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THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE IN POSTWAR EDUCATION¹

By Professor HENRY E. SIGERIST

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

THERE can be no doubt that the history of science as a subject of instruction has been greatly neglected in the past and is still very much neglected to-day. Few of our great universities offer any courses at all, and among them only a very few offer adequate instruction.

There was a time, not so long ago, when studies in the history of science were considered an unnecessary luxury, a hobby for retired scientists. Science was progressing rapidly, was becoming increasingly complicated and specialized, and everybody was looking ahead into the future. It seemed useless to look into the past and seemed wasteful to burden the students with historical considerations.

The attitude toward the history of science is changing rapidly, for reasons that we shall discuss in a

¹ Address of the retiring vice-president of Section L, American Association for the Advancement of Science, presented at the meeting in Cleveland on September 12, 1944.

moment. Leading scientists, historians and educators, presidents of great universities have come out openly in favor of instruction in the history of science and have repeatedly emphasized the great educational value of such studies.

They talked, beautifully, but as a rule did not act. When you have a chance to discuss these matters with such an educator and you ask him quite candidly why he does not provide, in his school, instruction in a field that he considers so important, you invariably hear the same answers. One is that funds were not available. Yet funds were available for many other purposes, and wherever there is a sound constructive program and the determination to carry it out, funds usually come forth.

Another and more serious answer is that the school intended to provide instruction in the history of science but could not find the right man to teach the subject. And in such a case the educator will usually

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