

Women's Education and the War

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Even before our entry into the war, educators were keenly aware of the responsibility of institutions to youth and to the country. For twenty years we had been teaching peace; and we had to help young people in a tremendous readjustment of thought—help them to realize that, though everything that we had said of the horror and wrong of war was true, there were things that were even worse.

With our entrance into the war, institutions were eager to help the country. Rapidly changing conditions brought changes in education. Short courses and technical courses sprang up to give men as much training as possible before their induction. Liberal arts and the idea of the four-year college were at a discount. And prominent educators pointed out that, if learning and culture were to be preserved in this country, the responsibility would fall on the women's colleges, since men's education had to be cut over into preparation for the armed forces.

Thus women's colleges have a twofold responsibility: 1. to help girls to meet the requirement of wartime; and 2. to prepare them to meet the problems of their own lives and, as citizens, to meet responsibility in the changed, post-war world. Men's preparation has been narrowed by the war, since men are for the most part headed for the armed forces; women's, broadened, since all the old and permanently important positions still need women, and many new jobs, created by present conditions, are open to them.

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BR Some changes were inevitable. In many institutions acceleration of course was made possible by long summer sessions or change from a two-semester to a three-term year. Many girls, however, are not accelerating their course, not only because they wish to avoid "undigested cramming," but also because they need to earn part of their college expenses and can get valuable experience and do useful war work in the summer. Last summer, Milwaukee-Downer students had paid jobs inspecting bullets and mine fuse parts, driving cars for a

shipbuilding company, assembling primers, working on Radar, spending ten hours a day in a punch-press department, working on springs for periscopes, tanks, guns, and jeeps, etc., etc., as well as taking the volunteer training as nurses' aides, working in victory gardens, canning, donating blood, etc.

Besides some changes in the "calendar for the year," the war brought to women's colleges changes in their curriculum. New courses include both the theoretical and the technical, and there is great increase of interest in departments which furnish background for definite war work, such as science and mathematics. There are new courses on post-war problems, problems of democracy, theory of navigation, preparation for work in centers caring for children, problems of nutrition in wartime, preparation of government reports and digests, and there is increased emphasis on courses in American history, meteorology, cartography, map-reading, etc.

Women's colleges have also studied the combinations that can be made from a regular curriculum by which a student can both work for her degree and prepare for definite war work. For example, colleges are offering courses in preparation for reconstruction work. At Milwaukee-Downer College, we have published a special bulletin entitled "Study for Victory," prepared with the help of outside experts, showing combinations of courses for students interested in diplomatic work, pre-engineering, pre-aviation, supervisory positions in industry, personnel work, etc.

But in addition to the many new positions, some of which will continue but many of which will end with the war, there is crying need for trained women in the permanently useful professions such as teaching, social work of all kinds, laboratory technicians' work, recreational leadership in such organizations as the Girl Scouts, YWCA, many kinds of business positions, etc. And there is great need of girls who hold the B.S. in nursing, for dietitians, and for occupational therapists. This latter profession, which got its impetus in the first World War, is being particularly emphasized now, since it trains women to help not only civilians who have physical or mental disabilities, but also those whom the war has crippled. Even through the depression, we had more requests for our graduates than we could fill, and present conditions have greatly increased both the demand and the number

training for such work. Lastly, I want to add that the colleges through their curricula and general training are sending out young women to handle intelligently that most important profession, home-making.

In women's colleges today there is a new emphasis on the counseling of students with the aid of many tests of ability and interest; on the building of health through education and through a well-developed and universal program in physical education; on personal discipline; on the acceptance of the responsibility which goes with the privilege of opportunity. There is a simplification of social activities and an emphasis on war work. The students have a greater maturity of outlook, a seriousness, a feeling of responsibility for getting the most out of the opportunities which they can have and their brothers cannot, so that they may be more useful after college years.

The fact that women's colleges have greatly increased enrollment this year indicates that parents want for their daughters — and girls themselves want — an education which will prepare them for the post-war world. We know that that world will be different, and that liberal arts, not narrow technical training, will give flexibility to meet changing conditions. Women will take an increasingly greater share in civic responsibility. Government and industrial leaders, as well as educators, emphasize the present and future need of women whose mental training has equipped them for responsible positions. Women will need a knowledge of history, government, economics, sociology, languages, and literature, and many other subjects, to understand the ideals and problems of this country and of international relations, and a knowledge of art, music, etc., for culture and for breadth of appreciation. The challenge has come to women's colleges to conserve our intellectual and cultural heritage; to meet the present; and to prepare for the future. And they are meeting the challenge.

"Some things can and should be postponed for the emergency that is today," writes Dr. Helen C. White, national president of the American Association of University Women. "But there are some things that cannot be put off until the end of the crisis. First among these is the training and exercise of the critical and inquiring mind, of the creative imagination. Today we need them desperately to save what is good in the world we have. But tomorrow we shall need them even more to build the world we want to have."