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Space for Notes



The modern state of the industrial arts has got its growth and holds its footing by force of an effectual disregard of national demarcations. Not only is it true that this body of industrial knowledge, which makes the material foundation of modern civilisation, is of an international character and that it has been brought into bearing, and continues to be held, as a common stock, common to all the civilised nations; but it is also to be kept in mind that this modern technology always and necessarily draws on the world's resources at large for the means and materials of its work, regardless of national frontiers - in so far as the politicians do not deliberately put obstacles in the way of a free movement of these means and materials. In the realm of industry it is obvious that national frontiers serve no better purpose than a more or less effectual hindrance to the efficient working of the industrial system. Yet in this industrial realm men still argue - that is to say, shortsighted statesmen and interested business men are able to argue - that the nation's industrial interest may best be served by hindering the nation's industry from taking advantage of that freedom of intercourse which the modern industrial system presupposes as an indispensable condition to its best work. So far are men still bound in the ancient web of international jealousy and patriotic animosity.

On the other hand, in the adjacent field of scientific knowledge it is recognised without reservation that political boundaries have no place and, indeed, no substantial meaning. It is taken as a matter of course that science and its pursuit must be free of all restraints of this character; that it is a matter of "the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men," not merely among the citizens or subjects within the nation. That such is the case, that no politician comes forward to advocate an embargo on knowledge at the national frontier, or a protective customs barrier to serve as a fence against an undue infiltration of enlightenment from abroad - that the national statesmen fail to make mischief at this point is apparently due to the fact that no vested business interest has seen its advantage in taking measures to that end. There is also the difficulty that the international diffusion of knowledge proceeds by such subtle and intangible ways as to make its confinement by statute a perplexing matter.

It is true, something may be done by indirection at least - and the nationally minded statesmen have perhaps done what was possible - to hinder the free passage of knowledge over the national frontiers. They have, for instance, taken thought to impose a restrictive tariff on books and other apparatus made use of in scientific and scholarly pursuits or in the art of teaching; and there are also, now and again, certain restrictive measures taken to hinder aliens from imparting knowledge of any kind to the youth of the land. In all these cases of petty obstruction it will be seen, if one looks into the matter, that there is some vested interest of a businesslike sort which seeks to be benefited by these measures of restraint. But when all is told, these and the like endeavors of retardation are, after all, trifling and nugatory in comparison with that voluminous and many-sided restraint of industrial intercourse that appears to be the chief material use of the national frontiers.

Happily, there is no need of argument among civilised men to gain assent to the proposition that the pursuit and diffusion of knowledge is a matter of joint

and undivided interest among all the civilised nations; that it runs on neutral ground, irrespective of national intrigue and ambition; and that no nation has anything to lose in this respect through unguarded co-operation with its neighbors. In respect to this joint interest all are gainers by the gain of any one. Happily, again, this joint interest in the pursuit and diffusion of knowledge is the one end of endeavor which all men and all nations are agreed in rating as the only end of human endeavor that is worth while for its own sake. It may seem a singular state of things, but it will scarcely be questioned on reflection, that this intangible body of knowledge which is in no man's possession and is held as a common stock by the peoples of civilised mankind is not only the most highly valued asset of the civilised world but is at the same time the one indispensable possession which alone can give any community a valid claim to be rated among the civilised peoples. Any substantial loss or defeat on this ground, the ground of what is called the higher learning, would by common consent be accounted the most shameful setback which these nations could suffer; and it is a case where, by common consent, any one's loss is the loss of all.

But at the same time, unhappily, because this pursuit of knowledge is, always and necessarily, of the nature of a collective or joint interest, it results that there is no one class or group of interested persons, no vested interest, which is in a position effectually to parley with the politicians in behalf of this higher learning, in which the civilised world's chief spiritual asset is capitalised. The elements of a political bargain are wanting in the case; and that massive popular sentiment whose pressure can for a time divert the endeavors of the statesmen from the broad and sinuous path of political bargaining is also taken up with other things. And just now, under the strain of desperate work to be done, the material needs involved in the prosecution of the great war take precedence of all else, particularly of all things less tangible. Yet all the while it remains true - and on dispassionate reflection, if such can be had, it will be seen - that this joint pursuit of knowledge which centers and finds expression in the higher learning is the most consequential matter involved in the fortunes of war.

All of which should clear the vision and determine a course of concerted action for those men who still have the interests of science and scholarship at heart, and whose endeavors are not all engrossed with the conduct of the war or with the give and take of political intrigue. The charge which circumstances impose on these keepers of the higher learning is simply the keeping of the ways and means of this pursuit of knowledge well in hand against the time when sober counsels shall again prevail.

Among these keepers of the sacred flame it happens that the hazards of war have thrown the Americans into a position of peculiar responsibility. Through no peculiar merit of their own they have been elected by the singular play of circumstance to take the initiative and largely to shape the prospective fortunes of the republic of learning. Their European copartners have fallen into a state of disorganisation and depletion, both in their personnel and in their equipment, so serious as to leave them, prospectively, very much in arrears. It is perhaps an over-statement to speak of the European world of learning as bankrupt, but it is also to be kept in mind that the misfortunes which make for its undoing are not yet at an end, and will by no means end abruptly with the formal conclusion of the Great War. For one thing, the European community of science and scholarship has been divided into halves between which the war has fixed a great gulf, a gulf so deep and implacable that even for some time after the war it will not be bridged. And within that half in which, by the

fortunes of war, the Americans belong - the half which will now have to go into action as a decimated whole - within this half of the pre-war complement the channels of communication have been falling into neglect, the coordination of parts has failed, the local units have been depleted, the working capital is exhausted, and the equipment is falling into decay. In short, there is at the best a large depreciation charge to be written off. And all the while there is an indefinite promise of more of the same, and worse.

To put the case in concrete terms, the German men of learning have been and are going through a very trying experience, to choose no harsher expression, and are in such a resulting state of moral dilapidation as should in all likelihood leave them largely incapacitated for sound work in science and scholarship for the term of the passing generation. The visible displacement of judgment and aspirations among them has engendered a profound distrust of their working powers among their colleagues of other nationalities - at least all the distrust which they merit. They are at the same time not being at all fully replaced by a new generation of scholars and scientists, since the war is draining off nearly all the men available for such work as will serve the war, which is also permanently diverting the energies of nearly all the residue to uses that are alien to the higher learning. By force of decimation, diversion, and debauch of scholarly morale - coupled with a stubborn distrust of them by the scholars in other lands - the learned men and the seminaries of the higher learning in the German-speaking world are presumably, in the main, to be counted among the dead, wounded, and missing in so far as concerns the reconstruction now to be entered on in the affairs of the higher learning. Something is plainly to be allowed in abatement of any appraisal of so sweeping a nature; but it is also plain that in the reconstruction now to be undertaken there is no German scholarship to be counted on as a present help, and what is to be counted on in the near future is an indefinite and doubtful quantity. In this respect the German-speaking community is plainly the heaviest loser among all the peoples who are losing by the war, and the loss suffered by the German scholarly community is net loss to the republic of learning at large.

In their degree, though in a less sinister measure than the Germans, the other Europeans are subject to much the same depletion of forces, decay of the spirit, and impoverishment in their material means. The Americans, however, have been less exposed to the disorganising experience of the war, and especially they still command the material means indispensable to the organisation and pursuit of scholarly and scientific inquiry under modern conditions. So that by the play of circumstances the Americans are placed in a position of trust to turn the means at hand to the best use for the conservation and reconstruction of the world's joint enterprise in science and scholarship.

As it is perforce a joint international interest that so calls for initiative and wise conduct at the hands of the American men of learning, so it is only by a disinterested joint action on an impartially international plan that the Americans can hope to take care of the work so entrusted to them. They have the means, or they can find them, and it is for them at this critical tide in the affairs of learning to turn these means to account unreservedly in that spirit of co-partnership and self-effacement which alone can hopefully be counted on for anything that shall be worth while in a joint enterprise of such a scope and character.

As an initial move to this end it should reasonably seem obligatory on all those American schools which claim a rating as seminaries of learning to "keep open house" - freely, impartially, and as a matter of routine management to accord

unrestricted privileges of sanctuary and entertainment, gratuitously and irrespective of nationality, to all comers who want an opportunity for work as teachers or students and who give evidence of fitness in any respect for this pursuit. It should be a safe rule, particularly under the conditions of bias and inducement now prevailing, to leave full scope for self-selection on this head, and to afford full opportunity for all whose inclination leads them to follow after the idols of the higher learning.

With this as a point of departure there follows a second step, necessitated by the first - an inclusive coordination of these American schools, together with a large measure of coalition among them. Such a move of co-ordination and allotment of the work to be done is imperatively called for also on grounds of economy, even apart from the more exacting requirement of economy brought on by such an agreement to keep open house as has been spoken for above. As is well known, though it is more or less ingeniously denied from time to time, the American schools that are of college or university grade have hitherto been competitors for the trade in erudition, somewhat after the fashion of rival merchandising concerns. Indeed, it is just as well to admit frankly that they have been rival concerns, doing a competitive business in student registrations and in the creation of alumni, as also in scholastic real estate and funded endowments. This academic competition has led to an extensive duplication of plant and personnel, and more particularly duplication in the courses of instruction offered by the rival schools, and in the extra-scholastic inducements held out by each to attract a clientele of unscholarly registrants. It is scarcely necessary to insist that this rivalry and duplication have been wasteful, at the same time that it has engendered an undue animus of salesmanship in the place of scholarship. All of which may charitably be held as well enough, or at any rate not to be remedied, in time of peace, prosperity, and universal price-rating. But just now, under pressure of the war demands and the war-time inflation of prices and costs, the wastefulness of this manner of conducting the schools is becoming flagrantly evident, at the same time that the schools are already beginning to fall into distress for want of funds to carry on as usual.

The present should accordingly be a propitious time for a move of co-ordination and a degree of coalescence, such as is spoken for above, particularly as it will be practicable on this plan for the rival schools now to cover their retreat out of the underbrush of rivalry and intrigue with a decent - and unfeigned - avowal of devotion to the greater gain of that learning which they have always professed to cultivate with a single mind, and to which they doubtless have also quite amiably hoped to turn their best endeavors so soon as the more pressing exigencies of intercollegiate rivalry should leave them free to follow their natural bent. If recourse is had to some such measure of co-operation among the schools, they will easily be able to carry any prospective burden of providing for their prospective guests, foreign and domestic, as well as the effective volume of their day's work, which now seems an overload.

Such a pooling of scholastic issues would reasonably give rise to something in the way of a central office to serve as a common point of support and co-ordination, which would at the same time serve as a focus, exchange, and center of diffusion for scholarly pursuits and mutual understanding, as well as an unattached academic house of refuge and entertainment for any guests, strays, and wayfaring men of the republic of learning. This central would then stand as an impersonal, impartial, communal central for the republic of learning, an open house of resort and recuperation through the season of stress and infirmity which the community of scholars is facing. There would be no implied degree of unselfishness on the part of the Americans in so placing their

resources and their good offices at the service of the world at large. They would only be serving their own ends as community partners in the pursuit of knowledge; for they can neither increase their own holdings in the domain of learning, nor hold fast that which they conceive themselves to be possessed of, except in co-partnership with these others, who now have fallen on evil days.

More specifically, and as affording a concrete point of departure for any enterprise of the kind, provision should be made under the auspices of one or more such centrals for the reorganisation of those channels of communication that have been falling into disuse during the period of the war; for the maintenance and unbroken continuity of the work and the records of the many learned societies that have been falling into abeyance during the same period; and for the keeping of records and the collation and dissemination of materials and bibliographical information, on which the learned men of all countries are in the habit of depending.

The details of this work will be voluminous and diverse, even if it is taken over only as an emergency measure to tide over the period of reconstruction; and the adequate care of it all will call for no small degree of sobriety, insight, and goodwill, and also for no small expenditure of means. But it is hoped that the American scholars are possessed of the requisite large and sober insight (otherwise there is nothing to be done about it) and it is known that, just now, the Americans have the goodwill of all thoughtful men throughout those countries that come into consideration here. It is also known that the Americans command the material means necessary to such an undertaking; and any degree of reflection will show that the American community runs no chance of material impoverishment in the further course of the war, quite the contrary in fact.