

# Does a University Career Offer "No Future"?

## Failure to Pay Professors Decent Salaries Presents Grave Problem—

### World of Business Is Drawing Them Away

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IT is an accepted generalization, proved by the facts of economic history, that a period of general advance in the price level tends to the advantage of those who make or sell goods and to the disadvantage of those who sell their services.

Since the middle of the last decade of the nineteenth century one of these secular changes of price level has been in progress—a steady upward movement, rapidly intensified during the war. As usual, salaries and wages have lagged behind; but partly because of the operation of the "supply-and-demand" factor, and partly because of concerted action by many industrial groups among the wage earners, the lag in wages is less pronounced than that in salaries. Of the salaried workers the two chief groups of clerical workers and teachers are the hardest hit and are facing a real crisis.

The position of college teachers in this crisis is no worse than that of many others of the salaried workers, but because of the importance of the higher schools of learning in our national life, their case calls for special consideration. Looking at the plight of our university and college teachers from this national viewpoint, we must admit that they might well claim something more than an increase in salary which barely makes good the rise in the cost of living. They might point to the new functions which during the last generation have been taken over by the leaders in our educational system. They are now expected not only to transmit the store of usable knowledge, but to add to it by research on all sides; they are looked to increasingly for the training of teachers and administrators for the lower schools, thus bringing the university in closer touch with the great masses of the population; they are under constant pressure to meet the new needs of an industrial society by new, specialized instruction; they are called upon to respond intelligently to the demand for constant improvement in methods and results.

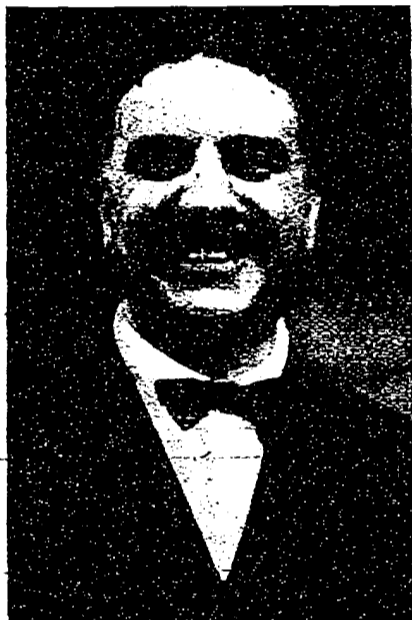
And yet while striving to meet these great expectations the men who carry such heavy responsibilities are relatively sinking in the salary scale. As compared with the rewards paid to exceptional training and intelligence in the business world, even a restoration of the professor's earning power of twenty years ago still leaves him lower than his classmates in business. And in our industrial society it is the business men who more and more set the scale of social values. The professor is warranted in asking, "Is my work less valuable to society than it was a generation ago?"

The modern business man, realizing more fully than ever before the growing dependence of his great enterprises upon scientific research, systematic organization, and keen intelligence, knows well the answer to that question. By his very complaints of the shortcomings of the colleges he acknowledges that the professor's work is more valuable actually and immensely more valuable potentially than at any former time. He wants, as he tells us, to find "topnotchers" for his business, and he knows that it takes big men to train big men. Every year he turns more confidently to the colleges for promising recruits and for "experts." If this fruitful relationship is to continue the teacher's needs must be met.

President Lowell states the modest case of the college teachers: "Professors in universities," he says, "do not de-

mand or expect salaries on the scale of those earned in business or among the successful members of the great active professions. They would be satisfied with salaries that enabled them to live with reasonable comfort in the comparatively modest scale of life which their position calls for, and to give to their children as good an education as they received themselves. They also want to provide for their old age."

No considerable amount of proof is necessary to show that this not unreasonable standard existing before the war cannot in most colleges be met today. President Lowell says that "the salaries of professors at Harvard are not large enough to enable them to live in this way." What is true of Harvard is still more true of the large number of in-



Professor Edwin F. Gay, Who, After Jan. 1, Will Forsake Educational Pursuits to Manage The New York Evening Post.

stitutions with a somewhat lower salary scale. From one of the greatest of our Western State universities come figures and facts which illustrate the statement. At this institution careful budgets have been recently collected from twenty-six full professors, fifteen associate professors and twenty-one assistant professors, which show an average annual deficit for the three groups of \$646, \$723, and \$826, respectively.

The average salary in 1918 of these sixty-two men of professorial rank was \$2,438 and their average expenses were \$3,191, leaving a deficit of \$753. A study of the budgets by size of family indicates clearly the advantage of celibacy, since an average married couple, even without children, incurs an annual deficit of \$221, while with two children the deficit is \$792, and with three children runs to \$923.

From the confidential report accompanying these figures the following comment should be read:

Only a detailed study of the budgets can make apparent the lowered standards of living, as compared with life here ten years ago. Families which formerly could employ domestic help have been compelled to give up that item of expense. Many of the men reporting have noted that the items for clothing have been reduced to a minimum during the war period. Again and again in these budgets one can note that the items for books, for vacations, for theatre and music, and for travel are extremely low. Of the sixty-two professors reporting, only six have automobiles, and some of these are explained by residence, location, or professional use; this is not included as an item of expense in any budget. Four men of professorial rank report absolutely no insurance and no savings. One professor remarks that "practically all recreation that involves expense has been

given up," and this condition is apparent in many of the budgets.

The representation of the university at meetings of learned or scientific societies has materially fallen off because of the expense involved. The effect upon research work in the university is serious, and the standing of the university in scientific work is falling.

The study of the budgets can only hint at the sacrifices and economies which have become necessary in professorial families. The burden of the solution of the problem falls inevitably upon the wife. The social life of the university suffers; students under the circumstances can see little of the professors in their homes.

In view of the above it is apparent that the actual deficits as reported by the university professors represent only one phase of the acute situation which now faces the university staff. The lowered standards of living which accompany these deficits are of serious import for the educational interests of the State.

The Faculty Committee, headed by a well-known economist, in drawing up its report, calls attention to its earnest effort to avoid exaggeration. We may safely regard the case it presents as typical. Its work contributed to an increase of 25 per cent. for professors and 30 per cent. for the instructing force below that rank, to be effective for the academic year 1919-20. President Lowell likewise advocates an increase of only 25 per cent., while college teachers face account books which show scarcely an item which has increased less than 50 per cent., and many over 100 per cent.

But this is not a statistical article, and it is not particularly to the point to demonstrate, as can readily be done, that many artisans are earning more than the average assistant professor, and that the more skilled groups of wage earners are rapidly climbing to equal salary rank with the full professor. Nor is it needful to dwell on the precise figures of the rise in cost of living. These vary somewhat with locality, but no statistical phenomenon of our time is more painfully obvious to all of us to whom the cost of living is a matter of concern. Serious as is his present situation to the college teacher, it is not so serious as the future situation of the American college, with all that this implies to our national civilization.

The present generation of college teachers will manage somehow. Salary increases of 25 per cent., combined with a radically reduced standard of living, will permit their continued individual existence. It was not an easy life before; it must become still more frugal.

The really urgent problem is that of the next generation of college teachers. Two generations ago the choice of professions open to a college graduate was limited and the narrow curriculum made easy the entrance to college teaching. Now the whole world of business has been opened and college graduates find ready acceptance, while college teaching calls for prolonged, intense, and specialized preparation. There are no splendid material prizes at the top of the teacher's profession, but they have not been needed, for even if scholarship were not its own reward, there still remained a pleasant social estimation of the university career. "High thinking and low living" may have been the teacher's traditional habit, but when the living falls too low, even the high thinking youngster must look elsewhere for the exercise of his talent.

The registrar of one of the chief Eastern colleges sums up tersely this aspect of the problem. "I can only say," he writes, "that the situation here is serious, so serious that a good many men are going from the Faculties into other lines of work. Practically no men among the undergraduates will even consider-teaching as a profession."

The exodus of the college professors,

noted by this college official, is one of the interesting and significant consequences of the war. College salaries are not, of course, the only reason for their leaving academic work. The varied opportunities of war work brought new contacts and new vistas of possibilities, developed unsuspected executive capabilities, released new energies. Some of those who are changing their vocation may later return to their first choice; some would change even though the financial prospects were equal. But in most cases the question of salary or salary prospect undeniably played a considerable part. Those who come back to the colleges return enriched by their war experience, but the colleges are certainly poorer by the loss of the many leaving.

Any one who had some acquaintance with Washington at the close of the war can confirm this statement as to the unsettling effect of the war on college teachers. He will count up his friends who have gone into business or remained in Government work and note their success. One has gone into a rubber concern at double his college salary, another to a steel export house at a similar increase, another to a manufacturers' association, another to an important labor position. An oil expert, formerly an assistant professor at \$2,200, is now making seven or eight fold this income as a consulting engineer. A professor of economics from an Eastern college goes to Spain for the Department of Commerce; another economist, this time from the West, remains with the State Department; still others with the Shipping Board. One hears that five out of seven teachers of physics in a leading Western university went away for war work; not one is returning to university employment.

The significance of this change lies in the quality of the men who are now withdrawing from academic service. They do not belong to that small class of pure scholars, but to that far greater number of average able men who do most of the useful work of the world. They are men who possess each a variety of aptitudes, who can act on occasion as well as meditate. Research and teaching had appealed to them, but in devoting themselves to this work they had sacrificed some of the joys of action. Now the opportunity for executive responsibility appeals to them with redoubled force, because the scholar's life seems to have become, in its material conditions for themselves and their families, too cramped and penurious.

The war, however, has only accentuated and opened the opportunity for a shift which was already noticeable before the war. Young college graduates of energy and talent who normally, twenty or thirty years back, would have thought of entering upon university work, now just as normally think of business careers. What college teachers of experience have not known repeatedly of bright youngsters, proficient in their undergraduate work, who could not be induced seriously to consider preparation for the scholar's and teacher's career, or who have so considered it and reluctantly turned from it because "it has no future"?

This is the vital problem in the present situation of the colleges. It is obvious that our universities have performed and are performing an indispensable function in our national life. It is not so obvious to the general public that this great service cannot be rendered as it should be rendered in time to come, if the university career "has no future." American college education has many advances still to be made, but one thing is fundamental to its progress: Its teachers must be decently paid.