

## UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR COMMERCE.

AT the University banquets in years gone by, I am told, Trade and Commerce was one of the inevitable toasts. It was proposed, of course, by a university man. To-day the toast is no longer on the list. But in its place men of affairs come and raise their glasses to the University. They confirm their *pronunciamentos* by sending up their sons as students. The change is significant and it is not merely local; it holds for much, perhaps for most, of the civilized business world. Old views are indeed passing away; and among them is the belief that the professions alone call for a liberal education.

The change in opinions is the result of change in conditions. During the last twenty years national and international trade has taken on immense proportions. The exigencies of its organization and control are demanding the best equipped men. Some people are even asking if commerce is not a science. Joint stock organization is leading to increased community of commercial interests. Finally, partly as result, the ethical view of business is gradually but surely gaining ground. A commercial career has accordingly reached a new plane of dignity and responsibility; from the standpoint not alone of dollars and cents, but of the general welfare of society.

There are two familiar facts that still deserve emphasis. Commercial education cannot turn every boy into a competent business man. No education can do that for any trade or profession whatever. Many young fellows who have had the best instruction money can buy do not succeed whether in business or in law, in medicine or in soldiering. A host of other things are factors leading to victory. Industry, honesty, pleasant manners, social tact and knowledge of human nature, the power of inspiring confidence all count for much in winning success in any employment. No amount of teaching, or for the matter of that, no amount of cleverness will ensure success. Preparation can only make those with the natural gifts somewhat better; it can only make those not so well endowed somewhat less bad. Education is not a cure-all; though it is an excellent tonic.

In the second place commercial education does not take the place of apprenticeship. An employer need not expect a young fellow with a special education of this kind to be at the outset more useful to him than if he had entered a couple of years sooner. But there should be little doubt as to his greater efficiency in the near future. This of course touches the heart of the question. "Self-made Merchant," in one of his dashing letters in *The Saturday Evening Post*, writes: "I've always made it a rule to buy brains, and I've learned now that the better trained they are the faster they find reasons for getting their salaries raised. That was when I caught the connection between a college education and business." These words of "a practical man" only put in market terms Bacon's opinion that "learned men with mean experience would far excel men of long experience and outshoot them on their own bow."

If you have read Stevenson's fascinating story "The Dynamiter" you will probably remember Mr. Godall (Prince Florizel) distinguishing *aptitudes* and *knowledge*. The distinction is well in place. Commercial education seeks both to train the mind and to impart certain kinds of useful knowledge. By commercial education, it may be well to explain, I do not mean technical education as popularly understood. I mean something broader and more advanced, in which one studies not merely the laws of production, but the manifold laws of distribution as well; commercial geography and industrial history; wages and prices;

tariffs and transportation and banking; modern languages and commercial law; besides some of the natural sciences. The phrases "commercial course" and "business course" have too long been synonymous with something good as far as it goes, but not in any case suggestive of a liberal education. We shall have to revise our phrases.

The habit of using one's head, which education of this kind aims at forming, of observing quickly and accurately, of putting facts together and asking the reason for them is something precious in all walks of life. In the present shifting conditions of commerce it means a faculty quite as valuable as in any profession. Says Goethe: "I could not say whose mind is or should be more enlarged than the mind of a genuine trader." Modern business calls for both well trained and well informed men. And if *enterprise*, whether individual or associated, may be taken as the great characteristic of our civilization there was never greater demand for them than at present.

This broad question of higher commercial training leads one to enquire what is the relation of universities to the general intellectual life about them? German universities, for instance, are the active centres, the shrines, of German scientific thought. Oxford and Cambridge, by way of contrast, stand almost apart from the main current flowing near them. The two great English universities have indeed their work to perform, and they are performing it. It is being left to the other universities, such as Glasgow and Victoria and Birmingham and others, to come more directly in touch with everyday life. As for a young country like Canada it seems as if, for a considerable time to come at least, the mission of a university can be none other than to provide for the teaching of all the main departments of knowledge and skill in a philosophic spirit and upon scientific methods. It is a matter of congratulation that in Canada our own university has led the way in providing a well-arranged commercial course. Other Canadian universities appear about to follow.

When visiting a leading technical college in a certain United States city I received the impression that, speaking generally, the students there were being simply trained for traffic—"to do the trick." The presence of higher commercial instruction at our universities should act in this respect as a leavening and liberalising influence. It should help teach those equipping for commercial life to look upon business from a higher standpoint as a fit matter for science, as a subject not to be regarded solely from the side of pecuniary gain. Nothing would go further towards securing sounder legislation in all questions of government, especially of currency and taxation, than a mastery of the theory of production and distribution by the leading men of the country. Nothing would be more helpful in making clear to them their exceptional possibilities for exerting a salutary influence within their sphere. The great labor problem lies at their door, and many other matters of public concern await their attention. True education bears not merely better business men; its children are better citizens. It teaches them to live by the way.

But ulterior considerations for the moment aside. In later years there can be few treasures so precious to the successful man of business as the memories of his university student days: of the contact with student and professor; the fresh points of view; the hopes and fears; the frolics and the grinds. Were this possession alone the heritage from one's university life it were a bargain at its price.

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