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Freedom of Thought and the Colleges

By Henry J. Cadbury

THE war has scored one victory, at any rate. It has successfully won the attention of whole nations to a most remarkable degree. It pervades all our life. The very language which we speak is succumbing to the picturesque influence of its terminology. Every effort is now a drive; every opponent, a slacker; every pretense, camouflage. And so, to commandeer its own language, we may speak of a conscription of mind.

There are probably some who regret this diversion of attention keenly. It seems to them a pity that so little interest can now be aroused in simplified spelling, or Irish poetry, or other most worthy causes. But the real danger of our monomania does not lie in these forms of casual and temporary indifference, but in the suppression of judgment and in the mental and moral astigmatism that war inevitably brings. The bane of conscription whether of brains or of hands is the mechanical uniformity it produces. Its goal is something like the Liberty motor—one convenient, universal type of mind, with interchangeable parts and easy repairs.

The present writer has no thought of criticising such intellectual standardization as inefficient. No doubt military necessity justifies it in a fighting machine. Independent ideas would clog an army, as foreign matter injures the works of a watch. But what of non-combatants? Shall they too yield, by the same stern military necessity, to intellectual rations of canned political ideas? Must we erect our censor into a dictator of food-for-thought? And shall an imperious public opinion and patriotic propaganda control absolutely the manufacture and commerce of ideas—by the gentle pressure of the black hand and committees of safety?

In a militarized nation the answer to the questions is certainly "Yes," but in a nation opposed to militarism the answer as plainly is "No." In the United States ninety-eight per cent. of us, by reason of age, sex or conscience, are in the class of non-combatants. If we are not to be ruled by our Junkers, the non-combatants must determine the policy of our country, and must determine it with the freedom of thought for which our fathers made this land the asylum. And nowhere does the duty of such freedom make such a call as in our colleges.

Even before the war we had begun to hear a good deal about academic freedom. It was then something so largely "academic" as to seem a very minor issue. It was something quite commendable, to be sure, the right of scholars to seek the truth fearlessly without restraint or loss of station. It was a protest against the arbitrary treatment of professors according to the economic interests of trustees or the political prejudices of state legislatures. The war has made this need more apparent by certain flagrant cases of patriotic academic execution. But after all, this kind of liberty is not the greatest need. It is a question of rights; I would plead for academic freedom as a duty, and a duty for students more than for faculties. For to their youth belongs by right a greater freedom and to their future greater service. Theirs is the boasted leadership of the college-bred; but leadership, it should be recalled, is not supplying brains as instruments of a passion, it is supplying judgment and moral poise amid prejudice.

And the freedom is not merely a freedom from conscious slavery. Most Americans were shocked at the Manifesto of the ninety-three German intellectuals justifying the war. It appears to have been prepared and signed by imperial request. But how much more shocked we should be if such general agreement were due not to special pressure but to the more imperious force of a perverted public opinion. The latter is apparently our greater danger here. It is not that we are so coerced in our thinking that we chafe at our restrictions; but that our minds only too eagerly accept the current standards of opinion. We are suffused in a sentiment until it penetrates within, and, above all, we yield to the subtle temptation of taking sides for once and letting cool deliberation go. After the strain of nearly three years of official neutrality it was a welcome relief to plunge into violent partisanship,—a relief similar to that of him who plunges into battle.

This freedom is to be achieved certainly not by violent counter-partisanship. I would make it plain that I have no such counsel in mind. Freedom of thought is not to be defined as opposition to a prevailing view. It is a certain detached point of view—detached neither because of smug aloofness, nor of selfish indifference, nor of moral neutrality, but because of a wholesome desire to see the whole issue. It allows the mind to consider other ways of meeting the problem than the way that is in vogue, and it directs the thought to the future.

The present situation seems to offer many fields for independent thought. The coming months will not only open many new fields, but will make manifest that this liberty is and was an imperative duty. There is first of all needed a more careful scrutiny of the military method as a means to an end. Does the means secure the end? Does the end justify the means? It is a great disadvantage—that by the sheer limitations of attention belligerent nations have not given sufficient consideration to the possible alternative use of non-military methods for securing both their respective war aims and an early and satisfactory peace. Both sides have unfortunately confused the right of their aim with the right of their means and so have come to identify war with right and peace with wrong. Some time these equations must be challenged, and every day they are retained without truth is a day of culpable waste.

A second almost contradictory result from absorption in the war is the obscuring of the aims of the war. As the end appears to justify the means without much consideration of the morality and effectiveness of the means, so in turn attention to the details of military endeavor leaves little place for considering the hoped-for fruits of the effort. There is certainly one thing more important than winning the war, as no one will deny; it is winning the noble things for which the war is fought, and which alone can to any extent justify the evils of the war. But these things are forgotten and need to be kept in mind. They are called war aims or peace terms—but they are more than either. For neither fighting nor the cessation of fighting will bring them: they are principles for reconstruction of the world, and can be secured only by new and united endeavor, unselfish, intelligent and based on the highest ideals. They, too, deserve some attention, perhaps priority of attention for non-combatants, if our dictator of thinking were really wise.

Of course some of our freedom of thought will have to be negative. There are many false emphases that war suggests that unbiased judgment must correct. For instance, the hysteria against all things German still feels somewhat strained even to many an ardent patriot. There is also the idol of democracy which is being exploited for the purposes of a war-cry. Perhaps it is not too soon to be throwing this useful

watchword into its proper perspective and defining more clearly its limitations as a merely tolerable working scheme. Last of all, one thinks with regret of the perversion of terms like loyalty and sacrifice—as of a noble unselfishness too often spoiled by the innocent ignorance of the victim. For the value of sacrifice depends not on the heroism displayed but in part at least on the goodness of the cause for which effort or suffering is endured, and the effectiveness of the effort and suffering finally to achieve their aim.

Sonnet

By Gilbert T. Hoag

What man can say there is divinity;
And who can prove we mortals rule supreme;
Or show the power that shaketh land and sea;
That I am I, and you are what you seem?
If God there is not, who did make the earth,
And who did formulate its endless laws?
Solve me the mystery of death and birth;
Read me the riddles Nature's pencil draws.
If God there is, can He be infinite,
Ever-existent, dread, omnipotent?
Through one dark maze with these two paths in it
We reach one wall, by different descent.
Grope ye, poor mortals, grope for evermore;
An aeon's roaming brings none near the shore!

The Ghost of the Black Forest

By J. Reiter

GREY thatched cottages, streets running at random, but all seeming to run into the cobbled platz; a smithy; a shop or two and a few stray dogs and children; a sprinkling of industrious, plump fraus—and you have the village of Machtenhagen. It lies between two high hills; a little curling, clear stream rushes through it from the Black Forest, bent on its way to the Rhine and the land of windmills. A rather imposing, yet small castle stands on the hillside like some granite boulder dropped by the whim of chance. Machtenhagen today is the same Machtenhagen of a century ago. The broad, rich fields that make up the fief have changed lords often, but the peasants, the town, and the fields remain. So do story and tradition.

In that glorious age when a gentleman was born, not made, and when a gentleman's only qualifications were a good liquid capacity and a love for hunting, this village had a mystery in which they gloried, they talked, and they feared.

The plutocratic Bomemanns were the lords of the castle then, and haughty lords they were. They feared not God or man. They were insolent and indolent, working only when they hunted in the nearby Black Forest. But—here was the mystery. The scions of the Bomemanns would go into the Black Forest and, sooner or later, on one of these visits, they would return with the sign of a cross branded into the flesh of their left cheek. Then and then only did a Bomemann fear. The Ghost of the Forest had gazed into his eyes. This ghost they described, but they knew not whether he was mortal or an apparition sent from the dead, to be a curse on the Bomemann freinschaft. Those eyes! The ghost was covered with a flowing white robe that completely enveloped his form. Only two holes were in it, and out from those peered two eyes. Brown, quiet eyes, of a brown that is rich, richer than gold or a fantasia of color. The brown softened imperceptibly into the black of the pupil and softened again at the outer edge to a circle of bluish grey. They were the eyes of a soulful woman, but slowly they would change. They snapped fire, a living, glowing, orange flame. And then came the cross for another Bomemann.

Villagers had seen the ghost, but he always turned from them and rode away on his fleet white horse. Parties had pursued him, and the ghost always eluded them; but he would leave his mark in the camp of the hunters.