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MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY

by Ortega y Gasset,

translated by Howard Lee Nostrand.

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This denunciation of a civilisation shattered by over-specialisation and professionalisation must have sounded new and striking when the Spanish original of this book appeared in 1930. But alas since then our trouble. have turned out to be far more radical than Ortega y Gasset had thought. His book relies implicitly on the continuity of our European heritage. The universities are strongly exhorted to "impart culture" to the masses, without the slightest doubt being felt about their authority for doing so. In spite of a occasional expressions of pessimism his age still felt certain of salvation by continued scientific enlightenment. 'He who lives at a lower level, on archaic ideas (we read) "condemns himself to a lower life, more difficult, toilsome, unrefined.'" So may many of us have thought at the time when Mr. Wells' star was yet undimmed and those thoroughly modern men, Mussolini, Goebbels and the rest of them, had not yet shown all their teeth. We also felt sure enough that 'the one thing that is requisite for any being - individual or collective - is to live to the full its powers ... " But the uprising of the 'armed bohemians' (to borrow Heiden's excellent expression from his book "Der Fuhrer") has since badly shaken this assurance. No, the thunder of Ortega y Gasset's voice does not carry into our times. The author of "The Revolt of the Masses' deserves to be carefully studied as an historical figure. But we whose eyes have seen Europe upturned by the root can find little guidance in a spirit essentially limited by the complacencies of the yet comparatively safe and solid period of the nineteen-twenties.

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