THE TEACHING OF HISTORY IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES OF THE UNITED STATES AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR SOUTH AFRICA. A BRIEF REVIEW.

A few years ago a Carnegie Travel Grant enabled me to visit the United States and Canada for the purpose of studying the teaching of History in American colleges and universities. Since the underlying purpose of such grants is that profitable visits should be made to as many institutions as possible, I made a selection of twenty-one colleges and universities from more than 2,000 that exist in this vast country.

At each institution I had the privilege of meeting prominent historians who extended a most cordial welcome to me, and went out of their way to make my visit profitable, and also very enjoyable. I was afforded the opportunity of having many discussions with individual historians and conferences with groups of professors. I mainly concentrated on the following aspects of the teaching of history in American colleges and universities

(a) the place;
(b) the aims;
(c) the programmes;
(d) the methods; and
(e) the correlation between history and the social sciences, humanities and sciences.

Before, however, discussing these aspects seriatim, it may be advisable, for the sake of South African readers, to clarify the general organization of teaching in American colleges and universities very briefly:

1. Undergraduate studies in the Arts and Sciences leading to the degrees of Bachelor of Arts and Sciences are conducted in autonomous colleges or colleges connected with universities. The programme for the Bachelor's degree, with few exceptions, covers a period of four years — freshman, sophomore, junior and senior.

These four years are again divided into lower division — freshman and sophomore — and upper division — junior and senior.

2. The courses taken during these years are semester courses and during freshman and sophomore years an average of five and during junior and senior an average of four courses per semester are required.

3. Graduate work in the arts and sciences and vocational study — medicine, engineering, agriculture, etc. — is done in the graduate and professional schools in the universities.

The Place of History

The question of the place of history in South African universities, colleges and schools has developed into a serious problem. It is generally realised that a healthy balance between the social sciences, humanities and sciences must be maintained in our programmes, but as a result of the phenomenal development of industry and mining in South Africa, the sciences

tend to attract all the attention and to dominate the interest of both universities and students. History, as well as the social sciences and humanities, has therefore suffered serious impairment of prestige and interest. No better proof of this can be found than in the fact that the increase of history students is not at all proportional to the great increase of students in our universities. In our technical education history is often regarded as superfluous. When it is realised, as Morrison in his "Teaching in the Secondary School" puts it, that "History and Geography constitute the matrix out of which most of the other sciences have evolved and hence lie at the basis of the intellectual life of the individual", this general trend in our universities, colleges and schools seems to be fraught with danger for the further maintenance of the cultural background and, above all, the traditions and values of South African and in general Western Civilization.

This problem also exists in the U.S.A., and probably in a much more acute form. Because of the titanic race for the conquest of outer-space, this is a demand for more science in education. The difference, however, is that leading educationalists, and especially scientists, realise the danger of the distortion of education in the scientific direction alone. Not alone is the danger realised, but a firm stand is taken against it. The generally accepted principle of a liberal education is the main buffer against this onslaught and it is defended with force and ability by outstanding educationalists, among whom Dr. Kilian, Science adviser to the President of the U.S.A., Dr. Conant, former president of Harvard and Prof. Lee Du Bridge, President of C.A.L.T.E.C., Pasadena, are certainly the greatest champions.

An evaluation of the true place of the teaching of history in the American colleges I visited, must therefore be projected against the principle and practice of liberal education. This is a vast and diverse field and it is with hesitation and at the risk of dangerous generalization that I venture on it.

The education in these colleges rests almost entirely upon the principle of *liberal education*. Liberal education is not concerned with those aspects of education that train the student for a job or a profession. It aims rather at the cultivation of a sense of values, at sharp discernment, at understanding the complexities of the physical and social world we live in, as well as an appreciation of the traditions of Western civilisation. At the same time it enables those students who intend specializing to explore that basic fields of human knowledge before embarking on a career. To quote the Annual Report of the Carnegie Corporation for 1957: "A liberal arts education enables the young man or woman to range widely over the fundamental fields of knowledge. These fields are basic to all effective use of the mind and must precede all sound professional education. These are the fields that equip a man not only to be a more intelligent wage earner but a more valuable member of the community. They are the fields that aid a man to understand himself, to comprehend the world around him, and to be worthy of the responsibilities democracy thrusts upon him." Liberal education is

a buffer against over-specialization and the danger of the distortion of education in a one-sided direction.

For a liberal education the following two requirements are fairly generally accepted:

Firstly, the *distribution* of courses in the lower division over the three main fields of human knowledge, viz. social sciences, humanities and sciences, so as to provide the student with a basic general education which will enable him to understand himself, his country and the intellectual and physical world he lives in. Much attention has been given to the problem of how these courses could best be distributed so as to accomplish the goals of general education most effectively, but no magic key to what is to be comprised in general education has as yet been found. Various approaches based upon various theories have been attempted by various colleges.

One approach is that the goals of general education may be accomplished through a judicious distribution of standard or traditionally organized courses. To achieve this, courses in some disciplines representing each of the major areas of human knowledge are prescribed. In these prescribed courses the place of history is presumed. Moreover, in most of the colleges of the prominent Eastern universities the tendency is to regard history as a separate major field of human knowledge, and it is neither grouped with social science nor with the humanities. In their programme for liberal education history therefore becomes compulsory for students for the bachelor's degree whether it be in the arts or sciences. As it is obviously impossible to cover all aspects of history, survey courses in Western civilisation and American civilisation are usually prescribed. I shall refer to these courses at a later stage.

Another approach to the distribution of courses for the purpose of general education, gravitates towards a synthesis and unification of the social Sciences, humanities and sciences. Inter-disciplinary or correlated or integrated programmes in the three fields are devised. The basic aims of these efforts are, as Prof. Malcolm S. MacLean of the University of California, Los Angeles, puts it: "To produce individuals who see wholes instead of parts only; who comprehend interrelationships and interactions; who have with their fellows, common cores and concepts, and common vocabularies for intercommunication". These courses are compulsory to all college students in the lower division.

It may almost be said that history dominates general education thinking at one place or another in these programmes. In the social science programmes history invariably forms the basis upon which they are constructed. This is evident from a study of the *Contemporary Civilization* programmes at Columbia and the social science courses at Harvard and Chicago Universities.

But the second requirement of a liberal education is *concentration* on a particular study or group of studies in the junior and senior years. At the end of the Sophomore year the student must select his major subject

and, with it, he must do extensive work in disciplines which are collateral to his main field of application. In this way too over-specialization is counter-acted. In meeting this requirement history proves to be a very popular field of concentration while it is also accepted as a very useful collateral study to other disciplines.

Over and above the place thus accorded to history in the liberal colleges, it is very significant that a typical curriculum in a good engineering school requires the student to study social sciences and humanities during the years before he graduates. In these studies history plays a very important part as is evidenced by the history courses at M.I.T., Cambridge. Here history has progressed to a point where it is given a status equal to that of the professional fields of science, engineering and architecture. At M.I.T. a further advance in the teaching of history will soon be tackled when economic history and the history of industrialization is introduced.

Not only educationalists, but also legislators, realise the important place of history in higher education. Under the Federal and State college constitutions all students who are candidates for the bachelor's degree must demonstrate a knowledge of American history and the principles of American institutions.

My estimate that about 80% of the student body of the universities and colleges visited take a course in history or participate in the general education programmes underline the high standing that history enjoys.

The important place accorded to history in the colleges must inevitably be a stimulant to graduate study in the universities; it not only lends stimulus and momentum to the further study of history but it requires a large body of teachers and professors. It is not surprising therefore that a large number of students continue their studies and that graduate study in history at the universities shows great vitality.

Finally, I found it interesting that history not only plays a very important part in American education, but also in American life. The excellent historical museums, the large scale preservation of historical sites and buildings, and even the rebuilding of historic places create a living tradition which must inevitably stimulate historical interest.

In contrast with the United States there is a great need for an enhanced status for history in our own schools, colleges, universities and life. A sustained effort should be made to persuade Provincial and Union legislatures, Departments of Education and university authorities to reconsider not only the place of history in our lower and higher education, but also to establish whether the foundations upon which our education rests, are still sound enough to stand the strains imposed by a twentieth century civilisation

The Aims.

The main tendency in South Africa is for history to be studied and taught as a preparation of students for the teaching profession; consequently the aims and values of history teaching are often judged by the material benefit it brings to the history teacher. Moreover, the purely academic and

classical approach to the teaching of history for the sake of history itself is preferred to an approach in which history might also serve other practical purposes. Admittedly it is a debatable question where any line should be drawn between these two aims, but in a world as complex as ours the teaching of history should bear some relation to practical conditions.

In the United States the dividing line between the academic and more practical purposes of history teaching is drawn faintly by the two requirements of a liberal education that I have mentioned.

Probably it would be more correct to say that the academic approach is retained throughout, but that in the lower division the practical purposes are not neglected. Professors may differ individually as to their specific aims, but the fundamental ideal of liberal education and the ultimate goal of training scientific historians, must inevitably give some conformity to the aims of history teaching.

One immediate aim of the wide teaching of history is to supplement the study of the social sciences, the humanties and natural sciences. This will bring about a better conception of the relationship between human achievements, and an appreciation of the significance of the varied activities of mankind.

Furthermore, in conformity with the general ideals of education, history is taught for the purpose of establishing that breadth of cultural background which will give the student *an understanding of man himself, of his own country and institutions, and the world he lives in.*

In the understanding of man himself, history as the story and interpretation of man's experiences and achievements, is held to be indispensable to the education of civilized men and women. In these experiences and achievements, Prof. Burchard of M.I.T. finds "a boundless laboratory of vicarious participation, a laboratory potentially as rich as the informed imagination of those who use it.' Prof. Marsham of the University of Princeton formulates it as follows: "Our life is a pattern of the tradition we live in, and to understand that pattern we must understand the past and the tradition." Prof. Allen of the University of Colorado, is of the opinion that history is not merely a subject to be taken, but it is a study that gives every American a foundation to his life. I found this approach to the teaching of history very aptly reflected in an inscription on the facade of the library of the University of Colorado, Boulder: "Who knows only his own generation always remains a child."

I paid special attention to the aim of teaching history so as to give the student an understanding of his country, its institutions and its people, because this is a very important aspect in the teaching of history in South Africa, with its multi-racial population. As I mentioned previously, great emphasis is laid upon the teaching of American history and government in the United States. Historians, however, differ as to the real scope of their aims in teaching national history. They all agree that it must give the student a clear understanding of the past and present of his own country and especially a clear understanding of the political and constitutional posi-

tion in the United States, but they differ widely on one point — whether it should also serve the purpose of inculcating a patriotic and national feeling. This latter is condemned outright on one hand as a violation of historical objectivity. On the other hand it is openly confessed that national history should also be taught so as to build a sound and strong feeling of nationhood and this for two reasons: In the first place, to weld together the varied components of the American people and, secondly, to the present time the U.S.A. has been secure in its existence so that no real attempt has been made previously to foster a strong nationhood. Today, however, in view of the increased power of Russia, a stronger nationalism has become a necessity. The advocates of this point of view, however, emphasize the fact that it must not be over-accentuated and that the student must retain a critical but constructive outlook on national affairs.

Furthermore, history is taught in order to give the student an understanding of the modern world, its institutions, and the agencies by which they are controlled. No-one is more conscious of the close inter-relationship between countries, nations and cultures than the historian. An attempt is therefore made to give the student courses that draw an ever-widening circle of interest round the United States. Prof. Mendenhall of Yale expressed it as follows: "The function of history is to give the student the ability of sharp discernment, a lively judgement and a penetrating insight into the modern world."

These and many other aims may be cited as the objects in teaching history in the lower division, but one gets the impression that a knowledge of history is regarded by historians as essential to the full education of every student.

In the upper division, when history becomes one of the fields of concentration, the general aim of a liberal education is not overlooked. If the student selects history as his major, approximately one-half of his time is devoted to the advanced study of history and the rest to related fields. In the advanced study the objects become more and more those demanded by any rigorous and scientific discipline — depth of study, and familiarity with the methods and the techniques of research. At the same time, however, the study in the related fields continues to broaden that mental perspective of the student that will aid him in comprehending the inter-dependence of the facets of human knowledge and in arriving at sound judgements. With the emphasis on scientific specialization these objects are carried over to and through the graduate study period.

Programmes and curricula.

To restore history to its rightful place in South African schools, colleges and universities, I have always advocated a periodic and drastic revision and supplementation of our curricula. The ideal was to make the programmes more attractive and imaginative, but although the object was clear the means of achieving it remained tenuous. I am not altogether sure that I found a solution to this problem in the United States, but I believe that by adopting certain principles and features of the American programmes, we can improve

and renovate our own curricula.

Once again the programmes in the United States must be seen against the background of the two requirements of liberal education — distribution and concentration — and graduate studies.

Leaving the general education courses out of consideration the object of the history courses in the lower division is to provide the student with a basic historical knowledge of and an introduction to Western and American civilisations. With few exceptions these courses are called: "A History of Western Civilisation" and "A History of American Civilisation." These courses must, by virtue of the wide field they cover, be survey courses, and the danger exists that they may become swift and superficial dashes down the years of unfolding history. American historians try to avoid this by attempting differing approaches to the study. In the first place, a few colleges still adhere to a chronological treatment of the material, but then they divide the topic into more than one course and the successive courses are made compulsory. Secondly, major trends, such as the political, social, economic, cultural and intellectual, are traced and brought up to the present. Thirdly, problems in Western and American civilisation are taken and explained through a study of the past. Fourthly, significant topics, such as Charlemagne, the rise of the Papacy, the Renaissance, the Reformation, etc., are selected for emphasis. Finally, the programme is based on a broad study of major elements in the Western and American heritage so as to introduce the student to the ideas, attitudes and institutions basic to these civilisations.

The introduction of a programme in Western Civilisation in the undergraduate study appears to me to be a very sound principle. It is not only indispensable to the student's general education, but it provides him with that basic historical knowledge which will lay a solid foundation for his further studies in history as well as in the social sciences and humanities. This is especially important in South Africa where in many instances these studies are undertaken for vocational purposes. Because of the preference for the academic approach a course of this kind has not yet been attempted. In my search for better programmes, I have therefore come to the conclusion that a course in Western civilisation will undoubtedly meet a long-felt need, and I am convinced that the approach to such a course should be the study of heritages.

As regards the programmes in the upper division in the U.S.A. colleges, there is such a bewildering fragmentation of history into innumerable courses that it becomes confusing to anyone unacquainted with the system. It seems to me that whereas in the lower division as emphasis is laid on attaining general education, and as syntheses and unification of learning, in the upper division there is a too abrupt and unnecessary splintering of the fields of knowledge. Even with a very close guidance to students, I doubt whether any continuity and accumulation of knowledge could be attained. However, the fascination of the programmes in the upper division lies in the related courses.

When the large number of courses are closely inspected, they boil down to the following major fields:

1. American History.
2. Latin-American History.
3. European History.
4. History of the British Empire.
5. Arabic and Asiatic History.
6. African History.
7. Historical Method and Historiography.

With these basic fields in mind it is possible to reconstruct not only our undergraduate, but also our graduate programmes. A study of our programmes reveals that we pay notoriously little attention to Arabic and Asiatic History and to African history — histories which have been and will be very important to us in future.

It is natural that in the graduate programmes the emphasis should fall on specialisation, but even here I could not rid myself of the feeling that the American universities were over-specialising, and that their programmes were too restricted in time and scope. The attempt to minimise this danger by prescribing a minor in a related field and electives in the major or minor field is, however, praiseworthy, and an adoption of this principle in our Ph.D. programme would undoubtedly improve it. I found it strange, however, that so little was done concerning the philosophy of history which we regard as basic to the advanced study of history. American historians admit that this is a defect in their programmes. In the report "The Graduate School Today and Tomorrow", it is stated: "What is important, we believe, is this: Some work in every graduate programme that forces into high relief the philosophic aspects and implications of each special subject so that the student will raise the kind of questions in relation to his studies which will make him a wiser teacher and a more penetrating scholar."

Method

At our Universities the lecture still remains the heart and soul of our method of teaching history. Supplementary reading by students from text-books and other secondary works is required, while essays based on secondary and primary sources play a very important part in teaching students the techniques of research and the methods of history writing. This system has never satisfied me fully because insufficient reading is done by students, there is not enough participation by students in the learning process and, above all, the system is calculated to accumulate knowledge and not to stimulate independent and original thinking. In short, there is too much teaching and too little education in our system.

These problems also exist in the United States and no foolproof remedy has as yet been formulated, yet attempts and experiments are being made to minimise such defects in the teaching of history.

The lecture still occupies a very important place, as it always will, in American history teaching, but it has undergone a certain metamorphosis.

The lecture is no longer so academically formal. Opportunity for questions and for class discussion is given and in many instances invited by the lecturer. No offence is taken by either lecturer or students when there is a motivated difference of opinion — even on the most delicate issue. The danger is realized that students may lead the lecturer into side-alleys and so hamper normal progress towards completion of the course. For this reason emphasis is laid upon the fact that every lecturer should not only be a good scholar, but also a good teacher. In this respect the lecture is approached from a slightly different angle — it must not only conform to the academic requirements, but must be lively and stimulating. Finally the lecture is no longer aimed at the recapitulation of chronological facts, but at the evaluation and interpretation of historical events. The acquisition of a knowledge of the general course of history is the responsibility of the student. In this way the student is drawn into the processes of teaching, thinking, learning and reading, and although this may not be true of all students, in practice, the opportunities are there.

To enable the student to plot the general course of history and to acquire the necessary factual knowledge, textbooks are written and prescribed for the different syllabi. Textbooks are especially popular in the lower division. In the upper division less use is made of them, but students are required to consult several standard works on the specific courses. Textbooks and related reading are prescribed to supplement the lectures. This reading takes different forms in the lower division. The general practice is to use select readings from original material. Many such selections have been published, but some professors prefer to make their own selections and have them mimeographed. Some professors, however, assert that students in the lower division are insufficiently mentally mature to appreciate and understand the great writings of the past. They, therefore, prefer more simple narrative essays on specific topics, often written by themselves. In the upper division readings are prescribed from standard and classical works which are mostly obtainable as paperbacks. At nearly all the colleges we visited, discussion classes have been introduced so as to lend meaning to these readings, to encourage discussion, to stimulate critical thinking and at the same time keep a control over the work of the students. Out of an average of three class hours per week two are used for regular lectures and one for discussions. The large classes are divided into discussion groups of 10 to 20 students. They meet under the supervision of the professors or student assistants and the discussions usually last from two to three hours. In different colleges different use is made of these discussion groups. The most common practice is to prescribe certain readings that cover the same field as the lectures and then to discuss both the lectures and readings. In other instances these classes are used for the discussion of essays written by students and read by them in class.

The efficient and successful working of this method depends upon careful planning and thorough organisation. It has therefore become a fairly common practice for professors to draw up a detailed schedule of lectures, readings and discussions before the commencement of the course.

These schedules are mimeographed and handed to students.

In general this whole scheme of teaching history at the college level rests on very sound educational principles, and its application seems even more feasible in our universities where the number of students is much smaller.

In the graduate studies there is hardly any difference in the methods pursued and the seminar also plays a dominant rôle.

In concluding this aspect of my study, I may add that as a result of the close co-operation between students on one hand and the professors and student assistants on the other, a far better control over the work of students is possible and examinations are obviously less imperative. A thorough investigation of the examination system is really a study in itself.

Correlation between History, the Social Sciences, Humanities and Sciences.

In South Africa history is taught as an isolated subject, having no relation with or correlation to the curricula of other subjects at the university. As history, however, "constitutes the matrix out of which many of the other sciences have evolved," I have always felt that there is a dire need for closer co-operation especially with departments in the fields of the social sciences and humanities.

This is undoubtedly not an easy problem, but much attention is paid to it in the U.S.A. and fair progress has been made. Probably the most important progress that has been made in the first instance, lies in the direction of creating a mental attitude which accepts the broad unity of all human knowledge, and so cultivating a mutual appreciation and respect amongst scholars for their respective disciplines. In the second instance, positive attempts have been made to find some means to correlate and integrate knowledge.

Once again it is in the various general education programmes that the correlation of disciplines and co-operation amongst faculty members has had great success. This correlation is not limited to the various disciplines in the respective areas of social sciences or humanities or sciences, but an attempt is made to correlate social sciences and humanities. As examples the *Contemporary Civilization* programme at Columbia and the *General Courses* at the University of Chicago may be cited. Not only the drawing up of the programmes, but of the courses, constitutes a co-operative and concerted action on the part of the teaching staff of the various disciplines. In the social sciences, for instance, historians, anthropologists, economists, political scientists, geographers and sociologists meet regularly to discuss ways and means of better co-operation and correlation. But it is not only in the general education programmes that an attempt at correlation is made. Interdisciplinary work is carried out at nearly every university.

In all these attempts history is found to be a very important and useful subject to bridge the gaps between disciplines. For instance, at the University of California, Berkeley, the history of science is employed to create a link between the Social Sciences and the Sciences.

In conclusion I should like to mention that the American historians

have a sacred devotion to their fields of study and teaching, a high respect for their own profession, an unwavering belief in the essential value of their subjects and an infectious enthusiasm in imparting their knowledge to students and visitors. This attitude, I believe, contributes largely to the popularity of history in the U.S.A. and will remain one of the outstanding impressions of my visit to the U.S.A.

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