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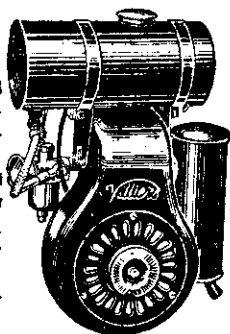
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BOOKS

Reform in the University

SOME THOUGHTS ON UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION. By Sir Richard Living-
stone. National Book League. Cambridge
University Press.

(Reviewed by F. L. Combs)

OURS is a harassed and per-
plexed civilisation. Half
its time it is hot and both-
ered; the other half it is escapist.
One thing that used to perplex it
was the question: "It's pretty but
is it Art?" The con-
sidered answer
found to this con-
undrum a decade
ago is "No." But
to the question "It's
ugly but is it Art?"
no reassuring reply
has yet been found
even if the trend
of opinion is at the
moment toward the
affirmative.

With the art
question still un-
settled, another fun-
damental question
is looming up, viz.:
"It's clever but is
it Education?"

No living man
can give a weight-
ier better-balanced
reply to this ques-
tion than Sir Rich-
ard Livingstone. His answer is that
cleverness is *not* education; not even
in the universities, those forcing houses
of gifted intellects in which so many
ordinary intellects groan and strain in
order like Hamlet's mother to "assume
a virtue if they have it not."

Sir Richard is fair to the university.
He begins by saying, "In my opinion
the last 40 years have been a time of
steady improvement in the universities."
He praises their increased fitness for
their work as regards equipment, organ-
isation, teaching, and research. But at
the same time he believes that "they
need reform and that the future will
be astonished that we have done nothing
to remedy grave weaknesses in our
system . . . for the moulding of the
whole outlook of our modern world
. . . depends on these distant nerve
centres of intelligence and on their
health and vigour."

Beginning his criticism, Sir Richard
says: "In the last 20 years two new
conceptions of society have changed the
course of the world—Communism and
Nazism. The universities have not
created or moulded them; like mercen-
aries they have served the rulers of the
day in Russia, Germany, Italy; sup-
plied them with the weapons they need,
and asked no questions. Outside the
countries which accepted these philoso-
phies the universities have provided no
alternate philosophy to counteract them.

Achilles ponders in his tent,
The Kings of modern thought are dumb;
Silent they sit and not content,
And wait to see the future come."

What answer is given "to those who
thus complain that the university is
amoral, indifferent to values, concerned
with nothing except knowledge?" It is
that "history is full of warnings against
the sacrifice of truth to edification."

Sir Richard Livingstone is not satis-
fied with this answer. Like Plato, in
whom he is steeped, he wants an educa-
tion that will make a whole man. Re-
search that turns out expensive human
spare parts and graduate-grind which
equips for the pursuit of profitable pro-
fessional careers is to his mind far from
being enough and he quotes the edify-
ing definition of the noble-minded Mil-
ton given in his letter to Master Samuel
Hartlib:



JOHN MILTON
Magnanimously was the word

I call therefore a
complete and gener-
ous education that
which fits a man to
perform justly, skil-
fully and magnani-
mously all the offices
both private and pub-
lic of peace and
war.

He particularly
liked the adverb
"magnanimously" in
this definition, and
he considers that
"the churches and
the universities are
the natural institu-
tions" to make the
collegiate generation
"conscious of the
deeper issues at
stake and the values
involved in them. If
it (the university)
does not undertake
the task in the end

we may find as in Russia and in Hitler's
Germany that the State will dictate a
philosophy of life to the nation; or that
we shall drift into no philosophy at all.
Either alternative is dismal."

Carlyle a hundred years ago made
what, compared with the trenchant criti-
cism of Sir Richard Livingstone, must
be regarded as a furious attack, an at-
tack savouring of the *sacra indignatio*
of Swift, but did he not say much the
same thing? There is room for one
quotation.

We (in Edinburgh) boasted ourselves a
Rational University; in the highest degree
hostile to Mysticism; thus was the young
vacant mind furnished with much talk
about Progress of the Species, Dark Ages,
prejudice and the like; so that all were
quickly blown out into a state of windy
argumentativeness
—the end of which in "the better sort"
was "sick impotent Scepticism" and, in
"the worsor, finished self-conceit" which
caused them "to all spiritual intents to
become dead."

In what direction does Sir Richard
turn to find a remedy for an education
system which has given us nuclear
physics with its atom bomb on the one
hand and on the other a lack of will
and ability to grapple with big and for-
midable problems involving the destiny
of the race?

He opposes the sort of specialisation
that makes a high grade factotum and
would counterweight its one-sidedness
by the teaching of philosophy and re-
ligion. In his mind these two overlap,
as will be seen from his definition of
religion as "a study of what we should
think of the meaning and ultimate
nature of the universe; how in the light
of the view we form we should live. . ."

Sir Richard's own temperate but
cogent criticism is that the disappoint-
ingly limited influence of the universi-
ties is due to their too little concern