

Universities are occasionally asked to "report progress", and it is well that they should be. But progress, as everyone knows, does not mean the amassing of bricks and mortar, nor the swelling of attendance lists. It has been one of the cardinal features of Dalhousie University to insist on quality and not to trouble itself about "growth" in the vulgar sense of the word. In attempting to adhere to this course in the future, Dalhousie University, like other Canadian universities, must take a wide view of the changing conditions in the social and the economic growth of the country. Certain features in Canadian education have developed almost unnoticed until now, when all of us realize the gigantic disproportion.

I have just been reading the Report of the British Head Mistresses, who toured Canadian colleges and schools early this year. It is an exceedingly friendly document, which makes plain the realization on the part of the authors, of the appalling magnitude of our task in Canada, namely, to maintain civilization among ten million people scattered over a vacant empire. At the same time, it is a scientific investigation into facts performed by experts; and Canadians, I believe, will read it gratefully. It adds, perhaps, nothing to the knowledge of those of us who have made a special study of conditions, but the expression is so detached and scientific, and the outline of our tendencies is etched so clearly, that it provides, to say the least, an hour's most profitable reading for any Canadian who is interested in the future of his country.

For example, without any allocation of praise or blame, we are told: "Probably the fundamental reason for the relatively subordinate place taken by humane studies in Canadian universities lies in the circumstances and needs of the Dominion as a whole." In the same way we are told that scholarships in all Canadian universities are small: "There does not appear to be adequate financial assistance available for able students of small means." Again, we read: "The curricula (of secondary schools) are largely conditioned by university requirements. These curricula are rigidly standardized by most of the Provincial Boards of Education. The latter approve text books, prescribe methods, and publish courses of study which set forth, in detail, sections of the text books, problems, and, in the case of languages, the actual phrases and vocabulary which have to be mastered from point to point." Again, (of secondary schools): "Generally speaking, the need for more specialist teachers of university standing and of higher standing is widely recognized in Canada. We find evidence of this, not only in intercourse with men and women in the scholastic world, but also in papers which had been read at university conventions."

The following two statements are made with no further comment and with not even an exclamation mark at the end of them:

"High school classes have not infrequently as many as forty-five pupils; one Grade XII class, with fifty-five pupils, was visited whose teacher stated that the numbers were insufficient to warrant subdivision."

"There seemed to be no widespread practice of grading boys and girls within a large class according to their progress in such a way that the pupils with real aptitude in a certain subject may be separated from those who need to move at a slower pace, even if only for a time."

Now if a sensation-monger wished to annotate, or to make headlines of some of these phrases, out of their context, we could have a "political incident" about our ears very shortly. It is to be remembered, however, that these ladies were invited to Canada by Canadians, and that they have proved very courteous, grateful, and gracious guests. Their report is an encouragement to all well-wishers of Canadian schools and colleges. As I have said above, they realize acutely the magnitude of the task and the suddenness with which, in many parts of Canada, we have had to deal with it. The report should, I think, be particularly encouraging to men and women in the Maritime Provinces, where genuine culture has been steadily prized and where the relative importance of material and spiritual things has never been forgotten. We have in these Provinces with their geographic compactness and their homogeneity of population, marvellous opportunities for a high order of civilization which exist hardly anywhere else on this continent.

How clearly our course is mapped out for us in the sentences I have quoted above!

- (1) The paramount importance of "the humanities".
- (2) The selection of the best human material for higher studies and the providing of ways and means to secure this.
- (3) The stark necessity of providing everywhere and at all times that the teacher of any subject in a secondary school shall have had a special training in that subject.
- (4) The vital importance of ensuring freedom and responsibility to good teachers, once the good teachers are found.
- (5) Remembering that youths and children are animals, live things with individual ways of growing and thinking, and not dead blocks. The Chief Inspector of Schools in Toronto once boasted publicly that he knew every hour, every day, what each child in the Toronto public schools was doing. Whereupon an old lady was heard to say, "Poor little dears, you have buried them all?"

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in view of the interest your paper has in Dalhousie
scholarships. Accordingly, I send off the enclosed
to you at a late hour this evening.

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