

An address by the Governor General, His Excellency the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, delivered at the Convocation of the University of Western Ontario, London, Ont., March 7, 1953.

Western University in its seventy-five years has not been without the tribulations promised to the saints. I need not dwell on your past history. It would not be fitting for me to reduce to a cold chronicle the story which is built into the very lives of so many members of the university present here today. I have, however, given myself the pleasure of looking into this story, and I have been deeply impressed at the combination of audacity and persistence on which you have flourished. The original demand for a university on the "Western fringes" - to quote a significant phrase - was typical at once of the saintly daring of the missionary who thinks nothing too good for his flock, and of the more worldly sentiments of those who refused to be absorbed by Toronto.

But if it was audacity that seized on a charter -- a charter which envisaged colleges in arts, science, medicine, law and engineering -- it was persistence which clung on during the difficult years when problems of religious affiliation, of absentee presidents, of hesitating students, and, of course, of fugitive finances harassed those who continued to believe in the predestination of Western University. The support which came from fees and private gifts was, indeed, persistent, but it was not lavish. Only fifty years ago you were still facing a deficit. It is true that the amount was less than \$1000 but this trifling sum was, understandably, disturbing to those who were operating on a budget of \$3,500.

Audacity and persistence have now been rewarded and Western University has won an honourable and I think a very happy place in the local community, in the province, and in the nation. You have a fruitful association with affiliated colleges; you receive necessary and, I do not doubt, welcome support from federal and provincial governments. I think, however, that I am right in saying that the association which marked the great change in your fortunes is the one which gives you your special character among Canadian universities today; your intimate and happy association with the City of London. London as a city is well-known for its keen enjoyment of the arts, and for the generous patronage which it extends to them. It may well be proud of its relations with this foundation.

I could say much in praise of this university. I could recount the names of your distinguished scientists and scholars; I could speak of the well-merited recognition that you have received throughout our country and abroad; I could praise the far-sighted generosity which has given you dignified and commodious buildings, and I could pay tribute to your own earnest efforts to offer to young men and women a generous and balanced programme of study and recreation. I shall not, however, enlarge on these matters. It is a great pleasure and privilege to observe these fine accomplishments and to join with you today in

praising those responsible for them.

In these very difficult times, however, such institutions as yours even at a time of celebration are forced to look forward rather than back. They are drawn rather to face the challenge of the future than to contemplate the achievements of the past.

Universities today are rightly claiming evercreasing support for their manifold activities. This support they ask and receive from their students, from their graduates, from private persons and from voluntary societies as well as from government. The support is welcome, and is often generous, but universities are now illustrating their own version of the Malthusian law: their activities are forever pressing, and pressing closely on their means of subsistence. They are, therefore, obliged to ask themselves regularly, and persistently; What claims come first? And if all seem pressing, How can we secure increased funds? And these two questions lead inevitably to the third and fundamental one, not always considered in its correct priority, What, in essence, is a university and what is its function in relation to civilized society?

In dealing with this question, I have no novel or startling statements to make. I am only carrying on the conversation which constantly engages all those Canadians who know and love our universities. It is, I think, these earnest conversations, whether public or private, about meaning and purpose which alone can maintain and direct our growth.

May I commence by stating this as a proposition: that the primary and essential function which the university has increasingly assumed is nothing less than the care and preservation of the entire inheritance of our civilization; that it is for the universities to maintain and to keep alive the memory and the evidence of our accumulated cultural achievements, in the arts and letters, in science, in philosophy and in religion; that it is for them to make this intangible heritage available to each generation; to cultivate it and to present it in such a fashion that it may be, so far as possible, comprehensible to all.

This responsibility imposes on the group of scholars young and old which constitutes the core of a university, many tasks which still go to make up one whole. They must acquire knowledge both ample and precise. No field is too broad for their investigation, no detail too minute for their attention. They will, inevitably, in the process of acquisition add to the sum of knowledge. For the scholar can only reach the bounds of knowledge by looking beyond them.

To the acquisition of knowledge must be added the task of arrangement. As new knowledge is added categories change, and old classifications become useless. The whole body of knowledge must constantly be re-thought and rearranged if the new facts are to be fully valued and the old understood. The university in the intellectual world is like careful librarian who knows that books not classified and arranged are worse than lost.

This conscious organization of knowledge implies the process to which I must refer, regretfully, as integration. It is the special task of the university to maintain the conception of knowledge in its wholeness, of knowledge with an appropriate emphasis, with an appropriate centre, knowledge not dispersed but with the corporate form, without which there can be no sense of direction in learning. In other words, the university must represent and hold forth a coherent philosophy. It must help us, if I may use familiar words, "to see life steadily and see it whole".

This responsibility again is linked with another. The true university is not and never has been an "ivory tower". An essential aspect of its work is the interpretation of knowledge. The relevance of all knowledge, the relation of the whole sum of our cultural achievement to contemporary life must be clearly shown. This is the collective witness of the university. This should be the individual witness of every man and woman privileged to receive a true university education. Osler placed this passage from Froude in the clinical note-book he prepared for his students:

"The knowledge which a man can use is the only real knowledge, the only knowledge which has life and growth in it and cements itself with practical power. The rest hangs like dust about the brain and dries like rain-drops off the stones".

I can now explain very easily what I take to be the creative function of the university. In the past the men who have launched great creative movements have, as a rule, been men of extraordinary gifts perhaps, and of extraordinary experience, but they have been men grounded in the standard knowledge and philosophy of their day. St. Paul, Francis of Assisi, Luther and Wesley, each a religious revolutionary, was each grounded in the accepted learning of his time. The men of the Renaissance and of the Enlightenment had also as a rule orthodox training before they went each on his brilliant separate path. The corporate life of a university at its best is probably as I have suggested inimical to true creative effort. Yet by its nourishing and disciplinary functions, by its clear representation of the best that has been done, it is calculated to foster those who will later create, if only as an act of rebellion at conservative complacency which they think they perceive in those who have reared them. It is the function of the university to provide the grounding, the roots.

The question which universities are asking themselves today is, whether they are able to perform the function adequately. For one who is almost, if not quite an outsider to raise the question, and even to attempt to answer it, may seem presumptuous. And to suggest any doubts in this place and on this day when everything invites us to rejoicing and to mutual felicitations, must seem ungracious in the extreme. I am, however, profoundly convinced of the service demanded from our great Canadian universities to the nation, and indeed to the whole of western civilization. But I cannot follow up my warm and sincere congratulations merely with empty platitudes. I must show you my respect and my esteem by speaking frankly and directly of what I take to be some of the

problems faced by all universities as they address themselves today to their increasingly heavy and difficult and vital task.

To those who, like myself, received their education a generation or so ago, the modern university seems to be alarmingly given to short cuts. There is, of course, the "college text", handsomely but sturdily bound, lavishly illustrated, scrupulously headed and sub-headed. It is too often, I am told, high in price, mediocre in style, poor and even inaccurate in matter. In addition to these works of dubious merit, the student may be offered anthologies and abstracts, the newest commentary on the philosopher, dramatist or poet. There seems to be a constant tendency to substitute the book review for the book, the critic for the author. I do not believe that this is a vice exclusive to North America, but I do know that our English friends have some rather penetrating things to say of us. This for instance:

"..... literary criticism is elevated above its subject matter. Critics themselves are being discussed and their works published in weighty American anthologies ..... The college boy in Indiana and Minnesota, satchel of these in hand, creeps more unwillingly to school than ever before. He is fed on 'Elegant Extracts'. They tell him how, not what, he must read to be saved. Their directions unhappily show a narrow but not a straight way. They lack a definite standpoint and a common ground, become murky in a torrent of various doctrines."

I am relieved to observe that it is Minnesota and Indiana, not Alberta and Manitoba that are in question, but I am forced to ask myself whether we in Canada are saved from these strictures by the purity of our education, or only by its relative obscurity. There can be no doubt at all of what comes of such practices. They can lead only to ignorance of fact and superficiality of understanding; to a scorn of precise scholarship and to the inability to exercise a truly critical faculty; to a love of vague abstractions and a complete inability to relate acquired knowledge to experience.

How, indeed, can anyone learn truly to love the great places in literature when, instead of being left to observe them for himself as he plods steadily along the quiet ways, he is rapidly whirled from this one to the next, and on and on until the end of the "course". It may save much time to give him the best of Aristotle or of Plato, of Moliere or of Shakespeare. He may have "covered" them completely enough; but he has been deprived of the pleasure, of the interest and of the discipline of gathering his own fruit.

It is worthy of notice that many of this generation, fed on text books, on anthologies and on abstracts, cannot read. Neither can they write. I have heard of a young man in the class-room of a great university - not in Canada - who was asked to write an essay as the basis of discussion at the next meeting of the class. He said, "I am sorry but I can't." "Why not?" asked the professor. Then came the reply, "I'm non-verbal". It is strange that in an age when we hear

so much about mental hygiene we have forgotten that a good diet is the first rule of health and that books are still the cheapest and the best form of intellectual nourishment. Moreover, reading is the best stimulus, the surest invitation to quiet meditation, to rational analysis, to creative thought. A well-known figure in Canadian university life, disturbed by the business of these days of "audio-visual" education and of precise laboratory techniques, used to say to his science students, "If you want to get an idea, go and take a walk by yourself. No one ever had an idea in a lab.". Many will agree from experience that he is right. Reading and walking are the best provokers of thought. The present generation is rapidly losing both these useful arts.

Modern universities encourage, in spite of some qualms, early specialization. This means that many students have no knowledge at all worth the name, of certain important areas of learning, and these gaps in his knowledge occur too often in the areas which should be the focal point for all others. How can there be a unity of knowledge, an integration of learning, a philosophy, when the centre is dropped out? Nowadays we admit the importance of man in the mass. We are paying, and we know we ought to pay, increasing attention to research in political science and sociology. We are, however, forgetting man as an individual, as he is found in literature, as he appears in history. We lose thereby the vivid understanding of the person which comes from seeing him set forth clearly at his best, and at his worst, and in all kinds of situations. We lose the great moral lessons which must be taught, which must be learned by anyone who, for example, has considered seriously and sympathetically the great figures of literature and of history. And we lose, moreover, our whole sense of the mystery of life, of the spiritual nature of man, for only in literature, sacred and profane, do we find men dealing boldly with the unknown and with the unknowable. We must derive from literature the surest foundation of our knowledge of man and the preparation for an understanding of God.

Modern universities also and perhaps inevitably encourage early research. Many of their advanced students have no adequate background even in the field of their own research. They have, as a rule, done no wide reading. It is safe to say that in very few of our academic departments does the specialist master the classics of his field. This is as true in history and in literature as in the sciences. Even when the student becomes a professor he may receive no encouragement and he may have no time for the wide reading and intensive thought necessary to his teaching and to his scholarship.

May I offer an illustration which has come to my attention of what I believe to be a most dangerous contempt of wide reading and ripe reflection along with an undue emphasis on so called "research". In a certain university professorial publications are classified either as "research" or as "magazine articles". The latter, less worthy category may and does often include essays of a high quality giving evidence of wide reading and of deep reflection. Such essays perform what I take to be the proper task of the humanist in applying his understanding of human nature and human experience to current human problems. They are rated, however, even though they may be published in the most reputable periodicals, as

"magazine articles", and, to descend from the scholarly to the practical, they bring no promotion. One young man in a junior position, with a growing family, renounced such work in favour of what he deemed relatively easy mechanical studies. He won preferment. This was told me as a true story; I can only hope it is not often true.

University communities contain those who are natural technicians and those who are capable of the highest creative thought; those preoccupied with the "know-how" and those concerned with the "know-why". The latter must not be kept to the level of the former's training. If they are, then our swollen faculties will be obliged to secure recruits from those who themselves have been trained not as philosophers and scholars but as technicians. Such a process could lead only to a condition in university communities where there would be scholars unable to fit their knowledge into a philosophy or so interpret it as to make it relevant to current needs. Their background may become so inadequate that they cannot even analyze a current problem. In other words, our intellectual and spiritual heritage, although not lost, may be effectively buried as deeply and hidden as securely as were the manuscripts which humanists of the Renaissance sought for with such diligence in the attics and cellars of fifteenth-century Europe.

We have not yet reached quite this parlous state, but we are in grave danger of it. Our civilization is derived from three great sources: the Greek pursuit of truth and beauty; the Roman devotion to discipline and order; and the Judaic-Christian spiritual insight, with its penetration into the abiding mysteries of human nature and divine love, on which all Christian civilization is founded. We are slowly but surely cutting ourselves off from these roots, "those things which are eternal and incapable of man's measurement" which give to our contemporary civilization at once nourishment, support and direction. It is the duty of the university to maintain these roots in healthy and active connection with the tree. The leaves, flowers and fruit will appear in careless abundance in the upper air if the roots are safe and healthy and allowed to do their work; but without them there will be no creative inspiration, no intellectual food, no sense of form, no logic. The great menace of civilization in the present is that we offer an education with too little regard for the roots.

It may be argued that such indictments come from old-fashioned scholars devoted to gentlemanly disciplines. Why concern ourselves with roots when science has changed everything? Why bother about growing processes in a synthetic age? Scientific techniques enable us, or will enable us if we use them intelligently, to achieve the security that everyone wants. With them we have everything.

The answer is, science has not changed everything. We are still the product of tradition. We are constantly moved by our unconscious assumptions. Indeed it might be said that, like the iceberg, nine-tenths of our motivations are below the surface. This is, I believe, good psychology although I am not a good psychologist. The idea has been expressed perfectly by Shakespeare in The Tempest, "What's past is prologue". This I believe is true at any given moment in history. It is most of all

true in times of crisis. We are always moved by our own past. We act most surely and most effectively when we are not slavishly, but consciously and intelligently aware of this fundamental fact.

Let me then come back to my original idea. The weakness of the present generation is that it is rootless and the great function of the university is to take it back to its true roots. We have been living through a time when the common retort to a serious remark has been "So What?". The question is intelligent enough. The tragedy of the "So What" generation has been that they have assumed that there is no answer. Today there are many signs among university students that this generation is passing. Young people today, with all their apparent indifference feel, even if they can hardly express their thought in words, that there is an answer to the persistent question, and that they should be helped to find it. It is, I believe, the first duty of our universities to bring with understanding and sympathy, a far wider knowledge and a far sterner discipline to the reluctant heirs of the "So What?" generation - to lead them back to their roots. The function of the university is to tell them what they all want to be told, that there is an answer, but that it is not an obvious or an easy one. The answer cannot be reached through academic short-cuts, nor can it be determined by a simple technique. The answer is yielded slowly and reluctantly, but those to whom it can be conveyed will have received far more than a diploma granting entry to a profession. They will have gained the understanding which permits them to enter into the life of civilization, "a thing not divided in time but a communication between the dead, the living and those who shall live".

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