainly to the period for which official statistics are available, namely, from 1867 to the present time, and Prof. Ashby's wide knowledge of this branch of the subject has enabled him to avoid the pitfalls into which a less expert writer might have fallen. Ifor Evans knows the human side, and has been able to add the descriptive detail that puts life into the official figures.

The authors are fortunate in their period. In the early part, Welsh farming was mainly subsistence farming; each family ran its holding and produced the food needed: wool also was produced for clothes, and with the aid of a few craftsmen settled in the villages all the ordinary needs of life were supplied. The centres of the communal life were the

chapel and the local Eisteddfod, and there were various activities associated with these that brought the young people together. Actual cash transactions were few, limited to rent, rates, and an occasional special event, and these were met by the sale of cattle or of sheep. Petty cash for special household needs was obtainable by those near a market, but not everyone was in this position. I well remember the market at Carmarthen in 1891-92, to which the country-women came dressed in their tall-crowned hats, shawls, bodices and a bulky array of drab-coloured petticoats; they brought with them eggs, poultry and butter, the chief characteristic of which was its great variation in quality, no two samples ever being alike, but all being poor. The pitiful thing, however, was the low level of prices, for there was no organized marketing and the sellers did not wish to take their produce home unsold. It was a peasant community, and its problems could find a parallel in any of the peasant countries of Europe.

Then came the great change. From the early days of this century the subsistence farming gave place to farming for the great markets of England and South Wales. Things were produced for sale, and not for home consumption; the people ceased to be peasants and became small farmers. The change took a long while; indeed the authors do not think it was complete until 1939. They trace in great detail the changes involved. Livestock and livestock products became more important and arable crops less: the reduction in these, especially grain, is very graphically shown. Unfortunately, the change was accompanied by a general abandonment of liming, which had previously been common; the early agricultural advisers were not blameless here, for they too often thought that the basic slag they were busy introducing could take the place of lime.

Once Welsh agriculture was fairly on the sales basis, its history was not unlike that of English farming; it was subject to the same economic factors, enjoyed temporary prosperity during the two Wars and suffered from the severe slump that came in between. The livestock figure for 1916 marks a record high level which was only just passed in 1937, while that for 1920 is the lowest in the present century. But the authors are careful to note and explain the differences between Welsh and British farming, which are numerous.

The Welsh farm still remains essentially a family affair: farmers and their relatives accounted for more than 60 per cent of those engaged in agriculture in the last census (1931). Even so the number of 'male relatives' working on the farms decreases, and the staff tends to reduce itself to the farmer, his wife and his children. One difference from English practice is brought out: when the parents die, the inheritance is divided equally among all the children; whoever takes the farm has to buy out his brothers and sisters, and this may land him in debt, with awkward consequences. Yet the system works, for in a sample survey, 75 per cent of the farmers were sons of farmers, while only 11 per cent were sons of farm workers and 7½ per cent sons of other manual workers.

The authors state, with some reserve, that nearly half the arable land and pasture of Wales was in 1931 in farms of 50-150 acres, and less than one quarter in farms of 150 acres and more. These two groups of farms employed less than one half the total number of full-time farmers.

Livestock, especially milch cattle, are now the central feature of the farming, and this has empha-