

## THE UNIVERSITY AS A POLITICAL FACTOR.

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A CERTAIN eminent politician, upon being asked what influence the average college undergraduate in this country exerts upon politics, answered shortly, "None." Then he went on to say, "The intelligent college graduate, after he has been out in the world for a time usually comes to exert an influence second only to the daily newspaper. But so far as the undergraduate is concerned, his influence is *nil*, save, of course, in those small towns where the voting strength of the undergraduates is sufficient to materially influence the outcome of the local elections."

There can be but little doubt but that the sentiment of the general public is very largely in accord with that expressed by this gentleman. In fact, many people go farther than this, and believe that not only is the actual influence of the undergraduate a negligible quantity, but that he is not even interested in political matters of any sort. The latter view, however, will scarcely be held by any one conversant with the actual situation. But to the thinking man, who is always apt to compare American conditions with those elsewhere, it would nevertheless seem to be a fact that the average American undergraduate does not exert the influence on or manifest the same interest in the political affairs of the nation as does his European cousin.

We are all willing to grant that at the time of those great crises of our history—the Revolution and the Civil War—students left the college halls by hundreds and volunteered to serve in the defense of what they believed to be right. We are forced to admit as a matter of history that the great majority of our real statesmen have been college graduates. Yet it seems peculiar that in a land where political affairs have been so much a matter of public opinion, and where questions of such tremendous import are left to the decision of the general public, that, for some reason or other, the college

men actually enrolled as undergraduates have not taken a more active part in the affairs of the day.

We read with intense interest of the student insurrections of 1848 in Germany and Austria. Even in our own day the Italian, Russian, French, and German student riots form seemingly conclusive proof of the superior influence of and interest among the students of those countries over their American counterpart. We may, indeed, believe that these insurrections are merely the expression of popular sentiment, that the students lead them only because of their exuberance of spirit and usual fearlessness of consequences. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the students do lead the demonstrations. Sometimes they have been aided by the populace, it is true, but in more cases than one they have actually achieved momentous results through their own efforts. Naturally, aside from the lawlessness of the affair, such a comparison tends to throw discredit upon the American undergraduate, and most of us are prone to believe that in this respect, at least, he is not equal to the European student.

It would hardly seem to be out of place, therefore, at a time when the colleges and universities are attracting so much attention, to inquire what the reason for this seeming apathy can be, and we believe that before we are through, three facts will stand out pre-eminently. First, the difference between the American and European students in this respect is due to entirely different circumstances; second, the apathy in America is only on the surface, and beneath it lies a keen interest and an unquestionable influence; and third, the indications for the future point to an increasing interest and influence.

Since the comparison is most commonly drawn with the German universities, it would be well to investigate the problem by selecting these as typical for our purposes. It is essential to understand at the very beginning that the students as such have never been the primary instigators of the student riots of central Europe. They have been merely the outward manifestations of a deeper power lying behind them, namely, the professors in the universities. Investigation reveals that they, and not the students themselves, were usually the promulgators of reform and of opposition to established institutions. As an educated man, a specialist in his line, and usually a liberal in his political beliefs whatever his religious convictions may have been, the university professor could, with a comparative degree of safety, teach doctrines under the guise of ordinary instruction which might well have cost another man his

life. The fact has been frequently commented upon that doctrines have been taught at the University of Berlin which, if carried into effect, would mean the destruction of the Imperial Palace just across the street. Consider the effect of this sort of thing upon the average college student who is plastic in mind, yet earnest and enthusiastic. More or less unconsciously, he formed deep-rooted convictions which later became fruitful sources of unrest, dissatisfaction, and intense activity.

Another thing to be considered is that the origin of the universities in Germany had much to do with the interest manifested by the students in political affairs. There the higher schools were founded by the government and were patronized, even to the present day, chiefly by the upper classes who are always leaders in political life and the ones most interested in it. Hence it is but natural that the advanced thinker, whether student or teacher, should belong to the class accustomed to political influence and most vitally interested in reform. Is it to be wondered at, therefore, that these men should become somewhat impatient if checked in the carrying out of their convictions? The realization of their strength, the memory of at least partial success in the past, and last but not least the fact that coeducation was a thing unknown, are inherent factors in the situation in Germany that are not to be forgotten.

Here a vital difference exists between American and German conditions. The universities of this country, with exception of the state universities which are of a distinctly western origin of a later period, have been founded by religious organizations, and nowhere in the world are religion and politics so widely separated as in America. Moreover, education has always been more widely diffused here than in Europe, and reform movements have in consequence been more general.

Again, the educational ideal among the German universities is different from that prevailing in this country. Among them higher education is regarded as synonymous with intense specialization and research far more than in this country. This renders it not unusual or a thing to be severely criticized, as is the case even to-day in our country, if the professor be a staunch advocate of reform in his particular field. Confining his attention to a more or less limited field of investigation, it would indeed be peculiar if with the thorough understanding of his subject in all its bearings and ramifications which years of study would naturally give, he did not see the weaknesses of its present state and persistently teach reform. In America, on the other hand, a college education is made simply the foundation

of a more technical training which is to follow; in other words, it is a liberal education. The American university has ever been, until recent years, an institution primarily of instruction, not of investigation. The university professor, like any other teacher, was supposed to keep to facts as they had been taught in days gone by, not to develop a plan or theory of his own, or indeed even to raise any question which might reflect unfavorably upon the educational orthodoxy of the times. The days when a distinguished college president could say to a newly-elected instructor in history who wished to promulgate original work, "My dear young friend, you have been called here as a teacher of history, not as a revolutionist," have gone, it is true, but not so very long ago after all, and the tendency still lingers. So the American professor, even though he have deep convictions regarding political and social questions, never dared voice them for fear of dismissal by a bigoted board of trustees, or if they failed to note his "heresy," lest either his fellow instructors or the general public would make it too uncomfortable for him to remain.

A third factor which influenced the situation lay in the fact that, contrary to the American custom, the German student did not remain long at one university. It is therefore quite the natural thing to expect that advanced views on contemporary history were not confined to the students of any one particular university, but spread rapidly and were absorbed by the entire student world. Thus in the very nature of the German educational system lay the seed from which dissension and discontent were spread, and as an inevitable result the universities became the very hot-beds of liberalism and reform.

Is it to be wondered at, then, that the German students became impatient, sometimes even blind and desperate through despair of ever effecting their reforms, and that they occasionally rose in open rebellion against what they considered tyranny and stagnant conservatism! Perhaps, indeed, it was the only way by which they could have made themselves heard effectively. Be that as it may, it was such an insurrection that caused the fall of Metternich, and changed the map of Europe.

As a fourth fact enabling us to understand the student riots in Europe, it is well to note that a student insurrection such as the older countries have not infrequently experienced could never have effected reform elsewhere than under a despotic form of government. A democracy would never have been profoundly influenced by disturbances of this kind. Bearing this fact in mind, it will be easier to understand why such methods of reform have not been employed

in America, for let it be remembered that permanent reform can never be secured by attempting to browbeat the chosen representatives of the people, and that it can only be secured by peacefully appealing to the voters at the poles.

Finally, it is only just to remember that in the light of subsequent history the principles for which the European students have stood have generally proven a genuine advance. Moreover, there were always those among the nobility, though not university men themselves, who were liberal minded and sympathetic, ready to accept the new thought. Beneath the student classes lay the peasantry, largely ignorant, it is true, yet not without those who could reason for themselves and appreciate new ideas. Thus the student class formed an entering wedge between the upper and lower classes, and could in time secure an influence over the older nobility above and the peasantry below. Herein lies a fact which cannot be overlooked.

It is therefore apparent, even from this brief survey, that essential differences exist between the relation which the undergraduate bears to politics in the old world and the new. The origin, ideals and nature of the universities themselves, the character of the government under which they operate, and the composition of the student body are so different that no comparison can be drawn between the two. It is therefore both illogical and unfair to rate the American beneath the European merely on the basis of outward manifestations of interest.

But is it true that the American student has neither interest nor influence in politics? Despite these powerful factors favoring the German undergraduate, his American cousin has really done more toward the attainment of political advance than many of us are apt to think. The influence of college graduates lies beyond the pale of this discussion, since we are treating solely of the undergraduate. The fact, for instance, that every chief justice of the Supreme Court (save only John Marshall, who ceased his course at the College of William and Mary at the outbreak of the Revolution) have been college graduates, as were Thomas Jefferson, the draftsman of the Declaration of Independence, and Payton Randolph, the first president of the Continental Congress, although interesting, does not bear upon the subject in hand.

Yet an historian of no mean ability has said that the Revolution would have been postponed half a century had it not been for Harvard College. Political clubs have been in existence in our universities almost continuously from the days of 1875 down to the present

hour, and one can hardly measure their influence, direct and indirect. The American Republican College League of but a few years since was organized by the chairman of the Republican Central Committee, its proceedings sanctioned, and its work aided. Prohibitionists and socialists as well as republicans and democrats, have well-organized clubs in nearly every college and university in the land. That their influence is considerable is well attested by the fact that in probably every college town in America the attempt has at some time or other been made to debar the students from voting in that town. It is not at all uncommon during the various campaigns for the party organizations to send out men from the undergraduate colleges to speak in behalf of their candidates. And so, in spite of declarations that "the college graduate is too much of a gentleman to be a successful politician," or of an equally intelligent critic that "college men are not of a sufficiently practical turn of mind to attract public attention or to deserve public trust," the fact still remains that the college students of America form a political force of actual and potential power that cannot be spoken of lightly.

And what of the future? We can but recognize the tendency to-day through the college world, whatever we may think of the past. Everywhere men are coming to recognize more and more that politics is a profession, not "a job." In Germany this has long been recognized and accepted, and men there study to enter political life even as men here do to enter medicine or the ministry. It is a law of civilization that with greater development comes greater complexity in national institutions. So it comes to be increasingly true that in all government, whether monarchy or democracy, specialists are needed just as truly as in engineering or surgery. It is well that we are fast coming to learn this truth. More and more we are realizing the necessity of putting educated specialists in positions where their education and knowledge will count for the most. Tariff schedules, railroad rates and tax commissions are being made up more and more of men who know, instead of inexperienced legislators. Governor Wilson of New Jersey, Professor Seligman of Columbia, Professors Ely and Meyer of Wisconsin, ex-president Eliot of Harvard are well-known instances illustrative of this tendency. The commission form of government for cities is but another evidence of this fact. So an ever increasing number of men are specially preparing themselves for the various departments of governmental activity—forestry, consular service, and so forth—through the medium of the college course.

Equally important with greater specialization for the political

leaders of the future is a close and strong bond with the people they would lead. More and more will this be true as the American people come to realize to the fullest extent their political responsibility and become more and more sensitive to changes of policy on the part of their representatives. Recognizing this, and seeking to strengthen this bond of union, the universities of to-day are expanding in both directions—toward greater specialization on the one hand, and toward a utilitarian ideal on the other (note in this connection the growth of university extension departments)—so that as time goes on, though there may be fewer people who actively engage in politics, yet will the people as a whole be in closer touch with their representatives and their work.

This then is one of the brightest signs of our modern life: a deep and influential interest on the part of college men in the affairs of government, an interest which is daily growing and making itself felt, and one that can but filter down to those less fortunate people to whom circumstances close the college doors; a recognition of the great truth that politics must become a profession, even as medicine, law and engineering are professions; an ever strengthening bond of sympathy and purpose between the public servant and his constituents. And as a last thought, let us not forget the inestimable value of the small college in this direction, whose growing popularity and increasing power for service prophesies well for the rounded development of the independent leader of the future, who, using the party organization as a means, and the service of his fellowmen as an end, becomes thereby the true patriot and scholar.