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## EDUCATION AND SOCIAL STABILITY

A RECENT address before an important national educational convention opened with the sentence: "The kind of education we shall have in the future depends on the kind of society we shall have." That can be true only if education is limited by a very narrow definition and philosophy. Education is a tragic failure unless it grasps the philosophy and catches the vision that will rewrite that sentence into: The kind of society we shall have in the future depends on the kind of education we shall have.

The kind of society we have today—confused, disorderly, bewildered, and rebellious—may be due in large measure to the failure of education to grasp that philosophy and catch that vision, to the willingness of education to accept a place as the servant of society instead of maintaining its proper place and dignity as the master, to the tendency of education to yield to the clamorous demands of transient popular opinion.

In a profound essay, Thomas Hann \*deplores the bewildered and confused retreat of older cultural groups before the masses in revolt and foresees the complete collapse of civilization unless there is a militant revival of humanism. This seems to me another way of saying that humanistic education is in retreat and that civilization will collapse unless it turns and gives battle.

The kind of education which has been substituted for humanistic or liberal education has been so busy "educating for a

changing civilization"—and repeating the catch-phrase *ad nauseam*—that it has almost entirely overlooked the fact that most of the fundamental elements which make civilization do not change. We have demeaned education into a chameleon-like something changing its color with every change of location and trying to adjust itself to every ephemeral situation. Instead of lifting the masses up by education we have been dragging education down to the masses. We have taught people to read but have not enabled them to understand, we have educated the masses to a sense of their power but not to a sense of the responsibilities that go with power, we have equipped people to make a living but not to live disciplined lives.

With what result? I quote from Mann's essay to which I have just referred:

"...Modern man is at once the product and the prey of wild, distracting impressions which assault him, intoxicate his senses, and stimulate his nerves. The amazing development of technology, with its triumphs and disasters, the noisy sensationalism of sports records, the fantastic adulation and overpayment of popular stars, the boxing bouts before hordes of people for million-dollar stakes—these things and more like them make up the picture of our time, together with the decline and obsolescence of civilizing, disciplinary conceptions such as culture, mind, art, ideals.

"...Many things were now possible which the stricter humanism of the nineteenth century would not have tolerated; all sorts of occult sciences had slipped in, to the blaring jazz accompaniment of the time—half-sciences, charlatanry, obscure sects, and silly backstairs religions, sheer humbug, superstition, and quackery. They had hordes of believers; they set the tone of the time. And many educated men saw in all that not modern vulgarity, not cultural blindness, but a mythical rebirth of deep living forces and a lofty manifestation of the folk soul.

"...This half-educated pseudo-knowledge, stimulated to the top of its bent, flings about its malicious propositions and mystagogic rubbish unchecked; while true science stands there, in part intimidated, in part shockingly sympathetic, and now and then weakly ventures a soft rejoinder. It will not be long before this kind of thinking will hold the field alone, and arrogantly rejoice in its power to translate its ideals into history."

\*Mankind, Take Care!, *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1938.

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All this sort of thing is the inevitable result of substituting propaganda for education, of playing on the emotions instead of disciplining the intellect, of replacing education with some sort of "activity." In consequence we must now—clearly and unmistakably—reckon with revolution—a revolt of the masses. We cannot reckon with it to advantage unless we analyze and understand it. Assuredly "this sort of thinking will hold the field alone" unless it is met with a better and sounder thinking.

Two concepts seem to dominate the thinking of this mass revolution: the concept of collectivism and the concept of change as something desirable *per se*. To one or both of these may be traced all the hasty and strange expedients and experiments of our age in government, in education, and in the social order. Unfortunately, education, or what we have been calling education, has capitulated to these concepts and, to a considerable degree, has been functioning in the social machine as an accelerator when it should have been serving as a balance wheel—or as a brake.

It is significant that an acceptance of the general idea and spirit of collectivism has followed so closely on an aggravated individualism that many people are still explaining its evils as the result of over-emphasis on individualism. The pendulum has swung as far in one direction as it formerly did in the other and is still just as far from the steadiness of dead center. To the spirit and concept of collectivism may be traced the great national experiments in both communism and fascism and innumerable other experiments in governmental systems and procedures throughout most of the world. But its influence doesn't stop with political relations. To it may be traced the various Youth Movements, the alignment of class against class, the decline of the sort of religion whose philosophy emphasized individual accountability, and similar tendencies so obvious to anyone who reads the signs of the times.

In the group, the individual finds escape from the risks and obligations of individual responsibility. More and more significant, he finds escape from the obligation, and the necessity, to think. The collectivist intoxication satisfies needs which were formerly satisfied by "culture" in its broadest and best sense. Instead of seeking to be attuned with the Infinite, the individual merges his personality into and seeks to be attuned with the State, the party, or some such collectivist group.

The effect which this spirit has had on education is more or less obvious. There has been much insistence on the part of a considerable and highly vocal group of leaders that our educational procedures should be governed by it or conformable to it. But when we fill our school rooms with happy little boys and girls all a part of a highly socialized group where there is no competition, no failure, and no anything else that belonged to the unenlightened days of individual responsibility and original sin, we may well give some thought to whether we are laying the foundations for a life that will make them happy as adults and able to do an adult's part in a world that will need all that is possible of culture and character to keep it civilized. If we carry kindergarten methods and mentality into our elementary schools, secondary schools, and higher institutions, we will certainly carry them into life and develop a social order on a kindergarten level.

The concept of change as something desirable *per se* is the product of shallow thinking, which reasons that because progress involves change, change itself is progress and, therefore, all changes are beneficial. The gradual and more or less orderly mutations of history are made the excuse for all manner of capricious, hasty, and violent alterations and substitutions. Sometimes they are made the excuse for mere destruction of the old with no substitute to replace it. When Tennyson wrote "Let the great world spin forever down the



ringing grooves of change," he surely did not envisage a world spinning dizzily in this direction and that, without convictions or standards, regardless of all the lessons of history or philosophy.

Change is so much the obsession of our times that it is the word most used to describe them. If we read a book, listen to a lecture, engage in a discussion, or talk over the back fence with a neighbor, we meet the repetitious phrases "changing world," "changing times," "changing social order," and the like. These phrases do not arise from the normal growth changes necessary in social evolution, but from the development of a spirit of change to the abnormal proportions of an obsession. One reason this spirit is allowed to play havoc in government, in education, in moral standards, and in the social fabric is because it means, as does the spirit of collectivism, escape. For when people become accustomed to constant changes and form the habit of making them readily, they more easily discard irksome restraints, forgetful that those restraints are based on sound reason learned by bitter experience; they more easily abandon time-tested fundamentals, adopting in their place ideas and procedures whose only merit is that they are new and superficially attractive. People find it so much easier to try something new than to master the techniques and submit to the disciplines required by the old.

This accounts for the persistent and widespread error of a large number of educators who think that doing something means doing something different, and who, unconsciously, perhaps, but none-the-less certainly, promote the fallacy that whatever is old is bad and whatever is new is good. This accounts, too, for the popularity in certain educational circles of purely destructive criticism of all accepted and established practices and procedures, and for the confusion of cheap sneering at traditional standards with originality. Thus does education allow itself to be shaped by the

spirit of the times. It is easier than the effort to shape that spirit.

The unrest of the world, the preoccupation with change, has naturally given great impetus to chimerical enterprises which have always engaged the imagination of a few. Common sense, and the failure of countless experiments, tell us that the perfect state, the perfect social order, the Utopia is an ideal something ever to be held before us but never, in the human sense, to be attained; and that it is folly, therefore, to upset existing social and economic orders merely to try out others theoretically better but entirely unproven. Yet the world is doing much of this right now. The assumption that a sound social, economic, or political order is something that can be constructed rather than something that must grow and evolve gives opportunity to the extremist, whether he be crackpot visionary or ambitious megalomaniac.

In the former class are found many sincere and patriotic souls who are so afflicted with a reformer complex that they can see no good at all in what is and no weakness at all in what is proposed. They must "grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire, . . . shatter it to bits—and then remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire." Usually they are more successful with the first half of this enterprise than with the second. Like a child with a watch, they make a pretty thorough job of taking it to pieces but must give up in despair the effort to put it back to keeping time. One definition of Utopia is "an ideal place or state with perfect laws," but another definition is "a visionary, impractical system of political or social perfection." The world knows the first cannot be attained, but still is willing to experiment endlessly with the half-baked philosophies and ill-digested ideas of the second.

Education which should be a strong defense against this sort of thing is conspicuous for its hospitality to visionary and impractical proposals. It is all too ready to



fit in with the popular tendency, long ago remarked by Herbert Spencer, to see "what seems an immediate public good without thought of distant public evils." About a century ago, when such community experiments as Brook Farm, Fruitlands, Oneida, Harmonie, and the like were being tried out in America, Emerson wrote to Carlyle: "We are all a little wild here with numberless projects of social reform. Not a reading man but has a draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket." With as much truth we might say today: "Not an educator but has a draft of a new system of education in his waistcoat pocket."

There is no educational Utopia. Education must fulfill its purpose in some less perfect state. To do this it must focus its attention less on what is wrong with education and more on what is right, what is practicable and usable and effective in a world of reality. A transition sentence in Milton's immortal Tractate reads:

"I shall detain you no longer in the demonstration of what we should not do, but straight conduct ye to a hillside, where I will point ye out the right path of a virtuous and noble education; laborious indeed at the first ascent, but else so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospect, and melodious sounds on every side, that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming."

With all of the philosophers of the past as our guides, we may let the experience of the past be a hillside vantage point from which we can attempt to find that path. Let us give attention to some of the guide-posts which will help us on our way.

The effort to achieve the good life through education may be compared to the effort to achieve it through democracy. For a long time the world has been struggling toward democracy. Present discouraging setbacks notwithstanding, it is still, thank God, struggling toward it. But its achievement is still far in the future. Its progress is a constant succession of ups and downs but its general direction is forward. So with edu-

cation. Because the accomplishment of its purposes, the realization of its hopes and dreams, is so painfully slow, and because its limitations and inadequacies are so painfully evident, impatient elements clamor for a new system. This is not the cure. What is needed is not a hastily constructed new system replacing one destroyed, but a growing, evolving, old system better understood and better applied.

The needs of an unstable world cannot be met by an unstable education. When the world is stodgy and conservative, education can afford to be radical and experimental; but when the world is in a period of rapid and bewildering change, education's chief concern should be with the preservation of social stability. It is a primary function of the schools to preserve calm in the midst of confusion, thinking in the midst of thoughtlessness, sanity in the midst of madness. Their responsibility for preserving and passing on the social heritage—for understanding and conserving the experience of the past—is most evident and most pressing in an age when the world is most disposed to ignore or forget the lessons it has had to learn. So in our time education should be something stable in an unsteady world. If it is not a pole-star, it will be a will-o'-the-wisp.

A stable education cannot be guided in its methods and provisions by the immediate and impulsive interests of the students. Its emphasis must be on needs rather than whims. In spite of some quibbling that the school itself is life, reactionary and radical alike agree that it is the business of the school to prepare for life and life situations. Now life is not easy. We all must constantly exercise restraints, face the unpleasant, do what doesn't enlist our interest, do the hard job. So the school must have remote objectives, hard tasks, compulsion, authority, penalties. Else it cannot prepare for life because it will be unreal and unlike life.

Neither can it be chiefly guided by the



apparent immediate interests of the times. Here again the emphasis must be on needs, and education must know those needs from history and philosophy. The interests and problems of the moment change too rapidly for any system of education to keep up with them: the principles underlying the intellectual training and accurate thinking which should be brought to bear on the interests and problems of any moment are relatively permanent. Changing education for changing times is another illustration of the vicious circle. Each changes because the other changes. There is a great deal of activity and effort with no worthwhile result, like a dog chasing his tail.

A stable education must be a liberal education, i. e., "one that liberates, one that releases the mind from ignorance, prejudices, partisanship, or superstition, one that emancipates the will, stimulates the imagination, broadens the sympathies, and makes the student a citizen of the world." Mere training tends to specialize rather than liberalize, to concentrate rather than liberate. Education for the moment does not broaden one's horizon and set him free. It focuses his mind on immediate perplexities and enslaves him to fashion. Educating for the moment too frequently fails to produce an appreciation of the permanent moral and social values that are the unchanging elements in civilization; too frequently loses in the search for immediate facility the larger search for fundamental truth. If we would be free we must still heed the ancient injunction "Ye shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free."

This means that we must have education for culture. Culture does not mean a cheap dilettantism or pedantry. It does not mean a smattering of Latin and Greek. It does not mean a sort of education that separates a man from the interests and problems of everyday life. It means, rather, a refinement—an enlightenment and discipline acquired by mental and moral training—an intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual develop-

ment. Matthew Arnold defines it as an effort toward perfection "through all the voices of human experience which have been heard upon it, of art, science, poetry, philosophy, as well as religion." It seeks to achieve its purpose by preserving and transmitting the best that has been thought and said in the world on all matters of human concern. It is not satisfied with mere knowing, but insists on doing—for the betterment of mankind.

There is no antagonism, as is often falsely assumed, between culture and *realism* in education. Instead of being in opposition to the practical, culture is in itself intensely practical in that it qualifies a man to face the problems of life with a poise, an equanimity, a moderation, and a background impossible to the uncultivated man. It enables him to reason from safer premises and to base his actions on sounder conclusions. It recognizes that we must teach with the old humanities the new science, that manual and vocational skills should be developed, that we must fit boys and girls to fill useful places in the world in which they will live. But it insists that the whole of our education shall not be vocational, that all of our educational material and procedure shall not be tested by the question of its immediate, practical use in a material sense, by the notions of any noisy cult or "school," or by the ephemeral enthusiasms or transient "trends" of an unsettled age.

We will not "educate our pupils for a changing world" if we merely feed them on the pap of current ideologies. We must enable them to drink deeper from the Pierian spring—to learn from the philosophers, the law-givers, the poets of the world. And as we pursue this course we shall say to those who insist on some more "practical" and more "modern" approach to the problem of education that the humanists are the ones who are really practical, who are really modern, in an enduring sense. They are "practical" because they deal in those fundamentals which are essential to any suc-



cessful living: they are "modern" because they deal in those verities which are "the same yesterday, today, and forever"—so modern that they come to grips with the present and anticipate the future.

So far as we know, no minerals were mined and no timber was cut from Helicon. Hippocrene floated no commerce and turned no mill-wheels. But their spirit governs all that is best in our world today. Education must continue to be a Mount Helicon to which men may go to learn the meaning of mythology, to read intelligently the rich scroll of history, to know poetry and philosophy, to learn to winnow the eternal from the ephemeral, to join with all the philosophers of all the ages in the only enterprise which can give a satisfying meaning and purpose to life—the unceasing search for Truth.

HENRY G. ELLIS

### CHINA'S GRIM STRUGGLE

WE are witnessing today the employment of force by a few aggressor nations to secure territories and privileges from weak and helpless countries. The great champions of law and order have been able to raise only feeble protests. Yea, some of them for the sake of preserving peace have even condoned such aggressive acts. This unwillingness to be embroiled in war has spurred the aggressor nations to more unbridled depredations and marauding expeditions. The weaker nations are being sacrificed to the insatiable greed and lust of these aggressors. Abyssinia and Czechoslovakia have been made victims, and China is still ravaged by Japan. For more than sixteen months the army of Japan has been devastating, plundering, and bombing the large extent of territory in China, wounding and killing more than a million of her population and rendering more than thirty millions homeless and on the verge of

starvation. Many simply look on and pass by like the Pharisees of old. Sad to say, some even supply Japan with sinews of war to make China's sorrow more difficult to bear.

After years of patience in the face of unceasing provocations, interference, and high-handed actions at the hands of Japan, China was forced to resort to arms in defense of her very existence and independence as a nation. In many respects her position is similar to that of America in her struggle for independence. Like Washington, General Chiang Kai-shek possesses an army poorly equipped compared with the highly mechanized modern army of Japan.

But despite the gloomy clouds, reverses, and evil forebodings, China is not without gleams of hope and encouragement, for General Chiang Kai-shek, like Washington, is a military genius of consummate sagacity and the Chinese soldiers are men of great valor and self-sacrifice. The Chinese people as a whole have immense capacity for suffering and an uncanny spirit of cheerfulness in the face of great odds. The reverses in the North during the first weeks of the encounter, the losses sustained in the three months' gruelling defense of Shanghai, the great debacle in Nanking, the six months' thrilling defense of the Lung-Hai Railway, and the strategic retreats from Canton and Hankow may be compared to the Battle of Long Island, August 1776, and the slipping away from Brooklyn Heights, to the storming of Fort Mifflin, September 26, 1776, the capture of Philadelphia 1777. The capture of an enemy's capital does not necessarily end the control of the system of administration nor does it make it a decisive blow. The Chinese victories at Tai-er-chwang and many other places compare favorably with the Battle of Bennington, Oriskany, Washington's masterly campaign in New Jersey and Burgoyne's surrender.

Thus despite China's severe losses of both men and territories, Japan today, like

An address before the students of Madison College on January 25, 1939.