

EDUCATION FOR THE NEW DAY.

BY VIDA D. SCUDDER.

IDEALS of education vanish under our eyes. Gone the English idea that a man was educated if he could quote Horace and play a good game at cricket; gone to join the Persian picture of the youth to whom society has done its duty when it had taught him to ride straight and speak the truth. Gone, or going, the segregated class-training with sharp distinctions of sex, which at its best produced in privileged girls lovely manners, attractive accomplishments, and personal charm—in privileged youths, chivalrous virility touched by love of adventure, and sense of responsibility toward inferiors. Enter education, democratic, enter education, Freudian. Enter, on the one hand, the "Commercial High," and the technical school; enter, on the other, the delightful idea that the chief business of the educator is to remove inhibitions—an idea, this last, which destroys all ancient standards of drill and discipline, and lets each little Montessori child work out his or her preferences unchecked, to his or her ultimate misery.

Myriad experiments are tried on the unlucky young. They tell us that they have "had" this or that as if it were a matter of measles, a malady experienced and left behind. They reach us, these young folk, at college age, crusted as it were with a chaotic mosaic casually applied; there a dab of science, there a purple patch of Arthurian Romance, here Hygiene, here Folk-dancing, here Civics. And what of the living creature within the crust? Alas! When we seek to penetrate, we find him in a state of nature; a little cramped and dulled, probably, but totally unaffected in his real self by any of the processes to which he has been subjected.

In the confusion of experiment, it is not easy to generalise. But two salient facts surely stand out concerning the broader trend of modern education. Our training makes for two results, [p 186] one intentional, the other inevitable; it proceeds under the protecting care of the twin genii, Efficiency and Mediocrity.

The chief point that distinguishes education to-day from older types is that it aims at production rather than personality. It wants to make people practically useful, and it pays little attention to what kind of people they are. Action, not being, is its objective.

This tendency is a natural expression of an epoch which has put Production above Humanity; which has feverishly toiled to control and increase our material resources at whatever sacrifices of human beings to the exigences of the machine. But the vast procession of men is slowly turning to face another way. Most units in the procession do not realize this yet; but the word has gone out, and the column is curving, and presently even the laggards will reach the cross-roads and find themselves marching toward a new goal.

The chief point of the social order we are entering is the proposal to put less stress on production of physical values and more on the creation of men; less on machinery, more on life. Years ago Ruskin made the Victorians contemptuously angry when he said, "There is no wealth but life." Yet that is what the workers mean, in their stubborn fight for leisure and decent, secure well-being. That is what Russia is going after, blindly perhaps; that is the point of the revolution everywhere. Efficiency, by all means, gentlemen; increase of commodities, ease in exchange, what you will. But never to this Moloch will we sacrifice the joy of freedom of one tender adolescent, the health or vision of one working man. The end of our economic system shall not be the multiplication of goods, but the direct enlargement and enrichment of personality.

For we observe that the rage for production has made the race the victim of its own activities. We know the disconcerting proportion of men found during the war in every country to be below the normal physical standard. We meet on every side that curse of mediocrity, resting on our intellectual life—the banal, machine-made minds, the development among abler men of a type alert, competent, but hard, insensitive; the atrophy of the higher powers of joy. We reject

therefore the miserable complex of modern civilization. It is our firm resolve to break this sorry scheme of things, and remould it nearer to the heart's desire. There will be a time for salvage; no one denies that there are some precious values to retain. But something is wrong which must be put right with our economic foundations. In our effort to change them, catastrophe may await us; but we cannot stop the effort if we would. For the impetus is up, the power is on.

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It is the young who will fully share the future conditions, and to prepare the young is our task. The task is stern in a way; for the world in which they are to live is not likely to be either peaceful or prosperous.

One might as well face facts. The old aim at efficiency was not wholly thwarted. For large sections of the population, civilization has been a pretty comfortable affair; life has been soft[missing s], commodious and easy. Now, that comfort is not likely to last. Even if not dramatic disaster befalls, Efficiency—own sister, she, to Ruskin's Goddess of Getting On—will probably desert us for a time at least: and a nerve-racked race, spent with emotions, but at last set free from goad and external pressure may pass through a phase of exasperating laziness and incompetence. Symptoms are visible already. The lady who has never worked eight hours on end in her life is filled with moral horror as she sees how careless men are about their jobs, and how those awful unions make them throw-down their tools at five o'clock. Lenin, over in Russia, has found it necessary soundly to berate the emancipated Russian workmen, and to preach thrift and energy, quite in the tone of the sententious employer. Everybody is getting slack; and men will be slacker before they are energetic again, for there is a psychological reaction from long continued mechanical pressure which will take time to wear away.

This reaction will wear off by degrees. There is good reason to hope that one of these days, when workmen own their work and know what that involves, they will labour with a new kind of zest, more enlightened and keener than slave-labour has ever known. We are not likely to slip back into savagery; we shall probably continue to have automobiles and bathrooms; and some time the creative instincts of men will be asserting themselves with undreamed vigour. But reactions take time; and the children now growing up will in all probability live out their days in a world which is lazier, more demoralized than the world of their fathers. A world in which all wheels will be out of gear, a baffling world, hard to live in, awaits us.

How shall we prepare our children to live in it?

It is obvious that they must be held to good standards for work. The offspring of the so-called lesiure [sic] class, in particular are perhaps the people who must be chiefly relied on to keep the world going. They have fairly healthy bodies in the main, and they are not handicapped by the hungry passion for rest and freedom which the present working classes cannot be blamed for feeling. It should be a simple matter to imbue them with a new chivalry, as class distinctions become blurred and disappear. The old incentive of private profit may be much diminished as

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the young reach maturity; but a better motivation must take its place. Technique must not be allowed to lapse if we can help it, and vocational training must be carried on under a higher inspiration than now, when the prime object is to enable men to earn their living.

But if we aim first at use, or usefulness, we shall repeat the blunder which has plunged us into all our difficulties. Education should right-about-face, with the procession. It should aim, and that immediately, not at making men more useful, but at making them more alive.

Not Efficiency, but Personality, is the spiritual word; and the opportunity of our age is the opportunity to release the spirit.

The Christian will not care overmuch to equip the rising generation to make the poor world rich again; he is not sure enough that comfort and well-being are benefits. But he will be very concerned to develop men and women who can be the right kind of citizens in the new social

order. And the first necessity is to enable people to live with fine serenity in difficult days,—to give them rich resources in themselves that they will have no atom of regret for the old times, so pleasant on the surface, so corrupt within—the kind of resources that will be independent of circumstances, that can survive a ship-wrecked world. It is the meek who inherit the earth, after all; and if we want men to possess their heritage, we must set about making them meek.

What does that mean? Well, for one thing it means discouragement of the aggressive, pushing, acquisitive instincts, and (since negative methods are always false in education) the supplanting of these instincts by a full development of the power to enjoy without possessing: of the passive, contemplative powers, if you will, which were always given precedence of the active in more spiritual epochs, but which have been at such a discount in the West for two or three hundred years. The ignorance of it on the part of modern youth is amazing, is measureless. They can take an automobile to pieces and repair it, which is doubtless a useful accomplishment; but how many of them know the *Divine Comedy*? Yet a knowledge of Dante really does equip a man better to meet possible misfortune than knowing how to run an automobile.

To initiate people into their glorious inheritance, to make them sensitive to the best in it, eager for the possession of it, is our first educational duty. The laws of Nature, the achievement of humanity, will not fail us. They will endure, they will wait on our reverent study, though every factory in the land should close, though we be driven back on homespun and personally grown potatoes, as Mr. Brailsford expects.

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To love true beauty, to learn real truth,—this is to gain personality. In one of Mallock's novels, a dull, handsome girl ruefully consults an older woman as to how she may become more attractive. Her friend tells her to learn the best of Wordsworth's poetry by heart, and by and by to look in a mirror and see if a new charm has not come into her face. This is an aside: but, speaking of Wordsworth, no one has suggested better than that wisest of English poets what education should do:

“We live by admiration, hope, and love,
And even as these are well and wisely placed,
In dignity of being we ascend.”
There is a motto for our schools!

Young people nowadays too often grow up in a curious, hard apathy, scarcely admiring anything. To teach them to admire is to imbue them with reverence—a quality which democratic civilization needs to protect with jealous care. It means to quicken them, to give them severe accurate standards, by exposing them to what is beautiful and noble in every form. History, literature, and art can all be taught from this point of view. If the young are to be prepared and equipped to create a fairer and more genuine civilization than ours, they must gain the power to admire the right things. They can be taught to do so; nothing is more responsive to real excellence than a youthful mind. But in a world beset with blatant excitements, with coarse pleasures, a world of movies and cheap magazines, where the strident note is struck so constantly that finer melodies are hard to hear, it takes patience and brilliant energy to give the right training. Constant contact, enforced if need be, with the finest models, is essential; and a teacher who is himself honestly possessed by the perception of true excellence rarely fails to impart his passion to his students. It is quite possible to get a group of average Philistine boys and girls to the point where they would rather read Shelley than the “*Saturday Evening Post*,” and know, not because they are told so, but because they see, that greek marbles are better to look at than a movie. The power of admiring rightly does not come by nature; it is the result of careful, protracted, and painstaking education, and there never could be conditions which make the task of the teacher in this line harder than it is to-day. But he can succeed, for he does succeed when he is the right man.

Next, hope. And hope means the forward-looking mind. It means release from convention, timidity, dull acceptance of what is, simply because it is; it means flexibility and eagerness. A period of tremendous social experiment lies ahead. Let us
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prepare the rising generation to play their part with prudence, with zest, with trust in the future of the race. Hope, like most other good things, must be socialised. Personal expectations may not play so large a part in the immediate future; certainly some forms of personal ambition will be discredited. But a social hope, high, pure, tenacious, will be the sustaining power of these coming days. It must be founded, as all reasonable hope must be founded, on close study of the past; it must not be the kind of hope that flutters vaguely on weak wings in a rainbow mist, it must have precision in it; and young people can only acquire it as they are drilled in sound knowledge of history, of psychology, and of sociology. All these studies should be made to converge on the creation of purpose; for purpose is the final name, the ultimate end, of hope; and clear-sighted conviction of what is desirable and feasible in social experimentation is what the new world-order will grow by. Institutions, in the past, have come about in a fashion more or less haphazard; in the future, they must be the result of the reasoned purpose of disinterested men, and if the rising generation is to gain such purpose inspired by confident faith in its power to achieve, it must be enlightened by knowledge of the past and of human nature, and possessed by a religious conception of human destiny.

And love. Love in [sic] the key to every situation.

You cannot say to young people, "Love one another," and stop there, without falling into a slough of sentimentality. Unlucky children are sometimes led by their teachers to wallow in that slough, but the healthy-minded pull themselves out promptly and betake them to very hard dry land: Love is a difficult quest, slow and complex and beset with pitfalls. And it is quite peculiarly the modern quest. For unless love can be made stronger, wiser, more universal than it is, industrial democracy, soviet rule, guild socialism, and the rest, will be only a new type of mechanism.

Love is active and self-controlled fellowship, based on true understanding; and it is a perfectly practical thing, though unusual, to train young people and even little children into sympathy with alien minds and groups. History must teach us, not only how men acted, but why they acted as they did. Literature must teach us, not the meticulous fussing about sources (though this has its place), but the expansion of love. We must patiently teach the young to overcome the provincialism, the instinctive distrust of the alien, that to-day imprisons us all. We must break down barriers; and just as we seek to understand ancient Greece and Rome and medieval
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Europe, so we must help people to understand capitalists, Germans, Russians, and the rest of those outside their ken. Pride must be evoked on the side of sympathy—not in opposition to it, as has been the case in all forms of aristocratic idealism. For a psychology of imaginative sympathy is the first requisite of a stable new world. The love which education must develop must be rooted, not in passion, but in imagination. It must echo Whitman: "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels; I myself become the wounded person." The noble expression of a modern idealist and martyr must be some day native to everyone: "So long as there is a soul in prison, I am not free."

Through admiration, hope and love can be developed the power not only to inherit the joy and beauty of the world, but to add to them. Admiration always carries with it an imitative impulse; hope is in its nature constructive; and love is the creative force of the universe. Our aim is to enrich personality; but there is scant danger lest the joyous, the lovely, the well equipped persons of our desire slip into passive days and spend their lives in contemplation. The conditions of the world, for one thing, will hardly allow this luxury; the natural impulses, which set so strongly toward activity in a healthy organism, will not allow it. Let us create the right kind of people to live

in the new and dawning day, and they will, automatically and spontaneously, be efficient people. But efficiency is not to be the first objective of our consideration. Rather, we are to remember the old saying, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." When men fix their first thought on Being, when they develop their latent faculties for perception, sympathy, and adoration, their doing will follow as naturally as fruit follows flower. Only it may be a very different kind of doing from what we see to-day.

There was something to be said after all in favour of the old aristocratic ideal of education. It produced, for a small minority, exquisite results; people finely-tuned, sensitive, emancipated, simple, the type of people whom we should grieve to lose out of the world. The acute fear of losing them is the reason why many cling ruefully to an aristocratic ideal, and refuse to surrender their minds to democracy. For this minority, the end of education, the end of life itself, has been, not working, not producing, but merely living. These few have been flowers in the rank human growth; but it has taken the benumbed toil of the silent millions to maintain them. These millions, so far as they were educated at all, were educated to do the world's work.
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And when their hour struck, it was inevitable that the aristocratic ideal should go. A utilitarian and practical conception seemed part of the whole democratic movement. Reinforced by modern materialism, it has dominated, and the demand is all but universal that people be trained, not for life itself, but for service to life. We are in the full swing of this theory, and the older cultures languish and die. Yet even the most ardent Democrat or Socialist, noting the dim mediocrity which befogs our national life and the vulgarity which taints it, must mourn their disappearance. So far does this regret go that one finds a liberal journal soberly stating that the only thing for an American to do, if he clings to the best intellectual traditions, is to flee his own country, above all the Middle West, and betake him to Europe. He will, according to this writer, render better service to general culture and thereby to American culture also by devoting his powers "to strengthening the centres of culture which at present lie elsewhere."

But this is a very pessimistic conclusion, to say nothing of the fact that old traditions are at present breaking down in Europe even faster than with us. Surely there is a better way. Mediocrity is the natural beginning of a strong democratic tendency, but it will not be the end. Democracy will not always remain inconsistent with "the humanization of man in society." As the old class-alignments vanish, we must aim at the union of the two ideals, envisaging an education open to all, carefully noting natural capacity and training for function, but also, and more fundamentally, opening the sources of power and joy in which all normal human beings share. Let us sedulously level up, not down; let us give personality its sacred right of way. At whatever sacrifice of comfort or immediate convenience, at whatever cost in commodities, let us aim at making people beautiful, noble, happy and loving, fit citizens of an ideal commonwealth. And all those things which efficiency connotes shall in due time be added unto us.