

TIME AND THE UNIVERSITY

An Address by Alan Gregg
Director, The Medical Sciences
The Rockefeller Foundation



WHEN on such occasions as this we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of a medical school, we can perhaps wisely attempt that most difficult yet most surprising of all explorations, the exploration of the familiar, a pilgrimage in search of new meanings that lie implicit in what has always been around us—yet all too often escaped recognition. If it be true that strangers have the power to make the commonplace seem strange, then to match your welcome invitation and your delightful hospitality I'll play the stranger. So for a few moments at least I shall try to do what's rare and risky in the West, examine the present and immediate circumstance of our lives.

I remember that in my childhood in Colorado Springs at the foot of Pike's Peak, there was a picture in our living room of the Cornish coast, a picture that to me was one of unerring and declared beauty. Colorado scenery all about me was quite as beautiful but it was all but overlooked. No one had declared it beautiful except for commercial purposes, heartlessly. No artist I can remember, unless perhaps Frederick Remington, had begun to present to Westerners the life of the West for what it was. And even today the sense of the reality about us is still somewhat lacking, perhaps I should admit inevitably lacking, because we haven't produced enough artists, philosophers or perhaps mere travelers — at any rate enough men who have escaped the provincialism of time as well as of space—persons who can react vividly to the present because they can contrast it with the past, who can sense the ephemeral because they have had glimpses of the things that endure.

Perhaps I should warn you that in this talk I am going to speak of higher education of all kinds, not merely medical education. This I shall do because it is part of the plight of medical education that it has become segregated from the rest of the university, even to the point of being feared as a parasite that threatens the strength of the university. There is no likelihood of saying too often that medical education is a form of education. Furthermore, the problems of medical education are so engrossing that many of us ignore the framework in which these problems can best be understood—the framework of higher education in a changing world.

I set myself the task of commenting upon American universities in the light of having seen a good many universities in other parts of the world. You will agree with me that this is a curious essay, of necessity incomplete in plan and piecemeal in accomplishment. No one could be more aware than I of my limitations for I accept completely the implicit as well as the explicit meaning of Oscar Wilde's observation that "all criticism is a form of autobiography." My life hardly qualifies me to criticize. None the less, attempts at appraisal are needed, not so much as guides for the future as in the hope that you all may in some measure try to appraise your handiwork—the future of this University. For here in the West we are pouring concrete, literally and figuratively we are pouring concrete. We are setting the forms and forming the lines not for fifty but for five hundred years of civilization in this great valley. It behooves us to find each for himself the significance of what he is doing or failing to do.

THE first element of American university life that needs to be brought into sharper relief and given a different value is the importance of time. We Americans regard time as an enemy: it can be used as an ally. Time is a considerable matter. Admiral Cunningham, as Churchill reports, decided at the risk of losing ships to go on with the rescue of the British Army from Crete. He said, "It takes the Navy three years to build a new ship. It will take three hundred years to build a new tradition. The evacuation will continue." If you believe that in human relationships tradition can be singularly powerful, then time is a considerable matter. Among the arts, music, which is infused with tempo, timing, cadence and rhythm, provides a better analogy by which to understand the uni-

versity than painting with its almost static elements of pattern, design, composition and color. Young people, in the intricate process of becoming, not merely being, pass through the university. They are passing through phases: the process of maturing depends on the timing of experiences. Instruction is offered them in deliberate planned sequences. Even their teachers, it may be at least hoped, are still and steadily growing and changing. And if at the worst the professors are no longer changing, then the contrast their teaching presents to what it should be begins to grow, producing a steadily increasing strain on the university's justification for existence and support. In universities it is as important to ask, What is the story? as it is to ask, What is the set-up?

Nor does the analogy to music cease with a reference to students and teachers. The university itself has its own history to make. At what tempo is it reasonable for a school fifty years old to change and grow? It keeps forever unfolding with variations and developments of its original motifs or themes developed later in an elaborate and all but unending symphony. Is not the major difference between evolution and revolution a matter of tempo? We speak of "giving me time to turn round in." I never fail to experience a sense of the mysterious flow of time when I walk in the Quartier Latin where without a day's cessation for eight hundred years have walked students and teachers, their studies and their horizons slowly but constantly changing and their youth and their general purposes forever renewed. Universities have their own unending flow, based, as they are, on the inextinguishable desire of succeeding generations of parents to give to their children, and on the inexhaustible curiosity of an unending succession of those who are young in spirit; students becoming teachers.

ONE aspect of the development of the American university deserves more reflection than I have seen accorded it. As part of the story of the American university it explains much of the present. The precursor of the American university was the American college: from this college grew the university, and from the college the university took a leitmotiv of singular importance. The American college was not, like the European university, a spontaneous segregation of scholarly minds in an established feudal society. The American college was usually and characteristically a means of pro-

ducing teachers and preachers as soon and as many as possible for a rapidly growing colonial society. It was so frequently denominational in origin and support as to justify the assumption that its leitmotiv was religious and social rather than purely intellectual. True, the European universities were for hundreds of years controlled by religious authorities but that control came only after the Church discovered how powerful was the *universitas studiorum* in shaping contemporary thought. It was, as I think, quite natural that the idea of scholarship and respect for individual originality of mind was and still is taken for granted more easily in the European university than in the American college, or, to press the point home, in the American university that grew out of the American college.

Two illustrations of the European attitude will perhaps convey this point. It was, I believe, Otto Warburg who told me that if a German professor of histology wished to devote most of the budget of his institute to the housing and feeding of an elephant from which he could take occasional snips of tissue for study or experiment, the comment of his university colleagues would be to the effect that he must be a clever and original man from whom something important may well be expected. There would be no censure or objection to so unusual a procedure in disregard of teaching duties. Or another example of an attitude practically unknown in this country: only last October I talked with a European professor who exclaimed with some vehemence, "I don't understand all this talk about 'education' nowadays. What has the university to do with education? Education is the task of the primary and secondary schools. The university exists for Truth and a student can well count himself lucky to be privileged to hear professors explaining their views out loud. It is the student's opportunity to learn but surely it is not the professor's obligation to see to it that the student does learn. For then where could the test of a student's independence, originality, curiosity and earnestness be found? No, I don't understand all this talk about education. In my day we went to the university to learn, not to be taught." Or one more example of the European attitude that Lawrence Henderson told me: a French historian, having written some excellent volumes on the Middle Ages, was given a chair in the Collège de France. Arriving in Paris from his home in the south of France, he inquired from another professor at the Collège what were the expected and traditional duties of a professor at the Collège

de France. The reply was "Ask the janitor. He knows what lecture rooms will be available to you and at what hours. For it is the tradition of the Collège de France to assume that a professor knows better than anyone else what he may best offer students out of the results of his work as a savant." I might add that the Collège de France was not closed at the time of the French Revolution since it was not by tradition involved in indoctrination as was the University of Paris,—which was closed by the revolutionaries.

I HOPE that these stories convey some measure of the ways in which the European university tradition contrasts with the American. Possibly the difference could be made still sharper by a story or two from my experience in this country. Not many years ago I asked the president of one of our leading schools of technology what forecast he could make for the top ten of each year's graduating class. He showed immediate concern at the question to which he had already devoted a good deal of attention because the records showed that the subsequent careers of the men graduating with the highest marks fell far short of fulfilling the expectations one could naturally have formed. "I think the reason lies in this fact," the president said, "Our courses, though they are stiff, are rigid or inelastic in the sense that our teachers' efforts are devoted to students who are getting D's and E's. Students getting A's are left alone. Now the school has each year about a dozen really gifted students capable of getting A's without working very hard and so they graduate without ever learning the one thing that has most to do with success in later life; namely, the importance of driving yourself up to the limit of your abilities. Our brightest men all too often leave the school without ever having learned that lesson." Now in my judgment that story illustrates a characteristic of American institutions: the professors' preoccupation with the needs of his whole class of students. Graduating whole classes of students, rather than adding to knowledge, has been our longest tradition. The students are assumed to have the right of way. The American university continues the assumptions and the axioms of the denominational college; namely, to graduate steadily classes of students not below a certain standard for positions in a growing population that needs such services as they are thus prepared to give. As in assembly-line manufacture, the higher educational institutions examine for, and correct if possible,

defects in the product as it passes through. Excellence receives no special attention: it simply passes muster. There is no obligation to exploit or refine individual excellences. When the whole assembly-line organization gets big enough and busy enough, there is no time to discover or explore unexpected individual excellence. The policy begins and ends with the belief that each student must have equality of opportunity: the opportunity must be equal to any other student's opportunity, not equal to his own abilities.

Curiously enough it is in athletics and extra-curricular activities that attention is paid to excellence. It is the students, not the teachers, who set the example of expecting, without attempting to define in advance,—simply expecting the optimum performance from those who are gifted. I venture to think that football could be eliminated from any university if it were a required course, marks were given and the coaches gave their special efforts to the worst players: as the professors do in most of the college classes.

THE devotion of our teachers to the task of helping the weak and shepherding the stragglers comes, as I think, directly from the religious motive of the Good Samaritan. If this be true, it has some noteworthy implications. If teaching is a religious duty, then a teacher's salary can be set as much below his worth as his religious devotion can endure. I remember that in my boyhood the professor of mathematics and astronomy in a denominational college (whose preparatory academy I attended) had a salary of \$1,300. He also had five children. One summer his wife's father died. His wife inherited thereupon property that provided an income of \$500. The president of the college promptly advised the professor that since God in His wisdom and kindness had provided for the professor's family, the college could only supply \$800 as salary in the future. If I may use a phrase not quite appropriate to the realms of religion, his abnegation, the president got away with it. Some of you may think that I am a very old man to remember an event so far removed from the salary policies now in vogue. But most of you know perfectly well that in terms of their purchasing power American university salaries have long been a reproach in comparison with European and are now the most serious threat to the future of higher education in this land.

Even if university teaching has looked to the modesty and self-sacrifice of serving God in a denominational college as providing the

model of salary levels, I would see no ultimate wisdom in assuming that those who serve God should therefore and naturally be underpaid. Furthermore, we should do well to remember that when our colleges were training only teachers and preachers, the students could look forward to earning no more than their teachers. But today our universities in their schools of medicine, law, business and engineering are preparing students for work that is paid far better than the work of their professors.

In short, the tradition of the denominational college persists in the assumption that teaching, being akin to piety, need not be adequately recompensed this side of Heaven, and in the other curious assumption that professors have a moral duty to devote their energies to providing not less than a minimum of equal opportunity to a maximum of students. Can anyone wonder at the consternation among faculties imbued with these traditions, when it is announced that promotion and tenure will depend upon productive scholarship? Or the despairing bewilderment of the students when their teachers turn under such pressure to add to knowledge instead of injecting known facts into the expectant student body?

THERE seems to me to be wide-spread misunderstanding between faculty and students in our professional schools. College graduates come to the medical school naively supposing that their premedical courses have prepared them for the medical school. But, poor lambs, the transition is quite an unexpected affair. In our best schools the transition is a radical change of method, of attitude and approach. It is not a gradual increase in mere facts to be memorized in the same old way. It is a change of intellectual climate. I often have wondered whether any program could be invented that would be more likely to dull curiosity, subdue originality, discourage initiative and penalize independence than four high school years of memorizing abstractions without much of any direct motivation and with rewards that are neither prompt nor particularly pleasurable. And this is followed by four college years of tactical drill in subjects taught in the convoy tempo (i.e., not much faster than the slowest boat) and with no responsibility for deciding what to learn or in what order or how or when or where to learn it, or when to stop learning more of one subject in order to have some time for something else. Eight years! Eight years during which all studies and

most major decisions concerned are at second hand—via a teacher—while sports, dances, club life, vacations, most of the rest of living is at first hand. And in the medical school we expect the students to become all of a sudden realists and tell us teachers what they see and hear and feel and *think*. Why, they have hardly been encouraged to convey a simple, original, direct observation to a teacher since kindergarten days. Poor things!

Now peculiar or unsatisfactory conduct in others occurs oftenest when they are under pressures we know not of, or when they are making assumptions that once were sound but no longer obtain. That is why I suggest that the semi-religious flavor of higher education in America deserves to be examined in the light of present realities. I do *not* mean that it should be condemned. But it should be understood: its defects are numerous and serious but its strengths have been and could continue to be extraordinary were we but to understand them.

THE lasting strength of the private university in America is conviction shared by teachers, trustees, alumni and students. Without such conviction the budget will swiftly pre-empt the focus of attention, or what one might fancifully describe as the edifice complex will exert its baleful influence in exciting jealousy and so destroy the morale of the teaching force.* We have become used to reading of the accomplishments of a retiring university president in terms of buildings erected during his regime, of increases in student attendance, and of increases in endowment. None of these items requires much discernment. Why do we rest content with information so easy to comprehend and so dangerous to be impressed by? We know that the great university president is to be measured by his personal integrity, by the degree to which by example and by articulate statement he is able to convince his trustees, his faculty and the students of the wisdom and generosity of his convictions, and by the quality of persons brought by him to the service of the university. Intangibles, you may say, but since when has the value of higher education depended on tangibles? Because university presidents cannot possibly do all these things alone, it seems to me that shared conviction or moral solidarity must be admitted to be the ultimate power of

* You will recall the definition of a zealot as a person who redoubles his efforts when he has lost sight of his aim.

a university. Money alone will not secure it: quite the converse, it alone can, and frequently does, secure money. Time and sequences and timing are important in the life of a university because they are essential to produce conviction and solidarity. The self-confidence that conviction engenders, assures the university community its greatest opportunity and its greatest strength. It takes time to convince people and especially to convince them of the value of tolerance, of suspending hasty judgments and of the obligations as well as the rights of academic freedom.

ONE cannot think of conviction and institutional morale without realizing that our forerunners in the early American colleges operated on the basis of denominational conviction that was often more powerful than a mere thirst for knowledge. Between mere clannish rivalries and doctrinal convictions I have never felt that I could easily distinguish. But it is evident that in a small college, denominational loyalties can survive, and have survived, more consistently than in a large university. Indeed, it seems that one of the principal tasks of the modern American university is to become as sure of its mission as was the college, to discover and develop convictions that will be important enough and deep enough and clear enough to knit the whole institution into a harmonious and unflagging effort. You may ask what kind of convictions? Convictions about what?

I would reply, convictions as to the proper function of the college of liberal arts and the proper function of each of the professional schools; convictions regarding the best methods of teaching and the best approach to knowledge. For example, a university might put its greatest effort upon the unity or interrelatedness of knowledge and break down interdepartmental barriers and build up every influence that broadens the student's contacts and horizons. Or some university might be built around research work as nearly as possible to the exclusion of introductory or merely expository instruction. Or another university might be built around the conviction that intimate tutorial relationships are more significant than any other form of teaching. Or another might incarnate the conviction that service to the community tops every other consideration in university administration, or that developing citizenship and responsible characters is the only thing that matters. Such possible courses should not be regarded as irresponsible experimentation: without the least doubt each of these special emphases would be peculiarly suited to a con-

siderable number of students in these United States. Eliot's elective system at Harvard was perfectly adapted to some students and equally unsuited to others. But any alert student could know in advance just what to expect at Harvard. Each university should care and dare to have its own particular convictions; and students should do some thinking and choosing where they'll go.

The State universities, being geographical, have, as it would seem, the obligation to compromise and be attentive to local needs of many kinds. From the State universities I expect, therefore, less venturesome freedom to follow a clearly defined conviction to its logical and happy conclusion. This does not mean that State universities should not take advantage of regional agreements in point of the adequate development of different areas of knowledge. But it does mean that private universities are foolish to compete with State universities in size and coverage and a polyvalent attitude toward education. The private universities should realize that they must have a special function, determine what it is and then declare their convictions and rely on the self-challenge that accompanies such a declaration. I realize that this is somewhat a counsel of perfection. At present most private universities present a confusing accumulation, a sort of palimpsest of successive policies and conflicting views. And most of them are flirting with the idea of accepting federal aid to help maintain a wide variety of policies and usages. There is a Brazilian proverb which runs, "Quem quer tudo perde tudo"—who wants everything loses everything. But what are the private universities to do? Try to do a little to please every variety of interest and conviction only to find that what is everybody's business is nobody's business? Do private citizens prefer to be taxed and so provide funds through the Federal treasury for the support of private universities? Or will they give to such institutions directly to enable them to steer clear of government subsidies? Cannot "rugged individualism" be applied to giving money as well as making it?

IN the oncoming crisis of financing our universities the old American tradition that the students have the right of way will be invoked, I think, to justify taking government aid. The argument that the private medical schools should accept federal subsidies runs in this wise. Forty-one of our seventy-eight medical schools are privately endowed. The quality and number of their students provide an

important part of current medical care. The costs of medical education are a part of the costs of medical care. The people want medical care and will now pay taxes to provide it rather than go without. Private funds are not forthcoming to keep our medical schools solvent and producing enough doctors for the public's needs. Therefore Congress will vote a subsidy to medical schools, making no effort to control the educational policies of such schools as are above a reasonable minimum of performance. The arguments against Federal subsidies are these: acceptance of Federal aid will progressively diminish the gifts from private sources. Private schools may lose their independence to experiment and explore new ways of teaching. Local pride will wither and die. Control from Washington will then grow despite the fact that it may not have been intended at the outset. Politics will creep in and power will gravitate into fewer hands and the equivalent of absentee ownership will prevail. Some way must be found to preserve the liberty of our hitherto independent schools. Would group practice organization of our medical schools not be the lesser of two evils?

Well—do you wonder that I have spoken of shared conviction as the ultimate strength of the university?

THE year 1890 witnessed the end of the American frontier, for in that year a narrow aisle of population of at least two persons to the square mile stretched across the plains and the mountain states to the Pacific slope. Until then a common solution of social tensions was merely to move West, to unoccupied land where we would not be bothered by neighbors, because there would be no neighbors. 1890 is a convenient date to mark the beginning of a growing need in this country—the need for political maturity. Our past has been characterized by an almost neurotic distrust of government. I remember a young Hungarian whom I met in Paris in 1925 who had spent a year in the United States. With great earnestness he posed this question: "I was told in America that your best men do not go into government service. How can the United States survive without using them?" An interesting question and one to which student life in our colleges and universities supplies more of an answer than I think most of us realize. Let me explain.

Man, as the Greeks observed, is a political animal. His education should therefore include preparation for dealing with his fellows.

In our colleges and universities the methods of instruction so constantly cheat (though with the best of intentions) our young people of the responsibility of planning, ordering and controlling their intellectual growth that in the colleges at least they have both time and inclination to organize and maintain activities of their own. College papers, dramatics, bands, debating clubs, dances and sometimes athletics are examples of these extra-curricular activities. In them responsibility is assumed by the students,—responsibility for planning and cooperation in executing their plans. No grades are given. You either make the editorial board or you don't. Failure is evident and painful. The more ability a young man has, the more is expected of him. In college he is young enough to be able to discover what to the rest of us later becomes commonplace; namely, that you get out of anything about as much as you put into it. He is young enough to be able to learn much of what various kinds of social behavior lead to. He is getting at least some experience in choosing when and on what he will engage his strength, the strategy of life. And he is hammering all this out with his contemporaries and his equals. That is the important aspect of extra-curricular activities: that student activities give our young people a splendid start in learning to deal with each other.

I NEVER realized how valuable are the extra-curricular activities of our colleges until I visited the universities in the western zone of Germany last September and October. More than ever the German university student lives a life in which isolation, competition and anxiety over his marks control his waking hours. Indeed so intense is this competitive existence that I wouldn't be surprised if it colored his dreams with nightmares of failure. His purpose is to get high marks in the examinations and if possible to attract the favorable attention of his teachers. In the pursuit of such objectives he has no time to spend in extra-curricular activities. So, he thinks, why waste time with mere contemporaries and equals when by subordinating myself to my elders and betters I can get ahead of my fellow students and secure a livelihood and a superior status? As a result of this attitude the German student is more than ever immature in his social relationships. In the hands of such frightened adolescents, the famous *Lernfreiheit* is sadly abused. Talking with four of these students one evening I happened to use the phrase "agree to dis-

agree." It was apparently a totally new idea to all of them. One of them, uncertain of whether he heard aright, asked, "Does this mean that you can get along with people you do not like?" "Yes," I replied, "And it is sometimes useful even with people you do like." The only comment of the others was "Fäbelhaft!" On another occasion I asked some students whether they did not resent the type of student who was forever currying favor with teacher. This, too, seemed a new point of view, for they asked if American students resented such behavior. "Yes," I said, "We even have a name for it—apple polishing," and I explained the term. Later in the discussion I was diverted to hear frequent reference to *die Apfelpolitik*. I had known of *Weltpolitik und Kriegspolitik*. . . . I submit to you the simple reflection that the forerunner of *Kriegspolitik* and *Weltpolitik* may be an educational system and experience that encourages *Apfelpolitik*.

In any case I believe that what our students learn through extra-curricular activities of the art of working together and getting along with contemporaries and equals is one of our greatest political assets. If twenty per cent of Americans from 18 to 22 are now going to college, and if extra-curricular activities show them how to live and work together in effective and harmonious relationship, then that aspect of higher education calls for preservation in any changes that may be contemplated.

* * * *

No anniversary can claim its appropriate significance that omits all reference to those who began and have maintained the institution through all the years. No list, however, could be complete, for many a wise and generous action that has nourished this medical school has been done quietly and in deliberate anonymity by your predecessors. I speak not only of benefactors but of the trustees, of the officers, of the teachers, of the employees and of the students—of everyone whose work for and in the university has been signed with the indelible signature of him who does just a bit more than was expected. For like all things in nature, a university lives from the life abounding round about it. One might safely surmise that we would not be here tonight nor at our tasks tomorrow were it not for the unrequested and unrecorded generosity of those who are no longer here. Every seat in this room could be occupied by the spirits of persons who have in a sense provided your places for you, for

the present is their creation just as the future will be yours. In the symphony of the school's history one chord gives place to another—itself incomplete yet part of a long sequence yet to be played.

Let us not be misled by words: a university does not have an existence apart from those who participate in it. The word university conveniently comprises the voluntary relationships of large numbers of human beings. The Brazilians have a refreshing way of saying "I get along well with someone." They say, "I give myself well with him." The task must be to make this university a center of relationships so firm and yet so sensitive, so critical and yet so grateful, so earnest and yet so light, so devoted and yet so generous that no one can pass as much as a year in Washington University without being able to say, "That was the year I first found the best there was in me and in those about me—I gave myself well in that University."

I have spoken much of conviction but little of its counterfeits, vanity, impatience and intolerance, or its devouring canker, self-pitying indignation. To those in this school who may care to create productive and satisfactory human relationships, Shakespeare's lines offer the best advice, "Ne'er prefer your injury to your heart lest you bring it into danger."