THE UNITY
OF
WESTERN CIVILIZATION

ESSAYS ARRANGED AND EDITED

BY

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I HAVE been asked to address you on the Unity of Education in Western Europe. The task is not an easy one, for what do we mean by unity? It would be easy for me to spend my time in talking on the technical aspect of the subject; I could deal with curriculum and organization, with school buildings and class-rooms, black-boards, and all the material of schoolmastering, and could show you how great is the similarity in these matters in all civilized countries. I doubt, however, whether this would interest you; I doubt whether this is the unity of which you are in search. You would tell me that you asked for unity and I had given you uniformity. Uniformity you can have anywhere; in modern life all is standardized and stereotyped; you have it in the great hotel and the Atlantic liner—there you have men of all nations, they do the same thing at the same time, they eat the same food and wear the same clothes; you find it in the factory and on the battle-field. Go to a textile factory, whether in Oldham or in Chemnitz, or in Bombay, the processes are the same and the product is the same, except as there may be more or less adulteration.

And so in education, if you care to do so, you can find the mechanical uniformity of modern civilization. A new form of school-desk makes the round of the world as quickly as a new chemical process or a new battleship. The pictures on the walls of the rooms may be the reproduction of some modern German work, and the atlases you use may be second-rate copies of the products of Gotha or Leipzig; you

can have, too, uniformity in time-table and curriculum; but, after all, this uniformity may be merely superficial. Go along the streets of an old town and you may see the regular façade of a modern street, but behind this you will find all the variety of the mediaeval buildings which it encloses—the façade is mere paint and stucco.

Uniformity is not necessarily unity, and unity is not inconsistent with variety. That which I presume we are searching for is a more fundamental, spiritual, and intellectual unity—internal not external; not a painted and stucco resemblance, but a unity of origin and of life.

Let us see what we can learn from history.

The history of European education is centred round two institutions, the School and the University. Both have their origin in the remote past, and both have maintained themselves with singular fidelity to their original type.

The School goes back to the very origin of our civilization; if we are to understand its nature, we must transfer ourselves in thought to those early days when the first missionaries planted in the Somerset valleys and on the stern Northumberland coast the Cross of Christ. They came to a people still on the verge of barbarism, with a language still unformed by literature, with a religion that gave no clue to the mysteries of life by which they were oppressed. They came to these men full of the enthusiasm of the Gospel—coming not only as teachers of religion, but as the apostles of a higher civilization, for they had behind them the awful name of Rome.

Wherever they came, among their first duties was to found schools in which to train men who would succeed them; we must always remember that the education which they gave had one supreme object—it was to bring up the boys of the rude and barbarous communities in which they found themselves, to become teachers and servants of the Church. The substance of the teaching was

always the same, whether in Spain, in Gaul, in Ireland or in Britain; it was the Bible, the services of the Church, and the writings of the Fathers. It was by the school that the boys were initiated into the common system of Western Christendom, and were made citizens of the greater world the centre of which was in Rome.

But if the substance and the object was identical throughout Europe, so always was the form in which the teaching was given; at a time when all learning and all religion came from Rome, the foundation of knowledge was the Latin tongue. In these early days was established the tradition that still subsists; the gateway to learning and to culture lay by the narrow road of the Latin grammar. The schoolboy who still tells out his longs and shorts can compare them with the ruder efforts of his Saxon forefathers thirteen centuries ago. Never have authors attained a fame and a circulation equal to that of the great grammarians who, during the decline of the Empire, codified the rules of Latin speech; generation after generation passed, and down almost to our own days every schoolboy began his career on the lines laid down in the works of Donatus and Priscian.

We must, however, guard ourselves against a mistake into which it would be easy to fall. It is true that in the early mediaeval days education was based on the study of the Latin language; and it was only through literature that the language could be learnt. The study of classical literature as we understand it was, however, far removed from the ideals of this time. The most authoritative teachers never neglected to warn their pupils against the moral dangers which arose from the study of heathen writers; Ovid and Cicero were only admitted under protest, and they were merely the stepping-stone to the study of Augustine and Prudentius.

On this common basis—the Bible, the Church, and the

Latin language—was then established the education of Western Europe, and the form it then assumed it retained for over a thousand years, almost without change. By this a common cast was given to the intellect, and the nations were disciplined by common spiritual teaching. It was extraordinarily effective. It kept down, and in many countries almost destroyed, the vigorous and aspiring local and national life which, in every country, was striving after self-expression. In our own country this effect was most conspicuous. The English, illiterate though they might be, were not without the promise of a great future. In the remains of the Saxon poems we can see the beginnings of what under happier circumstances might have grown into a great national literature. Its origins were deep seated in the life of the people. It proved itself quickly able to absorb the new teaching of the Gospel, and, as the Christian Epics show, here was the basis on which might have been built a national interpretation of Christianity. All that was required was the adoption of English as the language of the Church and the School. The beginning was made when Alfred, during the few years which he secured from the Danish inroads, began his great work of founding an English literature in which the teaching of the Church and the works of antiquity were included. The attempt was ruined for the time by the renewal of the Danish inroads, permanently by the Norman Conquest. For William brought with him not only his French knights, but also Italian priests. Once more, under the influence of Lanfranc and his successors, the Church and the School were brought under the full control of the revived power of Rome, and all prospect of a spontaneous and indigenous national intellectual life was destroyed. Unity was re-established, and the School was the instrument by which England was fully incorporated in the culture and religion of the Western Church.

As it was with the School so also with the university. The second, as the first, was the creation of the Church, and even more conspicuously it was the vehicle for fostering and maintaining the control of common institutions and a common learning, and thereby of crushing out the rich variety of local life which everywhere was springing up. In its very constitution the University of Paris, the mother and model of all later universities (at least in northern Europe), showed its international character; the students who flocked to it from all countries were organized in 'nations' a system which, at least in name, still remains in many of the universities to this day; the whole instruction was and remained in Latin, and the whole course of instruction was a long apprenticeship to the study of theology. It was from the universities that emanated the great system of philosophy in which a Frenchman as Abelard, an Italian as Thomas of Aquinas, an Englishman as William of Ockham each took his part.

We may regard with admiration the great intellectual achievements of the Scholastic philosophy which, for over two centuries, dominated the official education, but we must not forget that its ascendancy implied the exclusion from all public recognition of the local and national thought and literature which now, as before, was struggling into life. The Troubadours and the Minnesänger, the Chanson de Roland and the Nibelungenlied, the Chronicles of Froissard, Chaucer, and Piers Plowman, each of them so full of fresh vigorous local life, were not only outside the official system of education, but in their essence opposed to it. This was clearly seen as soon as the free and uncontrolled mind was directed to the highest subjects of thought. National idiosyncrasies, as they found expression in the domain of philosophy and theology, produced results different from the established teaching of the school. To the

Church truth was always one and the same. Truth was one, error was manifold; in unity was salvation, and divergence was heresy. And so every attempt at national and local thought was not only suppressed in education, but fell under the ban of discipline. In Languedoc the Albigenses ventured the assertion of their independence; Huss in Bohemia, in England Wyclif. What happened? The Albigenses were massacred, Huss was burnt, Wyclif was condemned, and his followers suffered under the new law of heresy.

This system, which had originated as a part of a great spiritual movement, long outlived its usefulness. It became an intolerable tyranny. Its effects were to be seen in the teaching of the humblest grammar school, and every boy who began the study of the Latin grammar was being initiated into the abstractions or the Scholastic logic. It became a dead and iron crust by which the mind of man was confined, and it was the school and the university which were the peculiar institutions by which this system was maintained. Unity of education there was, but at what a price had it been won.

One thing had, however, been secured: the common Christian basis of our modern civilization had been stamped upon the peoples; so long as Europe remains Europe this cannot be forgotten or obliterated. No nation can repudiate its own past, and, whether they will or no, all Western nations are irrevocably bound together by the ties of the home in which their childhood and youth was passed.

At last the change came: it came in that double revolution which we call the Renaissance and the Reformation. In considering them we must confine ourselves as closely as we can to their effect on education.

The revival of learning was essentially an educational movement, it had from the beginning to do primarily with the school. It had as its object a complete change both in

the subject-matter and in the spirit of education. Always it drew its inspiration from the literature of Greece, and this meant the fullest freedom of the human intellect, freedom of speculation, freedom of inquiry on the conditions of human life, and in particular it was a revolt from the ascetic ideas of the mediaeval Church; it was the assertion of the dignity of the body and mind of man. Now whereas in Italy, its original home, this took a warp definitely antagonistic to Christian faith and Christian ethics, in Northern Europe the new classical learning was harmonized with Christianity, and classical learning was applied to the interpretation of the Bible. It was the synthesis of what mediaeval Europe had regarded as irreconcilable opponents. That was the inspiration of the school reform, and this is the guiding principle of all higher education for the next three centuries. It was a movement that originally was not local or national but European, and in its first form was not in opposition to the maintenance of the ecclesiastical unity of Western Europe. The figure in whom it reaches its clearest expression is that of Erasmus. Standing at the transition between two epochs, he was the last of the great European scholars, and belongs to the undivided Catholic Church as much as did Abelard or Anselm. The wandering scholar of the Renaissance, without father, without mother, completely freed from ties of family or country, at home equally in Deventer or Cambridge, in Basel or in Paris or in Rome, without even a native language, for to him Latin was the only vernacular (he has, I believe, left no word written in any other language), he saw the vision of a Europe still united in obedience to the one Church, but a Europe in which the culture of the humanist would go side by side with the common faith inherited from early days.

The hopes of Erasmus were not to be fulfilled. It is indeed true that he laid the foundation on which the recog-

nized and official scheme of education has continued almost to our own day ; the Latin schools of Germany and the Grammar Schools of England were each alike conducted on the basis of the Church and the classics, but even before the foundations had been completed the real unity was gone. The Renaissance was met by two forces, each stronger than itself, and the common stream was broken into a number of smaller currents. These have since increased in strength till the sense of the common origin has almost disappeared.

The common mediaeval system (and in this the spirit of the Renaissance was still mediaeval) depended on the common Church, and especially in education, in the use of Latin as the universal language of learning. During the sixteenth century both were overthrown. Luther was stronger than Erasmus, and the new languages, Italian, French, Spanish, English, quickly began to encroach on the claims of Latin to be the one language of the school.

The religious revolution need not detain us. It is sufficient to recall that in many parts of Europe the divergence of creed tended to become if not identical with, at least closely to follow the boundaries of states and nations. In every land the school was still strictly under the control of the Church, acting now as the delegate of the temporal ruler, and in each country a whole body of teaching and discipline was evolved, the result of which was a fundamental difference in the attitude of mind. The English bishops, the German consistories, the Scotch presbytery, set their seal on the schools, as much as did the Jesuits and Port Royal in France. The Shorter Catechism, the English Prayer Book, the German hymns, each gave a distinct character to the religions of the country, and this character was the basis of the teaching in the schools.

Religion, which had been the great unifier, became the chief engine of separation.

Equally important was the growth of national literature. This indeed goes back far beyond the sixteenth century, but none the less it is from this time that the writers not only of imagination, but also of learning, began to express themselves each in his own vernacular. Sir Thomas More, it is true, wrote his *Utopia* in Latin, but it was in English that it had its great circulation. Bacon used both languages, but it is on English editions of his works that his fame chiefly rests. In particular we find that works on religion and theology are now produced not only in Latin, but one hundred years before Hooker would have discoursed on ' ecclesiastical polity ' in the learned language, and Pascal would never have thought of using French for discussing the philosophy of the Jesuits.

The influence of these changes upon the school is remarkable. Strictly speaking, for many generations they seemed to have little immediate effect upon it. In every country in Europe Latin remained both the subject and the vehicle of higher education, but it is just for this reason that we find that, during the seventeenth century and the greater part of the eighteenth, the schools are more and more falling out of touch with the intellectual life of the times. They continued in the old way; for them Shakespeare and Milton, Montaigne and Molière, Cervantes and Tasso, seemed to have written in vain. They maintained the form of an older period, but they had lost the spirit by which it had been inspired. Their learning remained purely classical; but even though the new national literature was long in winning for itself a definite place in the recognized school system, the growth of this literature and the evolution of national consciousness of which it was a part could not in fact take place without altering the whole spirit of the teaching. If we are to understand how this was we must keep in mind one of the chief characteristics of what is called a classical education.

The study of the classics means the study of the whole life of the two great nations of antiquity as preserved in the extant literature. Now this does not contain a definite and formulated doctrine, it does not even, as might be said of the Middle Ages, mean one attitude towards the world; it opens to the student a field of extraordinary wealth and variety, and from this each will take that which he is able to appropriate. To one it may be the mysticism of the Cambridge Platonists, to another the frank and pagan joy in life of Anacreon and Horace. Rousseau and Grote will each in his own way appropriate the lesson of Liberty, while others will turn to the story of the militant and dominant aristocracy of Rome. Goethe and Keats, Milton and Gibbon, Berkeley and Schopenhauer, will each draw their inspiration from the classics, but the result will not be to make them resemble one another, it will be to give vigour, decision, form, resolution, and dignity to the qualities of each.

And as it is with individuals, so it is with nations. The schools of all nations maintained their classical curriculum; boys still began, and often ended, their schooling with the Latin grammar, but this did not mean, as it had meant in the earlier days, that the influence was the same. There was indeed little in common between what we may venture to call the pedantry of Germany and the superficial elegancy of the Jesuit schools. And so the classical basis did not prevent the school assuming a national complexion. Let me give one illustration of the manner in which the classical teaching could take a markedly national spirit. Perhaps the most effective classical teaching that we find in the eighteenth century is that at Eton, and it was on it that was founded the great school of oratory and statesmanship. It was on Cicero and Homer and Demosthenes that Pitt and Fox and Canning and Gladstone (for the tradition continued to his day) formed their minds and their style,

but they emerged from their training above all Englishmen, but Englishmen who had learnt how to give to their own national feelings a dignity of expression and nobility of form equal to that of the exemplars whom they had studied.

Now just as the finest expression of the English national spirit is found in those whose school training had been based on the classics, just as the Girondists based their revolutionary doctrines on Hellenic models, so almost at the same time the great political awakening of Germany and Prussia was inspired by what has been called the second Renaissance; and yet how profound is the divergence between Wellesley and Pitt, Humboldt and Stein, St. Just, Demousin, and Vergniaud; all were children of the common classical tradition, but how different is the use to which they put it. During the centuries that passed between the Renaissance and the Revolution, the education of the different countries had then in fact been drifting far apart. What has been done during the nineteenth century has been openly to carry into effect changes which had long been overdue and were already to a large extent operative.

It was inevitable that the new literature and thought would eventually find its way into the schools and universities. Before this change had been accomplished, a fresh and even stronger influence asserted itself. Democracy had come, and a democracy which based the state on the principle of nationality. It seized on the school as the means to hold the minds of men in fief, just as had the mediaeval Church, and in doing so enforced and perpetuated the national differences.

In the eighteenth century rulers troubled themselves little about matters apparently of such minor importance as the languages in which their subjects conversed and read. Even the French did not try to touch the German-speaking inhabitants of Alsace, and Copenhagen could

become a centre of German letters, while French maintained itself at the Court of Berlin. All this was changed by the Revolution, and Napoleon was the first deliberately to convert the whole fabric of French schools and the university into an instrument for the organized propaganda of the cult of the Empire. Since then there is scarcely a government (always except that of England, which alone has been strong enough to rest on the native and undisciplined political sense of the people) which has not followed in his path. In particular when the state is founded on the nation the school is used to develop in the children the full consciousness of nationality. That institution that was for so long the home of European unity has become the most useful agent for the perpetuation and exaggeration of national differences. It is in the school that the immigrant to the United States is taught to reverence the institutions of his new fatherland, and from generation to generation the school labours to keep alive the memory of the half-forgotten struggle of the new republic and the British monarchy. In France each successive government has used the school to force on the nation its interpretation of the national history and ideals. And the victories of Prussian armies were cemented and confirmed by the official exposition of the Prussian state and the cult of the Hohenzollern. To the school is transferred the conflict between the doctrines of authority and the revolution, of the secular state and of the Kingdom by by the Grace of God. Every nation rightly struggling to be free has seen in the school the instrument for securing the allegiance of the young, and the school has become the centre of political struggle. In Trieste and in Poland, in Alsace and in Macedonia, we find kings and politicians contending for the minds and souls of children, and it is in the school, the college, and the university that has been prepared the conflict that is now devastating Europe.

What has been done in the nineteenth century has really been only to carry into effect the change which was long overdue and was implicit in earlier years. The national culture and national authors have at length forced their way into the schools, and the result has been that institutions which originally in reality, and for so long in appearance, were the vehicles for the expression of the common European civilization, have been almost entirely won over to the cause of the national expression.

This is indeed inevitable. Education, as we have seen, can only be effective when it is the vehicle for strong beliefs, and is informed by the conscious expression of an attitude towards the world. Now, in modern days, the consciousness of a common European spirit has, in fact, almost disappeared. In its place we find the intense consciousness of the nation. Even religion has become national, and God has once again become a tribal deity. The new consciousness of the common interests of what is called Labour have no recognition in the approved teaching. If the work of the school was not to be merely the dead instruction in useless knowledge, if the work was to be directed towards informing the minds of the pupils with ideals and beliefs, it was only in the idealization of the national thought that this could be attained.

Is the older union of thought to be permanently lost ? If not, you must find it again in some higher synthesis. There are many who would do so in the pursuit of mathematics and the natural sciences ; in them, at least, no divisions of country can be found. The student in his chemical laboratory, the doctor in his hospital, the mathematician in his study, finds his colleagues in every country in the civilized world, and it matters not to him whether the next step in penetrating the secrets of nature have been made in Vienna, or in Paris, or Amsterdam, or Bologna.

There are many who believe that on this basis will be

established the Union of Civilization. If we look, however, more critically, we may find reason to doubt whether this optimistic view is justified. I do not share this hope and this belief, I do not look forward to a spiritual and intellectual unity of the nations established on the basis of scientific education. It is, indeed, impossible to overestimate not only the practical but also the intellectual influence of what we may call the scientific spirit. It is indeed true that those who are accustomed to the careful and systematic investigation of causes, who have been trained from their earliest years to recognize in the pomp and pageantry of the external world—and even to some extent in the working of the human mind and the structure of human society—the orderly sequence of natural law, will have a type and character of mind essentially different from those who have not passed through this discipline. The civilization (I scarcely dare to use the word culture) of those nations who have this in common will have a unity of their own, and will differ fundamentally from their own past and from that of other races.

On the other hand there are two considerations that I should like to put before you, as leading to a less important position, the one arising from the practical nature of science, the other connected with its essential intellectual origin.

It is a characteristic of all work in physical science that however it may originate in the pure desire for truth, it is very quickly available for practical use, personal comfort, the acquisition of wealth, and national efficiency. The physicist who calculates the stresses and strains of an aeroplane finds that in teaching man how to control nature he is also providing the means for his struggle, whether in peace or war, in commerce or on the battle-field. We soon find that the progress of technical skill is curiously inoperative in its effect on human thought and feeling.

Men remain the same whether they ride in a coach, or a train, or a motor-car; it matters little whether they use bows and arrows, or rifles, or hand-grenades, or liquid fire.

Now in education it is the technical side of scientific progress which almost inevitably becomes most prominent, and the greater the advance in knowledge the more will this be true. The wider the domain of knowledge the greater is the number of those who will be chiefly occupied with the use of the processes and materials that have been discovered and the smaller is the proportion of those who will have reached the border of the known, and will begin the work of exploration into the unknown. That is, the greater will be the number of those who are the servants and not the masters of science. A unity of a certain kind we shall have, the unity of those who have learned to pilot an aeroplane, to apply X-rays, to extract the phosphate from iron, or to test cattle for tubercle. All this may produce a uniformity in the machinery of life, it passes by untouched the motives of action, the beliefs, affections, and interests. How many illustrations of this do we see around us! What more glorious illustration of the power of the human intellect can be found than the later developments of electricity, but scarcely had the discoveries been made when we find them seized upon by the man of affairs, and wireless telegraphy becomes the subject of speculation on the Stock Exchange, and a chief instrument of war. That which the chemist finds in his laboratory is, within a few years, sometimes even a few months, found again in the factory, and perhaps on the field of battle.

Do not let it be supposed that I would underrate the possibility of a deeper unity, but if we would find it we must carry our analysis further back. The progress of science is in truth not a cause but a result, not an ultimate fact but the symptom of a state of mind. It springs from

that which was brought into Europe consciously at the Renaissance and which we may call the spirit of Greece. It is that to which we owe not only the investigation and subjection of nature, but equally with it all progress in every department of thought, the analysis of society, whether political or economic, the investigations of the working of human reason, the probing of human passions, and their record in art and literature.

What is this spirit? Is it not the confidence in the spirit of man, the spirit which in intellectual matters bends to no authority, and recognizes no limit to its enterprise, which probes all things, tests all things, and follows fearlessly where the argument leads it? This is what I mean by the spirit of Greece, it is that which Sophocles has immortalized. Of all this, what we call science is but a part, perhaps at present the most striking and important part, but still a part only; to look to it as the key of our civilization and the sole basis of our education would be to set up a partial and, therefore, a false ideal. An ideal, moreover, which, if pursued to its logical conclusion, would become the basis for the most appalling tyranny, by which the free spirit of investigation, to which we owe all our scientific progress, would be buried in the structure that itself had reared. For what is the end to which it must lead? Is it not a society which is held together by technical skill, a society of organized efficiency, where each individual holds his place, not as a living spirit, but as a slave of the great machine, tied throughout his life to the perfect performance of his limited and specialized task? I can imagine such a society; it is the ideal which some modern German writers have definitely put before us. It may be that this will be the Europe of the future, a Europe with a common government and a universal system of education by which each child will be trained to take his allotted part in an organized slavery. I hope I shall not live to see it.

None the less, a unity there is, but it is a deeper unity than this. It is the unity inherited from the past. Here we may find, not indeed a superficial uniformity, but a real unity of life and spirit. No civilization can repudiate its own origin, and whatever the future may have in store the childhood of Europe was nourished on the Bible and Christianity, and in the more mature years there was added the impulse to the boldest use of the human intellect that came from Greece. These two elements give us that which is the peculiar characteristic of Western Europe, and as we are told that the growth of each individual repeats the evolution of the race, so the education of each individual repeats in childhood and boyhood the education of the nation. It is from these two elements that the whole of modern culture springs, and it is from them that again and again they regain their strength.

And if we recollect this we need not be much disturbed by our apparent differences and misunderstandings. After all, they are the necessary result of freedom, and what do the Bible and Greece mean but moral and intellectual freedom? We want no formal and artificial unity: to us change, progress, conflict and division are the breath of our life. Just as the cluster of little towns in the Aegean islands and valleys prized before all things their political and intellectual independence, so is it with these small countries nestling on the shores of the Atlantic. Politically they have always refused to acquiesce in the establishment of any common authority over them, whether it comes from outside or even from among themselves, and so also they always repudiate the ascendancy of any single or partial intellectual doctrine. Each party and each nation adds its own contribution ; all have a common origin, and all spring from the same root. Since the bonds have been relaxed and the dominion of the Universal Church overthrown, we see nothing from the rivalry of political systems

and passing schemes of thought; they chase each other like the storms which arise from the Atlantic and pass in quick succession over our shores. It is this change and succession which is to us the breath of our life: we know nothing of the steady static weather of the great continents, where rain and drought have each their measured and settled space: and we know nothing, and will know nothing, of the formal and authoritative rule combining all Europe into one realm, whether political or intellectual. For we know that unity and permanence does not belong to this life, and our nearest approach to truth is to be found not in a settled system but in the thousandfold interactions of half-truths and partial systems.

> Life like a dome of many-coloured glass
> Stains the white radiance of eternity
> Until death shatters it to fragments.

A unity there is, but it is the unity of the countless and varied flowers that carpet the meadows in spring, the unity of the common spirit of life which animates them all.

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