

# It's Practical to Think

By JOSEPH A. BRANDT

Even in war time, the first duty of colleges is teaching people to use their brains, President Brandt points out

**M**R. ROBERT HUTCHINS in a recent speech advocating shortening the period of time for the bachelor of arts degree from four years to two years, remarked that all of the energies of the University of Chicago should go into the effort of winning the war; and, since vocational education and applied science were most needed now, that it should be the endeavor of the University of Chicago to supply those needs. Courses offered in the University should meet either the test of contributing to winning the war or of adding to the intellectual wealth of our citizens, he asserted.

Then Mr. Hutchins proceeded to analyze in his striking way, the failure of modern education to educate—through the 8-4-4 system perpetuated by Horace Mann—eight years of elementary education, four of high school, four of college.

"We are afflicted," said Mr. Hutchins, "with wastes of the most tremendous and depressing kind which are not really our fault. They result from the idiosyncrasies of the American educational system. Horace Mann, when he went to Germany to find a school to imitate, imitated the wrong one. He brought back as a foundation school for America—and a foundation can be laid in six years—a school that was terminal in its native land and that took eight years because it was terminal.

"The painful prolongation of adolescence in the United States," he continues, "must be attributed in part to Horace Mann's initial mistake. Students are delayed two years all along the line. And two years is about the difference in intellectual maturity between an American student and an English, French, or German boy of the same age."

And Mr. Hutchins adds: "We have waste because the program of graduate instruction does not take into account a fact patent on the surface of our professional life: a course of study which aims to produce both good scholars and good college teachers ends by producing neither.



NEWS!—STUDENTS STUDYING  
*Learning to think is the basic goal of the college student, though few of the published pictures of college life give that impression*

This is an educational system which the country can no longer afford."

I quote at some length from Mr. Hutchins because he is one of the nettles in the side of the educator who wants things as they are, he has been able to point out with striking success some needed changes in directions, and he has remained the healthiest cathartic in our educational world.

Mr. Hutchins was sincerely opposed to our entering the present war. He had been the most uncompromising opponent of vocational education. Like any patriotic American, once our nation had made its decision, he plunged heart and soul into the war effort. But, I fear, in an honest effort to do two things which are

not at all contradictory, he has needlessly abandoned not only his Maginot line but perhaps has invited the enemy to come in.

All of us must make it our first concern to win the war and to help the government, as the government indicates its needs. That is a job patently the first requirement of any teacher, no matter at what level of the 8-4-4. But what Mr. Hutchins forgets is that there are two tasks running concurrently through our effort, the first to win the war as rapidly as possible, the second to win the peace once war has ended.

**I**T is true that our government does need a vast increase in vocational skills and it needs those skills at once; but the supplying of those skills even under emergency conditions does not become a matter for the high school or the college, for their function still remains not skill with the hands but skill with the brain, the heart. Mr. Hutchins would terminate college work of a general educational nature with the sophomore year, which I myself think entirely plausible under given conditions. But I think it is more imperative today than ever before for educators to be aware of the real service they can render to the national effort, which is to train people to think.

Vocational education is a paramount need of America. It has been so long before the war. But how to give it, when to give it, and where to give it, was a problem no one seemed to be able to solve. As a result, it was all over the place. The elementary school man, because he was faced by puzzled mothers and by fathers eager to have junior aid in contributing to the family budget, began sneaking in so-called vocational subjects at the expense of fundamental subjects. High schools soon followed suit. The college, not to be left out of it, saw that it was following the parade rather than leading it. The college was more dignified—it used some high-sounding terms. But it was vocational training regardless of how it was bootlegged.

This was a logical sequence from the Germanic system of education which had most unfortunately begun clutching at the throat of American democracy. For let there be no mistaking of the cancer in our midst, the only result of the prevailing system of education in the United States is going to be either a form of

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fascism or a form of communism some thirty or forty years hence. Fortunately, some far-seeing persons saw the light here and there and we had purely technical high schools established, such as the marvelous one at Memphis which is operated by an Oklahoman, for young men and women who never intended going to college but who did want vocational skills with some degree of general knowledge so that they would not be entirely orphans of society.

This is the answer—definite technical schools which are terminal in themselves, supplemented by a most intelligent and comprehensive advisory system at the end of the eighth—or sixth—grade. This is the stage, perhaps, when intelligent guidance should be given, rather than at the college level.

Exclude as though a cardinal sin any vocational training—remember, it is not vocational education but training—in the critical years from the first grade to the sixth or the eighth. It is a crime against the student, against the parent, against society, to deny the young student at the formative years when he will either begin to acquire thinking processes or begin to become fodder for a dictator or a demagogue.

Unlike Mr. Hutchins, I do believe in vocational training but I believe in it in its place and that place is not in the elementary school or the regular high school or the college. Many people have been confused about the place of vocational training and because it taught a skill they praised it because it was "practical."

Now all education that trains people to think is practical. It is eminently practical. It makes money, much more money than vocational training ever can. But we do not need money makers right now, we need thinkers to plan the war effort and the peace terms on the one hand, and the fabricants, the planters, the warriors, on the other. But we must not abdicate, as President Roosevelt has so wisely observed, the true function of the college.

To supply vocational training the government could wisely aid in converting excess high schools in most of our cities into technical high schools, the students of which would understand clearly that when they had completed their work there, they were through with formal training. The colleges and the other schools should adhere strictly to their functions. By so doing, we would make a major contribution to the war effort on the one hand, and a master contribution to preserving democracy in the future on the other.

I have heard colleges and high schools criticized because, by teaching the humanities, the social sciences, the sciences, etc., they "weren't practical." It would

do these critics a great deal of good to read *Time's* interesting survey [*The U. S. College Graduate*, Macmillan] of the economic status of the American college graduate. For instance, only .2 per cent of all the male graduates and .1 per cent of all the women graduates of the country were on relief in 1940, at a time when many of their fellow citizens were on relief.

Ninety-two per cent of the men and 91 per cent of the women were gainfully employed. Sixty-three per cent of all men working graduates were in professions and 37 per cent were in manufacturing and industry, and farming. On an average, the family of the college graduate earns twice as much a year as the non-college graduate. The only exception to this, I should think, would be the Oklahoma school teacher! Twenty-seven per cent of college families made annual incomes of from \$3,000 to \$5,000. The median salary of all men working graduates employed by others was \$2,350, while the median income of those in business for themselves was \$3,860.

THUS as a "practical" measure, regardless of the work taken, the college graduate tends to profit by his education in terms of the income he earns.

To me, the most interesting figures were those showing how democracy makes those dependent on it suffer educationally. Obviously, the highest average median salaries were those of the graduates of the heavily endowed institutions. But, as though it were Banquo's ghost coming to confront Mr. Hutchins, the graduates of the purely liberal arts colleges tend to outstrip those who go to the colleges which have let down the bars. Let us take the figures of *Time* of those men of 40 years or beyond by colleges.

Harvard, Yale, Princeton	\$8,580
The Big Ten	3,970
Middle Western	3,250

Now, there are differences in economics, presence of great wealth, etc., to influence the Lonely Three but Harvard, Yale and Princeton still insist on a liberal arts training before they permit professional education. The Big Ten schools like Illinois do not adhere to such a rigid requirement. One final factor from *Time's* survey. The college graduate always gains financially by moving from his college geographic area.

I have gone into this detail because I have discovered a considerable confusion in Oklahoma on the vexing question of what the end of education should be. I have discovered an alarming abdication on the part of many teachers and many administrators of their true function of leadership. They say bluntly, well, if the public wants it, let the public have it.

But the public, in turn doesn't want the key to the school house, it does want direct answers to its questions. The public figures there is something wrong with the educational system but it doesn't know just what; since the public hasn't been accustomed to have frank statements from its educators, it has taken the liberty of supplying the leadership which the educator failed to supply.

Thus, for years we argued in Oklahoma that the support of colleges should be on the basis of increase in enrolment. For awhile this argument worked but only to a point, because enrolment overtook economics and the college and the high school became the worst of sweat shops. Then the appropriators of money discovered that there was something wrong with the formula of more students, more money; they just didn't vote the money and the college kept going just the same. While the teacher suffered immensely in the deal, it was future Oklahoma which was being betrayed. No one asked anything about the quality of the graduate produced by the college, no one bothered to ask why the intelligent young people of the state were leaving Oklahoma almost in droves.

No state supported college in Oklahoma today has a faculty adequate for its students; but as enrolment declines, you may expect the chickens of the administrators who argue not quality but quantity to come home to roost at the doorstep. The drive is already on to reduce the support of education—and if Hitler had time to read all the newspapers, how delighted he would be to know that he had such powerful allies, such mistaken foes of democracy, right here in the United States. The money to be taken away is not to be taken from the schools but from the youngsters of Oklahoma. I must not happen. If it does, then I think intelligent youth should resume the march from Oklahoma but it should accelerate that march. If youth is good enough to die for our country, it is good enough in my estimation to be given a square deal while preparing for that death.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of two articles by President Joseph A. Brandt. The second article will appear in the May issue.



WHITTINGTON-HARVEY: Miss Norma Ruth Whittington, '42, and B. H. Harvey, '40, former University students, were married February 21 in Oklahoma City. Mr. Harvey is employed by Braniff Air Lines in Dallas, Texas, where the couple are at home.

WILSON-SEALY: Miss Irma Wilson, '42, and Artis Sealy were married January 31 in Carnegie, Oklahoma. The bride was a senior student in the University. The couple are at home at Valley View, Texas.