

An address to the Johannesburg Council for Adult Education.

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by

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Monday, 20th June, 1955.

Many schemes have in recent years been put forward for the building of a better world. We have had housing schemes, employment schemes, re-habilitation schemes, training schemes, financial schemes, all designed to meet the needs of the immediate situation; to provide security against pressing economic dangers; to ward off threatening depressions and world upheavals. They were all short-term plans. In the main they were evolved with much care, conscientious thought and honesty of purpose; but, with respect to the rather more distant future, they closed their eyes and hoped for the best - very much like our tail-end batsmen against Tyson. They were concerned with the problems that still confront us now, not only as a result of two deplorable world wars, but largely also as a legacy of a lamentable lack of courage and vision in the field of domestic affairs and international politics.

I am no politician; I should not like even to be mistaken for a politician; I cannot presume to analyse political plans for world reconstruction. International policies are very much in the melting pot at the moment and it will no doubt be some considerable time before they simmer down to a consistency that will be conducive to some kind of world stability. I am sure you feel, as I do, that there should be some conscious long-term planning for a better world: a 25-year or a 50-year plan, say, to give mankind as a whole a chance to evolve a system of security, not so much against present common fears as against mistrust, hatred, jealousy, ignorance, misunderstanding and the hundred-and-one other lamentable things that lead to unhappiness and misery.

Do we take the defeatist view and subscribe to the thesis that the old world order must go on; that wars are inevitable; that men and women and children are doomed forever to be the hapless victims of greed, aggression and intrigue? Surely we do. We realise that the world is becoming smaller every hour; that very soon every man will be our neighbour; that now more than ever the truth of the old saying is evident that "All the world's a stage"; that we are all actors in the same play in the same theatre; that when the curtain finally rings down it will ring down on the lot of us.

We are all actors. What training have we had for our several parts? What sort of training is being provided for the actors of the future? I do not know that anything very com-

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commendable has as yet been done on any significant scale in the fields of Economics, Sociology, Politics or other essential departments of human activity; but this I do believe: that whatever is to be done will be done better if Education is to play its proper part in world reconstruction. We shall feel more confident of the future if our economists, sociologists and politicians, besides possessing expert knowledge in their own special fields, were to be richly endowed with the qualities that derive from true education, the education that the ancient Greeks regarded as the hall-mark of good citizenship.

There are three main aspects of education - the liberal, the vocational, and the moral. The distinction between them is not always very clearly understood, nor is it very clearly defined. The study of any particular subject could resolve itself into any one of the three.

Take the study of the Classics, for example, which is regarded in many quarters as a purely academic university subject. If you take up the Classics for the purely academic purpose of attaining that degree of scholarship which will enable you to read the old writers in the original, and to sprinkle your conversation with quotations from the Latin and the Greek masters, your education may be regarded as being "liberal", albeit somewhat pedantic. If your interest in the Classics is directed towards becoming a good scholar with a view to commanding a remunerative post in an academic institution, or to use your knowledge of Latin for a career in Law, or of Greek to enter the Church, your education is undoubtedly "vocational". And if you study the Classics so as to be able to imbibe at their source the moral philosophies of the old teachers with a view to using your knowledge to improve the lot of your fellowmen, your education is a "moral" one. I have no doubt that all three aspects of education have a lot to contribute towards the making of a better world.

The idea of a "liberal" education comes from the good old days when the Greek School of philosophical thoughts was at its zenith. The Greeks held that a free man should be more than a breadwinner - (how many men are perfectly satisfied to be just that - and not even very good ones either!) - that he should possess something more than the expert knowledge of the subject on which his livelihood depends. They regarded the full man as being made up of the trinity of body, mind, and character; and a man's task - besides the making of a living - the achievement of as great a measure of excellence in body, mind and character as possible. A liberal education, a "free man's education", was to help him to achieve this. The poor slave did not count for much; beyond the performance of his menial duties very little was expected of him.

A liberal education today might be described as scholarship for the sake of scholarship, but with the Greeks it was something more: in providing for the development of character it included much of what we call moral education as well. The Greeks did not encourage liberal education for the sake of material gain, but because they realised that a sound body, mind and character were good things in themselves, and essential to the existence of a good State. This was a highly commendable point of view, and it will be one of our tasks to see how our educational system can be amended to lead us back to these fundamentals. Our homes of liberal education, the Universities, seem to have drifted away from these old standards in the stress of our competitive, work-a-day world and

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apply themselves, in the main, to the training of men for a livelihood, to vocational education, to the turning out of doctors and lawyers as doctors and lawyers rather than primarily as good citizens.

Vocational education is just what it says: if you study medicine to be a doctor, carpentry to be a cabinetmaker, domestic science to be a dietitian, law to be an attorney, shorthand and typewriting to be a secretary, your education is purely vocational. Many people speak of vocational education as being the more purely technical or practical kind of education. Which it is, in a sense, because the matter of earning one's living is a very practical business. But we must not confuse technical education with manual training, although it does involve quite a lot of training of that nature. A good shorthand-typist is "worth her weight in gold" not altogether because of the dexterity she has acquired in the use of the keyboard, pad and pencil: the academic background provided by the study of languages, secretarial etiquette and commercial practice is a very considerable factor in her make-up. Contrary to popular belief, grammar is a pearl of greater price than glamour. By the same token, a good professor of Classics would be all the better as a man for a spell in a workshop where he can roll up his shirt sleeves, hit his thumb with a hammer, and generally get to see how things are done. Of too few men do we hear it said, "you know, he is so handy about the house."

Cultural education. This can be regarded as being synonymous with "moral education" if we are prepared to give culture its age-old connotation of all that is splendid, exalting, and dignified. Moral education, cultural education, is a handmaiden of both vocational and liberal education. Every department of educational activity, academic or technical, every subject whether theoretical or practical, can contribute its goodly quota to the making of a better citizen which is the true end of all education. Plato called education "the training to goodness from youth"; and no matter how we attain it, it is that urge to be first rate in everything, be it clarity of thought, honesty of purpose or quality of effort. The whole world needs more of this urge - lots more. There seems to be so little of it. Is our educational system to blame for this pathetic state of affairs? What can Education do to put its house in order so that it might contribute its maximum towards world reconstruction?

Let us look at our educational system as it exists today. We have our primary (or elementary) schools, then our secondary (or high) schools - academic and technical - and finally our Technical Colleges and Universities. It must not be imagined for a moment that any great proportion of the country's citizens enjoy a University education. As a matter of fact a very small percentage of school children get as far as the University. A few figures in this connection will be alarmingly instructive. Recent records show that out of every 100 pupils in Standard VI in the Transvaal, some 80 go on to Standard VII, 50 to Standard VIII, 27 to Standard IX and 21 to Standard X. On an average about 16 pass the Matriculation Examination, and of these 16 not more than 10 go to the University. Among the 20 fellows who leave at the end of Standard VI are usually to be found our commercial princes, financial barons and future millionaires; but let us consider their less fortunate schoolfellows as a group - a group, moreover, whose systematic education on the average stops at the age of 17.

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How much real education has anyone at the age of 17? How competent, how confident, how educated would you feel to-day had your schooling stopped at 17? We know that with "sweet seventeen" is associated a feminine achievement of a negative nature, but we still have to learn that it marks an age of positive educational merit. The High School pupil is taught quite an imposing array of subjects. The elements of Mathematics, the natural sciences, languages, literature and history. Some of these he finds easy to assimilate. Mathematics is reduced for him to almost a set of rules; Physics, Chemistry, Botany, Biology and Geography need very little more than ordinary powers of observation and a good memory; languages fall naturally into what might be regarded as the "predigested" category of subjects - but with literature and history it is different. Schoolchildren may appreciate the lighter side of literature, the more obvious characters, the simpler situations; but what do they know of life to lead them to a true evaluation of human emotions as portrayed by our classical authors or as reflected in the dramatic episodes of History? They could appreciate the beauty of words in poetry, much in the same way as many of them excel in music. You find child-prodigies in Music as you do in Mathematics. Children have been known to perform the most remarkable arithmetical feats at a very early age; the kind of miracles we have learned to associate only with reckoning-machines. Perhaps the mechanical nature of arithmetical computation explains these phenomena. Mozart is reputed to have composed a complete concerto at the age of 5, and Schubert in his 18th year reeled off two symphonies, five operas and 137 songs. But I doubt whether any child-prodigy ever came to light to produce any work of the slightest philosophical importance or of any literary merit. That seems to establish the point I wish to make. Philosophy, politics (in the good sense), literature, history, economics deal with the conduct and the content of the life of human beings, and schoolchildren have seen very little of either life or men.

I do not wish to suggest that literature and history should be debarred from the schools. On the contrary, I feel that, if appropriately taught, they are essential as an introduction to an understanding of human emotions and human relationships. They will provide the children (if I may put it that way) with the rules of the game - the game of life that they will presently be called upon to play, or even to referee. The pity is that so few enjoy the privilege of the opportunity of even getting to know the rules and that the fewer still who do get to know them have to take the field without any idea of teamwork or social co-operation. Our School-leaver at Standard X may possess a remarkable store of knowledge and useful information. I must confess that it takes a considerable amount of original research to maintain a dignified measure of parental prestige when dealing with problems of all kinds which our children bring home from school. But knowledge and information do not constitute education. Sir Richard Livingstone has said that "school education is not the amount of knowledge a child takes from school but his appetite to know and his capacity to learn; if a school is unable to teach children to wish to read for themselves it will be unable to teach them anything else of value."

This is another way of saying that we wish our schools to develop initiative in children and to encourage a healthy use of the imagination. No doubt many of our schools set out

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with these ideals in view, but one realises what an uphill fight they have when it is remembered that only some 27% of our schoolchildren go beyond Standard VIII.

Now what of our University products? For the last few years enrolment figures have shown that by far the biggest University Faculties are those of Medicine and Engineering. I should not like to go so far as to say that the medico the Universities are turning out today is an ill-informed man, unable to arrive at a proper appraisal of world affairs, or incapable of contributing something of value towards the correction of the world's complaints. But look at his University background; he is overwhelmed right from the start in a maelstrom of merciless competition; his very existence reflects the truth of the phrase which in fact is anathema to his calling - "the survival of the fittest"; he lives in an atmosphere of microbes, formalin and guinea-pigs, of which in later years an undue emphasis on the guinea tends to remain uppermost. If in spite of all these handicaps he becomes a thinker or a philosopher by the time he obtains his medical degree we must admit that he is an exceptional man. How unlike the old family doctor whose professional qualifications very often were not half as urgently required as his ability to give advice on all matters ranging from boundary disputes to foreign markets. To get back to this Utopian state of affairs it might be necessary to require all intending doctors to obtain a degree in Arts or Pure Science before they touch anything that has to do with Medicine. Either that, or they must be adequately equipped for the big wide world after they have left their medical studies behind them.

With our Engineers the situation is not much more encouraging. Instead of the biological sciences we have here the mathematical sciences; - and those parts of the mathematical sciences which reveal mathematics in its purely utilitarian, or material, or trivial aspect: which is mathematics at its worst. Which isn't bad, mind you, when you recollect that your homes, your railways, your steel-works, your wireless sets, your income-tax assessments are all products, one way or another, of trivial mathematics. But of the creative, inspiring part of mathematics, its philosophy, its romance, the engineering curriculum contains not a jot.

I can remember the fight which was put up for the retention of a purely cultural subject in all degree courses when medical faculties were still young in this country. But it was a losing fight against the forces of materialism, and materialism has long since won. And so today we find a deplorably small portion of University activity devoted to cultural studies, to the "humanities", to the study of great legal, constitutional, social or political concepts; and I fear the world is going to suffer unless something is done to restore the balance. As we noted at the beginning, the Universities have gone "vocational" and have neglected their true calling. But who shall blame them when the overwhelming impression one gets of the world today is one mad scramble for existence?

The schools and the Universities have become set in their respective ways, but I trust it is not too much to expect that they will put their respective houses in order so that the obvious defects in the systems which they have evolved might be remedied. It is altogether obvious that our school-leavers and our University graduates are no fit persons at present to undertake the salvation of a sorry world; so something will have to be done. What can we do in the field of Education to set the matter right? To my mind there is only one solution to the problem, and that is to supplement our present/.....

system with an educational plan in which the avowed object will be to provide opportunities for everyone in the study of economics, history, politics, literature, philosophy, law, human relationships and world affairs.

The question immediately arises as to when and how such a scheme is going to be fitted in. As we wish the "rules of the game" to be learnt at school, it should come after school education. As University graduates stand in as great a need of it as most, it should come for them at a time when their university education has been completed. So, to give all a chance, preferably after they have had some experience of life, it will have to be a scheme of Adult Education. Yes, we shall have to educate adults; the lads who left school at 13 become apprentices; the girls who took up commercial careers; those who have since become mothers and fathers; bank officials; shop-assistants; university graduates; professors; retired army men; civil servants; Provincial Councillors; Members of Parliament; a scheme to keep them all learning all the time.

There is nothing new in this. Plato taught that education to full citizenship for those who kept on learning was only complete at the age of 50; and the ancient Greeks, we must not forget, were remarkably good students! Sir Richard Livingstone, after 50 years in Education, was convinced that, for the studies we have in mind, the years after 30 are the best - which would seem to give us men an unfair advantage over women on account of the well-known phenomenon that we reach that age much more quickly than they. As a matter of fact, most women never reach it at all! Perhaps that explains the prevailing fallacy that world affairs should be the monopoly of man. The results that have thus far attended his efforts to regulate these affairs lead me, for one, to believe that it will not be altogether a bad thing even now to discard the barren reasoning of masculine logic in favour of the fascinating possibilities of feminine intuition - even if I have heard feminine intuition recently described as "that marvellous faculty which, through a million years of mistakes, has developed into that priceless gift which tells a woman she is right even when she knows that she is wrong".

Is there any one of you who has not at some time or another said, "If only I could have my schooldays, or my College days, over again"? It springs from a realisation that with a fuller experience of life and of human beings you could have brought such a finer perspective and understanding to your tasks. Under a comprehensive scheme of Adult Education you will have your school and college days over again - and without the bogey of an examination to cast its shadow over your shoulder at the end of the course. I should like to see all of us enter into such a scheme for the sheer delight of becoming better citizens.

There are so many different ways of becoming better citizens. For those who find Economics or World Affairs too heavy or too unpalatable a dish, there is the consolation of the dictum of Aristotle that true education is to help men to use their leisure-time aright. There is a lot in that. Everyone should have a reasonable amount of leisure, and everyone has a pet hobby, or a favourite subject, or a first interest. There is no reason why the finest things in Art, Music, Science and Literature should be reserved for a favoured few, or why the great majority should be content with the Springbok Radio, the Wild West film and the Comic Supplement.

Adult Education in its wider aspects will provide the opportunity to do better the things we like to do; to attain a measure of excellence in the field of one's own gifts; to widen the circle of one's acquaintances, the scope of one's discussions and the content of one's interests. This will be all to the individual, national and international good.

If we would only stop to reflect for a moment, we would immediately realise how very small a proportion of the population has any feeling whatsoever for the disciplines of thought, the niceties of behaviour, and the merits of learning; in those things of the spirit which constitute the fabric of true culture - those priceless qualities of the soul that reveal themselves in the shape of courtesy, kindness, dignity and generosity. We need a new Renaissance, and there is no better place to start one than right here at home in South Africa. We are still a long way from finding ourselves; we seem to be groping in the dark; our consciences are not easily stirred; we are prone to strike self-righteous and dogmatic attitudes; we are slow to follow the dictates of goodwill; we have not yet learned to know the meaning of the word "conciliation". We are inclined to indulge in ridicule rather than commendation; sarcasm rather than sincerity, and vilification rather than praise. We are intolerant. Intolerance is the child of incomprehension; incomprehension is the child of ignorance, and ignorance is by no means the monopoly of youth or of any one class of society.

Here, in the scheme of Adult Education that I have briefly outlined, lies, I think, the long-term plan for the better world that we are looking for. The processes of education are necessarily slow, and, in my opinion, in some such scheme of Adult Education we shall find the finest opportunity of Education as a whole to contribute something of lasting value to World Reconstruction.

Collection Number: AD1715

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (SAIRR), 1892-1974

PUBLISHER:

Collection Funder:- Atlantic Philanthropies Foundation

Publisher:- Historical Papers Research Archive

Location:- Johannesburg

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