THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE POST-WAR WORLD

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It is a great honor to have the privilege of giving the Franklin Medal lecture. The subject I have chosen is highly academic, but for this I offer no apologies to a distinguished audience. The matters which I shall treat are primarily of concern to scholars, yet, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, their implications affect the lives of all the citizens of this republic. And conversely, the attitudes and actions of the lay public will determine to no small degree the future of the world of scholarship. In short, my remarks to-night are in the nature of a footnote—an American footnote—to a discussion of the problem of the relation of society to scholarship, or, if you will, of the scholar to the nation.


It is clearly impossible to discuss the advancement of learning in the United States without making some assumption as to what these United States will be like in the next two decades. For example, if by some miracle Hitler should succeed in forcing a stalemate, the omens would not be auspicious for the advancement of learning or for many other human activities—quite the contrary. We should be living in an armed camp, the authority of the Federal Government would be paramount and the national policy would be largely determined by military necessity. Except in certain specialized fields, knowledge would not advance. Similarly, if a period of social crisis were to be followed by a highly regimented society, the advancement of learning would soon fail to prosper. Under such conditions, whether the strong arm of govern-