

## LEADERSHIP AS A SOCIAL FUNCTION<sup>1</sup>

**T**HIS morning we are celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the day when the Rice Institute first opened its doors and started upon a career of conspicuous service to the youth of our nation. But the idea of such an institution had been conceived by the Founder a quarter century or more before it ripened into a reality. There is convincing evidence that for at least a dozen years before his death William Marsh Rice contemplated offering such provision for the development of humanity and civilization, and even secured a charter for the establishment of an educational institution upon a broad basis, which should perpetually contribute to the cultivation of letters, science, and the liberal arts. Hence today we are witnessing the product of educational thought and activity during half a century and the results of a foundation whose influence will be increasingly felt as long as the United States of America endures.

It should be noted to the lasting credit of Mr. Rice that he was actuated by a well-defined purpose—something more than the mere perpetuation of his name, the gratification of vanity, or a desire for power. The sagacious Founder of the Rice Institute from the first possessed a general but clear view of the important service that he wished this institution to perform for the advancement of civilization. His vision

<sup>1</sup>Address delivered by Frank Pierrepont Graves, Ph.D., Litt.D., L.H.D., LL.D., President of the University of the State of New York and Commissioner of Education, at the twenty-second annual commencement of the Rice Institute, held in the Court of the Chemistry Laboratories, Monday morning, June 7, 1937, at nine o'clock.

## Leadership as a Social Function 271

may have been further broadened and cleared by the labors of those in whose hands the trust was left and by the pre-eminent scientists and scholars whose aid in behalf of the infant institution was solicited, but from the beginning it was unmistakably the thought of the Founder that he wished to create a center for the development of leaders. He sought not only to train for leadership in every field of social activity, but to rear as many leaders as possible for society. It was his firm intention from the beginning to maintain and promote scholastic and cultural ideals, as well as to meet and fulfill modern demands and requirements, and to extend the possibilities of development to every one who could profit from education on its highest level. He ardently desired that his adopted state and the nation at large should secure the widespread advantages that would accrue from the training of all their genius in every direction.

And with all the development during the past quarter century in the way of impressive buildings, elaborate equipment, generous support, and cosmopolitan student body, the aims and ideals of this philanthropic Founder have remained unchanged in spirit and form. If anything, the Rice Institute is today more devoted to its purpose of creating leaders in all lines of social, political, and religious life than it was fifty years ago when first "your old men dreamt dreams and your young men saw visions." Than this there can be no more worthy objective. The importance of leaders to civilized society can scarcely be overestimated. Even with the distorted views of democracy sometimes held at the present day, it must be admitted that the fate of society is determined almost altogether by the work of its leaders. Average individuals can for a while conserve the achievements of the race and keep the activities of everyday life in operation, but they must ever look to intellectual superiors for new steps in

progress, which alone can keep the world from stagnation. Such leaders have throughout history initiated our inventions and discoveries, bridging our rivers and tunneling our mountains, have organized our industries, have instituted social reforms, mitigating human suffering, sin, and ignorance, have produced our inspiring literature and works of art, and have written our greatest constitutions. We must realize that, if at any time our leaders should altogether fail to get into action, civilization would quickly slip back again into barbarism.

If leaders, then, have played so important a part in social progress, we may well agree that it is essential to secure the maximum of benefit from as great a number and variety of these guides as possible. But should we assume that any number of leaders can be readily produced through proper education? Are not all leaders, like those in poetry, "born and not made"? Should we hold that they are created by circumstances and training, rather than that they are purely a gift of nature? Or, to state the problem in its usual form, is capacity for leadership to be accounted the product of environment or of heredity, or of both? This question has long been mooted by educational philosophers, and wide differences of opinion have been expressed and vigorously defended. Although no philosopher is ever entirely consistent, since a point of view can be attained only at the expense of some of the facts, such men as Rousseau and Froebel seem to hold that intellectual attainments are purely a matter of birth and natural development, while contemporaries of theirs, Locke and Herbart, maintain that there is nothing present at the start and concede very little to any other factor than training and construction from the outside.

Perhaps the classic controversy as to the basis of leadership—certainly the one that has attracted most attention

## Leadership as a Social Function 273

during the past half century—is that between the English savant, Francis Galton, and our own fellow countryman, Lester F. Ward. Both of these thinkers were themselves intellectual leaders and contributed largely to half a dozen of the same natural and social sciences. But Galton was primarily a biologist and stressed the development of the individual, while Ward was one of the earlier expositors of modern sociology and leaned toward a social point of view. Galton invented the term “eugenics” to represent his propaganda and maintained that we might rapidly produce a gifted race through select and judicious mating. Ward, on the other hand, held that a large part of ability is not transmissible, but is acquired through opportunity, and that genius, being potential only, is best promoted by furnishing the right environment. In his judgment the way to increase the efficiency of mankind is not merely through eugenics, but by finding and utilizing all the environmental influences that have contributed most to the production of efficient leaders.

As a whole, Ward seems to view the question from a broader angle and to have rather the better of the argument. Surely we would agree that if we wish to increase the number and efficiency of our leaders, we must extend to all classes opportunity for training in every line. This would appear to be a wise course. Up to date we have achieved very little through heredity and eugenics by themselves. There has apparently been no marked physical or mental change in the race during the twenty-five thousand years more or less since, in the course of evolution, the first Cro-Magnon men began their activities. A census of the characteristics of the ordinary run of mankind at the present time makes us extremely skeptical concerning any noteworthy advance in the nature of inherited intelligence. One needs examine but cursorily the contradictory records of the various parties in

a presidential campaign, the gyrations displayed in the controversy of the Fundamentalists and Modernists, the widespread sale of patent medicines, and the prevalence of "faith cures," to sense how far superstition, irrationalism, emotionalism, sentimentality, and even Cave Men reactions endure and control in this present boasted age of enlightenment and reason. Probably no people have ever appeared in modern times that could be considered the equals (not to say superiors) of those Athenian Greeks who two and a half millennia ago attained such a high general level and produced so many intellectual giants.

But do not misunderstand me. We cannot, of course, deny the immense advancement that the race has made in civilization since the days of ancient Hellas. Through cooperative and specialized effort we have accumulated and transmitted a wide control over both ourselves and the forces of nature. Constant progress is witnessed by the extensive developments in science, art, industry, commerce, agriculture, government, literature, and religion since the age of Pericles. But, mark you, all these contributions have been handed down through training, without leaving any appreciable impression upon the germ cells of humanity. And it would appear to be through progress of this sort that most developments in the future must arise. If we are to raise the level of racial achievement, we shall have to depend very largely upon suitable environment and education. The course of natural selection and evolution is altogether too slow.

But it may be objected that we have never given the "eugenics" recommended by Galton a fair trial. This is unfortunately true. Even here in the second quarter of the twentieth century, we do not begin to give the attention to human mating that we expend upon the scientific breeding of lower animals. Kittens and puppies born under the hybrid

## Leadership as a Social Function 275

conditions that we tolerate without a protest in human beings would be promptly consigned to a watery grave, and any stock raiser who utilized his best blooded sires and dams to as little effect as modern society does its most worthy parent-hood would be a fit subject for the bankrupts' court or even a state hospital for the insane. As yet we are doing little or nothing to prevent the union and perpetuation of sense defectives, epileptics, imbeciles, and idiots, or, as has been widely shown of late, to interfere with the transmission of venereal taints. Men of intelligence feel largely constrained to evade the procreation of their kind; but not so the unintellectual and the imprudent. The name of their offspring is Legion. With the use of a tithe of our increased knowledge and control, we could, in the course of a few generations, vastly improve the race both physically and mentally, and raise inestimably the general level of intelligence and the possibilities of leadership.

Why don't we, then? It is in the very voluntary nature of this control (the fact that every man does as he pleases) that the whole *crux* of the situation seems to rest. It is the difficulty of rationalizing these deepseated instincts and impulses that constitutes the greatest value in Ward's amendment to the Galtonian theory. Racial improvement would proceed at less than snail's pace, or not at all, if left entirely to its own devices. Even today the average individual too often regards all social control as an interference and a menace. In the popular creed, one man's opinion is as good as another's, and we still refuse to be guided by expert or friend in the choice of a mate. Those of us who were naïve enough in our younger days to undertake to advise another—man or woman—to select a different life companion from the one contemplated, found that despite our good intentions we succeeded only in making two permanent enemies. No, if

we are to hope for any marked rise in either the physical or the intellectual level of the race, our *laissez faire* method of procedure must be corrected and supplemented by presentation and application of the abundant knowledge that we have inherited on the subject. The only corrective and effective means for overcoming these obstacles to the development of leaders and to racial progress is to be found in furnishing universal and adequate opportunities for education.

In connection with a discussion of the importance of universal opportunities for education, we hope that it will not seem altogether fanciful to note that both Galton and Ward may be regarded as typical products of their respective countries. It is but logical for an Englishman to hold that leadership is practically altogether a matter of heredity. From his boyhood up he has absorbed the impression that somehow there exists a natural intellectual aristocracy, which is in possession of the world's supply of genius and simply hands it on to its offspring. Those beloved of the gods, he holds, should properly receive the benefit of the best education, but even when deprived of it their light cannot be altogether "hidden under a bushel." Genius, like murder, will out. Of course, the selective theory in English education has been largely modified by the democratizing influences of the World War, but it is still quite consistent with Galton's traditions to hold it a self-evident truth that genius is confined to a small group and that all higher education should be similarly limited.

On the other hand, we people of America, among whom Ward was reared, have come to incline toward a very different attitude. It has gradually become almost an educational axiom with us that everyone should be permitted to obtain just as much education as he is capable of consuming, without regard to his social position and almost without

consideration of the cost. While our theory has at many points broken down, we still continue to maintain that the doors of the university should swing wide to every student of brains and industry. For the sake of developing as much genius and leadership as possible, no youth of ability, we hold, should be prevented from entering college through lack of financial support or through inability to find there the subjects that his particular type of genius requires.

It is unfortunate, however, that we Americans seem so often to have accompanied our broad and generous conception of universal education with the absurd implication that all persons are born with equal ability and possibilities, and should be given exactly the same training, as well as equal opportunities. It is fairly evident that, as a whole, we have by no means shown as much discernment as we might in determining the amount of education that should be furnished each individual. Can there be any more pathetic spectacle than the futile efforts of certain youths to lift the ponderous burden of a collegiate education when it is beyond the intellectual strength with which they were endowed? Their lofty ambition and dogged persistence are admirable and worthy of commendation, but they are frightfully misapplied and uneconomical. Shall we never learn that all Americans cannot do everything and that there are some occupations in life that are honorable and of good report besides those requiring a college training?

Thanks to the War, though, the land of Ward, like that of Galton, has of late had its educational complacency rudely shaken, though by a shock of the opposite sort. We Americans have at length come to have some misgivings as to the wisdom of admitting to college every one who applies. Such vast hordes have been besieging college walls as to make the reception of them all a physical impossibility. So we have

been coming to make a virtue of necessity and to pause long enough to ask ourselves who should be allowed the privileges of a higher education. Hence we have recently heard much about the necessity of limiting college admission to those who are able to get most out of the training. President Hopkins of Dartmouth is reputed to have been the first to apply the phrase "an aristocracy of brains" to the sort of student body to which he would have his college aspire, but there has come to be a general assent to the proposition that only students of reasonably strong intelligence should enter college. If what we wish is to create leaders, we certainly should not handicap ourselves at the start by the admission of too much poor material.

Possibly this conclusion has been hastened by the ease and popularity of "intelligence testing," which likewise gained its vogue as a by-product of the World War. At any rate, in numerous institutions psychological examinations have recently come to be somewhat utilized in selecting the "aristocracy of brains." Fortunately these tests have not generally been considered altogether infallible. A laudable caution is now being shown in their use, and we no longer hope to use the tests to the exclusion of every other form of selection. Moreover, we are at present by no means certain as to just what constitutes intelligence or whether we have taken account of all ingredients that enter into the complex, and until a satisfactory analysis is made, any simplification is likely to be more or less artificial. Experience shows us that moral qualities, like industry, perseverance, loyalty, courage, and integrity, or such social abilities as a sense of humor, tact, sympathy, sociability, and affability, for which no effective tests have yet been devised, are frequently of much more consequence in determining leadership and success than is abstract intelligence. Nevertheless, the attempt

## Leadership as a Social Function 279

to limit higher education to those who will make it of some real benefit to themselves and society may well be considered a healthful tendency, if it is but broadly construed. While the intelligence tests are still in a rough and unrefined stage, if they can be made to take account of all factors and can be used with proper caution, they may eventually become of considerable value in selecting those who are to be educated for leadership.

But in selecting the few to be trained for leadership, two of the moral qualities mentioned would seem to be a *sine qua non* and should be especially stressed. These are the capacities for industry and for perseverance, which have too often fallen out of academic perspective. Leadership can never be attained by the indolent or weak-willed, and trust funds, whether obtained through private endowment or appropriation by the State, must be devoted to the purpose for which they were given, if the trustees are not to be held guilty of malfeasance in office. Certainly, if we hold that the dull student should find the scene of his activities outside of college walls, how much more should this be the case with the idle and dissolute! The one is at least doing all that he can to increase the talent intrusted to him, but the other has wrapped his up in a napkin and laid it away.

As a matter of fact, if we must seek a slogan to rouse our spirits in the academic race, should we not select an "aristocracy of service," rather than merely an "aristocracy of brains" as the goal of our ambitions? Even the most gifted youth has no natural right to the advantages of a college education, since he is not in the least responsible for his great ability and the only justification for his receiving opportunities of which others have been deprived is that of a larger return to society. Indeed the more highly endowed he is, the more sensitive should he be rendered to social

service. For, if a higher education is to be added to his natural gifts, it will proportionately increase his already large capacity for good or ill, and if he uses his powers for strictly selfish, predatory, or criminal ends, there could be no more profound disservice to society than a college education. If the universities were to devote themselves to rearing Leopolds and Loeb's, as the yellow press has seemed to imply, the sooner they were swept out of existence the better it would be for the world. For such a policy, pushed to its logical conclusion, could lead to nothing but social suicide.

With our social problems and needs, then, as great as they are today, we should strive to select our leaders wisely, and, in addition, train them definitely for the service of society. There is still a wide range of superstitions and abuses to be overcome, and it should be not only the function but the privilege of university-trained leaders to struggle to their utmost to further the control of society over nature and to contribute continually toward the abolition of ignorance, poverty, disease, and crime. These obstacles to social welfare may well challenge the best valor of the college man, and it is because those who have gone forth as leaders from these halls of the Rice Institute select such abuses, rather than their own selfish ends, as the objects of their conquest, that this institution has been universally judged to be economically and ethically well worth while.

Some such view of the mission of the institution he wished to create, though "seen through a glass darkly," must have animated the Founder of the Rice Institute. And as many years ago in his mind's eye he beheld you young men and women going forth to do valiant service for the cause of civilization and progress, his emotions must have been stirred and his determination steeled. Can you wonder that he was willing to devote his time, energies, and fortune to

## Leadership as a Social Function 281

such a project? Surely you, his admirers and beneficiaries, with all your modern resources and increased opportunities, cannot prove forgetful of his purpose and recreant to your trust. Give ear, then, to the time-honored motto of the old Society of Jesus: "Freely ye have received; then freely give!"

FRANK PIERREPONT GRAVES.