

The following text is a transcript of Professor Dame Nancy Rothwell's reading at the University of Manchester's WWI Centenary Event, 25 November 2014.

Reading by the President & Vice-Chancellor

One hundred years ago, my predecessor was the well-known professor of botany, Frederick Ernest Weiss. Born in Huddersfield, he was the son of a German father and English mother. At the beginning of the new academic year of 1914, he had the difficult task of writing to returning students about the war that had engulfed the country during the summer vacation and the challenges to come. My reading is an excerpt from the article that he wrote for "The Manchester University Magazine", a regular publication for staff and students. His article was entitled "The new session" and was published on October 21st, 1914.

We are reassembling under very exceptional and totally unexpected circumstances. Like a dark cloud the consciousness of the great war, in which we are engaged, hangs over us, and we shall sorely miss the companionship of many students and some members of the Staff, who are serving their country at the front, or preparing themselves in various camps to step into the fighting line. All of these have our sincerest wishes for their welfare and for their safe return. The thought of their self-sacrifice and their devotion to duty will be with us throughout the session.

Let us hope that the constant realisation of the services, which our comrades are rendering to their country, will be an incentive to those who have remained at home to devote themselves equally whole-heartedly to fill, or prepare themselves to fill, the various posts of civil life. How comfortable, after all, will be the lot of most of us during the coming winter, compared with the hardships of those who are fighting in the trenches or under-going the rigorous discipline of camp life. To these the terrible war in which we are plunged has given an opportunity of displaying bravery and devotion to their country, but let it not be thought that no such opportunities are offered to the non-combatants. To each of us, in varying degree, there will come occasions for showing high endeavour in our academic



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work, and generous service in our civic life. May we be found prepared and eager for both.

With regard to the students who have responded to Lord Kitchener's appeal, the University is proposing to make such arrangements as will prevent, as far as possible, any student from being placed at a disadvantage by reason of them being absent from the University on active service, or for military training. The University is anxious to make everything as easy as possible for any student who, in this great crisis, feels he can and ought to enter upon military duties.

Those students who, from conscientious motives or for other reasons, are unable to take part in military training will find a wide field of activities in connection with the war, and without in any way interfering with their academic work, will be able to render valuable service in various forms of relief work, in making provision for the comfort of our troops, and for that of the wounded or the refugees. The appeal for workers in this field comes to both men and women alike. Let every student respond promptly to whatever he or she feels to be the call of duty.

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