

If the Schools Go Cultural

THERE was a discussion in these columns some months ago of the apparent failure of our colleges, particularly our colleges for men, to make readers of books. It was upon the American college graduate that the publisher relied for his market, and the college graduate had not responded. He read many newspapers, some magazines, but few, very few books. And it was said then that the English departments of the colleges could not escape some responsibility for this unhappy state of affairs.

Some, but certainly not all. The bookless college graduates are by-products of a busy, bustling America with its mind on the problem of competitive production. As undergraduates, they believed that there was no time to read in college and would be less afterward, and since they felt that way there was no time. They learned how to loaf between spells of physical activity but not how to divert some of their leisure to the pleasurable activities of the intellect. Leisure as a problem was never presented to them.

It is a different America now, less busy, much less bustling, with hours of enforced labor growing shorter, and hours of enforced leisure growing longer. The problem now is not only how to work, but how to live while not working. And, in the absence of some great calamity, this problem will outlast our time.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the schools are going cultural again, and this is the most important literary news for years in America. Many in authority in the last few months have described this change as a necessity, and it may be assumed that the practice will soon follow even where it has not already begun. The "practical" school, the vocational school is doomed, except for the relatively few of special capacity who can certainly be absorbed by industry. Why give inefficient courses in carpentering, cooking, or journalism, when the adult world can take each year only a handful of graduates, who will learn far more quickly under conditions of actual paid employment?

And why, to put it more philosophically, make a craft, a trade, or a technique a basis of education unless it is essential (as it clearly is not going to be in our time) to supply an ever increasing mass of semi-trained labor?

We are back, therefore, where we started in elementary education, and with as many problems unsolved. If the child—any child—is to be educated to understand life, to adjust itself to life, to get the most from life, then such subjects as literature (to be distinguished from learning to read) assume a new, or a renewed importance. The question here is not the revival of the classics, not magazines vs. books, nor the simple and colloquial vs. the sophisticated and complex. All these controversies apart and unsettled, it is the question of how to teach the child to profit by prospective leisure in a life under the new conditions of an industrial system which can produce without strain upon the masses enough to feed, clothe, and house the population.

Here is something that need not be argued, defended, or propagandized, although the means, the methods, and the objectives in view will be earnestly discussed with wide differences of opinion. The shift of emphasis from vocational to cultural will take care of itself because circumstances will make it inevitable.

What is interesting—news in fact—is the probable effect upon reading. We shall have more reading in a few years, much more of it, and perhaps better, for it could not be much worse. If the child is taught literature as a necessity rather than as a grace-note or a convention, he is not likely to fall quite so ready a victim to the exploitations of a cheap and vicious press inspired by profit-making to seek always the lowest common denominator in taste. It is true, of course, that the increase in reading will make printing more profitable, and so encourage a production of cheap trash for cheap minds cheaply educated. Yes, but it is quite probable that cheap trash will not sell so easily in the future. For the new reasons for giving a sound training in literature differ from the old in that they are based upon a necessity which may be compared to the necessity for teaching how to read when, thanks to the invention of printing, the letter rather than the sound became the medium by which facts and ideas were exchanged and disseminated. If there is to be more leisure, either enforced or easily attained (and who will deny that probability), then what the movies, what games and recreation, what the radio and social intercourse cannot supply, reading must. And will, for there is no possibility while this civilization lasts that the printed page will lose its absolute, though it may lessen in relative, importance.

It is the fashion to attack our "liberal" colleges and condemn our schools for superficiality. Those who cry out the loudest have seldom taken the trouble to

consider the complex problems which our growing and would-be democratic population has presented to the educators, with no alibi possible and usually no escape. But even so, the root of the difficulty, when it comes to preparing the child to read good books, is not to be found in poor teaching or feeble scholarship. It lies in the ideology of a country that has believed in material success, and thought it certain for every busy money maker. Extract the idea that education is solely a preparation for work, and that work is sure to be rewarded, and the position of the teacher of literature is bound to change. His task becomes relevant instead of irrelevant to the child's future, it is in accord with, not in opposition to, the current of opinion, it is practical in the best sense in that it is realistic, not impractical because regarded as merely idealistic. He and his work are sure to gain in confidence. And if there is any virtue in early example and enlightened training, we shall get more good readers, fewer indifferents, and only the inevitable proportion of congenital illiterates.

The Duffy copyright bill should pass in the House of Representatives, as it has passed in the Senate. Whatever its faults may be, it will end a disgraceful situation. As all with access to inside information know well, the successive copyright bills which have failed to become law in the past, have been killed directly or indirectly by minority interests wishing to protect their special privileges at the expense of authors, publishers, booksellers, and literature in general. American writing and the book trade in general has everything to gain and nothing to lose by joining the rest of the civilized world in adequate copyright protection. Let us hope it will be won.

Ten Years Ago

In the issue of August 15, 1925, *The Saturday Review* recommended "Glamour" by Stark Young. Walter Prichard Eaton, who reviewed the book in that issue, wrote: "In calling it 'Glamour,' he has happily expressed what it is he seeks and often in rather unexpected places finds, in his pilgrimages along Broadway."

Currently, Stark Young has shifted his search for glamour to the old South, and with signal success. "So Red the Rose" was one of last year's most popular novels, and "Feliciana," a volume of short stories in the same genre, has just appeared.

Today

The Saturday Review recommends:

SEEDTIME AND HARVEST, by Eleanor Blake. This, like Mr. Young's book, is a regional novel.

Letters to the Editor: *Charles A. Beard* *Answers Julian Huxley*

History and Social Science

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*.

Sir:

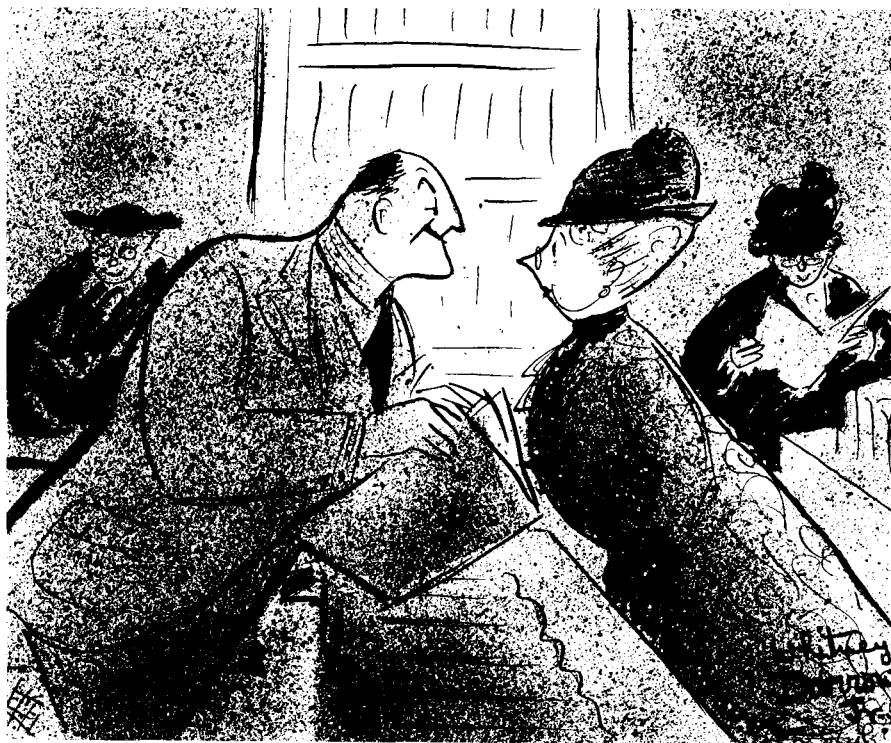
Every now and then a man of natural science steps out of his laboratory to tell the world that it needs a science of society—a scientific sociology. And many workers, from Comte to Pareto, have tried to make a science of social affairs. So far failures are admitted, but still it is constantly imagined that some Newton or Darwin will accomplish the feat. . . .

A science of society is possible. By common agreement, however, the science is limited to economics or sociology. History is generally given up as a bad case. It is a kind of old almanac of kings, princes, warriors, politicians, knights, ladies, mobs, wars, hysteria, prostitutes, and racketeers. Nobody is expected to bring all these "data" under some formula of law. In his thoughtful discourse on sociology as a science, recently published by the *Saturday Review of Literature*, Mr. Julian Huxley conforms to the general practice by dismissing history with the saying that it "has always been in the main a humanist as opposed to a scientific subject."

If history is to be given up as hopeless, how can a science be made out of economics or sociology which is enclosed in the immensity called history, and merely deals with selected phases and times of history? The question does not seem to be irrelevant. . . .

What is this history now dismissed for the thousandth time? As actuality, as reality, history is the total immensity of events and personalities (human occurrences in relation to physical environment) in time, perhaps 100,000 years, more or less. Since economists and sociologists also deal with human occurrence, they of necessity must take the occurrences with which they deal out of that totality of occurrences which is history as actuality. They may not take any fact older than two, ten, fifty, or a thousand years, but whatever its time-depth, the fact comes out of history.

The economist or sociologist merely selects from history some of the myriad facts available. He selects them for his purposes. Like the poor historian he cannot lift the actualities out of time, as the chemist takes sulphuric acid and carbon out of his containers and combines them in a test tube. Like the poor historian, the sociologist or economist takes symbols of the facts of past time—words and figures. His selections and combinations are formal—they are intellectual, not physical, operations. Sometimes he makes a gesture of recognition by saying: "These facts so symbolized in words and figures actually bore a vital relation to other facts in the reality of things that happened, but for the moment and for my purposes I am separating them in thought." Then he generally forgets all about his assumptions and concessions, for if he does not he is tangled up all the time with that cover-



"IT'S TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN."

ing immensity, called history as actuality, the very thing he wants to be rid of forever and ever.

By his operations the economist or sociologist produces important knowledge respecting specific occurrences—important, that is, for theory and practice. Without such knowledge human affairs could not be carried on at all, badly as they are carried on, if we regard unemployment, misery, and degradation as "bad." He discovers certain uniformities and correlations—in certain places and times. He deliberately isolates his places and times. He says this uniformity or correlation occurred *then* and *there*. He takes a time-depth and a geographical area, out of the universality of time and place which the poor historian must consider while contemplating and investigating the fulness of his subject matter.

When the sociologist or economist says that this uniformity or correlation has occurred, he necessarily means "in the time-existing circumstances." When he ventures to predict (which is of the essence of natural science), he necessarily implies "circumstances remaining substantially identical in time."

For example, an economist in Rome at the height of the Empire might have discovered a correlation between the marriage rate and the price of grain in the city of Rome. That would have been a bit of history—a fact of history. If he had ventured to predict that rate would be good for all time in the city, he would have guessed wrong. For some reason or reasons, or none at all, the provinces of the Empire fell off, the import of grain declined, and the Empire disappeared. Instead of the grand economy of imperial

Rome came innumerable local economies in which commerce and money prices played a relatively small role in social relations, including the business of getting married.

Now why did the Roman system break up? That is a historical question. Many answers have been given, but there is no general agreement, no Q. E. D. The historian can show some of the conditions which made possible that dissolution, but he cannot make a differential equation out of them, leading to a positive answer. The historian cannot answer that question positively, beyond all doubt. What warrant is there for saying that? The warrant is that the historian must derive his knowledge from records, that billions of occurrences in the "fall of Rome" were not recorded, and that numberless records have been lost. How can anyone be sure that he has made a science of occurrences when he is not sure that he has all the relevant occurrences before him? So it seems proper to say that were the human mind competent to grasp the totality of history, the state of knowledge of history as actuality prevents us from making a science of it.

The historian may, to be sure, work at his subject in the scientific spirit, that is, with a desire to find all the truth he can about things in particular and general. But he is compelled to confess that, given the very partial character of his "data," he cannot make deterministic or ordered science out of the totality of historical events in time.

What then is the upshot for the issue before us? It seems to be as follows.

We may expect from economics and so-

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