

The University Tradition

(By Dean Coleman.)

The subject I have chosen is a very large one indeed, for the history of the university as an institution goes back nearly a thousand years and any adequate survey of its activity and growth would cover not only the chief countries of western Europe, but also the two Americas and those countries of the Orient to which the spirit of Western learning has penetrated. As a factor in contemporary life the university has a prominent, if not a pre-eminent place, and it is fortunate (almost uniquely so) in the possession of wide-spread esteem and goodwill. What I wish to do on the present occasion is to direct your attention to certain aspects of the development of the modern university, and certain features of contemporary university life which seem to me to demand a place in any discussion, however brief, which attempts to touch the heart of the question at all.

One would feel like adding in this connection the further remark that in this age of multiplied educational interests and activities, there is need that we occasionally detach ourselves from details and centre our attention on the more permanent aspects of our educational problems.

The university had its birth, as we know, in one of the great social movements of the later Middle Ages. If I were to speak of this movement as spiritual in its character, I would be, I think strictly within the limits of the truth, but such a characterization is, after all, really unnecessary since all great social movements whatever their age, are in their essence spiritual.

At the time just mentioned, Western Europe was awaking from the stupor and despair, the chaos and anarchy of the two centuries which followed immediately upon the collapse of the Roman power and the submergence of the ancient learning under the wreckage of war and invasion. Newer forms of political organization were arising which later were to take shape in the nations of the modern European world. The Western mind could not remain satisfied with the limited intellectual horizons of the semi-barbarism into which society had been plunged by the collapse of the old order and all which the old order had stood for in the way of political stability and spiritual culture. The spirit of inquiry which is always the spirit of hope, was reborn in the heart of mankind, and so, beginning with the tenth century we witness the Rise of the Universities. In using the term "rise" historians have, I think, been guided, unconsciously, perhaps, by a fine sense of fitness, for I can think of no other word more suitable. As we follow the movement of which the universities were the most conspicuous feature, we witness a phenomenon akin to the gradual brightening of the Eastern horizon at the approach of day, or to the increasing tide of life in the veins of nature with the advent of spring.

Just as on a summer morning we may watch the paling of the Eastern sky until the moment arrives when we say to ourselves, "Now it is day!"; or as we may patiently note the relaxing of winter's bonds until we say with full assurance, "Spring

is here!"; so, in reading the history of the centuries from the tenth to the thirteenth, we watch the dawn of a new era in the history of human thought, the coming of another springtime in the life of the race.

The beginnings of the study of medicine at Salerno, of civil and canon law at Bologna, of logic and the newer dialectic at Paris, the organization of bodies of students and teachers under various corporate names, the presence of foreign students in increasing numbers at such centres as those I have just mentioned, the growth of a body of subject-matter the creation of academic degrees with the "jus ubique docendi"; all these are phases in the development of the university which the historians of modern civilization describe in detail and which are merely mentioned here in order that we may recall to our minds how firmly rooted the university tradition is in our Western civilization.

As I have said already, it is of the university tradition alone that I desire to write and in the interest of the brevity to which I am pledged, I will deal in a very summary manner with four aspects of this tradition.

FIRST, I would mention the explicit recognition in the university of the debt of the modern to the ancient world—that world which was overwhelmed but not destroyed by the barbarian invasions. Consider first the subject-matter of the early universities, a subject-matter of which we of the present day are the direct inheritors. The Arts course was essentially the curriculum of the Roman and Greek schools—the trivium—grammar, rhetoric, logic; the quadrivium—arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. Consider also the vitalizing influence upon certain of these studies of those fragments of Aristotle which reached the Western peoples by the devious channel of the Arab culture of Southern Spain. Consider also the results which ensued when in the time of the Renaissance the wisdom of Ancient Greece had free admission to Western seats of learning. You will understand that I am not pleading here for any specific program of instruction in the classics in our modern universities, I am asking merely that we recognize our debt to the ancient world, and that we teach our sons and daughters to recognize the debt also. Among the Romans one of the most highly regarded of the virtues was that of "pietas"—piety, if you please, but with them it meant, outwardly at least, something different from what it means to us. It meant essentially respect for one's parents and one's ancestors, and reverence for the household gods. Has the need for this ancient virtue entirely disappeared in modern times? And have we not ancestors in the spirit as well as ancestors in the flesh?

I would mention in the SECOND PLACE as an essential element in the university tradition, THE SPIRIT OF FREE INQUIRY. Let us concede that freedom of teaching and of learning may, like all other forms of freedom, lead at times to extravagance and excess. But the difference between these forms of freedom and their opposites is worth noting. For while these MAY at times produce unfortunate results, those others inevitably MUST, everywhere and