POST-WAR LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

By Charles E. Diehl

(Read at Meeting March 18, 1943)

There are some sincere people who believe that to win the war we cannot think of peace. Yet the war, to be justified, can only be fought for the sake of peace —not peace in the abstract, but peace that is fairly definite in its provisions. There are some who take counsel of their fears, do little credit to the adventurous American spirit and seem to have little in common with the attitude that made America great among the nations. We may not be willing to agree with Vice-President Wallace on a quart of milk a day for every human being in the world, if we are to furnish the cows and deliver the milk free. We may not be able, in view of all the complexities and uncertainties at present, to work out a blue print for the future, but it would be the height of folly not to give our best thought and endeavor in trying to avoid the mistakes made in the past, and out of our present distress begin to establish the kind of peace that all mankind longs for. Such a peace will bristle with problems which for many years will be simply war problems minus the actual hostilities.

One of the problems we shall have to face with the peace is the problem of education. We do not mean the re-education which some of our leaders are proposing for Axis youth, but education right here in this country, and particularly what is popularly known as

liberal arts education. In the judgment of some of our thoughtful leaders, one of the prime causes of the present world plight is our failure in real liberal arts education. What do we mean by the liberal arts? In the Middle Ages they were the seven branches of learning: grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. Later they came to include philosophy, history, languages and literature, science and the arts. To go back even further, the term comes from the Latin **artes liberales,** which among Romans only the free men, **liberi,** were allowed to pursue. In Cicero's time the cultivation in such knowledge was suitable for free men, as distinguished from the need of trades and skills for slaves. These favored sons studied these cultural subjects to give them that broad understanding which would fit them for worthy living.

American higher education, following to a considerable extent the concepts of Oxford and Cambridge, has been built upon the liberal tradition, because ours is a civilization for free men. From the Hebrew-Christian tradition comes the root principle of democracy, the dignity and worth of the human individual. Made in the image of God and accountable to Him, endowed with reason, conscience, emotions, and the power of choice, it was of vital importance that this human being make the most of his abilities and opportunities. The Church recognized the necessity for enlightenment and established colleges. Every one of the nine colleges in colonial times was founded with a view to supporting the claims of the Christian faith.

They desired to sustain a high order of church leadership so that they and their posterity might preserve the revered values of the Protestant faith. Social leadership required the discipline of sound learning, and that learning was rooted in the Christian philosophy of life.

The basic purpose of a liberal education is to develop a well-rounded personality. It begins with discipline and leads to self-discipline. The building of character is its most important purpose, and it is, therefore, concerned with training in good morals and good manners. As the name implies, a liberal education is designed to release the mind from ignorance, superstition, bigotry, prejudice, and partisanship, to emancipate the will, to stimulate the imagination, to broaden the sympathies, and make the student a citizen of the world. It seeks to widen horizons, open new windows of the mind, fit the student for the critical examination of ends and means, sharpen appreciation, elevate the taste, and encourage the formation of habits of independent inquiry and reflection. It endeavors to develop in the student a resourcefulness, which will enable him to do what he never expected to do, to meet situations not found in a book, and to meet them effectively with intelligence, courage and faith. In short, he is to be a man of honor, who will not lie, who has a sense of social responsibility, and who will carry his share of the load in church and state.

Liberal education is thus set in contrast to strictly vocational education, which is also of great importance. Vocational education is that which focuses the mind

on the particular trade, business, or profession which the student expects to pursue in later years, and it teaches him how to perform his future task with intelligence, skill, and competence. Vocational training, necessary and valuable as it is, does not attempt to liberate, but to concentrate; not to broaden a man's horizon, but to focus his mind on his job. Vocational education concerns itself primarily with making a living, whereas liberal education seeks primarily to develop a personality who will be able to live a larger, richer, more abundant life. Of course, we need both types of education, but we should clearly distinguish the purpose of each. Most of the criticism aimed at colleges by "practical" men for not fitting graduates to earn a living, to make money, to get ahead, is due to a failure to discriminate between the fundamental purpose of the two types of education.

We have pinned our faith to education in this country, as no other nation on earth has ever done. Horace Mann said in his report as Secretary of Massachusetts State Board of Education, that the American tradition of education was necessary to the "well-being of all the people," that without it, "though all mankind were well fed, well clothed, and well housed, they might still be half civilized." American civilization has been built upon liberal education, an education not only available to all the people, but one founded upon the ideal of Christianity and democracy—truth, honesty, justice, and sympathy—which have been the goals toward which man has been striving since his emergence from barbarism. These ideals are not easily

realized. They must be fought for with courage and steadfastness. Their importance is not always recognized. There are always those who are willing to subordinate them to the development of techniques, of vocational skills, which may better enable one to earn a livelihood, but leave one, if his attention is concentrated upon the skills, weaker in one's abilities to perceive the real direction of civilization.

It is not, however, the confusing of the liberal and the vocational aims, for in many cases these have been coordinated, but it is the secularization of education that has brought us to our present sad plight. By secularization we mean life that is organized and planned without taking God into account. The influence of eighteenth century enlightenment and romanticism, with its assumption that man is naturally good and is quite capable of looking after himself, was not uplifting. Sophistication and self-sufficiency became the order of the day in our era of expansion, which was characterized by mechanism, materialism and mammonism. Men gave themselves to developing techniques, and equipped themselves for scientific, mechanical, and agricultural pursuits, rather than for high moral ideals and high moral character. The religious aim was supplanted by the modern god efficiency, and the emphasis came to be laid upon means rather than ends.

Much of our modern education is based upon materialistic philosophy and behavioristic psychology—which insists that everything can be weighed and measured, and that man is a function of a set of cells,

chemical substances and electrical impulses. It believes that a man is an organism which can be conditioned to react in a certain way. Its education more and more becomes technical training to make man useful in society—which is only a larger organism. Basically, its function is to train a technician, not to build a character. Technology, whether in the creation of new explosives or a new method of super-salesmanship, stands outside and disclaims the moral results of its acts. This war shows that the education of the past few decades has trained a fine group of technicians. It shows also that we might well turn back to the older theory of a liberal education, for free men, which is concerned with convictions and consciences, with ultimate values. Some one has said, "What you would get from the nation, you must first put into the schools." President Hutchins, of the University of Chicago, says that we are getting the sort of education we deserve, that, having set up the Golden Calf to worship and having adopted the dollar mark as our standard of value, we have no reason to complain about the unhappy results which the neglect of the humanities has brought about.

"Many causes," says Dr. Alexander Meiklejohn, "have produced the present World War. But high among them all is the failure of our Anglo-American institutions of liberal learning. It is not the forces of the modern world which have wrecked us. It is our lack of understanding of these forces." He points out the fact that the majority of our intellectual leaders in 1939 and 1940 were in open rebellion against the

participation of the United States in the growing conflict which was engulfing the world. We continued our selfish policy of isolationism, which we proudly adopted immediately after the last war. He affirms that the colleges were not studying war and peace, not charting a course for the United States or for the world. They were doing "intellectual" jobs. They were "technical." They were not "liberal."

However far short institutions of higher education have come in the matter of measuring up to their opportunities and responsibilities, there can be little criticism of their attitude since Pearl Harbor. In less than a month after that treacherous assault, there was held in Baltimore on January 2, 1942, the largest and one of the most significant and enthusiastic meetings of college officials ever held in this country. The institutions pledged their whole-hearted allegiance to the winning of the war, and willingly placed at the disposal of the government their entire facilities. Committtees of able men were appointed to cooperate with government agencies. A few institutions had already announced the inauguration of an accelerated program, by following which a student could speed up the completion of his graduation requirements. Practically all the other colleges which enrolled men students, at that time agreed to adopt an accelerated program for the duration. In order to help the war effort, new courses were put into the curriculum and a new emphasis was placed on many of the old offerings. The necessity for a program of physical hardening for all students was recognized, and was agreed upon. In-

tercollegiate athletics, especially big time football, did not seem to loom so large under the circumstances. Those college men knew that modern wars are won not less by intelligence than by valor, and that, this being true, education must be classed as an essential war-time industry.

Institutions of every type were represented among the thousand or more educators who attended that somewhat turbulent meeting. There were different points of view that were rather vigorously expressed and defended, but there was absolute unanimity, regardless of vested interests, in the patriotic purpose of having their institutions make the maximum contribution toward the winning of the war and the making of a peace that would be just to all nations and hopeful for all men. Men and women left that meeting with high purpose and determination, with zeal and expectancy. They were awaiting the word of those in authority in the government to tell them how they could best serve at this critical time.

For months the officials and committees of the various educational associations presented plans, made suggestions, and worked unceasingly with government officials and agencies in an endeavor to help formulate a sound and comprehensive program, but there was a medley of confused voices, altered attitudes and points of view among government agencies, and the results were disappointing. The results were out of all proportion to the efforts put forth. In the meanwhile, the colleges were growing increasingly impatient. They were willing to do any reasonable thing that this

critical time demanded, but they did not know what to do or how to plan. Under these circumstances, and because of disturbing rumors, a special meeting of the Association of American Colleges was called, to be held in Philadelphia on October 29, 1942, for the purpose of hearing from Dr. E. E. Day, President of Cornell University, and Chairman of a recently formed special committee appointed by the American Council on Education on the "Relationships of Higher Education to the Federal Government." He was to acquaint the members of the Association with what it seemed probable would be decided by the officials of the government with regard to using the institutions of higher education. There was still no official or authoritative word. This was merely a fairly correct forecast of what the official announcement would be. As one might well guess this, too, was a well attended meeting. The interest was keen, and the atmosphere was tense as the grim facts were disclosed.

At the beginning of the meeting there was read a letter from President Roosevelt, addressed to the Executive Director of the Association of American Colleges, which is as follows:

THE WHITE HOUSE
Washington

October 22, 1942

Dear Dr. Snavely:

> Winning the war is now the sole imperative. But we may seem to win it and yet lose it in fact unless the people everywhere are prepared for a peace worthy of the sacrifices of war. Furthermore, the real test of victory may well be found in what the people of the victorious United

Nations are prepared to do to make the "United" concept live and grow in the decades following the peace.

Education, world-wide education, especially liberal education must provide the final answer. Colleges can render a fundamental service to the cause of lasting freedom. Theirs is the opportunity to work with sterling young people who give great promise of leadership.

Let me extend greetings to the liberal arts colleges, the mainspring of liberal thought throughout the country.

Very sincerely yours,

Franklin D. Roosevelt.

President Day gave a full, frank, and lucid statement concerning the developments since the meeting in Baltimore on January 2, 1942. He indicated that he felt that the Army and Navy would at an early date announce plans for the utilization of the colleges, that the emphsis in these plans would be upon training in scientific and technical courses, and that the number of institutions selected would be rather limited. When we remember the lowering of the draft age to eighteen and the fact that most of the men in that meeting wre connected with liberal arts colleges, whose death knell seemed to be sounded by President Day's forthright statement (for colleges cannot function without students), the attitude and spirit of those educators was a rare exhibition of fortitude and unselfish patriotism. There was keen disappointment, not merely because some colleges would perhaps have to close, but because there was a widespread feeling that the Army and Navy plan of ignoring the intangible values in liberal arts education was short-sighted and unwise.

However, they accepted the dictum of the military authorities and adopted, among others, the following resolutions:

> Whereas the United States, as one of the United Nations, is fighting to survive, to maintain Civilization, and to preserve democratic institutions, including schools and colleges, be it resolved that the Association of American Colleges offer to the Federal Government its wholehearted cooperation in the war effort, particularly in the wartime training of young men and women for victory.
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> Be it resolved that the Association of American Colleges and its member institutions wish it clearly understood that:
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> (a) The colleges are not interested in "education as usual" but are ready and anxious to modify their programs in every possible way that will contribute to the winning of the War.
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> (b) The colleges are not moved by the desire to protect their "vested interests" but place their physical plants, faculty, personnel and other resources at the immediate service of the Nation.
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> (c) The colleges do not request deferment from military service of college students as such, but urge the selection of youth for college instruction on the basis of demonstrated ability and democratic equality.

On December 17, 1942, the Army and Navy officially announced their plans to mobilize two to three hundred colleges and universities for training men in the armed forces. The headline of the New York Times for December 18 was, "New Plan Suspends Liberal Education, Stimson and Knox Give Details of Draft of Colleges." Despite President Day's accurate forecast on October 29, the official announcement came as

a shock to the general public as well as to some educators. There are differences of opinion about the wisdom of suspending liberal education for the duration, except as it may be given to women, to men under eighteen and to those who have been rejected for military service. Those who disapprove point to the plans in England and Canada, both of which countries are profiting by their experience in the last war, when they lost potential leadership out of all proportion to the number of casualties, because their college men were the first to rush out and volunteer. Charles Dollard, after visiting Canada and examining into her plan for this war, writes: "Canada is still operating on the assumption that trained minds are a national resource, and is still conscious of the fact that war presents problems which cannot be solved by a slide rule."

President Hutchins, of the University of Chicago, says that the government is wrong in what apparently is its belief that "the only education useful in wartime is an education designed to produce large quantities of low-grade mechanics and small quantities of high-grade ones." Also, "I do not believe the technically trained robots will be effective fighting men in time of war. I am certain that they will be a full-grown menace to their fellow citizens in time of peace."

No one ever thought of suggesting that colleges be made havens for draft dodgers, that college students be deferred as a class, or that any favored group of young men be shielded from the hazards of war. But some of us did believe that, for the long future of the nation, the English method of handling the situation

is perhaps wiser than our plan, especially if this is to be a long war. In England the normal enrollment of the university has decreased only about thirty per cent, but no student over eighteen and a half years old is there except by order of the Ministry of Labour and National Service, which corresponds roughly to our War Manpower Commission plus our Selective Service. No consideration of personal circumstances enters into the decision, only a consideration of the national interest. The carefully selected young man is on active duty, in uniform, receiving army pay, and is sent to the university by the government to continue his preparation for national service, which preparation is not confined to training in science or technology, but includes the liberal arts as well.

To quote again from President Hutchins:

> The disorders of our civilization result in part from our conviction that the advance of technology will solve all our problems for us. But technology will not even win the war for us, certainly not if it is a long one. And if the entire intellectual power of the country is drawn off for any considerable time into engineering, research in the natural sciences, and the execution of military operations, the contribution of the United States to the organization of the world after the war will be less significant than our part in the war would lead us to expect. We must have technology; but we must have something more. We must have the moral and political understanding which it is the object of the social sciences and the humanities to foster. Spectacular as the war effort of the natural sciences is, we cannot rely on it for victory—not, at least, for a victory of any adequate or enduring kind. It is indispensable that we maintain strong centers of

moral and political thought from which may radiate some light which may assist us to see the aims of the war and the nature of the peace.

Chancellor Samuel P. Capen, of the University of Buffalo, remembering our mistakes in the last war, and recognizing the need for qualified officers, writes:

> It is natural for the government of a nation at war to make mistakes. It seems unnatural and unnecessary that the government of the United States should make the same mistakes twice within a generation. Yet that is exactly what our government has done in one of the most critical phases of its war effort.
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> Machines do not win victories. Men win victories. Men who can operate machines and make them; men who can devise machines; men who can discover and apply the principles and processes of physics and chemistry that underlie the making and the use of the numerous instruments and materials required by a nation at war; men of superior intelligence and extraordinary skill; men of initiative, competent to assume the responsibilities of command on land and sea and in the air; men who can plan and administer both civil and military undertakings; thousands of men prepared for leadership or for highly specialized tasks; and a steady and increasing supply of such men, oncoming thousands and tens of thousands.

This discussion now is purely academic. The die is cast, the plans of the Army and Navy are being carried out. As a matter of fact, the financial plight of the liberal arts colleges does not seem to be so grave as it appeared in Philadelphia in October, when the representatives of those colleges, with anxious hearts, pledged their undivided loyalty to the government and to its plans for winning the war. They might disapprove and think that the plans were unwise, they

might, as a result of them, have to suspend operations, but they were game and loyal. The house is on fire, and every decent member of the human family must do his best to put it out.

The war must and will be won. At how great cost or how long it will take, no one can predict. The question we want to ask is, what about the post-war period as it relates to liberal arts education? There were many things wrong with our colleges, and much that was called liberal education was shoddy and did not liberate. Will these things be corrected? Shall we need liberal education less or more in the days to come? Are the humanities outmoded, or are they—philosophy, history, literature, the arts—still to be depended upon to give perspective, poise, insights, convictions, and a right sense of values? Now that the government has entered upon a new phase of education by contract, by which universities undertake for the government specific research problems, at government expense, or contract to train men and women chosen by the government, in fields and by methods prescribed by the government, will this plan be continued after the war? Will the accelerated program be continued, or will we realize that all growth is regulated and that there are limits to assimilation? Shall we, as some one has said, "squeeze out the things worth doing because they are superficially less attractive than the things not worth doing"? Will privately controlled colleges be able to survive, or will these citadels of freedom be lost and all education be in the hands of the State or the Federal Government? If they do survive, will they be used

to educate and rehabilitate soldiers at government expense as they are demobilized? If the government does provide for the further education of those whose education or whose careers have been rudely interrupted, will it do so by subsidizing institutions, or by a system of scholarships, allowing the individual to go to the institution of his or her choice? Will institutions of higher education be characterized by sound educational principles, or will they be geared to give the students a social experience, will they be devoted to "football, fraternities and fun?" Will the experience of the Army and Navy in discovering the unhappy results of allowing students to side step the so-called disciplines lead to the placing of greater emphasis on mathematics and languages, and a more insistent thoroughness on all college work, or will these short, superficial, utilitarian courses which the government is requiring encourage a continuance of that sort of training? Will there be a renewed effort to make our young men and women familiar with our history, more appreciative of our heritage, and more responsible for carrying forward our democratic way of life? Will the fact that some twenty-five to thirty per cent of the men called for induction are physically disqualified shame us into a greater concern for the physical development of all students? Will there be increased or decreased enrollments after the war? Will organized labor continue to be favored by the government, and will it demand that its children be especially provided for at government expense, or will the workers have saved enough out of their unprecedented wages themselves to provide

for higher education for their children? Will it be recognized that education should be a life-long process, and that Adult Education is in many cases of superior importance, value and significance? Will those in authority realize that education cannot be divorced from religion except at the peril of both, and the consequent impairment of our civilization? Will the institutions of higher education continue to improve their work by clearly defining their objectives, by restudying their curricula and teaching methods, by realizing that we may no longer live as provincials, but that we are world-citizens, inseparably linked with South America, China, Russia, and other nations, and that we must become one of the coordinate members of some kind of world association that recognizes the dignity and worth of the individual and our responsibility for maintaining freedom, truth, and justice upon the earth?

Many voices are being raised to emphasize the importance, yes, the necessity, of widening and deepening our interest in liberal arts education. President Nicholas Murray Butler, of Columbia University, stresses the enduring quality of a liberal education, and insists that the usefulness of the American college in the days to come will depend upon the clearness with which it recognizes its fundamental problem. He says:

> The real content of a liberal education changes very little, save in form as the years pass. Its utlimate objective remains one and the same from the time of Plato and Aristotle to the age in which we are living. The broadening of the conception of a liberal education, first by the advent of modern science, its methods and its discoveries, and next by the increasing understanding of problems

of economic and social significance and importance, has, of course, greatly altered and enlarged the course of instruction. These new knowledges have not, however, displaced the older forms of insight into the meaning of civilization which have from time immemorial been offered by a knowledge of literature, of philosophy, and of the fine arts. They have simply been added to them. Should the American college ever degenerate into a trade school, it would pass out of existence except in name.

The best apologetic, however, for liberal arts education that has come out recently has been given not by an educator but by Wendell L. Willkie in the address which he delivered at Duke University on January 14, 1943. That address should be widely pondered. In part, he said:

> The greatest civilizations of history have been the best educated civilizations. And when I speak of education in this sense I do not have in mind what so many today claim as education, namely, special training to do particular jobs. . . . I am thinking, rather, of what we call the liberal arts. I am speaking of education for its own sake: to know for the sheer joy of understanding; to speculate, to analyze, to compare, and to imagine. . . . The liberal arts, we are told, are luxuries. At best you should fit them into your leisure time. They are mere decorations upon the sterner pattern of life which must be lived in action and by the application of skills. When such arguments gain acceptance that is the end of us as a civilized nation. . . .
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> In fact, so important are the liberal arts for our future civilization that I feel that education in them should be as much a part of our war planning as the more obviously needed technical training. . . . We cannot win a true victory unless there exists in this country a large body of liberal-

ly educated citizens. This is a war for freedom—freedom here and freedom elsewhere. But if we are going to risk our lives for freedom, we must at the same time do all we can to preserve the deep springs from which it flows. . . . Freedom is of the mind. . . .

He quotes President Hopkins of Dartmouth as saying that "it would be a tragic paradox if, as a result of the war, we were to allow our system of higher education to be transformed into the type of education which has made it so easy for a crowd of governmental gangsters like Hitler's outfit to commandeer a whole population," and he adds

The destruction of the tradition of the liberal arts, at this crisis in our history, when freedom is more than ever at stake, would mean just that. It would be a crime, comparable, in my opinion, with the burning of the books by the Nazis. And it would have approximately the same results. Burn your books—or ,what amounts to the same thing neglect your books—and you will lose freedom, as surely as if you were to invite Hitler and his henchmen to rule over you.