

LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION IN TIME OF WAR

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There should be an understanding of the difference between General Education and Education in the Liberal Arts. Much of the confused thinking along educational lines in these days is a result of assuming that these are identical.

A General Education is just what the term implies. There is no degree of specialization. All subjects or disciplines are given an equal weight in instruction. At the end, even under ideal conditions, one has but a smattering of this and of that. The student is not fitted for the technical requirements of modern employment nor has he more than the minimum essentials necessary to enable him to see himself in relation to the universe.

An education in the Liberal Arts has well been defined by Erasmus, "The first and principal function of education is to drink in the seeds of piety, to learn and to love classical studies, to be informed concerning the duties of life and for youth to be habituated to courteous manners." This sentence is well worth considerable thought, man's relation to God, to the great minds and souls of the past, service to mankind, and relationship to his fellows. From this it would seem obvious that it is not so much the subject as the spirit of instruction which counts. Liberal subjects, taught in an illiberal fashion, have no claim on the title liberal arts, whereas on the other hand, the most technical of material given in a liberal fashion and related to the whole body of knowledge may embody the whole spirit of a liberal education.

Before leaving this matter of definition I should like to read a sentence from a recent article by Mortimer E. Cooley, Dean Emeritus of the University of Michigan, College of Engineering, and himself a distinguished engineer, "Education is made up of two parts: the first and most important part is teaching man how to live to get the most out of life for himself and to give the most to others; the second part is to give him a professional training enabling him to

earn money to carry out the first." Liberal education is concerned with understanding rather than knowledge. One can find many liberal minds full of knowledge, but understanding brings a warm human sympathy encompassing the world.

Now we are in the midst of war. According to the War Manpower Commission any young man, physically qualified, is destined for the armed services. Young women too are urged to prepare themselves for technical tasks to aid in securing the final victory. Must the liberal arts be, or have they already become, a war casualty? If they are already lost or are to become so, can they be revived at the end of the struggle? These questions have been, and are, in the best minds of America. The answers given vary from the blackest pessimism to the brightest optimism. Undoubtedly the answer is somewhere between. Soon the college campuses of the nation will largely be taken over by young men in uniform, training as specialists and officer candidates in the armed forces. The program of studies is prescribed by the War and Navy departments with the design of preparing them for effective use in the services in the shortest possible time. In order to help win the war so we may again live in peace the colleges must cooperate in this training to the best of their abilities.

None the less there are men not wanted by the military, women who are not now needed. Any college failing to carry on a program for these persons, any college failing to keep true to the ideals of the liberal arts, the enrichment of human understanding, will be false to its trust and ideals. The liberal arts may be lost in this case, not at the hands of enemies, but by the neglect of friends. In short, the arts may be lost by default, and this is perhaps the greatest crime we can commit against the younger generation as well as against the liberties of America. If we shut the doors to a liberal education even for a short time the result

may well be like that of the Nazis in Germany in burning the books which gave a continuity to German existence, and helped make possible the imposition of the crazed ideas of a single mind on a generation of German school children. We must defend our liberties and the best means, other than the present necessary battlefields, is to keep the books open and make a liberal education possible.

Most of us have already, in some measure, tried to meet this need. We are engaged in speeded up programs, year 'round college sessions, and other devices to aid in giving as much as possible before our young men go into the service. None of us has been satisfied for no real liberal education can come as a result of hurry and turmoil. One must have leisure to really arrive at understanding. Another phase we have overlooked or disregarded in our haste has been that of the maturity of our students. To arrive at understanding rather than merely absorbing information, a student must mature during the course of his instruction. This is no less a physical than a mental process. We can speed our teaching, we can put in the minutes and hours, but unless we can give young men and women time to mature much of our labor is in vain. No doubt, under the circumstances, half a loaf is better than none, but let us not be deluded into believing we have more than half a loaf. Here is where, in my estimation, the new University of Chicago Plan fails. It is general, not liberal, education; it provides the necessary time but does it produce or take account of the maturity necessary for understanding rather than mere gaining of information?

For the moment most of our energies must be devoted to the winning of the war. At the same time we must be preparing ourselves and our students for the return from violence. It is one of the glories of a liberal education that a man is at home in all ages and under all circumstances. With the war over we must again live in a peaceful world with our former enemies. Together we must try and build a world in which the dignity of man and the right of the individual to a voice in his own future cannot be violated. Only liberal minds can have the breadth of outlook to quickly bury the bitterness of the past and go on to the brighter future. Here America must be

the hope of the world. Only on this continent have colleges and universities continued in full vigor. In Europe the light of the humanities has been extinguished by the totalitarian leaders, and education means only propaganda for the "New Order" and technical training for the use of the state.

We must, to win the war, exceed our enemies in technical training, but there is a real danger that we may lose our liberal outlook in so doing. For years there has been pressure for a *practical* education; one which will fit graduates for specific jobs rather than the broad study of the humanistic disciplines. Under pressure of the necessity of the war program this process is well under way. If we are not careful and farsighted we shall be no better than the Nazis. Wendell Willkie in speaking of this subject a short time ago said, "If the humanities or the humanistic temper which they promote are permitted to lapse now we shall have lost the peace before we shall have gained it, and the real victory after the war will be to the way of life, inhuman, tyrannical, mechanical, of those whom we shall outwardly have conquered." This is the gloomy, the pessimistic view of what may or may not happen.

To look at the brighter side of the picture may prove helpful. Many young men, forced to undertake a technical training as part of their contribution to the war effort have been stimulated to question their relations with their fellows and with the universe. One is reminded of the story of the soldier in one of our lonely outposts who discovered a copy of Shakespeare and immediately enrolled in the Armed Forces Institute for a course in that subject. These men who are offering their lives are questioning what it is all about. Most of the answers can come only through a liberal education; literature, philosophy, history, economics, and other disciplines which show the relation of man to the universe and to his fellows. This is well expressed by President Cozant of Harvard in a recent article, "For one thing the present fighting generation and the younger boys in school will be tired of hearing even the names of science and technology. When the time for the resumption of normal education returns, a sharp reaction toward studies of a different type, a resurgence of deep interest

in the liberal arts among students themselves, would seem to be inevitable." It is well to remember that President Co-nant is himself a chemist.

Will we be, and are we, prepared to give this type of education or shall we have gone too far in our enthusiasm for all-out war preparation to return to it?

What I have said so far has been chiefly related to the colleges, but it applies just as much to the high schools. Here too the concern must be with essential and enduring values. In our enthusiasm it is too easy to lose the long view and give our complete attention to the affairs of the moment. The old statement that without vision the people perish is still true. It is our function to keep alive that vision and to provide the means whereby that vision may become an accomplished fact. If we betray our trust, an embittered, cynical, and mechanically minded generation can lose or destroy the vision which was the faith of the founders of this republic in the goodness of man and the essential value of the individual to himself and society.

At this point Christian doctrine and liberal thinking are in accord. We must keep these patterns of thought alive, not only now, in the face of the present emergency, but stand ready to expand them when the present crisis is past. Unless we can do this, there will be no great

liberal democratic republic as envisioned by the founders, or as hoped for by their descendants. America will have lost her high destiny while fighting to preserve it. The future is in our hands and we must not prove false to that trust.

From the foregoing statement one might assume that the schools, both secondary and of collegiate rank, are the perfect transmitters of the accumulated wisdom of the past and present. Such is not the case. In this hour of peril to all our institutions it is well for us to take stock of ourselves. We have been burdened with much dead wood in the shape of unreal and antiquated thinking and modes of operation. Now is the opportunity to think through, to reform and refine our procedures, to bring our institutions into line with the light of modern life and thought. If we take advantage of this chance, then, and then only, will we be prepared to render the maximum service to those who have every right to look toward us as custodians of the treasures of the experience of the race. Then, and then only, will young men and young women who have been stimulated to questioning turn to us for the answers. Thus we can fulfill the hopes and expectations of those by whom such institutions were founded and the dreams of those who nourished and helped them grow.