

STATE AID FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.

THE announcement that the committee, presided over by Mr. Haldane, M.P., appointed to consider the allocation of the Treasury grant to the university colleges has finished its inquiry, was made in our issue of last week. In the note dealing with the subject on that occasion the part of the grant to be received by each college was specified, and the fact remains to be recorded that 9000*l.* has been allotted to the purchase of books, apparatus, specimens, instruments, &c., to form equipment for teaching of a university character. As will be known already to most readers of NATURE, the Treasury this year has doubled its contribution to the university colleges, and in this way has acknowledged the national services which these institutions are rendering. The total Treasury grant to the fourteen university colleges is now 54,000*l.*

That the grant has been increased in this substantial manner is certainly a matter for congratulation, and men of science will view with satisfaction the evidence this additional State aid for higher education affords that the Government is beginning to realise the important part played by higher education in securing national efficiency—especially by higher education in science, using that term in its most catholic sense. But, even at the risk of appearing to be ungracious, it must be pointed out at once that the amount is even now ludicrously small and altogether inadequate when regarded as the contribution of the State to the pressing work of placing our system of higher education upon a satisfactory basis. As has been consistently and persistently urged in these columns, there is an enormous amount of leeway to be made up before the facilities for education of university standard in Great Britain can be compared with those in several European countries and with those in the United States, compared, that is, with any chance of a satisfactory result. The reason is a simple one. Great Britain alone among the first-class nations of the world has not learnt that the reign of muscle is over, that success, whether in commerce or war, will be always with the most highly trained and scientifically educated people. Other nations have taken this truth to heart, and believe enthusiastically that what is worth having is worth paying for, and paying for well. Surely, in view of the object-lesson that events in Manchuria afford, it will not be long before our own country will be prepared to make great sacrifices to secure as efficient a system of higher education as that of any other nation on the face of the earth.

The total grant to the fourteen university colleges is, as has been said, 54,000*l.*, and this is a large sum compared with what the colleges have received in previous years. But the State endowment of the University of Berlin in 1891-2 amounted to very nearly 169,000*l.*; that is to say, one university in Germany receives from the State in a year more than three times as much as our fourteen university colleges receive together from the Treasury. A single fact of this kind is enough to convince the student of educational problems that while Germany takes higher scientific education seriously, and reaps the advantages of her sacrifices, Great Britain has still to understand that commercial success and educational efficiency stand in the relation of effect and cause. If at the present day there still exist sceptics as to our educational inefficiency and our national parsimony towards universities and colleges, the presidential address of Sir Norman Lockyer to the British Association at Southport in 1903 may be commended

to them. Though men of science who have at heart the true welfare of their country are at present rather like "voices crying in the wilderness," it is clearly their duty to continue to urge the paramount importance of higher scientific education and of scientific research, and to petition the Government to act more generously on their behalf.

But it is not enough to provide large and adequate State grants for education in order to secure efficiency in the face of modern needs. It is just as important so to choose the subjects of study and to arrange the curricula of schools and colleges that our boys and young men may begin life as well and as suitably trained as the youths of other countries. The kind of education suited to the conditions of the days of the Renaissance is not in harmony with the needs of the twentieth century. The work of men of science in the last century has revolutionised life, and our system of education must be adapted to existing circumstances. The custodians of English education are still too much actuated by mediæval ideals. The entrance of the student of science to the older universities is still obstructed by an obsolete and ludicrous test in Greek. There is a tendency even yet among those in charge of our Department of Education to discourage and hamper the instruction in science in our elementary and secondary schools. The Prime Minister is reported once to have said that the only knowledge our boys have of natural phenomena is that obtained on the cricket and football fields, and on the river. The man of science has still much to teach his fellow citizens. The work to which Huxley gave so much of his energy is not yet done, and it is the duty of his successors to continue his efforts, and to take every opportunity of advocating the application of the principles of science to educational administration.

It must be recognised that there are many ways of obtaining culture. The idea of the Middle Ages that culture was obtainable only by studying Latin and Greek, though true enough then, is to-day hopelessly narrow and indicative rather of the state of mind of the Philistine. The scholar steeped in classical lore, yet ignorant of nature's laws and of modern literature, is but an uneducated pedant. The scientific specialist with a complete knowledge of some restricted subdivision of science, yet knowing nothing of the ideas of ancient and modern poets and philosophers, is but a narrow technical registrar. Culture is something broader and higher than anything with which the pedant or cataloguer is acquainted. The man of science desirous of producing cultured men and women will strive so to arrange school and college time-tables that they contain in due measure subjects designed to cultivate and develop all the faculties of the healthy human mind; and in this work the heritage which has been left us by the nineteenth century will not be ignored. The teachings of science, the love of truth wherever it may lead, will be inculcated consistently, so that a race may be produced able to deal with modern problems in a modern way.

Though the Government moves but slowly, and perceives so incompletely the unsatisfactoriness of our supply of higher education, there is cause for satisfaction in another direction. There are growing evidences that the broad-minded policy of wealthy men in the United States, which leads them to give of their millions to colleges and universities, is being emulated in a measure by our merchant princes. We have on several occasions lately been able to record noble instances of private munificence on behalf of higher education, and it may be that before long the Government will recognise its imperative duty.