

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

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HOW SHOULD THE STUDENT BODY BE RECRUITED?

Some time after the English blockade went into effect, a public official learned to his surprise that there was some relation between fats and explosives. The relation was not clear in his mind, but he said he understood it was a recent discovery. Since then there has been a more or less insistent demand in England that more science should be included in the university curricula offered those who were to become the public men of the British Empire.

Prior to the war these curricula have been much debated in all countries. During the past twenty-five years high school courses have gone to the maximum of subjects and the minimum of thoroughness. The requirements generally in the science course in universities specify that the student must study French *or* German, overlooking the obvious fact that a student who progresses to a point where either foreign language is essential requires both. To a dispassionate observer, therefore, it seems that the making over of curricula has resulted in small if any improvement. Certainly the present curricula are giving us no products of a more gigantic stature than the Huxleys, Kelvins and Haeckels of a past generation, themselves often critics of these very curricula.

Is it not possible that some other more important factor is involved here? May it not be the composition of the student body which is at fault? Through elective courses and studies students dictate the curricula to a considerable extent. For on their selection depends largely the relative strength of the various departments in every university. It seems, therefore, that the composition of the student body is of more immediate concern than the subject-matter studied. Professors cannot select or make students. Students can determine their professors; and it was an old Scotch professor who said: "The university is a fine place if it were not for the students."

Universities, their faculties and students are an economic burden to be borne only as society receives a commensurate return for their activities. There is every reason to believe that following the war such institutions will be scrutinized as possibly they have never been in the past. The composition of the student body will, I believe, largely determine the verdict under which such institutions must prosper or decline.

How is the composition of the student body determined, or, in other words, how is the student body recruited?

In the early winter of 1917 a leading weekly naively remarked that the criticism sometimes made that the sons of the rich and well-to-do were not doing their part in the war was disproved by the decreased university enrollments. Or, to put it bluntly, the institutions dependent on taxes or on endowments made valuable through the labors of society as a whole were attended by the children of only a portion of this society, parental wealth being the determining factor. High school teachers of experience will know exactly what I mean. The matter is as obvious as it is objectionable. Under unsettled social conditions it is a matter that might determine the very life of the institutions we all wish to see prosper, believing as we do that the salvation of the world is in their hands.

The answer to our problem is so easy and so just that one can only wonder why so plain a reform has been so long delayed. It is not to be solved by the wholesale education of all high school graduates of a certain age as the government has recently undertaken as a war measure. Rather it is to be solved along the lines of the following tentative plan:

The faculty of each commissioned and certified high school, the county superintendent, the superintendent of each school, and the township trustees or board of education shall at commencement designate 20% or 25% of the graduates of each school as beneficiaries under this plan. The basis of selection of beneficiaries shall be the class record of graduates during their high school course. Each beneficiary shall be permitted to select any course of study desired in any school in the State approved by the State Board of Education, provided that any course so selected must be in advance of high school work. Each beneficiary shall be paid for work done in any such school as follows: \$325 for the first year, \$350 for the second year, \$375 for the third year, and \$400 for the fourth year, provided that during his course he shall carry at least fifteen hours recitation, or its equivalent, per week. Payment shall be made to the beneficiary at the end of each month or term in which such collegiate work is done, subject to passing grades in each course of work pursued. Failure to make passing grades shall deprive beneficiary of further privileges under this plan; and in case of dismissal from his college for any cause all privileges are forfeited, subject to an appeal to the State Board of Education, which board may grant permission to enter another school, subject to the approval of such school, in which the beneficiary shall again be granted the privilege of this plan.

The funds for carrying out this plan shall be raised by a county tax in those counties in which commissioned and certified high schools are

located. By taxation a fund shall be created and held by each county treasurer. Each beneficiary shall be paid by a draft drawn by him through the bursar of the college where said beneficiary is pursuing his work, and such draft shall be an order on the treasurer of the county in which the beneficiary resides to pay the amount of such draft.

The purpose of this plan, as thus tentatively outlined, is to give a stimulus to better high school work, resulting in a sharper differentiation of those capable of more advanced education from those less capable. It aims to make capacity and ambition rather than the accident of birth the criterion for higher education. It is believed that it will result in a serious and purposeful student body and, in a few years, in a more enlightened, moral and capable citizenship. To the exceptional few who are capable of educating themselves under present existing conditions this plan gives an added stimulus, permitting them to go farther than would otherwise be possible. Finally, it may be remarked that the economic burden of the student body on society would be less under this plan than under conditions now existing. Education of individuals selected after the usual four-year college course should be provided for by scholarships, which should be available only for post-graduate work.

This subject of financial aid to students may not appeal to you at first glance as a matter of fundamental importance. But I wish to insist that it is. Other things being equal, that family or tribe or nation which gets for the family, tribe or nation the benefit of what it breeds will succeed over its neighbors or competitors. Biology has contributed one fundamental idea or concept to human thought—the idea of evolution. And legislation can be in harmony with or conform to evolutionary trends. Education of the most fit at public expense is, I believe, such legislation. Such legislation would tend to give the nation the benefit of what it breeds, a condition now imperfectly realized because our college students are largely recruited from a numerically inferior portion of our population.

“Heredity may confer some advantage; but genius generally mocks at heredity, and the frequent rise by sheer ability of men from the ranks of manual workers seems to prove that brain power in the case of a fairly homogeneous race exists in due proportion in all classes. The object of national education must be to provide, so far as possible, equal chances for natural talent wherever it is to be found. Otherwise there must be loss of national efficiency. At the same time, it must be remembered that marked intellectual power will always be the possession of a minority, that real leadership will always be rare, and that training in all classes may be wasted if carried beyond the inherent capacity of the individual boy or girl. * * * Of about 600,000 children (in England) who now leave the elementary schools annually, only

about 1 per 1,000 reaches a university. This is far too low a proportion, and it indicates the denial of that equality of opportunity which must be our ideal.”¹

“We are not limited, however, to a military objective, for when the war is over the international competitions of peace will be resumed. No treaties or leagues can prevent that, and it is not desirable that they should, for no nation can afford to be without the stimulus of competition.

“In that race the same power of science which has so amazingly increased the productive capacity of mankind during the past century will be applied again, and the prizes of industrial and commercial leadership will fall to the nation which organizes its science forces most effectively.”²

¹ Lord Sydenham, *Science*, N. S. Vol. XLVIII, pp. 482 and 483, 1918.

² Elihu Root, *l. c.* pp. 533 and 534.