

The University and Public Affairs, Dr. Brittain's Theme

Brilliant Graduate of the U. N. B. Speaks on Behalf of the Alumni Society—An Able Address in Which Much New Ground Was Broken—Subjects Taught at College Should Be of Practical Benefit.

Dr. Horace L. Brittain, of the Department of Municipal Research, Toronto, was the speaker on behalf of the Associated Alumni Society at the U. N. B. Encaenia this afternoon. He chose for his theme the University and public affairs and spoke as follows:

Introduction
One advantage of the topic of this paper is that it does not require the speaker to offer or the audience to listen to a definition of Education. One can get past the critics by confining himself to a limited description of the educational progress, namely, that education helps those submitted to the process to live and to make a living.

The University, in this, does not differ from the other educational institutions, although the centre of gravity shifts from subject to subject. Every subject which a university teaches should help the learner both to live and to make a living. Now the field of human activity, called public affairs, is coming to occupy a greater and greater area both from the standpoint of life and of earning a living. Since the university is the apex of formal education, its attitude toward and relation to public affairs is, therefore, of growing importance. In fact at the present time it is the opinion of close observers that no university can justify claim to be discharging its main duty to society unless the courses and facilities it offers have a close functional relation to public affairs.

The Growth In Complexity
Possibly the most interesting social phenomenon in the last fifty, and particularly in the last twenty-five years, has been the growth in the number and complexity of the services rendered by governments and public bodies. Originally the chief function of every government was the maintenance of order and the protection of life and property. Even a good part of this function was left in private hands. It is not so long ago that every gentleman carried his sword. Not long before that, nobles had their armed retainers, and even more recently, in large parts of the American west, a man's safety depended on his quick reaction time and his accuracy of aim. In Chicago at the present time a business man's safety may depend more upon satisfactory arrangement with a group of racketeers than on the efficiency of the official police.

A Unique Plan
If I remember correctly, in one of Dr. Bridges' classes, we were told of a Roman millionaire who accumulated part of his fortune by running a private fire department. It was an information and salvage department rather than a fire fighting department but, according to Plutarch, made him a large property owner. In case of a fire, he would get in touch with the victim and his neighbours. No doubt, if the prices offered were attractive, he would buy the property and, if possible, would have the fire extinguished and, if not, let it burn until the offer became attractive. While some large corporations now have private police operating under government permit, the whole function of protection of persons and property is now practically in the realm of public affairs.

An Important Function
Possibly the next most important function of government is the provision of streets, sidewalks, highways, canals and other means of transportation and communication. In the memory of many now living, some important highways were privately owned and were kept up by the privately collected revenues. At one time in England toll roads were found everywhere. Privately owned toll bridges are still quite common in the United States. Many sidewalks are privately owned and constructed. Until recently all railways, electric and steam, were privately owned, con-

structed and maintained. Now the greatest single steam railway system in the world is publicly owned, and many large cities on both sides of the Atlantic own their tramway systems. The greater part of elementary and secondary education in modern civilized states is conducted under public auspices and maintained by public funds. In most modern countries university education is partly under public control and supported by public funds and partly provided under public auspices. Time was when nearly all water-works systems were privately owned and operated, when all health work, if any, was under private auspices and when parks and playgrounds were in the fields of private effort. The ancient system of farming taxes to private interests is well known and indeed until recently existed in some modern states. Such a system would be unthinkable in modern European and American countries. Before 1895, at least, the classes in this University were familiar with the view that that government was the best which attempted the least possible number of services and performed what little it attempted in the best possible way.

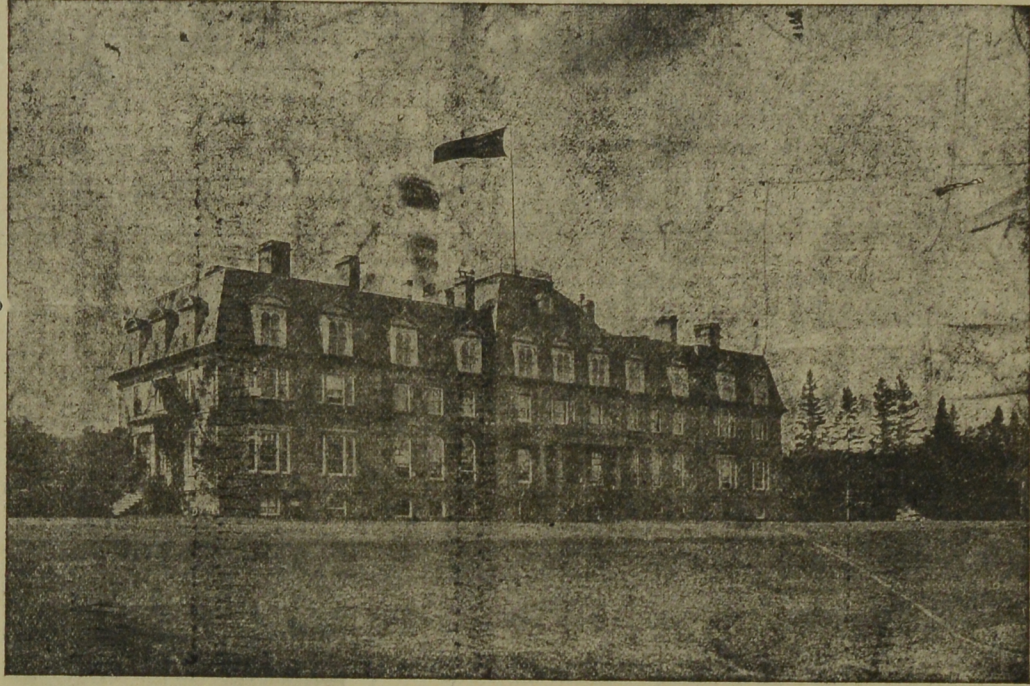
The Best Government
The cynical bystander of 1929 is apt to observe that apparently the best government is the one which is ready to assume the largest possible number of services and pass the maximum number of laws demanded by the citizens, irrespective of the quality or results of these services or laws. The direction in which a civilization proceeds is always a resultant of many forces. Our present drift is not a matter of chance, but is the result of disturbance of the forces which have been long operative in human affairs. There have always been two schools of thought as to governmental activities—one which wished to limit the functions of government in the interests of human freedom and one which wished to enlarge its boundaries in the interests of human needs. For generations the opposing forces maintained a fair balance and democratic countries made haste slowly in assuming new functions. The first great seismic disturbance of this equilibrium was the industrial revolution which brought in its wake such profound and disturbing changes in the social structure that governments were compelled by public opinion to enter upon fields of regulation and service which had not been dreamed of. The reverberations of this revolution are still with us. Present policies which twenty years ago would have been publicly advocated only by red socialists, but are now accepted as a matter of course by large sections of the public, are indirect results of forces which were first clearly seen to be operating in the 18th and 19th centuries. Public schools, public health departments, street cleaning and garbage collection, public parks and playgrounds, minimum wage laws, industrial compensation, mothers' allowance, old age pensions, have all been denounced as socialistic fallacies—and some still are. The industrial revolution brought about great cities and increased density of population as a whole. This resulted in a liberalising of the electoral laws and this finally led to university and compulsory education, at public expense. Things which were quite proper where society was primitive and population was sparse became impossible in the modern large cities. In the country it was not a matter of serious public moment that a family should draw its drinking water from a well in the yard, that the family toilet was an earth closet not far removed from the house, or even that these two necessities were in close proximity to one another. But, with the advent of the modern city, the existence of wells and earth toilets in small backyards became a menace to the whole urban community. The earth toilet was abolished by the tens of thousands and the community drinking water was brought in possibly from a supply 100 miles away and was carefully filtered or chlorinated or both. When one knew where the butter, milk, meat and vegetables which his family consumed came from, large bureaus for inspecting food products were not thought necessary, but when milk and butter and vegetables are brought hundreds, and meat thousands of miles to the city, there must be efficient inspection as a matter of more self preservation.

Important Changes
The automobile also has brought about deep seated changes in public affairs and the aeroplane and airship may easily bring even more revolutionary changes. We don't know how far we're going but we know that we're on our way and we know the direction of the present trend. There have been ages when changes were not daily or yearly, but at most secular. There are still countries where life now is practically as it was 1000 years ago. But modern man exists in a rapidly changing world, and the length of his existence depends upon his ability properly to adjust himself to these changes. A trip on a merry-go-round is apt to make one dizzy, which means simply that one's orientation apparatus is temporarily out of commission. The present situation reminds one, possibly, more of a kaleidoscope than of a merry-go-round, and the resulting disturbance is possibly more a mental than a physical vertigo. In any event the problem that faces us as thinking citizens is not how we can manage to disregard the present disturbing conditions and continue in the world but not part of it; but what principle can we establish which will enable us to maintain something like orderly development and to regulate the changes which are inevitable in such a way as to conserve the greatest quantum of individual liberty while meeting the legitimate demands of social wellbeing.

Stabilizing Formals
In the last decade I have found the following formals most stabilizing in my own thinking: "Governments are committees of citizens which exist to produce collectively those human services which cannot as well be produced by the citizens individually." It has the advantage of not being static, as a service which at some time or in some places might best be performed by a public agency might at other times and in other places fall naturally within the domain of public enterprise. At the same time, at a given period and in a given place, the definition provides a very real help in deciding upon community action. The extent to which a community may enter upon public utilities is limited by the intelligence, information, courage and honesty of the community. When a concrete question as to whether a community shall enter such and such a field or not comes up for settlement, the citizen may find a means of answering the question for himself by applying the definition in the light of his knowledge of the community's intelligence, information, courage and honesty. Whether or not a community shall own and operate its electric light plant is not a matter of religion or morals; it is a question of expediency, to be answered in the light of all the known facts. It may be consistently maintained that lying is lying wherever it occurs, that thieving is thieving and murder, murder; but thinking people will admit that public ownership and operation of a power plant may be a mistake in Chicago and a proper policy in Saint John. It might be a mistake in Chicago in 1929 and sound policy in the same city in 2029.

Escaped Mistakes
If the definition quoted had been

THE COLLEGE ON THE HILL



Arts Building of the University of New Brunswick Erected in 1828

universally applied as a test during the last twenty years as an aid to thought and not as a support for prejudices, many governments and governing bodies might have escaped serious mistakes in policy. If the developmental functions is to be kept on sound lines and within safe limits during the next half century, not only must citizenship be kept at a high level of intelligence and character, but its universities and other educational institutions must produce at the same time a supply of men and women of sufficient education, intelligence and character to represent the citizens as effective members of public policy forming bodies, such as City Councils, Legislative Assemblies and Federal Parliament and, also, men and women of sufficient training, insight and character to advise regarding these policies, and carry them out effectively when once adopted.

The basic element in any democracy is the electorate. If this fails, all fails, but if this has within it the elements of success, it can make proper use of the representative and executive machinery of modern government.

In addition to the ordinary qualities of intelligence and character, the

electorate needs to have a clear knowledge of the organization of municipal and other government and a clear conception of the requirements for service in the elective policy-forming bodies.

Public Affairs
For years I attended a semi-rural public school in which the annual school meeting was held. What business was conducted at this meeting, how its deliberations affected our interests, none of us knew and it is doubtful whether any of us thought of the matter until years afterward. Here was a magnificent opportunity for first hand contact with actual processes of government. We knew the British North American Act almost by heart. We were not interested in it. The local legislative body we knew nothing of. Our interest in it might readily have been awakened. The secondary schools of my day provided very little of vital interest on public affairs. What little of this subject was taught was in connection with history. We learned and enjoyed learning about the Domesday Book, the Magna Charta, the Petition of Right and the struggles between the barons and the King and the King and Parliament; but the appearance of the Canadian History period was

marked by shamefaced distaste.

Teaching Profession
It has long seemed to me that the teaching profession is of more vital importance than ever before to the body politic. The choices in public affairs that the average citizen has to make are becoming at the same time more numerous and more difficult. To guide growing citizens in their development toward "operating" citizens, a teaching profession of broad sympathies, true learning and deep insight is required. Before we would employ a man to perform the simplest. Surgical operation, we should satisfy ourselves that he had at least a minimum medical education, which now means 6 or 8 years beyond the high school. Yet we will employ a immature youth with but a year's training beyond the high school to perform the much more difficult operation of guiding growing human minds and characters of our children. When we become really intelligent we shall not permit anyone, even in the university, to start out on a career of educating the youth unless he knows more than the matter of the curricula, but about the laws of human growth. May I have

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