

THE FREEDOM OF TEACHING.

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THE higher education will always be despised and rejected by many, will be feared by others, and will not be without foes among those of its own household. To receive such treatment is the fate, and in fact the duty, of everything that represents true progress. But the cause of higher education is like the cause of higher morality in one notable respect; viz., in that it is at a disadvantage in argument, by reason of its inability to bring forward for each new attack a new reply. It must repeat very often an old story. Duty is one, and sin is manifold; hence, sin always has the charm of novelty—at least, until one is its slave. Even so the higher education pursues on the whole one great ideal; while the foes of higher education alter their ideals with the

whim of the hour, and so have resources that their opponents of the closet and the lecture-room must despair of equaling.

There is one battle that the friends of higher education have often had to fight anew, and that well illustrates their difficulties. This is the battle for the freedom of higher teaching. The story is an old one; the plea for the freedom of teaching is a bare, simple, commonplace plea, based on the moral law, and in fact on the most commonplace and tedious article of the moral law—that which treats of the duty called honesty. On the other hand, the enemies of the freedom of teaching are numberless. Passive tendencies, such as simple conservatism, or reverence for old age, or respect for the letter of ancient bequests, or desire for

peace, may be found united with some theological bias or with a love of strict discipline, or with some other active tendency in opposition to the cause of free instruction. Personal prejudices and quarrels may add their warmth to the assault. The ambition of meddling and ignorant busybodies is stimulated by such opportunities. The public are apt, as usual, to take part against the experts and in favor of restricting their liberty. And all these influences can easily be made more effective in a popular discussion than the opposing view dare hope to become. But still, hard as it may be to make interesting any plea that in the end rests solely upon common honesty, some one ever and anon must venture anew to sum up the case that in its earliest form was first summed up in the Defense of Socrates, that has so often since then needed defense, and that so much needs defense just now, and in this country. But to understand the matter it is needful first to look at the nature of higher education.

Higher education, then, is distinguished from elementary education partly by the fact that its subject-matter and the scope of its various departments are subject to more, and to more important, disputes than are the subject-matter and scope of elementary education. Nowhere, indeed, is the educator on wholly undisputed ground. But primary-school teachers dispute more about the order and the method of teaching than about the truth or the intrinsic importance of what is to be taught. Some may think elementary natural science an essential part of the training of children, and some may dispute this opinion; but all admit that children must be taught to read, write, and cipher, and nobody doubts the truths of the multiplication table. If teachers differ about how to teach these truths, the difference is one of less moment; it is a difference of a few months' time or of a little mental training to a child; it is not a difference that involves a lifetime or a life's creed. Religious instruction involves, indeed, even for children, very much that is disputed; but the religious instruction of children is once for

all a matter of individual caprice, hopelessly beyond the control of our present educational methods. Outside of the limits of religious instruction, primary education involves for the most part indubitable facts of no small importance, the method of teaching being the chief point of dispute. The higher education undertakes a different task. The territory of all the sciences is a more or less disputed territory.

The exact sciences themselves are no exceptions to the rule. Their fundamental concepts are disputed problems. Men do not agree as to the definitions of space, of force, of infinitesimals. More than that, the exact sciences are progressive, and possess an enormous wealth of material. There is room for dispute, and there actually are endless disputes, not only as to the method of instruction in these sciences, but as to the portions of them that are most important to a given special student, and as to the actual comparative value, more abstractly considered, of various very elaborately developed investigations. What is true of the exact sciences is still more marked in case of all other branches of study. To study the advance portions of any science or of any would-be science is to enter into a scene of warfare. An advanced student cannot be taught a set of dogmas to put in his note-book and take home with him; he must be taught to choose with such light as he has among conflicting views when such choice is possible and needful, and otherwise to keep his judgment suspended until he has light enough to choose fairly. A student of law or of Greek or of physiology or of theology must be taught this power of judging and this need of investigating before he judges. Unless the teacher teaches these essentials, he gives no real help, and is not fit for advanced work with rational students, however successful he might be as a dog-trainer or as a drill-sergeant. The higher the study, the greater must be the need of such guidance on the teacher's part. It is not the facts taught, nor even the theories expounded, nor even their practical applications, that will be so important to the ad

vanced student as the spirit and the method of research, the power to be himself a truth-seeker. "I suppose that you will forget the facts of the science, but I want you to understand the way in which the science gets its results, the method of scientific thought": such used to be the remark of a teacher of mine to whom many young men of my acquaintance owe as much as they ever can owe to any one teacher for real mental power received and cultivated. Such a teacher has in mind his highest task, which is not to make mere receivers of foreign doctrines that may be false, but independent workers ready to prove all things that they are called upon to accept. In fine, then, advanced teaching is a field full of disputed questions of principle, of method, of scope, and of result. No closed system of dogmas is as yet attainable. And in consequence, the advanced instructor must aim to make investigators rather than believers. And as another consequence, he must himself be, as far as in him lies, an investigator.

Such being the nature of the field covered by the higher education, what shall be the freedom allowed to the educator? Shall we presume to dictate to him what or how he shall teach? or to predetermine for him what he shall find out as the result of his investigations? Or does one, having chosen one's doctor, presume to tell him what medicines he shall give? or having hired a captain for one's ship, presume, being a landsman, to teach how to navigate? Does not one in every doubtful case need first to find a competent man, and then to submit one's self to his care in so far forth as concerns this case, not hampering him with impertinent demands? Must not one therefore choose an instructor in any subject on the ground of his ability, his devotion to his work, his learning, and his experience, and then leave him wholly free to do what he can?

The affirmative answer to this question will appear natural if we look more carefully at the considerations just presented. First, then, as we have seen, instruction in elementary studies aims rather to teach well-known facts, and the question there is as

to the method. But advanced instruction aims to teach the opinions of an honest and competent man upon more or less doubtful questions. And therefore whatever be the position of the elementary instructor, the advanced instructor at all events has to be responsible for much more than his co-worker. He has to be responsible not only for his manner of presenting his doctrines, but for the doctrines themselves, which are not admitted dogmas, but ought to be his personal opinions. But responsibility and freedom are correlatives. If you force me to teach such and such dogmas, then you must be responsible for them, not I. I am your mouthpiece. But if I am to be responsible for what I say, then I must be free to say just what I think best. If therefore you hire any one to teach any advanced science, you must hire either a mouthpiece or a man; and if you hire a man, you must ask him to be dishonest, or else you must let him alone in his work. Just so would it be with the physician or with the sea-captain. If you hire the physician, you make him responsible. But if you dictate the medicines, then he is no longer the physician, but you are, and take all the responsibility of what you order, making of him, if he continues to serve you, not your physician, but your body-servant.

Secondly, regarding the subject in the other light above suggested, the advanced teacher does nothing of importance unless he aids his pupil to be in some way, however humble, a fellow-investigator. Where there is properly doubt, the instructor fails if his student does not come to share, or at least to understand, the doubt. Where truth is not boxed up in some multiplication table, or similar storing place for useful and obvious truisms, where, on the contrary, truth is to be found by hard work, the teacher is wholly incompetent who gives only the supposed truth and none of the activity of research. Mind is activity. Dead statements remain dead till a student is taught to discover them afresh for himself under the guidance of the instructor. Or again: with equal truth one may say a mind is a bundle

of interests in things. Investigation is the effort to satisfy the interests. Only by investigation are they satisfied. The very dogs investigate, and their minds live by research. The children in the primary schools, as Dr. Stanley Hall's researches have lately illustrated for us in detail, are busied in their little minds with theories on the nature and connections of things in the universe—theories that indicate amid all their crudeness the very mental processes that are concerned in the scientific studies of the most mature and erudite of mankind; and it is such activity that the teacher appeals to, hoping to develop its interests. But everywhere the satisfaction of these mental interests consists for any one's mind in not merely finding, but putting this and that together. Everywhere higher consciousness is measured, like energy in the physical world, not merely by the mass of material in mind, but by the space over which the mind moves with this material in doing its work. Stuff a mind with facts, were they never so indubitable, with formulas, were they never so far reaching and complete, and the mind might still be the mind of an idiot. It is what the mind does with the facts and the formulas that makes it the mind of a wise man.

If such is the business of the teacher, viz., not merely to state his opinions, but to treat his pupils as embryo investigators, to be made into mature investigators as far as is possible, then surely the teacher must show himself as already an investigator. He need not be a great discoverer. Investigation is not usually discovery, save for the individual investigating. But to teach activity, the teacher must show activity. And of what use is the show unless the activity is certainly free? What shame to pose before the student as an independent worker, when the result of the work is once for all predetermined for the worker by the man that pays him, or by some superior in academic rank. What scorn awaits the man that struts about as a genuine investigator, while all the time he knows that there are certain matters lying within his province that he dare not openly investigate, and may have to lie about.

Yet such has been and is precisely the position of numerous teachers in places where the freedom of teaching has not come to be a recognized necessity. The very air of investigation is freedom. It dies stifled in rooms where the air of perfect fearless freedom does not come. The only demand you may make of any investigator is that he shall stick to his work and do it thoroughly. And that is the only demand that the advanced teacher may make of his students. But they must see that he too is faithful to the spirit that he expects to find in them. They must see, therefore, that he is really a free man, who teaches what he teaches because that is the best result that his method can just now reach, and not because he is hired to make a certain view appear plausible whatever the facts may be.

Honesty, then, requires that as a teacher of doctrines the instructor should be free to teach what doctrines he has been led freely to accept, and that as a model investigator of his subject he should set the example of untrammelled investigation. And consequently we may say that all one can demand of a teacher of any advanced branch of study is knowledge, joined with experience proportioned to his rank, with a clear head, with personal power over his students, with industry and ingenuity as an investigator, and above all, with absolute personal honesty. Given these requirements, your instructors must then be left to do their work so long as they continue to give evidence of possessing these qualities. To interfere with them is simply impertinence, and the result of continued interference must be a calamity to the institution that they serve.

Now these simple considerations, old, flat, and commonplace as they are, may read almost like revolutionary speeches when compared with the common practices of a vast number of our institutions of higher learning in this land of "home industry" colleges. For the patronage of home industry in this happy country is interpreted as meaning, in regard to higher education, that every sect in every State should have at least one representative "university" to teach its own doc-

trines, or nothing to the prejudice thereof. In consequence, we have colleges founded to teach that the moon is *not* made of green cheese, and equally flourishing colleges founded to teach that the moon *is* made of green cheese; and all the professors in such colleges are pledged, or at least required, to discover nothing in any branch of learning that might be interpreted as out of harmony with the founder's view about green cheese in the college in question. And all this is considered laudable, and much money is subscribed and bequeathed for such institutions. Furthermore, the managers of such colleges have a very unfortunate tendency to consider themselves responsible, not merely for the original choice, but also for the methods of the instructors. It is in some places not so much that the managers of such institutions do actually often interfere with an instructor's work, as that they think themselves competent to interfere whenever they wish and however they wish; this it is which cripples the honest instructor. He knows not when he will be accused of atheism for having mentioned in his class-room Voltaire, without warning his pupils against Voltaire's books. Or he knows not when he will be accused of wicked rebellion against established custom for having made use of a new way of teaching that seems to him the best possible way, or for having laid stress upon some part of his subject that tradition has been accustomed stupidly to neglect. Or in some places he may find of a sudden that his non-attendance at church, or the fact that he drinks beer with his lunch, or rides a bicycle, is considered of more moment than his power to instruct. Or finally, he may be subject to the worst of all forms of terrorism, namely, perfect uncertainty about when or why the storks in his board of managers will interfere with his duties, joined with good reason to believe that they may interfere at any time and for any reason. The last condition of things is especially apt to be the case in the colleges of semi-political organization. In such places good men may be bound hand and foot, or at best they may be forced to follow a dull routine

without the power to progress, or to assume the initiative in anything, without the right to earn their bread honestly save by ceasing to make any pretense of living and teaching as they think men ought to live and teach, and by confessing openly that they can take no serious responsibility for what they do or how they do it. Take away the sense of security in his work from the college instructor, and what is left him? The freedom of honest and laborious study ought to be as secure and sacred as the offices of a priesthood. Yet what security is there in a state of affairs like the following: There was once a board of managers. It may have been in Babylon or in Nineveh, and its minutes may have been kept in cuneiform hieroglyphics; but, if we remember rightly, it was not so ancient a body as that. However, this board, in its own day and generation, was capable of sending a written order to the instructors in its institution, telling them in effect that some of them were too often seen out of their class-rooms, that this seemed suspicious, and that it desired them to stay each in his own class-room from nine to five daily, saving when called away on absolutely necessary business. In other words, this board had never conceived the difference between a university instructor and an office clerk, and actually imagined that an instructor was doing his business, then and only then, when he was in his class-room. Yet the body that could send this unspeakable order (it existed a long time ago, and things have much changed since then, we may hope for the better) was often very busy in deciding upon courses of study, in interfering with matters of special interest to instructors, and in causing delight to a curious and impartial public that was always amused by anything of the nature of vigorous action. In such an environment has the higher education sometimes to grow. May the world in which it has grown so nobly thus far not be able to crush it forever before it has grown into more freedom and has led us into more truth.

In conclusion, then, the writer wishes to urge upon the lovers of higher education

this thought, not in the least his own, but the thought of our time, the thought that all our best educators are insisting upon: *higher teaching must be free*. Not otherwise can it do the work that is needed in this day and generation. The institutions that are doing the great work of the day are institutions where competent teachers are chosen and are not interfered with in their work. The weak and useless institutions of the country are all of them institutions where instructors are chosen because they attend some par-

ticular church, or promise beforehand to avoid or oppose some particular view, or to doctor the minds of students in some particular traditional way. Many other institutions are still halting between two opinions. On which side true progress finds help is plain at a glance. This note has tried to point out, in the simplest way, on which side stands true morality. The end in view can be accomplished only through an enlightened public sentiment, which boards of managers will always sooner or later represent.

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