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Roscoe Pound

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THE UNIVERSITY AND CIVILIZATION.*

By the mere fact that man is, as Aristotle put it, a political animal, or as we have been putting it recently, a social animal,—by this mere fact he tends to be a civilized animal. Social life demands organization and ordering and directing of human activities. And this organization, ordering and directing, through associations which survive the personality of the individual, bind the past of the race to those to come and make possible a continually higher development of human powers. They assure the maintenance of past conquests of nature, both external nature and human nature; they call for further conquests of nature and harnessing forces to human ends; and they provide for transmission to the future of the achievements of past and present in this human domination of nature so that it may be carried still further. Thus the development of human powers to their highest possible unfolding appears to be the goal of the social order, and a progressive development of human powers, a continually growing human mastery over nature—both human and external—seems the one human, earthly reality. Institutions and governments and people and races rise and grow great and decay and fall, but the permanent reality that endures and goes forward is civilization.

From the first, man's activities take two main lines. On

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the one hand there is a struggle for existence waged with his fellow-men. His energies are directed toward acquisition and predatory achievement; toward making or securing a living for himself and his dependents and holding against others what is made or secured. On the other hand there is a struggle for existence waged with his environment. His energies are directed toward understanding and control of nature in the interest of all mankind; toward acquiring and passing on to those who come after him the wisdom which enables the race to prevail and endure. Thus, to speak for the moment in terms of primitive peoples, there are two functions of men in society—the warrior-function and the elder-function of maintaining the struggle for existence against other men, and the function of maintaining the struggle for existence against nature by conserving, furthering and transmitting civilization. The simplest and earliest of the institutions of social man is the “men’s house.” In this center of the social life of a primitive tribe, the old men, the repositories of tribal wisdom and the directors of the community, initiate the boy into manhood by appropriate ceremonies, instruct him in the science and morality of his people, inculcate those virtues of fortitude and obedience on which the tribal order rests, and teach him the tried customs which have been proved by experience to be grateful to the jealous spirits and vengeful powers of nature by which primitive man believes himself surrounded. Here in embryo are all the institutions of modern society—religious, political, legal, and educational. The elder-function, exercised as a simple function by the old men of the tribe, has become a complex of functions exercised through a complicated machinery of social institutions. But all these institutions are but outgrowths through division of labor, of some side of what was done in the men’s house. For with the development of human powers, men become even more interdependent. They remain interdependent through similarity of their interests in that they are all human beings. They become more interdependent through the division of labor that

sets each more and more exclusively to some fragment of the work of maintaining life in society and so makes him dependent on the doing of their fragment; also by each of his fellows. This interdependence through division of labor presupposes and rests upon an accumulated and organized experience and mastery of nature. It rests upon the elder-function as exercised in religion, in government, in law and in education; in church and state and school, which stand for a men's house in the social order of today.

Social control, the ordering of individual activities by some form of pressure of his fellowmen and the keeping of the individual to his task in a society resting on division of labor, is the most conspicuous feature of the elder-function. But it is no more possible to put this function wholly in terms of government than it was possible to put it wholly in terms of religion. The ordering of men in their relations with other men and of groups of men in their relations with men and groups of men is only one side of the maintaining, furthering and transmitting of civilization. It makes possible a complete devotion of human powers to the furthering and transmitting of civilization. It serves to maintain the political and legal and economic conquests of human and of external nature in the past. But the eastern Roman empire bears witness that if this ordering stands for the whole it will presently fail even of its task of maintaining and securing. If man shall not live by bread alone, neither shall he live by law nor by politics alone, nor even by these added to his bread. It is not merely that human powers are not to be developed to the utmost of which they are capable by these nor by all of these of themselves. Even more, the level of civilization attained in the past is not to be kept, nor may the increasingly high levels of civilization be maintained without something that no economic and no political and no legal ordering can give. The mere holding fast to existing conquests of nature demands a high order of popular intelligence. It calls for more than an accumulated mass of information. There must

be in each human being, or in as many human beings as possible, a developed individual power of understanding, of appraising, of using, of developing that information, of controlling himself in the light thereof, and of extending man's control over nature, both human and external, on the basis thereof. In a word merely to stand where we are in civilization requires protracted and thorough-going general education.

That instinctive human reverence for power that led the ancients to deify their rulers leads us to exalt unduly those phases of social life involving active exercise of authority over men and control over things. Hence the acquisitive and predatory economic life and the ordering and directing political life on which the economic organization rests, seem the vital things in our existence. A newly Christianized society, with its thoughts on the world to come, held withdrawal from this world and ascetic repression of human desires to be the highest life. A feudal society, weary of disorder and newly rescued by reciprocal duties of protection and fealty between Lord and man, fixed its eyes upon relations between men and on the loyalty which such relations required and held vicarious achievement of greatness and fulfilment of one's self in another to be the highest life. A society of discoverers and colonizers and pioneers, engaged in appropriating and exploiting the natural resources of new continents by the force of individual character and the strength of individual will, held that free individual self-assertion was the highest life. In like manner an economic, industrial society, with its eyes fixed upon the creation of wealth and hence on the orderly keeping by each to his post and doing by each of his minute task in the mechanism of production, sees the highest life in this fulfilment of one's part in a band of co-workers, and interprets liberty, the watchword of pioneer society, as a freedom to conform to the prescribed order and walk strictly in the established paths. Where an ascetic society ignored the legal and political order, a feudal society resisted it, and a pioneer society suspected it,

an industrial society would deify it. The institutions that assure conformity and confine men to the laid out paths are taken to be the whole of civilization. But, I repeat, if conservation in the interest of production were thus to be identified with civilization, these institutions alone would not suffice to the task.

For our industrial society of today presupposes much more than a mere ordering of human activities through law and government. It is so highly derivative, it has so many roots in so many distinct fields of the past, it rests to so great an extent upon ideal conceptions, and withal its machinery of minute division of labor is so delicate, that only a constant maintenance of the popular intelligence at a high level may prevent rude tamperings which it is not adapted to sustain. Let us remember that we are born into this intricate social organization wholly ignorant of the principles upon which it is constructed. "The civilized infant," says Ward, "is as blank intellectually as the savage infant, and has no longer to live and infinitely more to learn. Each one must be instructed in all this complicated curriculum *ab initio* before he can conceive of his true relations to society. We may therefore say in this connection as truly as Malthus could say of his economic formula that, while in the progress of civilization, the capacity to acquire knowledge increases only in an arithmetical or some lower ratio, the amount of knowledge to be acquired increases in a geometrical or some higher ratio." A pioneer society, schooled to put its faith in individual courage and self-reliance and inventive versatility under the pressure of necessity, believed that necessary institutions would evolve spontaneously out of the popular consciousness, and held to a romantic philosophical theory that laws and constitutions and political institutions and art and, indeed, all things human, were natural growths out of the consciousness of a people through the free action of individual wills. It is believed that we might observe them and study them if we liked, but that they were as independent of deliberate influence toward conscious

human ends as the revolutions of the planets. Hence it conceived of education as but a minor phase of the elder-function and gave it a lesser place among the derivatives of the men's house. Pioneer society stood in need of little in the way of education and made small demands upon laws and administration. It made relatively small demands upon inventiveness compared with today. Its structure was simple. Its political machinery was easily worked and if it sometimes went wrong, could do little harm. There was sometimes as little division of labor as in a primitive tribe. Individual courage, individual persistence under hardship, individual ability to adjust to a harsh physical environment were the virtues that counted.

Let us carry the comparison into more detail. Maintenance of the social order in pioneer colonial America did not require any highly developed body of law. The interests to be secured were few and relatively simple and overlapped at few points. Conflicts of interests were few and simple and called for no critical delimitations or delicate balancings. Hence, for a long time it was not necessary to have trained experts in our courts. In New York the senate was the ultimate appellate tribunal down to 1846, and a decree of James Kent might be removed by the vote of legislators who were confessedly innocent of all knowledge of law. It was not until 1857 that the last state abolished legislative review of judicial decisions. As late as 1818 the chief justice of one of the original thirteen states was a blacksmith. The conditions of administration of justice did not require courts manned wholly by trained lawyers in every part of the country until the Civil War. The demands upon courts in the heterogeneous, crowded, urban, industrial communities of today, with problems of social legislation, of administration, of conflict of class interest, of pressure from powerful extra-legal associations, are out of all proportion to those made upon colonial judges and are legion compared with those made upon judges of the middle of the last century.

In politics also the pressure upon our institutions has

increased enormously. In the two decades of the present century we have seen the simple political machinery of the nineteenth century wrenched more than once to meet the exigencies of the day. Since 1909 we have seen four far-reaching amendments to the federal constitution. When every citizen could take a direct personal part in the town meeting, when every one could know the few candidates to be elected to the few offices to be filled, when annual elections could insure faithful performance of the simple tasks of administration, such an education as we read of in Grant's Memoirs, might suffice to make a president as well as a general. Nor were there large demands for technical education. Our fathers who lived out of doors and tilled farms were not subject to the diseases bred by crowded urban life with the hurry and worry of tense economic struggles. Hence, the apprentice-trained physician was well enough. Likewise in the era of railroad-building before and after the Civil War, most of the engineers were former officers of the army with no technical training beyond the military engineering which they had learned at West Point. When we compare the political questions of the middle of the nineteenth century, centering around the balance of power between two sections and calling chiefly for opportunist compromise, with those which are agitating today, involving our relations to Europe and Asia, or in other aspects, involving the structure of society and the fundamentals of economics, when we compare the warfare of today and its extreme requisitions upon science with that of the Civil War, when we compare the engineering of today with that of the middle of the last century, when we compare the casual inventor of the old days of American inventiveness with an Edison, when we compare the manufacturer of the nineteenth century with the manufacturing corporation and its appurtenant sales companies as they exist today—when we make these comparisons we must see what an enormous progress of sheer knowledge is involved and that mere maintaining of

our economic social order presupposes a huge accumulated mass of systematized information.

Where the organization of society is so complicated and the division of labor is so minute, the danger from ignorance and well meant blundering is as acute as was the danger from wilful wrongdoing with which our fathers were chiefly concerned. We have seen how economic blunders may paralyze industry and profoundly disturb the whole social fabric, so that a people may starve in the midst of plenty. We have seen how modes of political thought adapted to a rural agricultural society may put shackles on business and impede industry to the profit of no one. We have seen how a banking system devised for another type of society might involve recurring panics and bring suffering to everyone. We have had abundant evidence that the mere maintenance of our economic order as it is, all question of progress aside, calls for knowledge of social forces and of their operation which was not needed in the past, calls for a standard of general intelligence and a diffusion of information far beyond the requirements of the past, and compels us to rely upon trained foresight as something possessed by the population at large to a degree beyond what has been demanded by any previous civilization.

In some measure we recognize the relation of education to our social order even in the external aspect of the American city, which has come to be the focus of the civilization of the day. As the temples were the center of the ancient city state and the cathedral dominated the mediaeval city, school-house and college at least rival capitol and courthouse and city hall in the city of today. Wealth is pouring into educational foundations as it was once poured into monastic foundations. Physically as well as spiritually university and schools are to the American city what cathedral and parish churches were to the city of the middle ages. Thus in externals at any rate, we recognize abundantly our dependence upon education.

Looking under the surface, we may see another story.

For as much as we appear to value education, the education valued is but a reflection of the dominant characteristics of an urban industrial society. We translate education in terms of that society, not in terms of the needs of that society. We interpret it in terms of the characteristic institutions of the civilization of the day, not in terms of civilization. Devotion of wealth and of material energy to the externals of education is but one feature of this translation of all the functions of the primitive men's house and of all civilization into terms of an economic society. Recently on a solemn academic occasion one of the governing board of a state university likened the university to a mill or factory. He pictured the trustees as directors, the president as the superintendent, and the faculty as the mill hands. The prime purpose was to be production and the incoming student might be thought of as raw material and the graduate as the manufactured product. Another speaker on the same occasion likened the teacher's office to the business of a salesman, rebuked the assembled professors for not understanding the psychology of salesmanship and bade them learn how to market their wares and to select wares with a view to changing markets. Closely allied to the brick and mortar interpretation of education and the mill or factory interpretation and the department store interpretation is another which I shall venture to call the patent-medicine interpretation. In the good old days of household remedies the prudent housewife, who was well instructed in the wisdom of her foremothers, was wont to prepare an annual draught for the children of the household and to administer it in early spring that their systems might, as it were, undergo a wholesome housecleaning in preparation for another year. The patent-medicine interpretation pictures teaching as a process of this sort. It is the administration of a series of tonic and alterative and possibly purgative draughts in the springtime of life, that the system may be toned up for the strenuous competitive years that are to follow. Ladle in hand the teacher stands beside a bowl of chemically pure dope prescribed by the

wisdom and experience of the past. Its ingredients are guaranteed by state inspection and the mixing has been done under state supervision. It contains everything which organized zeal and organized interest have been able to impress upon the legislative wisdom and it is free from everything which the latest wave of propaganda or the latest spasm of hysteria has been able to move the lawmaker to exclude. An orderly procession of youth passes before the teacher and each receives the appointed dose. It is the teacher's function to fill the ladle scrupulously, to administer the dose fairly and to see that it is duly swallowed. In this spirit the president of our greatest university, in point of numbers, has told us that all we need in teaching is laborious, steady-going mediocrity. The teacher must be a person who will not be tempted to slip anything of his own into the officially certified mixture; he must be one upon whom we may rely to fill the ladle to its full capacity, to drop none of its contents, to let no one go by undosed, to pour the full content down each student throat, and to see that it goes down.

We may insure production through any of these theories of education—production of huge and costly buildings, production of a host of diplomaed graduates, production of sensational pseudo-science or of sonorous platitude to be sold to a buying public by up-to-date salesmanship, production of well-dosed pupils to go forth certified as innocuous and heresy-proof. But these are not the things by which our complex social order is to be maintained even as an efficient mill for producing wealth; they are not the things by which a university, as the head and the heart of an educational system, giving it purpose and intelligent guidance and supplying it the life-blood of scientific truth—they are not the things by which a university is to lead in maintaining and furthering and transmitting civilization. For in a university a teacher is neither a craftsman teaching an apprentice the rule of thumb of his trade by precept and imitation, nor a prophet announcing his revelations “in the voice of a herald, using the name of

God and giving no reasons." Teaching in a university is not a process where teacher proclaims a revealed message and student accepts it on faith. It is rather a process in which truth is elicited and discovered than one by which it is imparted. Its language is not "thus saith the Lord," nor "thus saith eternal reason." It is not a clothing of the mind with waterproof dogma. It is rather a setting free of the mind, a leading of it by demonstration and encouragement to find, than a coercing of it into a prescribed way of faith.

In the quest of truth our problem is not stationary. We have not simply to understand what the world is once for all here and now. The reality that confronts us is something moving and changing. True in all times men have sought to give to this moving, changing reality an appearance of standing still. They have sought to cover it up with mythology or dogma or orthodox science and have angrily repressed everything that revealed the flow and change that were going on beneath. Thus in the ancient world mythology represented this movement as subject to the will of beings possessed of human instincts and passions and governed by human motives. If the gods were envious and vindictive, yet they had minds and hearts not unlike human minds and human hearts to which men might appeal and they were open to human friendships to be established by human means. Remembering this, we may understand why the early Christians were hated so intensely and denounced so extravagantly by those who had found the illusion of certainty and repose in a crumbling mythology and superstition. Remembering that a later time, when many dogmas were crumbling, found comfort in the Aristotelian astronomy, which put the earth as the fixed center of the universe, we may understand the persecution of Galilee. Remembering that in the last century, when the absolute governments of the eighteenth century were fallen or falling in the wake of the French Revolution, men found comfort in the dogma of special creation, which asserted that man, at any rate, had been made once for all as he must be forever, we may

understand the extreme hostility to Darwin and the bitter denunciation of those who taught his theory of the origin of species. The futile persecutions of prophets and philosophers and scientists, who have disturbed comfortable beliefs while in the pursuit of truth, ought to have taught us that the general security is but one of the bases of civilized life and to have made us cautious as to the possibility of reducing all human life and all civilization to this one item.

We are not passive spectators of life. At each recurring moment of our conscious life we must act, whether we will or no; and in acting we must take account not only of what exists, but of what ought to exist. Hence, our every action involves some judgment as to values. We find such judgments ready-made for us in traditional labels and social conventions and accepted creeds. It must be granted that such labels and conventions and creeds are an important element in social control and for this, if for no other reason, deserve respect and are not to be disturbed lightly or rejected hastily. Yet, it is easy to give them a factitious importance in order to cover up disinclination to the hard task of thinking about them critically and in a vain conceit that we have something secure against all change which shall stand fast forever. Thus we get dogmatic systems, organizing and rationalizing these labels and conventions and creeds, with their pathetic need of a ready-made final answer to every question. Thus we get a conception of learning as a process of bolstering up authoritative dogma by reason and philosophical or scientific method. But this bolstering up of dogma by reason has ever served to undermine dogma, so that Lord Acton could amend Dr. Johnson's well-known saying and tell us that it was not the devil but St. Thomas Aquinas, who was the first Whig.

I have said that the elder-function in society is one of maintaining, furthering and transmitting civilization. To maintain civilization we must systematize and keep before men a mass of information presupposed by our minute division of labor and complex social organization. To maintain civiliza-

tion we have also to deduce from experience and systematize and keep before men the limits of effective human action. We have to teach them to measure the ideas of a particular time by the ideas of all times; to judge of the experience of the moment by the recorded experience of the past. But if experience shows us that there are limits to what we may do effectively in time and place, it shows us also that we are not to despair of the efficacy of human effort and that all attempt to hem in progress and confine it to fixed channels and hold it permanently to historically determined lines must end in failure. Civilization does not stand still. If it does not go on and forward, a civilization soon slips back. Hence, the furthering of civilization is inseparably connected with maintaining and transmitting it. And the chief role of the university is in this function of furthering. Schools of lesser grade and lesser equipment and lesser ambition may keep and pass down the record of human conquests of nature. Only those which teach ripe youth, which have the full equipment and the large ambitions of the university may diffuse that clear vision, that critical thinking, that openness of mind, that tolerance in judgment, that resistance to unreason, that abhorrence of wilfulness, that discriminating view of the fashions of the moment, that indifference to panic and mob hysteria, that matured sense of values and that reverence for truth in and of itself—only universities may diffuse those things, which are the very roots both of stability and of progress in civilized society. For there is no real stability in a civilization without progress. Life is action. The moment a civilization ceases to achieve new conquests over nature, human or external, it begins to lose those which had been achieved in the past.

In its relation to the furthering of civilization, the university is next to the very heart of civilized society. Any interference with the fullest and freest functioning of the university in its own search for truth and in leading the youth to seek truth relentlessly and fearlessly is an impeding of a vital process of civilization. If we say to the university that teacher

or student may not see clearly but must look at the world through the dark glasses of some interest of the moment; if we say to them that they may not think critically, but must adjust their thought to that of an uncritical public without; if we say to them that their minds must not be open but may be no more than ajar at the precise angle of the average mind for the time being; if we say to them that their judgments must be as intolerant as those of the mob mind or the dominant class mind for the time being at peril of making no judgments, if we say to them that they may discourse of the unreason of the past but must not expose the unreason of the present, if we tell them that they must bow to the fashion of the moment and put on and off opinions as they put on and off hats and coats; if we require them to follow in the wake of each popular hysteria and shout with the largest or most determined mob for the time being—if we impose upon them any condition whatever but the free and fearless and unremitting quest for truth in every field into which the human instinct for inquiry leads them, we assume to set bounds where God has made men free, we assume to say that humanity shall not go forward in its ages-long struggle with nature and by our mere human fiat to usher in the twilight of civilization. There have been twilights of civilizations and they have been brought about by these very processes. But there has been no twilight of civilization. Neither Byzantine emperor nor pope nor king has been strong enough to stay the course of inquiry nor to hold the human mind to a fixed course. Nor may King Demos nor any of those who would rule in his name hope to do so. For the University is not the servant of these in their temporal capacity. It is the servant of civilization and it speaks not with their voices but with the voice of humanity. It looks at things under the aspect of eternity where they look at them in terms of yesterday or of today. Its duty is to truth and its highest mission is to engage in and to promote that continuous, disinterested, thorough-going search for truth whereby human

powers may be developed to the utmost of which they are capable. When any sort of ruler, temporal or spiritual, political or economic, bids it serve anything other than truth or stay its search for truth, or accept any version of truth but that to which it is led by the best methods of investigation which it may discover, the university must say to that ruler:

“Be it known unto thee, O King, that I will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou has set up.”

ROSCOE POUND.