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~~1934~~

Eugene Rosenstock-Hussy

THE RHYTHM OF SOCIETY

(Life and learning coordinated)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Yesterday a round dance of thought was acted before us which revealed the different reasons for which the particular alumna had thought it wise to attend your brilliant experiment: The Wellesley Alumnae College. Later we heard how the different nations of the world try to solve the problems of the depression, each country withdrawing from the world market into a kind of isolation and separatedness, but each facing exactly the same problems. Instead of a race in free competition on one World-wide market, they are likely to be in a race for anarchy. Yet it is a race again, with astounding similarities between the different countries. The more separately they act, the more similar they become.

Both events of yesterday present a lesson in the big question of Adult Education, one on the level of individuals, the other on that of nations. Let me try to bring together the two lessons into one, and to speak on the new rhythm in our social life.

One thing seems obvious from both events. There are things you learn better in later years, and you like more to learn after you have had some experience in real life. The nations express this truth more ferociously than individuals. The nations refuse to even look at the other nations in their task of overcoming the depression. They do not seek enlightenment

from outside. They prefer a certain blindness. Stubbornly, they cling to their national situation only, true isolationists. Even knowing about the universal identity of the crisis, they shut their ears to all the creeds which they were taught in political and economical books and lectures in their younger days. Their state of mind is completely experimental.

Later, I am sure, they will be quite ready to discuss what they did, and how they succeeded in getting out of the mud. But not now, not now, they seem to say. Let us try first, and like an inexperienced swimmer who gets much water into his mouth and his nose, they do not even open their eyes when someone tries to teach or warn them.

This raises the very great question of how far learning and knowledge can be anticipated by schools? What has to be left for the older people? What has to come up as a new wisdom in the later days of our life?

Our education was acquainted, it is true, with the fact that children cannot be taught at every age arbitrarily. We know something about the rhythm of education. But these considerations never embrace more than the first twenty-two or twenty-five years of humanity. There is little doubt that social sciences can be taught and should be taught college boys and girls.

At no period of life is our brain more open to intellectual truth than at twenty. Youth, loosening the ties which kept it inside the family, substitutes intellectual truth, which, after all, creates a new loyalty toward the universe. Thought is a means of association with the whole world, and the narrow circle of the family can be superceded by our citizenship of the world, because we exercise our mental powers in an effort to understand

the universe.

What a wonderful experience it is to look at the marvelous achievements of natural science! The method, highly inductive, invincibly clear, writes on the white sheets of youthful brains the discoveries in physics, chemistry, and so on.

The methods of natural science seem to be especially adapted to the youthful mind. Theory prepares it to master the matter in later practice. How is the same effect secured in the social sciences? The questions of marriage, birth control, buying and selling, of policy and war, are all treated in our schools and colleges, but with less success than the natural sciences. Burke explained this difference when he said: "The excellence of mathematics and metaphysics is to have but one thing before you; but he forms the best judgment in all moral (what is called today political and social) disquisitions, who has the greatest number and variety of considerations in one view before him, and can take them in with the best possible consideration for the middle results of all." (Works, VI, 133).

The Statistician may try to follow the lines of convincing demonstration by using figures. But reality is so terribly confusing that statistics in 98 out of 100 cases mislead all readers but the author himself. He, of course, knows what it is all about because he knows why he gathered those figures and no others. But floodlight concentrated on one spot in the darkness is all right for the man who has seen the rest of the place by daylight already. If you did not know the region before, floodlight would be rather dangerous. The picture you would get would be all wrong in its proportions. And this mis-proportion is inevitable as long as we put little cuts of the reality before

a mind which is blank about the rest of the reality. It must exaggerate the importance of the facts brought before it.

To be a good and intelligent blank is an advantage in all mathematical or scientific deductions. It is a serious drawback in every social discussion, because intelligence does not create the understanding of proportions, of tact.

Perhaps our social sciences can make better use of meetings of adults. Grown-ups are obliged by a difficulty, a real obstacle, a danger of national or personal character to concentrate. The confusion of the social world is simplified by the seriousness of our troubles.

Now these troubles are less irregular than we might expect. After all, the curriculum of a normal life, if it is a full and human life at all, leads us into different troubles in different epochs. After college there is perhaps a period where it is wise not to go back to school for a couple of years. Later, as we see it here, from seven years upwards, there are always very real questions before us. They have no date in the public calendar, it is true. To some it happens that in his 30th year, and to another in his 33d year, that he comes to his limits and is frightened by a disappointment. But for every one the hour strikes when good counsel is needed because life seems to have lost rhythm and reason.

Later, perhaps, it is not you, but your family, your pupils, your servants, or your friends who ask the questions which put you in difficulties. Later still, life has forced upon you the issue to take sides in the fight. But one night when you cannot sleep the desire creeps into your breast to see the other side, to know about your opponents, to find a truth that belongs to

both of you. And it can be of national and social importance that this truth is then rediscovered by you two as a virgin truth, holding the flavour of spring, and not grey by the reminiscences of a textbook on ethics.

There is learning, there is knowledge which is damaged because it is taught too early. This is, perhaps, the eternal truth underlying the famous law of nature, somewhat discredited today. Truth is always near and ready, but generation after generation has to learn the lesson, unbiased by the stale tradition of its predecessors. 'Natural law' tried to express this eternal reading of truth and the recurrent failure of each generation to get it by tradition. It can only get at truth by discovery and experience.

In a lecture on religion a lady asked the professor: "What are the young people going to become when they no longer get the fundamentals in their early years? "

I take the risk of answering this lady's question: They must get the fundamentals later. Take the bible, for example. Meet its revelations we must. But is it wise to make the bible a best-seller only? Everybody gets his bible as a present, and long before he wishes to buy it. Is it not a good thing to make the bible a "best-buyer" too? Let the grown-up buy the book anew, for example. A college of adults would offer an opportunity for such a transaction. We would look at the book we bought ourselves with new eyes. New editions of the bible, would, I am sure, have to be made for these buy-for-myself-people. And a change in the cover and in the binding of the ordinary bible would be for the good.

'We shall not eat without being hungry'. This golden rule must be applied to our rhythm and period of learning, too. What a hope to see people over 22 still longing for new revelations

because at that age young to understand the real secrets of their future. Life would get back its secrets, its room for the growth of our feelings, because it is the deep meaning of shame and reserve to help open up this room for the growth of our souls. Shame is neither physical nor sexual. It is the soul's fortress. Shame, intellectual shame, discretion, veils us in order that we may retain our identity through long periods. This quality of shame is neglected in schools today because nothing, so to speak, is left out of the program. To re-date learning, and to make it the nourishment of adults at the turning point in their lives, would bring a proper dignity to the older classes of men and women in society. The lime-light of education is turned essentially on the young. As long as adults gathered in church every Sunday, the young felt that older people progressed in knowledge and wisdom, too. But in our day, the connection between the church-going public and the school is gone. Students may know through lucky circumstances that their parents are in a state of mental growth, too, but society as a whole is not shaped to a form which gives symbolical expression to this need of the old.

Now in social life the private attitude is not all. Unceasingly in society customs and habits and conventions must be developed to express certain rules of the social game between old and young; otherwise the dignity of the adult would be destroyed by the crude contrast between youth filling the colleges, and old people nowhere listening and learning about the revelation of their own darkneses and experiences.

It is part of the dignity of man to learn by his mistakes. We are not automats. The dance of life does not work out as smoothly as a movie dance. How we handle the breaks or failures is what makes us men or beasts, great nations or blind masses.

The dances of the young are but metaphorical images and preparation for the real rhythm and harmony of a fuller life, and happy is the man who knows how to make the timely effort of listening to this inner-rhythm. He who does not know how to dance the proper dance of his psychic life - the fashionable expression for this rhythmical form of life today is 'being dynamic' - will soon be asked to join the dance macabre of death.

Even so, the rope stretched out between birth and death is more than once torn by our failures, and over and over again in life lacunae and interruptions occur - lacunae, empty spaces of lack and desire.

What is to be done in these epochs? By reaching a higher stage of sublimation, by eschewing the daily atmosphere of our homes, imperiled by our failure, and by bringing ourselves into an exalted and spiritual environment, we can heal this thirst and break. At this point, the isolated individual must be met by a sympathetic company. The true life of the spirit returns, not to the isolated soul, but to the adult who joins a group outside his ordinary group, a group devoted to this higher aim exclusively.

Perhaps in days to come, statesmen of the nations may prefer such 'summer-schools' of frank and exalted exchange in their conferences, where now most of the phrases that are used could be written down in advance by a careful newspaper reader.

The shifting of social sciences to an older body of students would probably help to fill these sciences with more serious stuff, and would make, for example, psychology or ethics more real than they are now, entangled as they are at present by teaching inexperienced children. However, please do not mistake this as a recommendation for abolishing the teaching of social sciences in college.

Far from it! All I mean to say is that the teaching of generalities in college must be backed by a parallel learning and re-actualizing of particularities by the grown-ups.

Thought re-actualizes truth which was forgotten, or absent for a time. Our students will read the great books of great men with better appetite if the process which makes for the origin of those books is actually going on in the community. They must feel that conditions like those which brought Plato's dialogues into being are cultivated in the present times, too. All great books on society are written because men and women feel the need of them at real and serious crises in life. They are never text-books, but books the text of which was a crisis in real life. Great men and great books will always stir the imagination of students. They inspire them with real passion for making the acquaintance of higher life.

But in an artificial world of cheap technicalities there must be, in addition to the biography and the edition of the classics, a supplement which reproduces in present society the conditions under which these books are ripening. It is essential that they be not ready-made tin cans, or products of a hot-house, but that their origin correspond to the eternal and immortal needs of mankind in every generation, and that they answer questions of life and death. The approach to the classics becomes easier when the creative process leading to their composition is illustrated by a present-day devotion. If it is felt that there is a working 'Christian Science' through all our life, the college-program of the classics, and the forms of society which are now out of joint will again be coördinated. And many a pseudo-science which now fills the gap, could vanish.

There are difficulties in the reform, too. It is so convenient to have all things together at one time and in one place. Is



it not a pity that the opportunities afforded by colleges and universities are not used thoroughly, and at the first moment we can get free? It is, I agree. But the real pity of it is that man was created by his Heavenly Father as a being who knows not everything always, but sometimes something.

The idealism of the natural sciences takes it for grant that we know more and more, and should know everything at once. The realism of the layman is startled by the fact that a truth is precious sometimes, and forgotten at all other times. To him the University is not a complete library of information about timeless truth, but he clings to the real meaning of universus, which is to start from many different points and at many different moments to aim at one point as your goal. 'Universus' tending in one direction means to do the right thing at the right time, and to know the right thing at the right time. That is all we can hope for in this short life. This new universism is represented quite well by the nations in the present crisis.

Is it not a strange universism when so many nations struggle hard to solve the same riddles side by side, learning their lessons by experience first, with the hope of exchanging their opinions later? The World's Economic Conference was based on the old idealistic conception of a universal and general theory of economics which should be applied by people who had learned their lesson in school.

The economic conference was a complete failure, because it did not see that Universism is all we can hope for: A parallel learning, a respect for the learning of our neighbors, but above all the methods of learning of adults and not of youths.

A word of Goethe says briefly what I tried to explain in many words. It is placed in that treasure-room for future use,

which expects its public, the Western-Eastern

(Maxims 6,28)

"Warum ist Wahrheit tief und weit,  
Birgt sich hinab in feste Grunde?  
Niemand versteht zur rechten Zeit.

"Wer uns zur rechten zeit verstunde  
Dem ware Wahrheit nah und weit  
Und ware lieblich und gelinde."

"Why dwells truth in far-off lands,  
Or hidden in deep abysses *the way*  
None at the right time understands.

"If only then men understood,  
Broad truth were also near our  
                                hands  
And truth were gentle, dear and good."

(Translated by Dowden, Dent and Sons, Toronto, 1913)

London, England.

WELLESLEY  
REUNION COLLEGE  
(First Session)

It is impossible to transmit briefly, and adequately in words, the actual content and the spirit of Reunion College but the committee hope that the following summaries and excerpts may suggest its delightful and significant character.

There were two short evening programs in the great hall at Tower Court between dinner and the late evening sessions, not announced in advance which should be reported.

Impromptu Round-Table

The first was an impromptu gathering suggested by a question raised in Group I by Margery Dietz Batchelder 1907. (It was, by the way, in Group I that all members were asked at their beginning session, to say who they were and what they were especially interested in). Dr. Batchelder's question suggested so clearly the special interest with which she came and the body of experience that lay behind it, that it was obvious that others present, in other sections, might like to know about it. So this brief margin of time between dinner and the evening session was chosen to ask her and as many others as time permitted, to tell what had brought them to Reunion College and led them to choose their particular group. The reply of Susan Huntington Vernon, 1900, is included in part under the report of Group I and it is hoped that presently we may have comments written in retrospect from at least the five other participants in this

impromptu program; and perhaps, volunteered replies from other members of Reunion College.

Bernice Conant Long, 1920, Barcelona, Spain, told how she happened to be in this country and discovered this opportunity, almost on the eve of sailing, to bring herself up-to-date with present-day trends in this country.

Helen Miller Cameron, 1921, who had driven with her small daughter from Waco, Texas for her class reunion and for Reunion College told how she had seized this opportunity for straightening out some of the subjects that had left her disturbed and unsettled when leaving college.

Eva Terry, 1901, who had passed a long service in educational fields in India and Burmah, told how she had welcomed the chance to be brought up-to-date in the Natural Sciences and as long as she stayed at Wellesley she herself was begged on every ~~side~~ to tell more of her own adventures and ideas.

Helen McCrea, 1920, of Spokane, told of her experiences in the work of adult education and the relation of this program and the opportunities for informal discussion to this interest.

Margery Dietz Batchelder, 1907, gave a brief account of her work as physician and educational advisor in the Lehigh Valley, which led to her being, apparently, in continuous conference from that moment until the end of Reunion College!

These "samples" of Alumnae interest and experience made every one long to know more about the rest of the assembled group.

### Life and Learning Co-ordinated

The second informal session was devoted to hearing from Dr. Eugen Rosenstock-Hussy, the honored guest of the conference, on the rhythm of the society of the future, from an educational point of view. The sub-title of his talk "Life and Learning Co-ordinated" suggests the emphasis of his speech.

At a time when "adult education" has many interpretations, sometimes too vague, sometimes too explicit to be adequate, Dr. Rosenstock's interpretation is particularly helpful. The depth and breadth of its philosophy gives points of contact for all that is best in our varied forms of thought and experiment in this field. He assumes neither that the phrase means cultural development of the individual nor preparation for citizenship nor is it for any other exclusive end, alone, - rather, as his use of the word rhythm implies, it is, in contrast to early education, a process of periodic interplay between theory and practice, "the co-ordination of life and learning" now taking place crudely and partially <sup>and</sup> capable of cultivation. Our present social lack is full acknowledgement of this truth and provision for needed exchange among adults on this basis, both as individuals and as groups. He cites the failure of The World Economic Conference as due to the fact that we are still so elementary in our points of view and methods that "we do not depart from the old idealistic conception of a universal and general theory of economics which should be applied by people who have learned their lesson in school. The economic conference was a complete failure, because it did not see that all we can hope for is a parallel learning, a respect for the learning of neighbors, and

the methods of learning of adults and not of youth."

Dr. Rosenstock enlarged at several points upon these distinctions between the comparatively arbitrary education of youth and the "co-ordination of life and learning" that characterizes adult education. In youth he comments "the picture you get is all wrong in its proportions.--This is inevitable as long as we put little cuts of reality before a mind which is blank about the rest of reality. It must exaggerate the importance of the facts brought before."

It is natural, as Dr. Rosenstock's talk implies, that the first swing away from early, comparatively arbitrary, education of the individual should be towards pure experiment, but presently we reawaken to our ignorance and uncivilization and to the unknown possibilities before us, acknowledging "the empty spaces of adult lack and desire, when the individual must take council with others, because life seems to have lost its rhyme and reason." Then "the desire creeps into your breast to see the other side, to know about your opponents, to find the truth that belongs to both of you. And it can be of national and social importance that this truth is then rediscovered by you two as a virgin truth, keeping the flavor of spring and not <sup>graced</sup> ~~graced~~ by the reminiscences of a textbook."

"The statesmen of the nations may in days to come prefer summer schools of frank and exalted exchange instead of the present conferences where now most of the phrases that are used could be written down by a careful newspaper read beforehand". In distinguishing further the content of education youth adult

Dr. Rosenstock said "There are things you learn better in later years and you like learning better after you have had some experience in real life." He speaks of the very great question how far learning and knowledge can be anticipated by schools. "What has to be left for older people? What has to come up as new wisdom of the later days of our life?"

"There is little doubt that social sciences can be and should be taught to college girls and boys--tho' the methods of natural sciences seem to be adapted to the youthful mind especially. The theory prepares it to master the matter in later practice. But how is the same effect to be secured in social sciences? Questions of marriage, birth control, buying and selling, of policy and war are all treated in our schools and colleges, but with less success than the natural sciences. Burke explained this difference when he said "the excellence of mathematics and metaphysics is to have but one thing before you; but he forms the best judgment in all moral (what is called today political and social) disquisitions, who has the greatest number and variety of considerations in one view before him and can take them in with best possible consideration of the middle results of all", (Works, VI 133).

"Perhaps our social sciences can make better use of meetings of adults. The adult is forced to concentrate by a real difficulty, an actual obstacle, a danger of national or personal character, which makes him know the proportions of the question and the true emphasis. The confusion of the social world is simplified by the seriousness of our troubles. But the curriculum of normal life, if it is full and human, leads into

different troubles and epochs--there is learning, there is knowledge, which is damaged because it is taught too early. This is perhaps the eternal truth hidden in the law of nature somewhat discredited today. Truth is always there but generation after generation must learn the lesson unbiased by the stale tradition of its predecessors".

"We shall not eat without being hungry. This golden rule also must be applied to our rhythms or periods of learning. What a brilliant prospect for the world when we shall see people over twenty-two still longing for new revelations because they know they are too young now to understand as yet the real secret of their future! Life would back its secrets, its room for the growth of our feelings! It is a reproach for our schools of today that nothing is left out of the program, that no place is kept for cultivation of awareness of the unknown, for acknowledgment of distances yet before the individual and of our present elementary methods of living in groups. Cultivation of a sense of shame, of mortification, of chagrin on these counts may well be made a part of schooling for growth and such shame, not physical, nor sexual but intellectual, is the price of individual identity through long periods of slow development".

"To re-date learning and make it the nourishment of adults at the turning points of their lives, would bring proper dignity to the older classes of men and women in society. Society is as a whole nowhere shaped to a form which gives symbolic expressions to this need of adult groups. One has only to reflect on the broken relation between school and church in modern life to recognize this fact - at the same time,



realizing that it is the way we handle the breaks and failures that makes us men or beasts, great nations or blind masses. The dances of the young folk are but a metaphorical image and preparation for the real rhythm and harmony of our fuller life. Happy the man who knows how to make this effort of listening to this inner voice of discontent and aspiration timely and builds up his own rhythm of life in the middle period, between the physical dances of youth and the dance macabre of death. In other words, teaching of generalities of college must be backed by parallel learning and reactualizing of particularities in middle life by the individual and the group". In the forwarding of this purpose lies the promise of adult education. #

Apropos of present-day education and life Dr. Rosenstock adds. "Thought re-actualizes truths which have been forgotten or absent for a time. Our students will read the great books of great men with better appetite, if the process which makes for the origin of those books is actually going on in the community. They must feel that conditions like those which brought Plato's dialogues into being are cultivated at the present time too. All great books on society were written because men and women felt the need for them at the real and serious front of life. They were never textbooks but books the text of which was a crisis in real life. Great men and great books will always stir the imagination of students. There is real passion for making the acquaintance of higher life. But in an artificial world of cheap technicalities, there must be in addition to the biography and the edition of the classics, a supplement which reproduces

# One can but reflect in passing, that the reason why individuals of good natural endowment, who, even with limited education (formal), outstrip others of high intellectual disciplines, in various forms of wisdom, is no doubt largely due to life long good habits, of coordinating life and learning.

ripened. It must become clear that the classics are no hot-house products, but that their origin corresponds to eternal and immortal needs of mankind in every generation, and that they answer questions of life and death."

He closed with these lines of Goethe's which say briefly what I have tried to explain in many words:

"Why dwells truth in far-off lands,  
Or hidden in deep abysses mewed  
None at the right time understands.  
If only then men understood.  
Broad truth were also near our hands  
And truth were gentle, dear and good."

(trans. by Dowden, Dent & Sons, London & Toronto 1913)

It is easy to understand why so little has been written or said about middle age, that tremendous part of life given up to creating and rearing another generation. It has been said indeed that change or adventure always depend upon youth and enlightened old age. This is conceivable. The complexity of the middle period, so little past, so little future, so almost completely of its own present, is all absorbing. The growing concept, however, of enlarged possibilities of understanding this middle period as one in which meaning is to be wrested from the process, by alternation of purely experimental epochs with epochs of recognized and provided for co-ordination of life and learning, for individual and group, - is reassuring at this time in the world. It meets to the full the fashionable word dynamic!

It lifts the American interpretation of adult education out of its reproach of specialization, "professionalism" and mere "efficiency". It connects happily and significantly with the teachings of Mary P. Follett's "Creative Experience". To quote only from her chapter on Experience as Creating \* --

"An interweaving experience produces social ends and power -- Society should be so organized that standards and powers evolve together." These and many other correlations of thought are suggested by Dr. Rosenstock's discussion of the philosophy of adult education in terms of life. Such a philosophy may further be conceived as opening the way to bodies of knowledge that may presently give significance to the promising but for the moment, relatively thin phrase social education!

"The drift of pinions would we hearken  
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors".

For Wellesley with its tradition of widening use of buildings and campus for summer educational conferences of adults under both college and outside auspices - this all has a lively meaning. The significance of this policy of the college is substantially accentuated by such an interpretation as Dr. Rosenstock's and by the Reunion College experiment as a whole. Here at least during the long pull we have ahead before "co-ordination of life and learning" may be expected to invade business and politics as an integral part of the process, we have a hospitable center for educational steps which are valuable in themselves and may lead, one by one, towards the more complete

\* Creative Experience p 156.

co-ordination of life and learning, for lack of which humanity suffers, <sup>perhaps</sup> needlessly, perhaps unavoidably, but at least not unproductively, when we perhaps consciously learn through the process.

Reports

Group

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I.

II.

III.

IV.