

## UNIVERSITY REFORM IN BRITAIN

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UNIVERSITY reform is in the air to-day. The amount of discussion about the future of higher education that is going on among thinking people—and to-day a greater proportion of citizens are thinking than usual—cannot but do good. Isolationism—the ‘ivory tower’ conception of the role of the university—has always been liable to become a limiting factor in its usefulness.

The National Union of Students has recently discussed the subject, and has issued a report\*, the chief characteristic of which is its entire reasonableness. One somehow expects student opinion to run to extremes, usually to the Left. It would indeed be unnatural if youth were satisfied with the present condition of affairs. But all the suggestions put forward here are in my own opinion worthy of thoughtful consideration by university authorities.

Here, as elsewhere, the abolition of fees tends to become a fetish or King Charles' Head. Education for all who are worthy to the limit of their need and powers is a first-rate end; but I do not believe that, in our present state of society, abolition of fees is the best means to that end. Nor is it likely to be for some time. There are very many people to-day who can afford to pay for their university career. Many find pride in doing so. Unless we drastically change our methods of selection—getting away from the purely intellectual sieve—we should, if we exclude fee-paying students, lose a valuable element of student life. Oxford and Cambridge in particular have benefited from the leavening influence of many men who would not have reached a university on intellectual qualifications alone, and no one has benefited more from their presence than the scholars themselves.

Also, while our society is so constituted that men exercise influence more than the average through accident of birth and wealth, it is good that they should, as part of their education, live in a university atmosphere for some years. Again, government is not yet so conditioned that the universities would not be financially crippled if fees were eliminated from their income. First we need the Government and local authority grants doubled and doubled again. I am therefore against the abolition of university fees. The time is not nearly ripe. What would be the value of flooding impoverished universities with students for whom we cannot cater properly, while excluding men and women all of whom to-day have to prove their intellectual fitness for university education through entrance examination; many of whom select themselves on other grounds better than some scholars, and most of whom, as society is organized to-day, are going to play an important part, and should have the best possible preparation. The abolition of fees in universities might be a proper and necessary feature of a social revolution; but as an incident of university organization to-day it is premature and out of place. Let us, on the other hand, have more generous maintenance allowances and more scholarships. Most of our anticipated expansion in numbers should derive from that source.

\* The Future of University and Higher Education: a Report prepared by the National Union of Students of the Universities and Colleges of England and Wales. Pp. 16. (3 Endsleigh Street, London, W.C.1, 1945.) 6s.

The need for, and value of, a high standard of character and personality as well as intellect in university personnel—be they staff or students—make the more important one recommendation that I can heartily endorse: compulsory residence for one year at least. I would go further and ask for two as a minimum. It is a debatable point whether, if only one is required, the freshman year is the best. Different colleges at Oxford and Cambridge hold different views about this.

An interesting point raised is the question of student representation on university governing bodies. At the University of Birmingham students are represented on the Court. This is a good thing, but it means very little in practice. At the University of Melbourne they are represented on the Council. That was never an embarrassment to the University during my tenure of the vice-chancellorship, and I do not believe it had been before. What the National Union of Students means by direct access to council, senate and faculties is not clear; but I do not believe any such body would refuse to see a deputation of students if asked, certainly not in any university on the staff of which I have served. I agree, however, with the Union that the most promising method of integration is through staff-student committees. I think few heads of departments, if properly approached, would refuse to participate in such discussion groups. A good example of this sort of co-operation is the Arts Council at the University of Birmingham.

The revolt against over-lecturing is natural, but can, I think, be overdone. Spoon-feeding would be as bad as under-nourishment. Let us have more seminars and informal tuition by all means. I have tried out the cyclostyled notes idea, and on the whole it was not a success. It was useful occasionally for broadcasting diagrams or charts, or especially difficult arguments; but used as a general rule it made for slackness and inattention, at least in some subjects and with certain types of students. I can imagine, however, that the issue of regular notes might be valuable in certain subjects. Personally, I would rather have students stay away and read than be compelled to attend lectures in which they are not interested. In this, as in many other things, however, a vice-chancellor carries less weight than professors, and he must defer to their specialist knowledge of teaching.

For the rest, a vigorous student union, as autonomously governed as possible, is an essential requisite for satisfactory life in the non-residential university. The sad thing to-day is the fact that the educative influence of the union is confined to a minority of students. The majority use the building only as a restaurant, lounge and dance hall. Only student opinion and student influence can remedy this. Many never go near the union at all. They are the ‘brown baggers’ of whom we hear so much. The only answer to them is compulsory residence in halls of residence generously equipped with a staff whose interests are student-centred, and with the amenities that foster community spirit and social activity.

I would agree with the estimate that student numbers in British universities should be increased over all by 50 per cent; though, since Oxford and Cambridge are near saturation point, this will mean doubling the size or number of the provincial universities. The remarks made about the curriculum are well worth study by university senates, which are, indeed, not unaware of the need for reform.

Many faculties are vigorously discussing these questions now.

Nearly all the proposals in what is a useful and provocative little booklet mean greater expenditure. We must hope that those who hold the purse-strings will realize that to-day the universities are a long way behind scratch. The greater part of the first increases of grant will be expended in bringing us back into line for a good start after the backsliding made inevitable by six years of war.

It has been difficult to review the report issued by the National Union of Students in a short article: it is quite impossible to do justice to the many subjects touched upon at the Second Educational Conference of the Association of Allied Professors and Lecturers, held in London on April 14, 1944, the proceedings of which are now available\*. Mental indigestion and a seething mind are inescapable after a first reading. There are, however, some impressions that pick themselves out. The modern Soviet university seems to have got farthest from the 'ivory tower' idea, but this has been incidental to profound social and political changes. Unless we are prepared to follow them in the larger field—and I for one think that we should lose more than we should gain by doing so—we must seek to attain the same end by more devious ways. The United States are trying hard to achieve an educated democracy and have had a measure of success. It has been easier in a country with an expanding frontier than it has been in overcrowded Western Europe with its bounds set by history and tradition. It will be less easy in the America of the future, when the expanding frontier will be a memory of the past. When I visited the United States in 1936, the Federal Government was spending sixty million dollars a year on student maintenance, because it was becoming progressively more difficult to work one's way through college in competition with the regular labour force.

I like Sir Fred Clarke's definition of training as "the cutting edge that makes education specifically

serviceable". General acceptance might give the word and idea a new lease of respectable and useful life. Interchange on the Franconi chair scale, with its fully equipped laboratory and specialist assistants for the visiting professor, approaches the ideal, and is linked in my mind with the good idea of occasional interchange between the professor and master of the school sixth form. The greatest professors like taking elementary classes despite what Bruce Truscott says. It is not too great a step to go back to school, though the step would certainly be new. The American system of sabbatical leave and the junior's *wanderjahr* have done much for peaceful penetration into China, and the British Commonwealth might well emulate their trans-Atlantic cousins here. Of the great university dangers, 'specialization, mechanization of learning, and interference by the State', we in Britain know something of the first two, but we have steered clear of the third thanks to our genius for anomalies in our government set-up. Long may that remain true.

Sir Ernest Barker has likened the ancient universities to mountains of ice nine-tenths submerged in seas of history and tradition. Having had experience of Antarctic exploration, I am tempted to carry the analogy a step further. The new universities are more like the snowbergs from the Antarctic continent with half their bulk above water. They may have a more workmanlike façade, if a different one. They are without the peaks and pinnacles, but there is something to be said for a solid rectangular shape. They are more responsive to the winds of public opinion. They are more readily adaptable to the social environment in which they are set. These are, on balance, not bad characteristics. I will not press the analogy too far, for icebergs and snowbergs alike, when they grow older, pass through the stage of being hidden dangers to navigation, and finally they disappear leaving no trace.

\* Association of University Professors and Lecturers of the Allied Countries in Great Britain. Second Education Conference, April 15, 1944: Some Comparisons between Universities. Pp. xvi+64. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1944.) 2s. 6d. net.

## NEW FELLOWS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY

THE following were elected fellows of the Royal Society on March 14:

MR. L. COLEBROOK, a member of the scientific staff of the Medical Research Council. Distinguished in the application of bacteriology to clinical medicine, he played a leading part in the practical establishment of the 'sulpha' drugs, and has thrown much light on the fevers of childbirth. During the War he has directed important investigations on burns.

MR. W. S. FARREN, aeronautical engineer, director of the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough. He has been associated with aeronautical research and development continuously since 1914, and has contributed greatly to advances in the science and practice of aeronautics.

DR. N. FEATHER, lecturer in physics in the University of Cambridge; distinguished for investigations which have added much to knowledge of the spontaneous and induced disintegrations of atomic nuclei.

PROF. J. H. GADDUM, professor of pharmacology in the University of Edinburgh; distinguished for his work on the identification and estimation of acetyl-

choline, adrenaline and histamine in animal tissues and for his experimental contributions to the conception of cholinergic and adrenergic nerves.

DR. H. GODWIN, lecturer in botany in the University of Cambridge; distinguished as a plant ecologist, and especially for his contributions to the knowledge of the post-glacial history of British vegetation based on the pollen analysis of recent deposits.

PROF. J. M. GULLAND, Sir Jesse Boot professor of chemistry, University College, Nottingham; distinguished for his analytical and synthetic work in the phenanthrene group of alkaloids, and for his work in the development of the chemistry of substances of biological importance.

MR. H. W. HARVEY, marine biologist; distinguished for his contributions to our knowledge of the 'productivity of the sea' by co-ordinating the varied factors, physical, chemical and biological, which determine it.

PROF. V. C. ILLING, professor of oil technology in the Imperial College of Science and Technology; distinguished for his researches on the relation of texture of sediments to oil accumulation, and for