

UNIVERSITIES AND PRACTICAL WORK

How These Institutions Can Help Business Professions— Unregulated Competition is Old-fashioned

Introducing his address at the Life Underwriters' convention at Winnipeg recently, on the teaching of life insurance in our higher institutions of learning, Prof. Theodore H. Boggs, of the University of British Columbia, stated that all are coming to recognize the peril of leaving our political and economic destiny to be worked out by the haphazard and oftentimes ill-advised process of individual inspiration. "The policy of laissez-faire, which for decades had been slowly dying," he continued, "has been quite suddenly put out of its misery by the exigencies of the past three years. No longer does the Anglo-Saxon cling to his old distrust of method and system. He is being forced to a recognition of the greater efficiency inherent in deliberate, conscious and purposeful action. Accordingly collective or state control has been widely extended during the war and it would appear that the impetus once given is far from being exhausted. Reforms which for decades have been violently championed or piously prayed for, according to the temper of the reformer, seem now, of a sudden, to command the respectful audience of most of us.

"In commandeering the shipping resources of the realm, in taking over control of railway facilities and coal mines, in mobilizing the banking resources, in regulating the gastronomic destinies of the people through food laws, and, in short, in exercising a general supervisory control over the lives of the British people, the government of Great Britain has taken action which cannot but be interpreted as an efficiency remedy dictated by the necessity of the crisis.

"Few probably will withhold their approval of the broad generalization that increasingly in the future should conscious and deliberate co-operative effort supplant our hitherto ill-directed and at times criminally wasteful methods of production. In the future, as during the present war-period, production, exchange and distribution should be viewed in general from the standpoint of society as a whole rather than from that of a relatively small group of privileged classes.

Old-Fashioned System.

"We are all aware of the tendency of unregulated competition to lead to competitive waste and to the adulteration of goods. Thanks to collective or government supervision, the zeal of the adulterator has been somewhat curbed. Similarly, in the field of education, no less than in the political and economic, the old-fashioned system of laissez-faire, which is to say, the trusting to individual initiative, must yield to a deliberate and consciously purposeful policy designed to serve the best interests of the greatest number. Far from viewing the educational policy of the country as a thing sacred and immune from change we must treat it as an instrument to the task of developing to the full the citizens of the nation. To the end that education should broaden one's horizon, free one from the domination of specious argument and flighty passion, give one independence of judgment, and withal inculcate discipline it is obvious that education should be developed along such lines as to acquaint the students with actual conditions in the world as it is. No longer should education be treated as a mere mental gymnastic, quite remote from actual life. The system of higher education cannot escape censure unless it seeks among other things to acquaint the student with the actual conditions of social and national progress of the world of which he forms a part. This, I take it, forms the bed rock upon which our discussion to-day must rest.

Indictment of Universities.

"The familiar indictment of our universities and colleges to the effect that provision is not made in the curriculum for instruction in many matters of vital interest to all, such for example, as national and municipal government, taxation, banking and life insurance, is happily less and less deserved.

"Slowly, but none the less surely, we have been throwing off the thralldom of the traditional belief that the process of education should consist of a rigid course of formal mental discipline; quite devoid, all too often, of any but an accidental relation to the actual conditions of real life. One critic of this older theory of education has compared the champions of unrelieved formal mental discipline to the Egyptian priests who planted rows of dead sticks, which, for disciplinary pur-

poses, they watered regularly; had they planted corn instead, the critic adds, they would have derived the same discipline, and something more as well.

"Happily we have proceeded along the path of educational development sufficiently far to feel no longer the necessity of apologizing if perchance some course of study possess a practical bearing on actual life. That a subject of instruction is of practical interest or may be of value in the actual everyday life of the student is no longer sufficient reason for condemning it. For supporting evidence it is but necessary to contrast the curricula of many leading universities of to-day with the curricula of the same institutions several decades ago. Not even Oxford and Cambridge, those ancient and honorable shrines of learning are immune from the influence of changing conditions. A century ago, those institutions, open to none but the elect, provided, in the phrase of Dr. H. A. L. Fisher, minister of education in the present British cabinet, 'but a few hasty scraps of elementary Latin, Greek and mathematics.' He adds that while 'a few rare men of learning lurked among the folios in the library, learning was rare, and the English Universities counted little in the march of European intellect. All that however has passed away.

Instruction in Practical Subjects.

"We may safely assume the general acceptance of the premise that instruction in such subjects of practical interest as the theory and practice of government, federal, provincial and municipal, the scientific principles underlying the computation of premium rates in life insurance and a comparative study of rival theories of taxation must involve mental discipline. Indeed the mental discipline incident to a course in the principles of life insurance may be much more severe than that entailed by many of the traditionally so-called disciplinary studies. Accordingly on grounds of intellectual discipline there can be no logical ground against the introduction into the university curriculum of instruction in life insurance and other like subjects of practical value.

"At the same time one oftentimes meets the objection that the function of the university is to provide in its broad outlines a liberal education; and to furnish the basis for a wide culture and acquaintance with the best thought of all ages. In reply we may hasten to give enthusiastic assent to the great value of the classics and modern languages in our system of higher education. While according full homage to the proven worth and honored past of the humanities the suggestion is ventured that room might advantageously be found, in the curriculum, among the elective studies in the last two years of the ordinary arts course for instruction in subjects of practical interest to all students, whatever the subsequent career may be. Indeed courses already are being given as a matter of course in most universities on such subjects of practical application as money and banking, taxation, statistics, labor problems and corporation economics. The foundational training in the more clearly cultural studies enjoys the unquestioned right of way during the first two years of the usual course in arts. It is during the last two years of the course that elective subjects in general make their appearance. Thus the establishment of courses in the principles and practice of life insurance as electives in the junior and senior years would in no essential way alter or disturb the present system of higher education. Such courses would merely take their appropriate place in the group of elective studies.

"That the proneness to cling to generally accepted beliefs is not restricted alone to the field of education is obvious. In all spheres of thought it appears to be natural to look askance upon proposals which depart from the traditional model or opinion.

Practical Business Education.

"That the general public has become interested in a practical form of business education may be inferred from the rapid growth in student enrollment of the various institutions. Thus the New York University School of Commerce, established in 1900 with 60 students, had an enrollment in 1916 of approximately 4,300. The number of graduates of this school in 1916 was 288 and in the present year 349. The instruction offered includes courses in accounting, commercial law, commercial Spanish, corporation finance, economics, foreign exchange, insurance, railroad finance, public utilities, investments, and money and banking. To be sure, be it confessed, the New York University School of Commerce has enjoyed, doubtless by reason of its location, a more rapid growth than any other such institution. The development of the Harvard School of Business Administration is somewhat more typical. Its enrollment of students, increasing from 80 in its