

► *War's effects on education are not as bad as they're painted.*

## COLLEGES IN TRANSITION

BY ADOLPH E. MEYER

THE American college, ever since its humble inception in primitive New England, has witnessed seamy days as well as flush. Yet in the end it has always managed to walk off in triumph, and just before the Yellow Blitz it was coming out of the Depression into a condition generally regarded by authoritative opinion as satisfactory. Today, however, all this optimism has vanished, and where there was once hope there is now gloom.

The plain fact, of course, is that the war has put its prehensile fingers on the college, and everywhere, like the hard-pressed butchers and gas dealers, the men of learning are beating their breasts and saying their prayers. The sad state of the college, Dr. Carter Davidson, President of Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois, has confessed, is what makes his hair grey and his sleep light. But the Knox

President is, I fear, too gloomy. No doubt, the college is aching from the strains of war, but that it is about to be ruined, or even seriously damaged, seems to me unwarranted pessimism. Indeed, an analysis of the many things the war has done to the college will reveal that while a few are bad, many are fundamentally good.

Consider, for example, the college's lament that it is losing students. It is a fact that the fat rosters of the boom days have diminished in heft. No longer will the college be able to produce, like New York University, some 4500 graduates at one swoop. But such a drop in numbers is, by and large, good and should be applauded. For one thing, it has finally stopped the limitless expansion which created such chain stores of the intellect as California, Northwestern, Boston, Columbia and New York. Decreased enrolments obviously will produce smaller

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classes, and if properly nursed and encouraged, such a movement should in time make extinct the large lecture class with its regiments of listless students. Under the new conditions any professor worthy of his hire will at least have a chance to know his learners by name instead of having to associate them with seat numbers in a room filled with strange aromas.

Another boon bestowed by the war is the shorter time now needed to get a degree. Not so long ago college pedagogues were convinced that no one, not even Aristotle, could ripen into the baccalaureate state in less than four years. Today everybody knows that no normal person needs that much time to complete the college's simple and elementary requirements. Because this has now become obvious, most efficient colleges have invented ways to thrust their learners into academic robes in the shortest possible time.

Some, like Chicago, have managed to do the job in two years, though most colleges still require three years. At Boston University, which has openly described itself as "a nationally accredited 'Grade A' university," any student can pluck a degree in three years or even less, simply by attending a couple of additional summer terms. Other col-

leges, like Middlebury in Vermont, have speeded up their output by increasing the credit values of "courses involving test tubes as well as text books." At New York University the idea of operating day and night, twelve months a year, has brought into being the Summer Session, Intersession, and Postsession besides, of course, the Regular Session. By turning his pressure up to the last notch the ambitious NYU scholar can master a regular thirty weeks' course in four weeks.

In the current pedagogic lingo this academic speed-up is known as Acceleration. That a good many men of learning have begun to appreciate its merits is apparent, since not long ago more than a thousand college presidents and administrators, assembled in conclave at Baltimore, gave the scheme a warm boost. Most States in the Union, likewise, are hospitable to the idea and have sanctioned its use in their domain. But New York, apparently preferring to cling to its ancient traditions, remains an exception. Still feeling that what counts in college is the time spent there rather than the quality of the work done, it recently decided that the new bachelor's degree from Chicago is non-negotiable in the Empire State.

## II

The college has also been forced to give its academic offerings a critical overhauling. True, most of the old and familiar staples are still in stock. Thus at Boston University a student may still pant over the intricate perplexities of Advanced Clothing or Stunts and Tumbling. He may still struggle with the metaphysics of advanced tap dancing, shuffle board and deck tennis. And what's true for Boston is true for most of the larger shrines of learning. But the fact is that these courses, like tours around the world, are today simply not in demand.

The war has made the college student more serious. He knows what he wants, and what he wants doesn't need any enticing lures to attract him. What he craves must be solid and without hokum, and even its rumored difficulties do not seem to scare him away. Consequently, while most of the more vapid, though once popular, courses are now waiting for the embalmer, the *bona fide* sciences of mathematics, physics and chemistry are in lush bloom. Not only are they flourishing, but the participants therein are actually proving that they are endowed with brains and, given the chance, they will use them. En-

couraged by this finding, some colleges have been optimistic enough to go in for such formidable taxers of the mind as Chinese and Japanese. Several, including NYU, have added Russian to their offerings, while Hunter College, the largest liberal arts college for women in the world, has embellished itself with a war course in Hindustani.

The revelation that college students can do serious work of a high calibre must surely be set down as good. Perhaps even more beneficial for the college may be its startling discovery that it can get along without Big Time Athletics. Before the war only a handful of the nation's front-page colleges had begun the process known as "athletic de-emphasis." The unconventional President Hutchins of Chicago, convinced that football was at bottom a menace to the college's main purposes, booted the sport out of its Chicago existence. The Yale authorities, feeling somewhat like Hutchins but lacking his boldness, were willing to compromise on a strictly amateur team. NYU, unable to match the dazzling feats of the nation's biggest teams, playing every year at the Polo Grounds and the Yankee Stadium, discontinued its football team altogether.

But outside of these three institutions most of the larger colleges

continued to employ athletics, and particularly football, as a major activity. Their advertising value and their money-making qualities made this inevitable. But the war has changed all this. Today the college must rely mainly on its academic benefits if it wants to attract customers. Where athletics exist they have assumed a minor rôle in the college's repertoire, and as a result athletic coaches no longer command a bigger salary than the Dean of Liberal Arts.

One of the college's more persistent complaints has to do with its loss of manpower. It is, of course, a fact that the higher learning has lost a considerable part of its personnel. Many a sweating professor, gratifying a secret yearning, has relinquished his drab cap and gown for the more rakish garb of the officer. In so far as some of these men were first-rate scientists and technical experts, the college's loss has been very real. This blow, however, should be considerably softened by the large exodus of vocational guides, scientific sociologists, and the professors of business administration. Most of these men have migrated down to the Potomac, where, suffused by pleasant air, they now contribute their science to such august bodies as the American Council of Education,

the National Research Council, the United States Office of Education, the National Resources Planning Board and hosts of others. Since a good many of these fellows were mainly hand-shakers and promoters rather than honest scholars, their departure from the academic precincts should turn into a real benefit for the higher learning.

Though the war has transformed the halls of higher learning in several ways, a few items, alas, still remain untouched. There is, for example, still an almost endless array of degrees. The original B.S. and B.A. have spawned a hundred-fold, so that today we have such things as B.Did., B.L.S., B.F.A., B.N., B.M., B.P.S.M., B.S.H.E., B.S.L.A., B.N.S., B.B.S., B.C.S., B.Ag., A.B. in L.S., A.B. in Ed., A.B. in Soc. W., B.S. in P.A.L., B. Voc. E., B.R.Ed., B.V.A., and the B.S. in H.Ec. There is even a B.O., plus swarms of others. Since all of them mean more or less the same basic thing, namely a baccalaureate, they might just as well be reduced to the original two, which at least were understandable. But the trend, unfortunately, seems to be not towards a reduction but rather to an even greater number.

Nor has the doctor's dissertation been affected very much. Doctors are still produced in good amount,

last year's output being over 3500. Of these, 197 came from Chicago, while NYU's puissant School of Education produced the largest number of doctoral tracts in any single field with 52 in the Science of Education. The subjects are still the familiar ones ranging from "Competition between Potatoes and Other Vegetables at Retail, Buffalo, N. Y., 1940" (Cornell) to "Hiawatha, an Indian Boy; an Operetta based on Henry W. Longfellow's Poem, for Unchanged Voices" (NYU). In the realm of graduate work, however, the war offers a real ray of hope. For one thing, the pure sciences will receive more stress than heretofore, with a consequent lesser attention being given to such bogus sciences as business practice, salesmanship, character analysis and the like. For another thing the war, no doubt, will decrease the number of graduate students, particularly in the quasi-scientific domains. This, plainly enough, has long been desirable.

Another matter which the war will probably not improve is that of the honorary degree. Quantitatively, as a matter of sad fact, there has been no letup. The war, indeed, appears to have had the opposite effect. This is due mainly to the fact that besides the usual army of archbishops, politicians and suc-

cessful hardware dealers, the college must now bestow the badge of learning on the nation's generals and admirals. Then, too, with the advent of the radio, it is now possible to hand out honorary doctorates all over the globe with no effort at all. It was in this manner that Winston Churchill was converted into an LL.D. by the University of Rochester. He was the first one to perform the feat *in absentia*.

### III

There is no doubt that the American college, particularly the smaller one, is today teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. This, of course, is not news, for outside of a fortunate few, most universities in this country have always been financially in a bad spot. However, in the gayer days of peace and plenty an occasional windfall often straightened out the cashier's affairs sufficiently to save his institution from the beckoning sheriff. But the war, as is well known, has cut down the supply of helpful altruists with cash, and outside of the \$20,000,000 check to Northwestern from the late Walter Patton Murphy, a railway equipment manufacturer, no such gold has been reported anywhere.

A few of the better-heeled schools, like Harvard and Columbia, have managed to weather the storm. The war has even taught them a few new tricks. Thus with an ascetic economy they have gone on the prowl against all waste, with the result, curiously enough, that they have not only balanced their budgets, but even have made a substantial profit. However, most colleges haven't been so fortunate. To save themselves they have installed a few new monetary faucets in the hope of tapping a helpful source somewhere. To begin with, a good many have tried to put across the idea that culture can help win the war. But here, alas, they have run into stubborn resistance.

Having converted themselves more and more into vocational schools during the past two decades, the colleges somehow don't sound very convincing to the War and Navy Departments, when they try to defend a truly liberal education. The result is that the war has shoved culture more and more into the background as the college finds itself specializing more and more in the mechanical trades.

A great many colleges, more realistic and perhaps also more truth-

ful, have preferred to leave culture for the postwar world. They have frankly harnessed themselves to the government's War Training Program. Through government contracts they have made available their buildings, equipment, and even their instruction for young men and women trained at government expense. Naturally, the government pays for all this, not lavishly, but well enough to make it worthwhile. More important than the merely financial aspect of this business is the fact that under the government's watchful eyes instruction must be of top quality, standards of achievement must be high, and no loafing is tolerated. All this surely is to the college's gain.

If the war has done many good things to the college, and a few bad ones, then the fact must not be overlooked that most men of higher learning are gazing towards the day when peace will once more caress the land and when once again they may resume their old and familiar ways. In other words, most college professors, soaked in their effete traditions, discount most of the war's beneficial influences, over-emphasize the bad, and sigh for the Good Old Days.



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# THE STATE OF THE UNION

## *The Press and Congress*

BY GARET GARRETT

IN his last great work, entitled *Modern Democracies*, where you will find some gloomy forethoughts on the world-wide decline of the parliamentary principle, Lord Bryce said of the American people that they read the President's speeches but not the *Congressional Record*. That is true. It was always true. The people never did read it. And why should they? What are their newspapers for? The *Congressional Record* is not intended to have what a circulation manager would call reader appeal. To report the proceedings of Congress as news is a function of a free press in a free country. How well do the American newspapers perform that function?

Important legislative acts are properly reported, certainly. If the measure pending is highly controversial, like the pay-as-you-go tax bill, you will read forecasts of the

outcome, lively speculations, interviews, statements, and all that. A filibuster in the Senate may rise to the relative importance of a sporting event. If the Congress slaps the President, or if the President says to the Congress, "Do this — or else," that is fair news for the big headlines. Investigating committees get space and limelight exactly equal to the news value of the drama and scandal they produce. But the reporting of speeches and debates is a disgrace to the institution that has believed of itself, and not without reason, that it made popular government feasible on the American scale.

Not only as general reporting is it poor workmanship, slovenly and indifferent; in contrast with a very high standard of newspaper reporting it is worse still, and in the fact that such slovenliness is the rule,

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