

contributed \$5 million to establish the Institute for Advanced Study, and Abraham Flexner was chosen as the first director. It was not a surprising choice. The plan for the institute was Flexner's and grew out of ideas developed in his book *Universities—American, English and German*.

The first professor he approached for appointment at the institute mentioned a salary figure which Flexner thought quite inappropriate. It was too low, he insisted, and he named a higher figure. The professor—Albert Einstein—gave in gracefully.

Flexner's early life offers a stirring record of humble beginnings, intense family devotion, and courageous response to economic hardship. His parents had emigrated from Bohemia in 1855, 11 years before Abraham was born. After years of struggle and moderate success, they lost everything in the panic of 1873, and the family was plunged into a period of severe economic deprivation.

Abraham attended Johns Hopkins on funds saved by his older brother, Jacob. In 1890 he founded "Mr. Flexner's School," with five students, to experiment with his idea that children

should be taught with a minimum of restraint, but with undeviating devotion to intellectual standards. Eight years later he married Anne Crawford, who had been his first girl pupil in the school. Anne Flexner later became a very successful playwright. Her best-known play was *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*.

In 1904 Abraham Flexner made a courageous decision: he decided to close his school in Louisville in order to study in Europe. He was 38 years old. He was a success in his chosen field. After years of straitened circumstances, he was just beginning to enjoy some measure of economic well-being. Yet he put all of it behind him and sought wider horizons.

From there the path led him to Harvard for his M.A., then to Germany, and then to the historic interview in Pritchett's office.

Abraham Flexner was a man of spirit and style. In close personal relations he was deeply affectionate and loyal. In matters of the intellect he was forceful, astringent, scornful of compromise, a warrior in behalf of wisdom and virtue as he conceived them. He had a sparkling wit which was

equally effective in the mischievous teasing of his friends, the needling of those he wished to stir to action, and the harpooning of those who won his scorn. No one ever said of him that he was "comfortable as an old shoe." More appropriate might have been "as invigorating as a cool breeze."

Flexner was an unrelenting critic of the slovenly and the meretricious in American education. He attacked it wherever he saw it, and he saw it in many quarters. He fought a holy war against slackness, triviality, and educational quackery. It is good to know that he lived to see the recent rebirth of a concern for excellence in American education. The authors of *The Pursuit of Excellence*, the Rockefeller report on American education, quoted a characteristic passage from Flexner's autobiography: "We have to defend the country against mediocrity, mediocrity of soul, mediocrity of ideas, mediocrity of action. We must also fight against it in ourselves." No one accepted that call to battle more zestfully than Abraham Flexner himself.

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Science in the News

Soviet Offers New Version of its Quota Plan for Checking on Atom Blasts

In Geneva on 16 February the Soviet Union offered the West a plan for monitoring a nuclear test ban, which, like earlier Soviet proposals, covers all tests and limits on-site inspection to a small predetermined quota. The latest proposal, however, employs criteria based on seismographic responses that broaden considerably the eligibility for inspection of seismic events.

The Soviet proposal is a reply to the plan offered on 11 February by the United States, which the Soviet Union rejected. The United States, with British acquiescence, suggested banning all

tests except underground tests below a certain size.

In the new version of its quota plan, the Soviet Union, for 2 or 3 years, puts aside its own criteria for defining suspicious events and accepts criteria based on standards recently proposed by the United States. The Western standards would permit investigation of a considerably greater number of seismic disturbances, to determine whether they are earthquakes or secret tests, than would the Soviet criteria. During the period of 2 or 3 years, Western and Soviet scientists would consider further the question of setting standards for ordering inspection trips.

The Soviet offer was accompanied by a limitation. Acceptance by the Soviet

Union of Western standards of inspection would depend upon acceptance by the West of a predetermined quota of inspection trips. The size of the quota would depend not on such scientific questions as an estimate of the number of suspicious events to be encountered in the course of a year but on political questions. In past discussions, the Soviet Union has favored keeping such a quota "very small."

France not Joining Talks

On 16 February the French Foreign Ministry announced that France did not intend to join the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union in the Geneva discussions. Theoretically, the explosion of an atomic bomb in the Sahara on 13 February entitled France to request admittance to the nuclear test suspension talks.

Also on 16 February the French Ministry of the Armed Forces repeated its claim that the above-ground atomic explosion posed no danger to persons in the Sahara or in neighboring African countries. France is expected to explode at least one more nuclear device at the Sahara proving grounds.