A School of Social Research

AFTER the debacle of the Franco-Prussian war, Frenchmen began to consider seriously and searchingly how far their country's defeat by Germany could be attributed to past neglect in organizing education. As a result of this inquiry many changes were subsequently introduced into the educational system, and among the innovations there was one which should be of peculiar interest to Americans of today. A group of private citizens started the Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques, the object of which was to train students for public administration and to apply scientific methods to the subject matter and the problems of politics. The new school differed from the faculties of law or government in the Sorbonne partly because it was not directly controlled by state officials and partly because it was planned to accomplish a special and exclusive work. Inasmuch as it was to study the foundation of the state and the operation of political institutions, its professors needed to pursue their inquiries under conditions which would emancipate them from obligations to the prevailing government; and in order to emphasize the importance of the subject matter and pull the several phases of the work together, they needed to isolate the study of politics and forge out of the inquiry a new and special discipline. The school has realized at least some of the expectations of its founders. It has contributed substantially to the improved standards of public administration in France and to the steadily increasing vitality of French legal and political thinking.

There is a group of Americans who hope to start an analogous, if not a similar, institute in this country. The prospectus calls for an independent school dedicated exclusively to the study of the subject matter of modern society. The curriculum would include anthropology, psychology, modern history, political and commercial geography, international relations and public law, jurisprudence, government administration and public service, economics, finance and statistics, industrial organization, social management and labor organization and administration. Its faculty would enjoy full control over the appointment and dismissal of professors and over the educational policy of the institution. Its founders would seek to bring together a group of men and women who were already contributing to the advancement of science in their own special fields of study, and in whose scientific ability and integrity the community would have full confidence. The administrative work of the new school could be cut down to a minimum. It would be dealing almost exclusively with advanced students, who would not require supervision, and in a city like New York which is so well provided with libraries it could dispense with an expensive equipment of buildings and laboratories. By devoting all its resources to teaching and scientific investigation it could make a comparatively limited endowment go very far.

This proposed school is an enlargement, adapted to American conditions, of the idea underlying the Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques. The French school was intended to improve the operation of free political institutions in France by creating opportunities for the disinterested teaching and investigation of the science of politics. In an hour of national distress a few Frenchmen called science and scientific method to the assistance of their distracted country and thereby renewed France's faith, which received its first expression during the Revolution, in the salutary power of ideas in politics. In the same way the new American school will, it is hoped, contribute to the social education of the American people and to the better realization of the social ideal, implicit in American democracy, by promoting the disinterested investigation of the subject matter of modern society and by deriving therefrom more serviceable social disciplines. It will study society rather than politics, because political science can no longer be profitably isolated from anthropology, psychology, economics and social organization, but just as the French school has studied politics in the expectation of improving French political practice, so the American school hopes to make social research of immediate assistance to a bewildered and groping American democracy. It also springs from a faith in the creative power of ideas which is no less implicit in the American than in the French national tradition.

Modern society is undergoing a process of quick and radical transformation, which most of its officials are insufficiently prepared to understand and control. The war has forced this transformation on popular attention by altering to a dangerous extent the pre-existing balance of social forces, but the transformation itself has been going on for generations and was destined soon to come to a head. The industrial reorganization and the technical advance of the last century has started it in its career and determined its character. Scien-
tific method was applied to the satisfaction of certain special economic needs with prodigious success and with the result of enormously increasing the control of man over nature and the accumulated fund of negotiable mechanical and social power. The war has helped us to realize at once what enormous resources science has placed at the disposal of the human will, and the imminent danger that these resources, if not better subordinated to social purposes, may contribute to the frustration rather than to the promotion of human progress.

The increasing ability of parts of the community to gratify important but selfish needs and merely particularist purposes threatens the integrity and balance of both individual and social life. Science has unintentionally placed a huge accumulation of method and power at the disposal of the dominant class. Under the traditional legal and economic system the surplus values created by technical investigation and industrial expansion, which were in part the gift of science and should have added much to the heritage of society as a whole, have been used chiefly to satisfy the special and frequently the exclusive needs of comparatively few people. The result has been a forced growth of moral and social particularism. Those who reaped the benefit of technical progress were reluctant to consider its fruits as anything but their own property. Those who believed themselves dispossessed could see no way of socializing the surplus save by anti-social agitation and even violence. The technical experts to whom society owes so much have themselves yielded to an excessive specialization, and the eminent danger that these resources, if not better subordinated to social purposes, may contribute to the frustration rather than to the promotion of human progress.

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The new school will be founded in the faith that science can give back to mankind some of the security and integrity which its own capture by individual, national and class particularism has jeopardized. There is a huge volume of social aspiration and purpose in the world which is enfeebled in its expression chiefly because of the lack of an adequate technique. If it is to prevail, if even it is to survive, it must elaborately prepare a counter social offensive against the existing kingdoms of scientific particularism and class exclusiveness. It must study particular social processes and problems as exhaustively, as concretely and as practically as physical and biological processes have already been studied. It must contrive and use experimental methods just as they have ever been used in physical laboratories, and it must seek this increasing understanding of social processes for the sake of exercising an increasing control over their subsequent behavior. In this way only can humanism acquire the technique of social progress which it needs in order to make headway against the increasingly formidable organization of social particularism and reaction.

There is, of course, nothing very new and nothing very startling about the purpose of the proposed school. The idea of a social science which would be useful in supplying a technique of social progress is implicit in the humanism of the Renaissance. It became almost explicit in the French eighteenth century philosophers; it obtained a freakish and pedantic maturity in the work of Auguste Comte; and it has during the past two generations been elaborated, tested and analyzed by hundreds of thinkers in all modern nations. The new school would build on this broad foundation, but in so doing it would have an unpretentious but substantial advantage over its competitors. The work of forging an improved technique of social progress ought to be accelerated by bringing into existence a school which concentrates the whole intellectual energy of its staff upon the study and mastery of social processes. Its singleness of purpose would save it from merely duplicating the departments in our existing universities which are already studying the same subject matter. It would have an advantage over those departments similar to that which the Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques has over the Sorbonne. Because it was financially independent and was governed by its teaching staff, it could pursue its work without a fear of interference from those class and official interests whose social behavior it would necessarily investigate. Because it fastened all its attention and resources on a study of the subject matter of social progress, it could follow its work through in a way that, as we shall see presently, promises to accomplish results of greater practical importance.

Notwithstanding the many able and original
minds all over the world which have been adding to the fund of authentic social knowledge, the achievement has not as yet been commensurate with the effort. There are many reasons for this comparative failure, but probably the outstanding reason is the preconceptions which the pioneer students of the new science derived from the older sciences and from the traditions and interests of the existing social establishment. These preconceptions hampered the development of a method of inquiry appropriate to the subject matter of social processes and relations. The pioneer sociologists all attached excessive importance to certain general laws, which in their opinion provided the clue to social progress, and these laws did not take sufficient account either of the complexity of the actual processes or of the part which human will and intelligence played in modifying their course. The classical economists, Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, Benjamin Kidd, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, are all examples of students who attached too much importance to their own partial and tentative generalizations and who as a consequence falsified the technique of social progress. One of them would conceive it to depend upon the administrative nihilism and the abdication of the collective will; another on the triumph of instinct and emotion over reason; another on enlightened selfishness; another on a fatal revolutionary catastrophe, and still another, on the world domination by the long-headed blondes. Their inquiries added much to the understanding of social changes, but chiefly because they furnished subsequent inquirers with very complete explorations of the most tempting blind alleys, which ran across the highway of social progress. All of them were too arrogant, and their arrogance was born of the initial presumption of seeking a law of social change which would land the voyagers at a preconceived goal.

Contemporary social scientists are escaping from this arrogance. Many of them approach the subject matter of social change as something which is essentially fluid and which because it is both complex and fluid can best be understood by the human intelligence in proportion as it is modified by the human will. Thus a school of social science becomes above everything else an instrumentality both of social purpose and of social research. Its instructors would have much to teach, but they would have more to learn; and they would need to have placed at their disposal the leisure and the funds required for an unending series of investigations. They would be exploring a continent whose boundaries still remain to be discovered and which changes so rapidly that new charts are needed usually before the old ones are completed.

But the very elusiveness of the material and the difficulty of understanding its changes as we understand those of the physical world, instead of discouraging the attempt to obtain the knowledge, may well stimulate the great research. The function of social experiment is emphasized by the fact of social fluidity. The work of understanding social processes is entangled inextricably with the effort to modify them. Every addition to the technique of social progress will automatically produce an increasing fund of social knowledge and an increasing validity of social planning.

The most important agencies of social experimentation are, of course, the state and the immense number of voluntary associations which breed and flourish in the soil of every progressive society. A school of social science must deal with these essays chiefly by subjecting them to analysis and investigation, but there is a more limited field in which it can initiate and guide as well as investigate concrete experiments. The ordinary business of society is made up of a vast amount of private effort, whose success is impaired from the want of a sufficiently conscious social impulse and which blunders from lack of trustworthy information. No adequate educational agency has as yet been provided to graduate men and women who are trained specifically to engineer and to man these private social impulses. No sustained attention has been bestowed upon the discovery or the invention of a specific discipline which will equip students for such work. Schools of social science could and should fill this vacancy. They could and should equip their graduates for social research by training them to infuse social research and method into the existing fabric of social effort.

The performance of this task is the ultimate justification for an independent special school of social science. The departments in economics, politics and sociology in our existing universities have trained students for teaching those branches of knowledge, but they have not supplied any training which would qualify graduates successfully to infuse social purpose into the work of society. The economic departments have developed schools of business administration but in these schools the study of social questions raised by business activities has not been considered relevant to business success. The departments of political and social science have done little or nothing to train graduates in social or political administration. While in several large cities groups of public-spirited citizens have started schools of philanthropy, which are training that peculiarly American product "the social worker," these schools are the offspring of a charitable rather than a scientific impulse, and their training has been restricted within too narrow limits. Yet they are an innovation in the right direction. What
we need is schools of social science which are also training schools for social service, and which will gradually give to the work of social administration, engineering and research a professional standing similar to that now enjoyed by physicians and lawyers.

But the scope of the professional training which an adequately equipped school of social science should supply should go beyond that of any existing school of philanthropy. It would first of all need to train men and women who were capable of dealing practically with problems of labor adjustment. It is in this region that experiment, determined by a social purpose and corrected by disinterested scientific research, is most lacking and has services of unquestionable value to perform. The existing friction between the wage-earning and the employing classes can be ameliorated in many ways as a consequence of political and economic reforms, but the permanent success of political and fiscal measures, such as those proposed in any programme of reconstruction, depends finally on the working out of successful methods of cooperation between the managers of industry and the rank and file of the laborers. A serviceable technique of labor management forms an indispensable, perhaps the most indispensable part, of any technique of social progress. In order to be serviceable it must be based upon the reconciliation of a high standard of productivity with hours of labor, conditions of employment, rates of remuneration and an amount of industrial self-government which will be satisfactory to the workers. A school of social science should train graduates equipped to go into a manufacturing plant, analyze the failures and successes of its management in dealing with its employees and suggest methods of increasing labor efficiency which would operate, not in spite of the workers' indifference or hostility, but because of their understanding and consent. Manifestly such pupils could not be trained in a lecture room or library. They would need to study the actual operation of plants in which attempts had already been made to reconcile productive efficiency with a prosperous, willing and independent body of employees.

In addition to training labor administrators, the school would need also to discipline pupils for public administration and social management. The attempt to train public administrators and social workers would be less of an innovation than the attempt to train labor administrators, but for all that the task would not be any easier. There is a fundamental difficulty in equipping graduates for public or social administration which does not exist in the case of equipping them for labor administration. The labor administrator would carry on his work with the consent of the employers and employees in any particular plant. He could be fitted into existing business organizations. But the public or social administrators are experts who work either for charitable institutions or the state, and fall usually into a false relation with the people whom they are seeking to benefit. They are generally in the position of extending aid to comparatively needy and disfranchised people, who do not always understand what they are doing and who frequently resent the ensuing patronage. Philanthropy has increased its serviceability as the result of organization and research, but the more expert it becomes, the more it tends to patronize its beneficiaries. Although the success of modern social programmes is impossible without the aid of expert administrators, all expert administration still remains an artificial limb strapped on to the shrivelling extremities of American local democracy. American democratic tradition and organization is hostile to the expert, whether he be a state official or a social worker. He cannot flourish unless he can obtain from his less sophisticated fellow citizens more understanding for his work and sympathy with it. Any school which proposed to train social engineers and experts, whether for public or private employment, and failed to take into consideration the place provided for them by American democrats, would be ignoring an essential part of its work.

Schools of social research which are alive to their opportunities and responsibilities will study the local and industrial organization of the American democracy particularly in relation to the incorporation of the expert in its fabric. They should even go further than that. They should encourage and support experiments in democratic organization which seek to create units in American social and economic life better adapted than those which now exist to the functioning of the expert in a favorable popular environment. The success or failure of the whole plan would depend upon breaking down the class suspicion with which the plain American people regard the expert and in turning out experts who would not justify such suspicions. The job cannot be accomplished merely by multiplying their number and in trying to persuade people of their value. It is a problem of experimental organization. Our American social and political units were created when the specialist expert was unimportant. Conditions have made him not only important but indispensable. Yet our social and political units still omit to recognize his positive political functions and in order to operate he has to be imposed upon the people by state orders or philanthropic pressure. If, consequently, the American nation is to
allow its social fabric to be permeated with social purposes, it must reorganize its business, political and social units to the end that the divorce between the plain people and the experts who are capable of working out in detail better methods of social progress will be brought to an end.

Finally, there is still another specific social service which a school of social research could assist its graduates to perform. It could equip them to become effective disseminators of ideas. If it should neglect this specific task the vitality of every other aspect of its work would be very much impaired. The school is born in general of the conception of a modern nation as a political group which proposes candidly and thoroughly to learn the lessons of its own experience and which gains experience by testing its ideals in practice. If such a nation is to learn the lessons of its experience it must not only have faith in ideas and in people who live for ideas, but it must pay far more attention to the way in which ideas are and should be propagated. Manifestly the investigation of this phase of social activity is central in the work of any school of social research. It would need to undertake an intensive study of the psychology of opinion and conviction, of the existing methods of spreading opinions and of the way in which those methods should be changed in order to safeguard and to promote vitality of public opinion. It needs to graduate men and women who are trained to penetrate the minds and the hearts of people with ideas, and who in doing so could inculcate conviction without dogmatism and toleration without infirmity of purpose. Their business would be not only to communicate warmth of social impulse and the fruits of social experimentation to the mass of their fellow-citizens, but to carry on a warfare against the enemies of ideas. They would have to contend good-humoredly but ruthlessly both against those propagandists who were trying to reproduce in other people's minds an impregnable protection against the intrusion of ideas and those even more insidious enemies of vitality in public opinion who propose to "sell" ideas to the American people by methods which are enjoying an evanescent success in the case of breakfast foods.

In the foregoing account of a possible school of social research I have emphasized the practical aspects of the school's work. I have suggested certain ways in which its graduates could be trained for specific and important social jobs, and which are either ignored or insufficiently emphasized by existing universities. If practical disciplines of this kind could not be furnished, the school would not in my opinion be worth starting, but, important as it would be to extract from social aspira-