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# THE VALUE OF THE MUSEUM[1]

By Dr. ROBERT MAYNARD HUTCHINS

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WE meet to-night to celebrate the birthday of one of the great educational and scientific institutions of the world. Through its researches and publications it has advanced the four sciences to which it is devoted. Through its exhibitions and instruction it has enriched the life of the community it serves. The museum can boast that for two generations no child could grow up in Chicago without coming under its influence. We record to-night our gratitude to the founder and his family, to the hundreds of generous citizens associated with them and to the distinguished scholars who have made these contributions to the enlightenment of our city and the world.

As an educational institution Field Museum possesses certain special advantages. It has no football team. It gives no course credits or course examinations and awards no degrees. Its labors are not encumbered by the elaborate apparatus of academic bookkeeping which has resulted in education by the adding machine. The students of the museum come here to learn. They do not ask the museum to help them make friends, get a better job or give them a leg up the social ladder. The students come to the museum from the cradle to the grave. Formal education in schools, colleges and universities is something you finish. It is like the mumps, measles, whooping-cough or chicken-pox. Having had education once you need not, indeed you can not, have it again. You put it behind you with your other juvenile troubles, praise the Lord that it is over at last, and proceed to the really important tasks of life. The museum is free from this regrettable tradition. The museum is seduc-

[1] Address given at the ceremonies marking the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Field Museum of Natural History, September 15.

tive. Perhaps because it does not employ compulsion, but woos the learner with artful wiles, it continues to deceive him into educating himself as long as he lives.

The combination of these advantages with the liberal and far-sighted policy of the board of trustees has given the museum a freedom and independence in the prosecution of its work that are enjoyed by few educational institutions. So Colonel Gregg felt able to say in 1939 that the sole purpose of the museum was to pursue knowledge for its own sake. He went on: "Whether its collections are used for the study of industrial scientists who seek to make a profit, by scholars who seek to solve some problem of research, or by casual visitors who seek recreation and enjoyment is not of primary concern to a museum. The only real concern is that the collections be available and that they be used."

The pedagogical significance of the collections is as obvious as it is great. The chief difficulty of any classroom teaching is the absence of three-dimensional reality, and the specialization, mechanization and urbanization of life are making the difficulty more serious every year. It may shortly be as hard to make an American city-dweller understand agriculture and its significance as it would be to discuss the Fiji Islanders with the Eskimos. Other educational institutions deal perforce with books and words. For that constant illustration of the idea by the fact which is indispensable to the communication of any ideas they must rely on the three-dimensional reality which can only be supplied by museums.

Armed with its peculiar advantages the museum goes forth to do battle with its peculiar problems. The first is produced by its origin and history. In 1931 the British Board of Education uttered the following melancholy reflections on the name museum. "Does it not suggest," the board said, "a depressing, decaying institution, the last resting place of travelers' mementos and of fossils which have undeservedly survived from ages long ago? The existing prejudice is deeply rooted in the tough soil of our language and in the popular mind, but it would most surely be overcome if a generation of children were given systematic opportunities of enjoying the treasures of modern museums." By the method recommended by the British Board of Education Field Museum has robbed the word museum of depressing or decaying connotations to such an extent that I am sure a Chicago audience will be surprised to hear that anybody thought it had any. In passing I should add that the facts seem to belie the gloomy attitude of the Board of Education toward the word museum in England. In 1939 a reliable authority stated that new museums had been opened in the British Isles at the rate of one every three weeks for the last ten years. Attendance at British museums has been steadily increasing during the war. By popular demand they remained open during the Battle of England and the blitz.

But the purpose of the second museum established in this country, that of the East India Marine Society at Salem, illustrates the problem that all museums are still trying to solve. The Salem museum was organized in 1799 to be a repository for the curious objects gathered by the ship captains of the town in the lands of the South Pacific, Indian and South Atlantic oceans. Such a museum, which was simply a cooperative curio cabinet, has the same relation to education as the stories of sea captains or the tales with which Othello, who was himself a sea captain, engaged the attention of Desdemona. They are interesting and amusing, and sometimes produce, as in Desdemona's case, sensational results. But they are usually ephemeral and often false—my sea-captain grandfather told me most atrocious lies—and such material, whether it is words or objects, should hardly be central in education. Whatever educational value it once had has now almost wholly disappeared, and its presentation is no longer the special function of a museum. The newspapers, the movies, the magazines and the department stores have long since taken over the job of gratifying the public appetite for the odd, the quaint and the amazing; and they have succeeded to such an extent that the public is largely indifferent to objects recommended to them because of their odd, quaint and amazing characteristics.

This problem is part of the larger problem of the relation between information and knowledge. Facts are indispensable, but they are not enough. Unrelated miscellaneous facts, however odd, quaint or amazing, are not knowledge, in spite of any impression to the contrary given by the Quiz Kids or Information, Please. The characteristic of knowledge is organization, which implies understanding, ordering and interpretation. A heterogeneous collection of facts is not knowledge; a heterogeneous collection of objects is not an educational institution. The art of the museum scientist, which is displayed at the highest pitch in this building, lies in the presentation of objects on an organized plan to convey meaning. For it is not the object that is important; it is the meaning of the object. The educated man is not one whose mind is a waste-basket or even an Encyclopedia Britannica of unrelated facts. He is one who grasps the significance of what he sees. An educational institution is one which helps its students to make these interpretations or at least to learn how to make them.

Education, to deserve the name, must be systematic. For this reason one may be permitted to doubt whether coast-to-coast radio broadcasting can ever deserve the name. It may encourage people to engage in systematic study, and hence be valuable as far as it goes. But since it can not be systematic, either in

its presentation or in what the listener does with it, it can not itself be education. The great museums have become systematic expositions of the arts and sciences with which they deal. They promote the comprehension of the facts presented. But the most systematic presentation of material must fail of its purpose if it is not systematically studied. The casual wanderer through the best of all possible museums will not get much education out of it unless he already has a good education in the facts and ideas which the museum is endeavoring to communicate. The casual caller without such education may be stimulated to get one; but he will not be educated by his call.

Therefore the maximum integration of the museum with other educational institutions in the community is the first requisite of its increased educational usefulness. Although the museum is so integrated with the public school system that no child can pass through the system without passing through the museum, the same relations do not obtain between the universities of the area and the museum, either in instruction or in research. The reason is partly the inertia of the universities and partly the small size of the museum staff. Highly valuable relationships do exist; but they are too few and too informal.

The universities are conducting teaching and investigation in the same sciences in which the museum is interested. The research of both groups should be advanced by cooperation between them. The teaching of the universities would gain reality by a more definite, planned exploitation of the museum's resources. The teaching of the museum achieves coherence as it becomes part of a course of study which gives some assurance that the student will begin at the beginning and go through to the end. The integration which the museum has achieved with the curriculum of the public schools should be rapidly extended to the higher levels through integration with the curriculum of the universities. This will require substantial additional funds at the museum to increase the staff so that it may be possible for members of it to participate in university work and give instruction here or on the several campuses to university students. But expenditures to promote cooperation in research and coordination in education are economies in the long run, for they help to get rid of the greatest waste in teaching and investigation, the waste of duplication, and their ultimate effect is to get the most out of every dollar spent for the advancement of learning in the community.

From habits of systematic study developed in their early years the museum may expect to obtain the systematic use of the museum by adults. The education of adults is and must remain the peculiar obligation and opportunity of Field Museum. This is much more important than the task of providing innocent amusement for the citizen's idle hours. The best index to the character of any civilization is the way in which those who have leisure use it. The Greeks said that work was for the sake of leisure. But their word for leisure was the origin of our word for school. They did not mean that work was to get the money to go to the movies or to Palm Beach. They meant that it was to provide the means for study, reflection and the duties of citizenship. And since they used their leisure for these purposes, they became the guides and teachers of all succeeding generations.

To the Greeks the object of life was happiness. Happiness consisted chiefly in the exercise of one's highest powers. And these powers were exercised in study, reflection and active participation in the life of the community. For these objects leisure was required, and one who did not have it could hardly be called human. The Greeks obtained their leisure in a way that does not commend itself to us. They got it through the ownership of slaves. Slaves were not people. But the leading thinkers among the Greeks went farther. They held the view that since leisure was indispensable to a human life, those who must spend all their time in menial, mechanical pursuits which gave them no inclination or opportunity for study, reflection or participation in the affairs of the community were not sufficiently human to be citizens of a good democracy.

In our own day, in our own country, the ideal of the Greeks has been attained. For slaves we have machines. The hours of labor have steadily fallen. The leisure which was the privilege of the few is now the prerogative of all. This process will continue. The concentrated labors of American scientists on military secrets have given an impetus to technology which will become apparent when the war is over. I believe that we are at the beginning rather than the end of the scientific revolution. Technology will continue to supply material goods in greater and greater quantities with a continuous decline in the amount of labor necessary to produce them. In spite of the cost of reconstruction and rehabilitation, in spite of enormous debts and enormous obligations to millions who are without the means of subsistence, the working day and the working week will continue to fall, and the amount of time which the worker will have at his own disposal will continue to rise.

Machines can set men free. But freedom is not an end in itself. It is no good to you unless you know how to use it. If we accept the Greek view that the good life is found through intellectual and moral development and service to the community, then true freedom is that which is devoted to these ends. The kind of civilization we have will depend on whether we can dedicate our increasing leisure to these ends

or whether we shall spend it once more, when we can, in driving furiously back and forth on the crowded highways, catching glimpses of the countryside between the billboards. The transformation of the American conception of leisure from time to waste into time to learn is one of the major responsibilities of the museums.

It is not education to make a living that we require, but education to make a life. For many, perhaps most, jobs in industry men can be trained in two or three weeks. As mechanization increases and we become a nation of button-pushers, the time needed to learn how to push the right button at the right moment will shrink still further. When jobs are available the worker can now get and hold one with less experience and skill than at any time in history. The knowledge and background necessary to make a living are approaching the vanishing point. But the difficulties of leading a good life and being a good citizen are greater than ever. And since our education has been largely devoted to vocational training and something called college life, we are unprepared for these difficulties. They place a strain on the intelligence and character of our people that has become almost intolerable. With increasing leisure we do not know what to do with ourselves. With the responsibility of leading the way to a democratic world community, we are unprepared to make the sacrifices required by a thoroughgoing democracy at home and unwilling to face the fact that a democratic world community, which offers the only hope for permanent peace, can not be achieved without the sacrifice of prejudices dear to our hearts—prejudices about foreigners and their goods and prejudices about the participation of foreigners in political decisions affecting our lives. Yet a world organization is on the way. There can be no doubt about that. The swift advance of transportation is making it inevitable. The only question is, what kind of world organization will it be? Will it be a despotism of that power or those powers which can hold down the world by force? If so, it will disintegrate as allies quarrel or as the oppressed and downtrodden gather the strength to rise against their masters. Will it be a democratic world community? If so, the responsibilities of the American educational system assume such proportions that we can only weep at the colossal triviality in which it has been wasting its days.

If every man is to be free, then every man must be educated for freedom. If every part of the world is to join in a democratic world community, then every part of the world must understand every other part. Transportation will not do the job. Faster transportation is just as likely to lead to more frequent and more terrible collisions as to world peace. Any community rests on communication, and communication means understanding. As the college must pass from the country-club stage which it has occupied too long, the museum must change from a curio cabinet into an integrated part of an educational system dedicated to teaching men how to live human lives and how to live them together on a world-wide basis. This is the great educational task of the future. The record of Field Museum in the last half century has laid the foundations of its leadership in the next.

# RECENT ANTHROPOLOGY. II

By the late Professor FRANZ BOAS

MODERN anthropological literature shows that intimate observations on individual lives are felt to be essential for further progress, and new methods have been devised to obtain the needed information. Some of these methods seem to me of doubtful value. It is obvious that, setting aside laboratory experiment, the only way to obtain the necessary information is through a most intimate and long-continued life with the people and a perfect control of their language. These conditions are rarely attainable, or those who fulfil the practical needs are often in other ways not equipped to obtain the information we seek.

One of the methods used to overcome these difficulties is to induce natives to write or tell autobiographies. The better ones of these give us valuable information in regard to the struggles of everyday life and of the joys and sorrows of the people, but their reliability, beyond very elementary points, is doubtful. They are not facts but memories and memories distorted by the wishes and thoughts of the moment. The interests of the present determine the selection of data and color the interpretation of the past. Goethe called his autobiography Fiction and Truth, and this is true of the autobiographies of elderly persons. It is similar to what happens in telling a tale. Quite recently Lowie has published versions of a Crow tale, told at various times by the same individual, which show remarkable variations in plot and motives. I have published similar records of the same tale, retold by the same informant after an interval of nearly forty years, which show the stability of formal elements and the variability of motives. This is much more intensely the case in records of personal experiences. The same person has told me incidents of his own life at one time as simple, matter-of-fact occurrences, at other times as