

A Faustian Pact?

American Higher Education 1945-1970:

A Personal Report, by Nathan M. Pusey,
Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978. 204 pp. \$10.00.

DR. NATHAN PUSEY was president of Lawrence College from 1944 to 1953, and of Harvard University from 1953 to 1971. Subsequently, until 1975, he was president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. With the perspective of a long and distinguished career of academic leadership, Dr. Pusey has written an account of what he considers the more important developments in higher education in a period of phenomenal change. He argues that the time from the end of World War II to about 1970 "constituted a definable and notable period in the history of higher education," and one which "has claims to be considered the most creative yet experienced in the on-going development of higher education in the United States." It

opened at a time of general euphoria and hopefulness and came to an end with the institutions "facing a sharp decline in public favor, the prospect of shrinking enrollments, an impending end to growth, intensified financial difficulties, and increasing government regulations."

Although the book emphasizes the positive achievements of the period, it includes a chapter on two damaging conflicts which were "roadblocks" in a time of general advancement. The first was the anti-intellectualism, hostile to all professors and threatening to academic freedom, which arose with anti-Communist fears in an early period of the Cold War. The author describes the unfair and inflammatory attacks and the courageous resistance made by the more responsible academic leaders, rejecting the simplifications of extremists on both sides who thought there was "a single, correct way of dealing with all the cases that arose." The other conflict, stimulated by anti-Vietnam emotions, came in the late 1960's with radical anti-Establishment violence led by student militants and joined by many faculty. Pusey expresses strong distaste for "this new breed of scoundrels" whose activism was seriously divisive and fraught with unfortunate consequences from which higher education has not recovered. "If the McCarthy era was a 'scoundrel time,' so was this; and its saddest feature was that in this instance the attacks on the colleges and universities were contrived and mounted very largely by their own people." Unhappily, "members of faculties often seemed less mature than the majority of students in their readiness to accept contrived student protests at face value and to encourage misdirected demonstrations." These disorders brought normal academic life "almost to a standstill" for a few years and have much of the responsibility for bringing a creative period in higher education to "a confused and dispiriting close."

The most dramatic part of this history, however, is not the story of the conflicts but the facts given in two closely-related chapters on finance and on graduate education and research capability. Here the cool language of statistics, even allowing for population growth and inflation, reveals the dimensions of a

phenomenal change. Graduate study began in this country about one hundred years ago and advanced in the late nineteenth century, but its explosive expansion came in this century: in 1900 there were about 6,000 graduate students and 250 doctorates conferred; by 1940 there were 100,000 students and 3,000 doctorates; in 1970, 800,000 students and 30,000 doctorates. Many forces prompted this growth, but Pusey stresses the impact of a new concept of the role of the universities in research and in relation to the federal government that emerged in the Second World War. In 1940 there was only \$74 million of federal money for support of research and development, chiefly carried on in government laboratories. Suddenly, during the war years, the figure rose to \$1.5 billion, and there was a revolutionary shift to the support of research through contractual arrangements with universities and scientific institutes. Prior to 1940 all the colleges and universities never had more than \$27 million a year for the support of research, with virtually all coming from private sources. By the mid-1960's institutions of higher education had more than \$1.8 billion for research, chiefly in the physical and biological sciences—and \$1.5 billion of this was from agencies of the federal government.

The spectacular developments in research and related graduate studies, along with a vast expansion of undergraduate enrollments, brought a formidable increase in the total costs of higher education. In 1940 the expense of operating all the colleges and universities had been \$600 million; by 1970 it was \$24 billion, \$4 billion of it annually from some forty agencies of the federal government. Federal funds, heavily committed to the sciences, brought changes in emphases and priorities, especially in the most research-oriented universities. Before World War II "scientists had not replaced humanists as the most prominent and most honored members of university faculties." But the humanities and other disciplines had a share in the increased enrollments and improved faculty salaries, and Pusey remarks, perhaps wryly, that it was "to the delight of the humanists" that NDEA funds became available for modern foreign languages as well as for

science and mathematics. Faced with enormous costs and increased demands for their services, many institutions became excessively dependent on federal funds, and by the end of the period were concerned "not so much because the federal agencies might interfere with their freedom of action, as because the support . . . was not keeping pace with rising costs and inflation."

The chapters have told of growth and achievements "to be remembered happily and gratefully, perhaps even to be celebrated." But the author concedes that "not all was gain," and that "there were and are legitimate grounds for entertaining reservations." The emphasis on advanced research "tended to lessen faculty concern for undergraduate education in universities." The uneven distribution of funds brought distorting outside pressures on the curriculum and led to heightened personal and departmental rivalries in the academic community.

Although the author closes his survey with 1970, he observes that additional "worrisome elements" were becoming visible by that time. An over-expansion in graduate schools had created for many young people expectations that could not be fulfilled. A direct result of the student militance of the late 1960's was the relaxation or even elimination of requirements for degrees and their replacement by "individually initiated programs of study bereft of any organizing principle." Moreover, there was increasing evidence that a price had to be paid for federal support. In the late 1960's all institutions receiving federal aid were required to develop programs of affirmative action; and though "the quarrel was with the means rather than the ends," the institutions increasingly resented the enormous and expensive burden of paper work and the "mounting evidence that the educational institutions, even the so-called 'private' ones, were losing the privilege of controlling their own affairs."

A final chapter reviews conflicting ideas on the aims of higher educations, especially on the extent to which colleges and universities should be direct agents of social change. The author admits that no definition of aims will be universally accepted, and that higher educa-

tion "inevitably and quite properly, came to serve a variety of purposes." In a final personal statement, however, he aligns himself with the conservative view that although colleges and universities have always had and met a responsibility to serve the practical needs of society, their people "need to preserve a degree of detachment from the world of practice." He takes his stand with those "devoted to the humanities" who insist that literary and historical studies ought to have a significant place for all students in higher education.

This book has described a period of extraordinary expansion and prosperity in higher education and one whose achievements, especially in the sciences, must be a matter of pride and satisfaction. Nevertheless, the reader who shares the author's concern for the humanities and for the independence and detachment of the academic enterprise is left with troubling questions. In the light of the observation that "there are reasons why academics, intent on their own intellectual aims, should share the conservative distrust of big government," perhaps it may be asked whether at least part of this story is that higher education has made a Faustian pact and must look to repayment.

Reviewed by CHARLES D. MURPHY

The Alchemy of Art

Person, Place, and Thing in Henry

James's Novels, by Charles R. Anderson,
*Durham, North Carolina: Duke University
Press, 1977. 308 pp. \$12.75.*

PROFESSOR ANDERSON quotes from James' 1875 essay on Balzac, concerning the French novelist's "mighty passion for things . . . [his] overmastering sense of the present world [which] gave him . . . his background, his *mise-en-scène*." From Balzac, according to Anderson, James got his first suggestion of a