

LIBERAL EDUCATION AND THE WAR

So much is being said and written about liberal education and the war that it would be well for us to understand something about the problem,--if, indeed, it may be called a problem at all. For when we keep in mind the true function of such education, we see the problem solve itself before our eyes.

Liberal education gives men knowledge and appreciation, character and personality; it gives them the power and dignity of manhood. It makes them human. It makes them free. If, therefore, we wish to continue our American manner of life after the war, we need liberal education and the liberal arts college as the means and instrument for securing that future. There is no other way.

For a real American, therefore, the problem is quickly solved. We never intend to give up the things that have made us a great people. We shall never surrender our power and dignity as free men. Unlike nations now subject to dictators, we shall not sell out our birth-rights for a bowl of pottage. Rather we shall endure whatever sacrifices are necessary to keep intact our heritage of democratic living with its freedoms and its opportunities for personal and social happiness. And therefore we shall maintain at whatever cost our institutions of liberal culture, because they are the sources of our democratic life.

At the moment, however, the necessities of war must be met, and education must be fashioned to that end. Modern warfare is technical; it is the application of scientific and technological research to destructive purposes. The war-machine launched against us represents the supreme technical effort of the Axis nations. We are therefore under the necessity of opposing it by building a machine more powerful and effective than their own. To do so we must place the

emphasis in education upon technology.

But this does not mean that after the war we shall not restore the balance that should exist between technology and liberal culture so that we may have normal human living. At present we are ^{merely} active ^{ng} like the famed minute man who left his plough to take up arms. We have left peaceful pursuits for warlike, but with the intention that he had of returning to the peaceful again, even though we are aware, as he was, that afterwards we shall need to defend what we have fought for, -which in his case was the liberation of a nation, and in ours is the liberation of mankind. Indeed, as long as we possess this flexibility of spirit so well exemplified by the minute man, the future of America will be safe for democracy, and also for liberal education.

Our present attention to technology, therefore, must never be misinterpreted. It does not mean that we have cast liberal culture aside, nor does it mean that liberal culture should be wholly neglected throughout the emergency. The fields of the minute man did not lie fallow because he had gone to war. Food was essential for the conflict. In a war against ideologies, such as we are engaged in, liberal culture is essential for victory. For it stands to reason that if Axis nations keep teaching their ideals to youth and we fail completely to take corresponding measures, the infection of the world by ideologies will not be opposed by a sufficient antidote, much less by a more powerful exterminant ^{ter}. And it may even happen that we become imperceptibly affected by the very ideologies we seek to destroy. Consequently, as far as possible, we should keep offering the opportunities of liberal culture to those among our youth who can legitimately accept them, so that at least a nucleus at each stage in our rising generation will be well prepared to

maintain our ideals and carry them into the future. To act otherwise would be a strategical mistake resulting from a lack of comprehensive vision and from an insufficient appreciation of the psychological phase of the war.

But the necessity of continuing liberal education, at least on a restricted scale, during the war arises not only from the presence of dangerous ideologies abroad but also from our extreme accentuation of technology at home. Technology as such is attractive. It displays its achievements. These appeal to the imagination and create an impression of their importance to human welfare beyond their real value. In this way, technology, even before its complete dedication to present warfare, had become a most effective instrument in the hands of Axis dictators. It mechanized men; it dehumanized them, and ultimately enslaved them. Hence its effects are ^opposite to those of liberal culture which expands human life and raises it to the enjoyment of its full dignity and freedom. Liberal culture therefore is needed to offset the dehumanizing effects of technology. This has long been recognized by educators in technological schools, and the reason is simple enough. Liberal education builds men; technology builds machines. Man must always control the machine or else he himself becomes a cog or ^{at most a gadget} in the work of his own ^{creation} making. He is then no more the master of himself. If we ^{grow} ~~become~~ too much enamored of technology through exclusive attention, we may gradually lose our appreciation of liberal culture and conclude that it is too ineffective, or at least too staid and static, for a high-g geared future. Should that occur, technology would cease to be a benefit and turn out to be a detriment. For technology deals primarily with things, -with material values; culture deals with men, -with human values. ^{But} Thus whenever things, and not men, become the chief concern

in human affairs, men suffer. In our case, democracy itself would suffer. We would undermine the very cause for which we fight. Then

There is every reason therefore why we should foster liberal culture as a protection against ourselves. It alone has the power to preserve the balance necessary for obtaining beneficial results from technological achievements. For technology is merely the application of science. Science in turn is but one of the several fields which together constitute liberal culture. Consequently, from the cultural viewpoint, technology has a very definite place in the scheme of human living and there contributes its part as a component in the great harmony of human life. Wherefore through liberal education we must constantly foster liberal culture so that it will continue to exercise effectively its function of keeping the right order in things.

From what we have been saying it is certainly clear that liberal culture is fundamental to our freedom. Why then, we may ask, has any question about liberal education been raised? The answer is: because of the defects that have crept into it. These have weakened it and even vitiated it. They have called for correction for a long time. At last the realism of war has laid them bare through open criticism. Such criticism, however, must be always remedial and not purely destruction, because we do need culture itself. Neither should it be propaganda for proposals that are unsound, sophistic, or harmful, lest the future state of education be worse than the former. Sound criticism has already been voiced. It has made certain demands, and these should be heeded. They require that what has been omitted from the scope of culture be now included; that what has been mistaught either in content or through method be rightly taught; that what has been left disjointed be put together in an organic whole.

These demands are justified. For only organisms have life,--and

this only when they have completeness and integrity of parts and when their parts coalesce naturally to form the whole. So constituted they have not only vitality but the full resourcefulness of all their powers. But liberal culture is by nature organic; it is the whole of human life lived at its best. If developed in accordance with its real nature through liberal education, it will manifest the power and resourcefulness to meet any emergency or evolve the progress of any future age. Moreover, liberal education which produces true culture will itself be scientifically sound, and therefore manageable. Within its own system the accents can be placed so as to meet emergencies and prepare progress without endangering liberal culture itself, for in doing this merely the life and power inherent in culture will be brought forth. And the educators who direct the task will be like the prudent householder, in the Scriptures, who according to the needs of his family brings forth from his treasure things old and new.

May we not confidently hope that such greater good in liberal education may be the outcome of its present relations with the realism of war!