

### FUNCTION OF A UNIVERSITY

There can be no serious doubt that there is a great need to re-think and re-plan our university system. Before any useful attempt can be made to plan a university system which will meet the needs of contemporary society, it is necessary to be clear about the functions which the universities have to fulfil. This is specially important now, because for a long time our universities have been changing their character, without adequate consideration of the consequences. In particular the development of science and its application have disturbed the balance of traditional university life profoundly. Its development has imparted an increasingly technical character to university education. This is merely one of the ways in which the organization and life of our universities have been altered by the pressure of social needs. There are many others. In this way new functions have been and are being thrust upon the university, without regard to their effect upon its older and more important functions. What we need are the principles of a new synthesis of university life, and it is only by re-thinking the functions of a university in relation to contemporary needs that we can bring these to light.

A university is primarily a centre of cultural life and cultural progress. Its business, in the community which it serves, is to maintain and advance knowledge and learning. One important character of university work follows from the nature of this primary function. It must seek the truth and know the truth. This task of cultural leadership, which is the full and proper business of a university, can only be fulfilled if the university combines and integrates three main functions. It must provide for the maintenance and diffusion of culture in the community. It must arrange for carrying on research in all branches of learning. It must undertake the education of undergraduate students.

The cultural function deserves special mention because it is the key to the other two and because under present conditions it is apt to be overlooked and neglected. If the university is to fulfil the decisive function two things are necessary. It must be a place where knowledge is unified and not merely a common centre for disjointed specialisms. Culture is synthetic and total. The pure specialist is the opposite of the man of culture. An association of specialists in different and limited fields of learning is not and cannot be a centre of culture. The university must be designed to encourage and facilitate the interchange of knowledge through which it can become a spiritual whole. The second need is that this inner unification should be in constant and



vital relation to the cultural life in the community around it. For this interchange with the living culture around it the university must also be designed. It is in this cultural function that our universities are most conspicuously failing. This cultural situation is reflected in the modern university in the dissociation of the faculties of Arts and of Sciences, the former supplying the elements of a liberal humanistic education, the latter devoting itself to specialized training in the techniques and processes of the various sciences. In consequence the crux of the cultural problem lies in the unification of Arts and Sciences. Their representatives must discover how to include science within a unified culture, and so make it part of a common, liberal education.

The second general function of a university is that of research. It must provide not merely for maintaining common culture, which includes and combines all branches of learning and cultural activity, but for the advance and development of each of these. The universities are very willing to carry out this function but they are seriously hampered in their efforts to do so effectively. For this there are two main reasons. The first is that except in special cases the funds available for research work are quite inadequate. The second reason is the inadequacy with which the modern university fulfils the cultural function. Except in those departments mainly scientific and technical, which have an active relation with social activities outside, university research loses its living stimulus and tends to become scholastic and trivial, a matter of personal idiosyncrasy which avoids contact with questions of contemporary importance.

The educational function of a university necessarily bulks largest both in public estimation and in the time, effort, and expenditure in which it involves the university staff. The great majority of the members of a university are undergraduate students. For them the university is first and foremost an institution for higher education. The educational function of a university is not a continuation of schooling nor a professional training-ground. Its educational function is derivative from, and should be integrated with, its other functions. It is clear from this that the ability of a university to perform its educational function will depend on the extent to which it performs its other functions adequately. If it fails to be a focus of cultural synthesis, it will at best provide a specialized professional training which varies from department to department. If it fails also to be a home of research it may degenerate into a glorified high-school. In a proper university education two things must be combined which correspond to its two



functions as a focus of culture and as a place of research. It must combine a balanced general education with specialized training in some particular department of study. The important and difficult matter is the combination of the two; for it is not enough to provide a general education for some students while offering specialized training for others. It must provide both for its students.

This analysis of the functions of a university looks rather to the future than to the past. There are clear signs that great changes in social structure and social outlook are taking place which will alter the demands that are made upon our universities. The new synthesis must be very different from the old. These are strong evidences that the tide is turning and that a period of social and therefore of cultural unification lies before us. To stress the cultural function of the university now is not to hanker after the past, but to look to the future. Any suggestions as to how these functions can be effectively carried out in modern universities under modern conditions have been deliberately omitted. Such suggestion would be premature. We must first agree upon our goal before we can fruitfully discuss how to reach it. When we reach this goal, which, it is hoped, will be very soon, then we can determine how the functions can be effectively achieved.

—FRANCIS BOLGER, '47.

### THE HABIT OF BORROWING

Among the parasites that infest all classes of society few are more thoroughly and universally despised than the habitual borrowers.

Now borrowing is something which everyone must occasionally do. It is an expression, in a concrete way, of our faith in our neighbor's co-operation and friendliness. But carried to excess its effects are most serious.

Who does not sometimes lose his temper when, on going to use some piece of equipment he finds that his neighbor has borrowed it, and neglected to return it? This latter seems to be a corollary to the borrowing habit. How many friendships have been broken through the medium of the borrowing habit in one of the partners?

Besides, the borrowing habit has a degrading influence on the character of the one who cultivates it. It leads to carelessness in a man, lack of appreciation of the rights and the property of others, and an almost entire disregard of