

KNOWLEDGE THE PATHWAY TO THE DAWN.

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An age is dying—nay is dead!
A breath of change, of morning, stirs!
Ah, yonder now the skies grow red,
And lo! the sun's sweet harbingers,
Birds of new vision and new thought
Are everywhere upon the wing!
Fair promise has the dawning brought—
What shall the coming daylight bring?

O you whose hearts are bold and free,
O you whose eyes with fire are lit,
A whisper thrills: "The day shall be
Whate'er yourselves will make of it."

IN 1807, when the age which, please God, is dying was still young, a President of the Royal Society, speaking in the House of Commons, told his fellow members, the great majority of whom agreed with him, that,

"However specious in theory the project might be of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would in effect be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in Society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent [p 798]

to their superiors; and in a few years the result would be that the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power towards them, and to furnish the executive magistrate with much more vigorous laws than were now in force."

The occasion of these remarks, so objectionable in tone to our modern way of thinking, was a debate upon a Bill for the general provision of elementary schools throughout England. Needless to say, it was not a government measure. It found few friends in either House, and it was killed by the House of Lords on the advice of the Lord Chancellor and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The sins of the fathers have been visited on the children. Some thirty years after the rejection of this Bill, Dean Alford made confession. "Prussia," he said, "is before us; Switzerland is before us; France is before us. There is no record of any people on earth so highly civilised, so abounding in arts and comforts, and so grossly generally ignorant as the English." The lost ground has not yet been recovered.

The shock of war stirred a brief-lived enthusiasm for education. The early successes of the German taught us that we must discover, develop [sic], and employ all the resources of mind within the country if we would beat him. Now that he is beaten the old indifference gains once more upon us. Squandermania must be checked. Mr. Fisher is a wastrel. If schooling is to cost so much we must do without it. (Only “we” shall not, it is “they” who will, a very different thing.) We could afford to teach men how to kill, no matter what it cost. It is not so plain to us that the safety of the State equally requires that we shall afford to teach them how to live.

For a time after the war had ended we were told that, if we would survive in the great world fight for trade which was to follow, we must still discover brains and develop [sic] them with all our war-time diligence. Members of Parliament and platform politicians had no doubt of it—no doubt at all for 18 months. But the seed had been sown upon a stony soil. It sprang up quickly, and as quickly perished. Men and women, boys and girls, were still but a part of the industrial machine. The politician and the employer had advanced so far in a century as to believe for a few months that it would pay to educate them to a point of technical efficiency. But out of that stony soil could spring no vision, nor any faith in the power of education, and of education only, to teach men and women how to establish and maintain in safety, by vote and influence, a great progressive democratic state, and live as self-respecting and wholly worthy members of it. There is no resolve, no wish even, that this shall be; no conviction that it should. [p 799]

There are those who still think with that President of the Royal Society that education inspires discontent. They are the men who cry out on Mr. Fisher, and call for the revision of his Education Act. Mr. Fisher with one of his many illuminating aphorisms routs these recreants, “Education,” he tells us, “does not cause discontent, but heals it.” But let us beware. The education that shall do this is more than a bare minimum of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, more than a technical training for the workshop or the office. It must be a liberal education, and it must be no exceptional privilege for a favoured few; all must share it. It is but a form of insurance against uttermost disaster.

If we will sow the wind, we know the whirlwind follows. An uneducated democracy is a danger to itself and to the world. Let the Russian Revolution teach us. An ignorant and down-trodden people, inflamed by hopes that have proved so tragically vain, followed with blind enthusiasm leaders whose sufferings under repression and persecution had distorted their mental growth, and made them fanatics—honest and most able and therefore most dangerous fanatics. They are extremists, men of one idea, to the service of which all their reading, all their thinking, all their great intellectual ability have been steadily directed. They trained themselves, as so many of our young labour leaders are training themselves, to serve a cause, not to seek and follow truth with a single heart. Heaven knows they had excuse enough. History, as they read it, tells one long tale of wrong. The past has nothing to teach them, so they will not search it; and while they will not ripe judgment never can be theirs. They take no account of the ways of human nature, or of the age-long story of its action and reaction to the stimulus of circumstance, for, as they judge, the nature of the capitalist is always to exploit and oppress the worker, and there’s an end of it. But that is only to kick against the pricks. For knowledge in its widest sense, true knowledge, they have no use. It is too balanced; it makes no partisans. They have made up their minds before they begin their studies, offending against Bacon’s golden rule: “Read not,” he says, “to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to

find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider." These men and those who follow them tread no pathway to the Dawn. Their road leads straight and swiftly to the night of ruin and despair. And that road we too shall surely travel to its end unless we set the young upon the path of knowledge, and teach them to weigh and consider; to search out with reverence the lessons of the past, and with humility to accept their mission as forerunners of that distant future, which shall be

[p 800]

so infinitely wiser, nobler, happier, than to-day. For we are not, as some would have it, the heirs of all the ages. Our civilisation is but a transitory phase. It is born of the far past: it will give place to the long hereafter. The learning of the twentieth century has not summed up all knowledge.

"What we have seen and felt, what we think we know," says Grayson in his delightful *Adventures in Contentment*, "are insignificant compared with that which may be known—

Not long ago, coming in from my fields, I fell to thinking of the supreme wonder of a tree: and as I walked I met the professor.

'How,' I asked, 'does the sap get to the top of these great maples and elms? What power is there that should draw it upward against the force of gravity?'

He looked at me a moment with his peculiar slow smile.

'I don't know,' he said.

'What!' I exclaimed, 'do you mean to tell me that science has not solved this simplest of natural phenomena?'

'We do not know,' he said. 'We explain, but we do not know.'"

There is after all but a difference of degree between the professor and those early scientists among primeval men, who, observing the vigorous growth of corn self-sown in the broken soil about the burial mounds, attributed it not to the breaking of the soil but to the presence of the corpse, and taught thence-forward that those who would be progressive and raise crops for food must kill a man and bury him, must make a sacrifice, at the time of sowing. They did not know, they explained.

Even Newton did not know; he only explained when he gave to the world his law of gravitation. Einstein himself can do no more. Time, space, matter, force, mind, God still present riddles to us beyond our wit to solve. Knowledge is but a relative term. It varies with man's power to observe and to interpret. It is the one thing to-day, another to-morrow. Between the Jehovah of the Exodus and the Jehovah of Isaiah the difference is profound. And there is not yet an end of revelation. The God of 10,000 years hence will surely differ as profoundly from the God whom our doctors of religion preach to us.

"The reading of histories is the school of wisdom," says Amyot in his preface to *Plutarch's Lives*. In that school the boy, the man, even the young man, shall learn intellectual humility; he shall be trained in judgment and shall gain vision. A Darwin, before whose mind is always present the infinite extent of the unknown, is humble. It is the men of little knowledge who are so arrogantly confident, so intolerant. That arrogance

[p 801]

and intolerance threaten danger. They are symptoms of the disease of discontent, which springs from ignorance and old injustice, and for which education is the only cure. One does not heap reproach on those who sicken of some wide-spread plague. That would be mere idiocy: it

would neither heal the sick, nor protect the sound against infection. One fetches in the doctor and the nurse, and all the apparatus of preventive medicine. It is equally futile, equally impolitic to reproach the hot-head leaders of the labour movement, or the masses who applaud their speeches. When injustice and ignorance are mated, suspicion, folly, ill-considered and intemperate action, even criminal violence are their rightful progeny. Who from such a union could expect to issue reason in argument, wisdom in judgment, restraint in action, tolerance in relations? Those who condemn the worker and his leaders, pointing to the obvious, the suicidal folly of much that they say and do, have not tried to see things from the worker's point of view. They should read what the workers read, and what is a grim tradition among them, the industrial history of the early nineteenth century. It is a tale of iniquitous injustice practised by the employer, with the approval and assistance of parliament and law courts; of monstrous hours that made of life a slavery; of wages so low that a man must take poor relief and put his mites of five and six to work if he would live (and those wages would be reduced at the first hint of trade depression, but never raised again upon the advent of renewed prosperity); of trickery that always made of industriousness an excuse to clip something off the rate of pay for piece-work; of legislation steadily directed against him; of magistrates who twisted old statutes to silence his protests, and then connived at the flagrant evasion by employers of the few Acts of Parliament that restrained their greed or put a limit to their tyrannous abuse of power.

Treatment such as this leaves memories that are not easily obliterated, and suspicions that import prejudice into every argument. And the bitterness of these memories and suspicions is intensified by the daily contrast between the lives of rich and poor. "They make us gain for them by our toil what they spend in their pride," said John Ball nearly six centuries ago; and the worker will declare that it is still the same to-day.

Labour does take narrow and exclusive views. But how should breadth of view and a large tolerance find a way into lives that are spent in poor houses and mean streets, and a drab environment in which cultured intercourse, social amenities, great literature, poetry, art, the drama, travel, and all that makes lives worth living, have no part?

There is only one medicine for what is amiss with labour.

[p 802]

Education, a liberal education, alone can cure the sickness, and prevent its further spread. And education, this sovereign cure, we stint and dilute till it has lost all power for good. To the great mass of the people we offer as a substitute mere beggarly elements that have no healing in them. As children we lead them, with an air of patronage, up to a little ladder set in a high park wall, beyond which there lies (so they have heard) a copious spring of healing, draughts inexhaustible of literature, history, art, music, for which they are athirst. All that opens the mind and trains the judgment is there, but they may not approach. The wall should be breached so that all who will may enter; secondary education like elementary should be free. But the wall is not breached, and there is still but one way in, the little ladder before which stands on guard a sentry, the examiner, who, like Odysseus in Hades by the spot where the loud-voiced rivers met, admits but a chosen few out of the mass that surges round. The others he turns back into the thirsty wilderness, where they jostle for the rest of their maimed lives, discontented and irritable, and ever more suspicious of a system which absorbs their best into the world above them, and leaves them apart, hewers of wood and drawers of water, depressed intellectually, socially, and industrially, though formidable by numbers, and armed

with all the power of the vote, which ignorance dooms them to misuse.

Who shall wonder that uneducated masses, moved by resentment at such manifold injustice, and always oppressed by an insistent dread of unemployment, resort to restriction of output, and strike for rates of pay which they cannot, or perhaps will not earn; or that, when their products in consequence are undersold by foreign competitors, and trade to their own discomfiture falls off, they are ready to believe that their employers are entering upon a wide conspiracy to rob them of their wage once more?

It is folly, but a folly that is the inevitable fruit of ignorance. If we will permit ignorance to exist when we might dispel it, we must not wonder that we make potential revolutionaries. Until we educate, labour cannot see the truth of things. It can read the seditious pamphlets that the President of the Royal Society was so much afraid of, but it cannot weigh them and consider, for it lacks the wider knowledge and the power of judgment needful to enable it to detect false reasoning and reject with decision bad advice.

But, it may be asked, what has all this to do with Miss Mason and her method of education? It has everything to do with it. She for the first time admits the children of the workers, all, not only some, to the school of wisdom. They follow the same curriculum, use the same books, as the children from the best homes in

[p 803]

the land. Nothing can really be too good for any child of man. In the wonderful reunions at Winchester and Whitby, children drawn from every type of home sat down together and worked side by side, foreshadowing the day when all will go to the same schools and none will be excluded, when the University itself will stand open free to all, and class distinctions, class exclusiveness, will have disappeared under the influence of a common heritage.

It is not too much to say that Miss Mason has shewn us how we may revolutionise the primary school; and not only the primary school, for there is not a school in the country that would not do well to learn from her.

There is much that is wonderfully good in the English public schools, but there is much that might be greatly better. Too many boys of average ability pass through them without having felt the quickening fire. They have been trained for muscular but not intellectual development, to act but not to think, to command but not to sympathise. Taste and imagination are too often left dormant, and atrophy as the years go by. The boys go out from school into the world honest but rather stupid and uninformed. They will play the game so far as they understand it, and the rival will always be a friend; but the game brings them into contact with so few, and the rest have not the playfellow's claim upon them.

What is lacking here Miss Mason gives. From the beginning she kindles interest. How is it done, this most difficult thing, which so many have tried to do with such small success? How does she banish indifference and inattention, for banish them she surely does?

First of all she has discovered that children of all ages and of every class are eager for knowledge, if only it be put before them in the right form. They begin learning, as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (for he has made the same discovery)—as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in his *Lectures on the Art of Reading* would convince us, with “a natural eager joy”; but, alas, he too, like Miss Mason, is constrained to add that “that natural eager joy is just what our schools, in the matter of reading, conscientiously kill.” They kill it because they put knowledge before the child in the wrong form, and in the wrong manner. The right form, Miss Mason tells us, is literary form, a

good book exact to the last line and letter as it came from the hand and brain of him to whom God gave the wit to write it. No intermediary is needed, neither the watered compilation so dear to publishers and teachers, nor the obtrusive [sic] voice raised in well-meaning lecture that only interrupts, "Given a book of literary quality suitable
[p 804]

to their age," says Miss Mason, "and the children will know how to deal with it without elucidation." The teacher has been mistaken in thinking that they cannot and that he must interpret between them and the writer. The children greatly prefer to do their work upon his pages for themselves; and in doing it they develop a power with which they had not been credited. They work as individuals, the personality of each respected, not merged with thirty or forty others into that artificial and soulless entity the class.

"Let the boy read and he knows, that is, if he must tell again what he has read." Here is Miss Mason's secondary discovery. There is only one reading (with the little children it is often, with the older still not infrequently, by the Teacher), and it is always followed by oral narration or written report, when the child gives back in orderly sequence the substance of what has been read. The knowledge that there will be but one reading, and that narration has to follow, compels attention, and fixes the content in the mind so surely that, without any re-reading or further preparation [sic], he will face and satisfy a searching examination at the end of term. He "knows."

That Miss Mason's methods do what she claims for them has been proved in scores of primary schools. Children and teachers who have used her methods and her books would not for worlds return into the old groove. But beware, there are no short cuts, no substitutes.

So much, all too briefly, of the method. What of the books, these books that of themselves, unaided, compel an interest that the talking, always talking, teacher so rarely can inspire?

It must suffice to enumerate those set for some of the subjects, the literary subjects, in Form III, roughly the Standard V, the eleven year-olds of the primary school, during the present term.

Literature. Marshall's History of English Literature for Boys and Girls, pp. 581–632.
The Old Curiosity Shop.
Hamlet or The Tempest.
Shelley's Poems (Oxford Classics).
Longfellow's Hiawatha.
Lamb's Essays.

English History. Arnold Forster's History of England, pp. 719–726 and 745–806 (1820–1861).

French and General History. Frances Epps' British Museum for Children, Chapter 8 (Egypt).

Fletcher's The Great War, 1914–1918, pp. 22–66.
Creighton's First History of France, pp. 279–290.

[p 805]

Citizenship. Miss Mason's Ourselves Book I., pp. 108–139.
North's Plutarch's Lives, Timoleon.
Smith's Smaller Classical Dictionary.
Strachey's Social and Industrial Life, pp. 36–71.

Geography. The Ambleside Geography Books, Book IV., pp. 142–187 and 277–284,
with special reference to recent changes.
Fighting for Sea Power in the Days of Sail, pp. 30–65.

The children are expected to know something about foreign places coming into notice in the current newspapers, and Map questions have to be answered before each lesson.

Hatch's Out-door Geography is used by the teacher.

Natural History and Botany. Haines' The Changing Year, April to July—or
Furneaux Country Side Rambles, April to July.
Furneaux' A Nature Study Guide.
Stopes' Study of Plant Life, pp. 72–108.
Ruskin's Ethics of the Dust, Lectures 1, 2 and 3.

Some special study is to be followed for out-of-door work, and a Nature Note-Book with flower and bird lists is kept, with daily notes.

General Science. Architecture (Jack) pp. 24–42.
Geikie's Physical Geography, pp. 1–46.

Reading. Bulfinch's Age of Fable, pp. 156–186.
Longfellow's Golden Legend.

In addition, of course, there are the other subjects of the ordinary curriculum, and one more so characteristic that it must not be omitted, the study of pictures by great artists, a set of six being circulated every term.

This it will be admitted is a full bill of fare, full in quantity as well as in quality, but if you may read once only how much more you can take! And observe what a part is played in this syllabus by the "reading of histories," and how skilfully the other books are chosen that they may make the histories live. Scott for whom there is no place this term is a great ally for this purpose.

Of the effect of all this reading upon the children one could say much, and multiply examples, if there were time. It is marvellous. To the parent accustomed to the methods and results of the ordinary school the tale of it would be beyond belief. What the children become, what they do, must be seen to be believed. It is idle to talk to those who have not seen it for themselves of the freedom of expression, the copious vocabulary, the vigorous imagination, the new wealth of knowledge, the joy and pride in work.

[p 806]

After all, the great books are the real educators of mankind. Is it so strange, then, that they should prove to be superlatively the best teachers of children too, or that the child should love them? "A desire of knowledge," said Dr. Johnson, "is the natural feeling of mankind; and every human being, whose mind is not debauched, will be willing to give all that he has to get knowledge." Johnson, you will remember, had just been greatly pleased by the declaration of the boy, who was sculling him and Boswell down to Greenwich, that he would give all that he had to know about the Argonauts. How it would have rejoiced his heart if he could have seen elementary schoolboys of 10, 11 and 12 years of age, who already knew all Jason's story, reading without notes Macbeth and Twelfth Night, and even Lear itself, and acting them with joy and spirit; learning, some of them, their parts right through the plays. It sounds incredible, but they do it; and a few months ago seven or eight of them, from a school I know, not having the money for the train fare (their all had been spent upon the tickets of admission) tramped stoutly 8 miles to Gloucester and 8 miles home again, that they might see acted on the stage Twelfth Night, which they themselves had read and acted the term before.

That is the effect of one great book, an effect that will be lifelong, manifesting itself in many ways. And it is only what we should expect. David Grayson, if I may quote him a second time, has told us why. "The great books have in them," he says, "the burning fire of life." But let him lead up to his conclusion in his own delightful way.

He and his neighbours have been talking of old Izaak Walton, and the professor remarks, "How superior it makes one feel, in behalf of the enlightenment and progress of his age, when he reads Izaak's extraordinary natural history.

'Does it make you feel that way?' asked the Scotch preacher. 'It makes me want to go fishing.'"

And he reads a delightful passage from the old book, in which Izaak unfolds the method of attack with artful grasshopper upon the Chub, "fearfullest of fishes." Having read it, he repeats, and if we read it we shall agree that his conclusion is most just," [sic] Now I say that it makes me want to go fishing."

Thereupon Grayson in his own person takes up the parable and points its moral.

"That," I said, 'is true of every great book: it either makes us want to do things, to go fishing, or fight harder, or endure more patiently—or it takes us out of ourselves and beguiles us for a time with the friendship of completer lives than our own.'

The great books indeed have in them the burning fire of life."

[p 807]

These books so used—the one reading, the immediate narration, the subsequent examination—give a quality and an influence to education, and above all to the education of the primary school, that it has never had before. They point the road and stimulate to self-education, which, because it is a lifelong quest, is worth more than all school teaching, though impossible with-out it; and they give one education to the worker's child and the rich man's child. For the first time we have in England a common education and the making of a common school. Here is a real foundation of knowledge, a school of Wisdom.

And the Dawn, what of the Dawn?

It is the rosy, dancing, elusive light upon the mountains of our horizon, which seems to point the way to a Land of Hope beyond them, where, if we could attain to it, we should shake

off most of that burden of ignorance, poverty, disease, hatred, strife and crime, which weighs us down to-day.

The Athenian saw the light and set out towards it along the path of democracy, but he had not knowledge—only a brilliant eager fancy—nor had he the means of judgment, for the recorded past was still too short.

The French people of the eighteenth century, beset by privilege and crushed by taxation, saw the light beckoning fitfully through the gloom; the Russians have seen it. But neither French nor Russians reached the mountains, for they too lacked knowledge and judgment. Their leaders had not made a faithful survey of the path, or taken Wisdom for their guide.

Failures have been so many, and the attendant disasters so grave, that those who burrow in the subterranean ways of commerce, and are content to batten on the wreckage of a world in misery, shout derisively that the Dawn is but a cheat, and that there is no Land of Hope beyond the difficult forbidding peaks. If the long past had had no greater share of faith and vision, man would have been still eating roots and berries in the forests, a creature little better than the beasts.

Let us proclaim our faith. What should be, shall be. Another century shall see (our own children may see) a secondary education free and compulsory for all; and the best brains will have ready access without charge to the Universities. The huge untapped reservoir of creative genius among the workers will have begun to yield its hidden store. Yet another step, a second century onwards, and, if man is wise and patient, thrifty and industrious (now alas being ill-educated, he is not), and does not mar his work by over-haste (he seeks short cuts to-day, only to find them blind alleys), there will be no slums, no dirt, no preventable disease, no poverty, very little crime. None will seek to live

[p 808]

in private palaces or pile up private wealth. There will be a full and rounded life for all. Self-interest will no longer be the guiding motive of man's life. In that day the note of patriotism will not be so much willingness to die for country as eagerness to live for it. It will be enough reward, enough honour, that a man's talent shall have served and enriched his state—whatever that may be—and that his children's children will be the happier and the better for his days on earth.

As for us, we see the first light of the dawn, and all the pathway lies before us. Let us march resolutely, but without haste, towards the mountains, that, in a far hereafter, men and women sprung from our stock may pass their summits, and reach the Land of Hope that lies beyond.