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Freedom of the Universities

WITH what now seems almost prophetic insight, the report of the University Grants Committee in 1936 referred to the special responsibility of the universities of Great Britain, in view of the suppression in the universities of several European and other countries of all independent thought and critical discussion of the principles of government or of the meaning of life, if the Greek tradition of candid and intrepid thinking about the fundamental issues of life is to be preserved for mankind. That responsibility has grown the heavier in the last three years. The area in which freedom of thought and learning is proscribed has grown larger year by year, and further waves of refugees have added to the burden of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, and converted what was possibly at first regarded as a temporary into an apparently permanent or perennial task.

There are welcome signs that their responsibility is nobly recognized by the universities of Great Britain. In one practical form it is seen in the support which has been forthcoming from them for the work of the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning. A series of meetings has been arranged for the first week in February in the majority of British academic centres, in which many leading men of science have promised to take part, including Sir William Bragg, Sir Henry Dale, Sir Richard Gregory, Prof. Winifred Cullis, Prof. F. A. E. Crew and others. The Royal Society, in collaboration with the British Academy, is giving a special reception to the academic exiles and those who have been working in their interests on February 7, and on February 10 the evening discourse at the Royal Institution is to be given by Prof. Max Born, one of

the many distinguished men of science who have found refuge in Great Britain.

This practical assistance is of importance not only on the grounds of humanity but also in the interests of learning itself, by enabling those who in the past have made important contributions to knowledge to resume their studies or investigations. Besides this, however, there is a rapidly growing volume of evidence that members of the universities of Great Britain, whether engaged in teaching or administration, are fully alive to the importance of preserving their full freedom of teaching and investigation. In a striking address to the Conference of Education Associations on "The Function of the University", Lord Macmillan asserted that the first essential of a university must be its spirit of intellectual freedom. A university must be the servant of truth, and have no other bondage whether of race, State or creed.

Lord Macmillan put freedom in the very forefront of the life of the university, as it is known in Great Britain. It is the essence of knowledge that it should give freedom to those who pursue it. To seek to impede the free interchange of thought and ideals is the supreme crime. The noblest task which the universities can perform is not only to maintain among ourselves the constant and free pursuit of truth, but also to use every endeavour to spread its light throughout the world, so that it penetrates even to those countries where the universities are subservient to the State.

No less striking were the speeches at the recent degree ceremony when the Duke of Devonshire was installed as Chancellor of the University of Leeds. In welcoming the Chancellor, Mr. B. Mouat Jones referred to him as one who, by tradition and conviction, accepted both the universality of

knowledge and the trust imposed upon universities to safeguard the liberty of thought and to defend the free spirit of man. In returning thanks for his election, the Chancellor responded on the same note. Of all the forces working for good in the world, for better understanding between peoples, for liberalism and tolerance in the highest sense of the words, for the spreading of true knowledge, the universities and all that they stand for are, he said, perhaps the most important. They are playing a greater part than ever in the life of the nation and their influence is felt among an increasing proportion of the population. Moreover, without minimizing the importance of the practical and utilitarian work at the universities, or their contribution to technical and commercial progress, a university must be a servant of truth.

In delivering an address at the close of the ceremony, on behalf of the honorary graduates, Lord Baldwin spoke vigorously on the same theme. There are two things, he said, for which a university stands pre-eminently: standards, and truth. The more democratic we become, the more important it is to maintain our standards in literature, in art, in science, in work of all kind. Nothing should for one moment be accepted as first-rate which is in fact second-rate. The second thing is truth, which is particularly important to-day. It is not yet in danger in Great Britain and he hoped it never would be. We never want to see the day when truth is sought merely with the object of proving a case, or history written with that object. Universities must stand and be recognized as seekers for truth with no ulterior motive.

It is a strange commentary on the distance we have travelled in the last ten years that the chancellor of a university should find it pertinent to speak thus emphatically on what a few years ago would have seemed a platitudinous theme, and to find his words so warmly welcomed. Lord Baldwin, moreover, proceeded to point out dangers which in Great Britain might affect, even if indirectly, the maintenance of such standards and the service of truth.

For universities to uphold their trust to-day, as ever, they must be absolutely free and independent, governing themselves and regulating themselves, and never becoming subservient. Among the dangers which may threaten their independence Lord Baldwin referred first to that attending the influence of wealth. In Great Britain it is scarcely a source of danger, for when people give money

to universities, it is not given with the idea of interference, but for use. It is for the universities themselves to decide in what way the gifts shall be expended. While this is generally true, in his recent book "The Social Function of Science" Prof. J. D. Bernal refers to ways in which the freedom of a university may be restrained by conditions attached to grants, and indicates that cases of the withdrawal of donations on political grounds are known to many scientific workers. If universities are to make their full contribution to the life of the community, while their members must be careful not to lend the weight of their names or influence to the support of statements on matters of which they have no special knowledge, it would be disastrous if any such restraint prevented individual members of a university from accepting their responsibilities for playing a part in the life of the community, whether as citizens or as the leaders for which their training and ability fit them. An atmosphere of right thinking and right action is demanded as well as freedom, and this is the more important as the emphasis on the social quality of the university is increased.

The greatest danger, however, which threatens the independence of the universities is one from which Great Britain is fortunately so far free—that of State interference. This we have seen in Europe in our own time, though had we not seen it we could scarcely have believed it. Universities depend more and more on State grants and public money, and this dependence is likely to increase rather than to decrease. The burden of equipment and re-equipment for efficient research is one factor likely to increase the need for State assistance. The more democratic that entry to our universities becomes, and the more widely their importance in training leaders is recognized, the stronger their claims upon the State for assistance. Many of the admirable recommendations, for example, of the recent Conference of the National Union of Students on student health depend largely on State assistance if effect is to be given to them. In spite of this, as Lord Baldwin asserted, the universities must resist to the death, if it ever came, any attempt of a Government department, or of a Government of any shade of opinion, to make gifts conditional on what is taught. In view of what has happened in other countries in recent years, we must be doubly vigilant in safeguarding our own liberties and our own freedom. It is a false optimism to eschew such vigilance because there is no immediate threat, especially in the face

of what is happening elsewhere in the world to-day. Circumstances can easily be visualized in which the threat might become imminent even in Great Britain. Nor is the threat confined to the totalitarian regimes. Even in the western hemisphere, religious dogma has already sought to restrain the teaching of particular scientific theories in the post-War period.

In Great Britain, as has already been pointed out, one or two attempts have been made, if not from the Government side, to impose restraints by withholding donations or subscriptions. When university needs are growing and financial stringency threatens, it is the more important that universities should stand together in resisting such pressure and in exposing the instigators. Such danger as exists is in fact largely indirect. It arises in part from the unfortunate extent to which teaching and research are linked under our present system. Conditions which may quite legitimately be laid down in regard to the donation of a large sum for research are quite intolerable if applied to teaching. None the less, because teaching and research are so interlocked, quite unintentionally endowment of research in this way may affect the prestige or extent of freedom of teaching in a particular subject.

Particularly is this true in the social sciences. On the universities above all lies the responsibility for developing a world conscience and a world culture if mankind is to be turned aside from the hideous road to economic self-sufficiency and war.

Moral unity can only be achieved through mutual understanding, respect and approbation, and we need more than ever to bring into relief the true aim and purpose of human society. Social science in this sense can bring into being a vital relation between the university and the non-academic world, but it can only do so as long as it possesses, unchecked and unhampered, its full liberty of criticism and investigation, free from any suggestion of prejudice or bias.

Many will recall Lord Baldwin's insistence on this same responsibility for preserving freedom and all it involves in the elimination of prejudice and of bias by the maintenance of scrupulous honesty of thought and fairness of criticism, in his welcome to the delegates to the Congress of the Universities of the Empire held at Cambridge three years ago. Scientific workers may be equally grateful for his latest reminder of their obligations and duties in this matter. Contact with many of the refugee scientific workers whom the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning has been assisting should render their own experience available for the vital task of foreseeing the threats to our great heritage of freedom and integrity of thought, and taken in due time, wise measures may be devised to minimize the danger, if not to avert it entirely. Certain it is that freedom is best served to-day by vigilance and foresight and constructive action, rather than by procrastination which may leave us merely with the option of resisting unto death.

French Administration in Africa

African Majesty :

a Record of Refuge at the Court of the King of Bangangté in the French Cameroons. By F. Clement C. Egerton. Pp. xx + 348 + 123 plates. (London : George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1938.) 18s. net.

MR. EGERTON'S choice of a change of scene to escape certain features of civilized life was little more than fortuitous ; but in the event it proved well judged for his purpose. For some months he lived in the headquarters of a native king of the French Mandated Territory of the Cameroons, and came into intimate contact with a cultural outlook and organization of life which he found novel, but in its cultural environment, essentially reasonable, allowance being made for

certain adjustments necessitated by the regulations of the mandatory power.

The author has had the advantage of training under Prof. Malinowski. It is, therefore, scarcely necessary to say that life as he viewed it at the *chefferie* of Bangangté was seen as a whole. The history of this kingship, unlike others enshrined in shorter memories in this part of Africa, is known for some ten generations. The country has been in the possession of the people, immigrants, for not more than a hundred years. In consequence, it is possible to trace to a well-defined origin certain peculiar characters in the social organization, such as, for example, the institution of the chief's henchmen, and the delegation of the chiefly authority to local sub-chieftains. The whole essence of the kingship seems to have resided in