

CONFERENCE ON HUMANISTIC STUDIES

December 10-11, 1926

Washington, D.C.

Present: Professor Edward C. Armstrong, Princeton University
Professor Campbell Bonner, University of Michigan
Professor James H. Breasted, University of Chicago
Professor Carl D. Buck, University of Chicago
Professor Edward Capps, Princeton University
Mr. Abraham Flexner, General Education Board
Doctor Tenney Frank, Johns Hopkins University
Professor J. L. Lowes, Harvard University
Professor John M. Manly, University of Chicago
Professor Nelson G. McCrea, Columbia University
Professor Clifford H. Moore, Harvard University
Doctor Frederic A. Ogg, University of Wisconsin
Professor David Moore Robinson, Johns Hopkins University
Doctor Julius Sachs, New York City
Professor Paul Shorey, University of Chicago
Professor Grant Showerman, University of Wisconsin
Professor Allen B. West, Princeton University
Professor Karl Young, Yale University

Mr. Flexner in introducing the conference pointed^{out} that it was solely to exchange views and to assist the General Education Board in sizing up the status, needs and possibilities and said that there had been an expression of interest on the part of the Board, but that no commitments of any kind were involved as to the outcome of this conference. Should specific recommendations or propositions emerge, the Board would be entirely free to deal with them on their merits. He did himself suggest that Professor Capps preside and that the gentlemen talk freely allowing him to listen until the subject had been thoroughly ventilated, after which he might want to comment or ask questions.

Professor Shorey discussed secondary instruction and the need of its improvement; collegiate instruction and the need of its improvement; the sad plight of university professors anxious to engage in research and the grave difficulties of securing publication.

Inasmuch as every subsequent speaker dwelt on publication, their general views may be summarized here:

Publication

1. There are a number of journals living on the subscriptions of underpaid professors and on their ability to beg money enough annually to make up their small deficit.
2. The increased cost of printing has compelled them to shorten the publication and to curtail illustrations. The result is that what was inadequate before the war is still more inadequate now.
3. If men cannot publish, they soon cease to write, for why write, if the manuscripts have got to go into a drawer? If they do write, instead of undertaking major tasks which would be monumental pieces of scholarship, they write little papers, for which there is some hope of securing publication. Despite the setback in Germany during the war, German scholars are at this time able to publish much more freely and adequately than the scholars of any other country.

Professor Moore - as to secondary and college teacher. The men get places too early. The demand for teachers in the increasing number of secondary schools is so great, and the initial salary (usually \$2500 or \$3000) so good compared with college salaries that men take these places and thus abbreviate their training. The college teachers getting inadequate salaries are in effect part-time men.

Research is hampered by the excessive burden of teaching, that is, the number of students, the number of hours of teaching, the number of subjects. The men want to teach. They enjoy it. It is hard to get them to give any of it up. (Manly disagrees.) The older they are, the worse.

Lack of means; no secretaries; no leisure; no adequate facilities for publication. There is, in his judgment, no lack of intellectual interest and creative ability, but what's the use?

Professor Manly: Teachers must be improved by better work at the top. All were clear that you couldn't make a really good high school or college teacher except out of a man who had felt the spur of adventure that comes with doing an original job and that, if men got this thrill, they would soon learn to study and

face what ~~the~~ problems they met in the secondary schools and colleges. They had under existing circumstances to adapt themselves to the material that came to them, much of it poorly trained. But the real way to do it was to make them enthusiastic scholars partly at least through participation in creative work.

No difficulty in Chicago in getting the real research men to reduce time given to teaching. The difficulty is to reduce the schedule, because the students need the teachers, but the thing could be done if assistants were provided. At Chicago the main difficulty is due to the A.M. degree. So much machinery is involved in getting it and so many people have to have it to get teaching posts. The A.M. degree is a sort of minor Ph.D. degree, requires high grades. Small groups of teachers must give examinations, examine theses. To get leisure for the men, they would have to change the M.A. degree, which is now the main qualification for a secondary teacher.

Another difficulty in America, in so far as cultivating research is concerned, is the absence of manuscripts and rare books from libraries. Men have to go abroad to find these, and they haven't the means or the time. This also has its effects in forcing men to select the minor topics for research. They haven't the facilities for engaging in major ones, quite aside from the publication problem.

Professor Lowes held that there is a difference between science and the humanities. His point was not clear to me, and I mean to write him and ask him to explain it more fully.

Professor McCrea: Humanistic studies differ from scientific studies in this respect. The past accumulations, the traditions fill the horizon because they are so imposing. Organized material is so great that the student has the feeling that it will take him much longer to get to the point where he can begin to create. In science the future beckons very soon, so that it is more attractive from the standpoint of adventure. As a matter of fact, it is not true that there is more novelty in science than in the humanistic field. The whole humanistic field needs working

over and is rich in surprises, as Breasted's work in Egypt shows, but the young men are not made to feel this early enough.

The social sciences, like the physical sciences, are new and unorganized. Of course much of their research is claptrap, but that the student doesn't find out until later.

Doctor Frank: His students in Rome said that they had to get away from America or they would surrender. They must get away during their formative period to a country where art and literature are valued as are the men who are doing them. We cannot control these general conditions which make for science and the social sciences and against the humanistic sciences, but we must do something to tide it over by improving opportunities in the humanistic field and getting larger numbers interested, by enabling them to participate in creative work and by enabling them to spend some time in classical countries.

In respect to creative scholarship America, the richest country in the world, has done hardly 1/40 or 1/50 as much as Germany. What an opportunity!

Professor Moore in answer to my question as to whether there is a reservoir of students to be drawn upon by either science or the humanities said that the real conflict is between humanities and business, to some extent only between humanities and the sciences. Deans and parents push their students into business or law on the ground that there is no future in the humanities.

Professor Young: In his opinion, the most serious discouragement with all kinds of ramifications is the difficulty of publication. The University of Wisconsin has \$5,000 a year for publishing. That little fund has made an enormous difference. Lack of opportunity for printing is the most discouraging feature and in discouraging men to work discourages others to go into the work and keeps scholarship at a lower ebb than it deserves.

Out of this discussion of the problem of publications comes the necessity of an inquiry as to the number of journals, their sources of support, and particularly

the situation and policy of university presses.

Professor Showerman: The preparation for the career of classicist, involving the mastery of two old languages and one or two modern languages, is a very heavy burden. Besides travel is an essential part of the preparation of a classicist. See how much more difficult this is than the preparation of a physicist or a chemist. Additional difficulty - shortage of art and archaeological collections in universities and cities as compared with Europe. There isn't even space for such specimens as can be obtained.

Professor Robinson points out that the opportunities for constructive scholarship in Persia and Asia Minor have hardly been touched and that the whole history of humanity will have to be rewritten in the light of excavation and new interpretation. Not only must these objects be excavated, they must be photographed and reproduced (as Breasted is doing) in order to be available elsewhere than on the spot. In his opinion, in the discovery through excavation there is as much thrill and opportunity as there is in discovery and science. The spade is as good as the microscope and has as much to reveal. Consider, for example, Manly's Chaucer and the work he is attempting for the first time in studying manuscripts. We need more trained men to exploit the opportunity.

Professor Buck: We need chairs for branches for which there is little demand whether there are students or not. University administrators look at the number of students before they decide whether they can erect a chair. The result is that we don't possess the chairs nor have men been trained to take the chairs, now falling vacant - Bloomfield, Harper (Hebrew at Chicago). We need more university presidents who will do what Harper did. When the University of Chicago was proposed, he picked out Breasted at Yale, told him to go to Berlin to prepare himself for a professorship in egyptology, for there would be a job waiting for him. Indeed when the University was created, Breasted was ready for it, but practically nothing has been done in recent years in the humanities on this scale or in this manner. The humanists have been discouraged and unaggressive. Corporations and presidents

have been pursued by the scientists and the doctors with the result that no aggressive policy has been followed in getting funds, in training men, or in attracting men to the humanities. This is the general American tendency to ignore the humanities and it has been allowed by the universities to have its way.

Professor Bonner: Michigan has acquired through the gift of the Regents 4,000 papyri which the staff are engaged in studying.

Professor Moore: The Harvard studies in the classics survive through annually passing the hat. Publishers concern themselves either with advanced textbooks or abbreviated articles. Cannot find ways of publishing books on large subjects. Publishers will not invest as they will in Germany. Universities are not interested.

General Reflections

The university authorities have been apathetic. The humanists have been unaggressive. The main tide of American interest is swept in other directions. None the less there is an eager, able, devoted and active group of men who, if organized, would be heartened and would bring pressure to bear upon the academic authorities which would tend to right the balance and to do something to withstand the narrow scientific and the materialistic trend in America.

No member of this group, though they represent the top group in the leading universities, gets a living salary. To my question as to whether anyone could live on his salary there was just simply an outright laugh. Doctor Capps said that there had been a slump in the standard of living and working on account of the inadequacy of salaries and that men were simply forced into the position of part-time men. To be sure, most lawyers and doctors make small incomes, but there are in the professions prizes enough to constitute an incentive, and the great men win the prizes. Regardless of subject, the General Education Board ought, in my opinion, ^{to} cooperate with institutions not only to raise the general

level of salaries but to establish in every institution a considerable number of high-salaried posts not attached to any chair but to be given to distinguished scholars and scientists, not omitting the scholars.

Many of the problems discussed were purely educational problems: the Ph.D. degree, the A.M. degree, the training of teachers. These problems can be solved only by the institution. The General Education Board can do nothing, though it might conceivably finance an inquiry or conference. In respect to the general university attitude and problem of salaries, the press, publication, fellowships, grants, the General Education Board could cooperate with the university as it cooperated with Princeton in science and as it cooperates in medicine, provided the humanistic group can get together, mature a program, and get the aid and support of the university corporation.

The General Education Board cannot judge projects, and it is not easy to set up a committee which will judge them well. The National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council represent in science a kind of machinery for the recognition of worth, for the administration of cooperative enterprises, which does not exist in the field of the humanities. The Council of Learned Societies will do something, but it is a federation with weaknesses inherent therein. Could the National Academy of Sciences be extended or a parallel academy be created? That question aroused great interest. If done, it would give these men a focus and center which they do not possess. They have lots of societies but, in their opinion, not too many, but they are all unknown, unrecognized. Sentiment was unanimous in favor of improving the classical schools at Athens and Rome, and Breasted commended highly the school at Jerusalem.

I was struck by the high quality and fine spirit of the men on the one hand, as I was by their intellectual and spiritual hopelessness on the other. It was pathetic to hear them, one after another, say to me privately that this was the first time in their lives that anybody had turned a sympathetic ear to them or had invited them to talk out. America is not organized so as to

stimulate them to make demands. Universities have passed them by or shoved them to one side with the exception in recent years of Harper and Gilman. They have accepted this kind of treatment. For the first time, so they said at this meeting, somebody asked them what they needed and opened their eyes to the possibility that they might get something if they made an effort.

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