

Values, education and schools

Prof. Maliha Khatun

(Contd. from last issue)

mean? This means that we ought to help our pupils to enter through great literature, history and scientific discoveries into the best that has been felt, thought and done in the world. This will give a vision of human life at its best in all spheres of human activities. But vision alone is not enough. The pupils need not only vision but faith. But faith can not be manufactured. What we can do is to expose our pupils and ourselves to the sources of inspiration, so that from the vision of greatness faith may grow. In broad term this is what is meant by philosophers as religious education. "The essence of all education is that it be religious" says Whitehead.

If the purpose of education is purely academic the divorce between education and life need not be a source of great uneasiness. It is possible under certain conditions for a culture to endure for centuries in which the material of education has nothing to do with the business of living. For instance, in old China public officials were required to pass a test in archery, long after fire arms had become the established means of warfare.

The most important conditions for checking up moral erosion and building up moral character are the personal qualities of the teachers and their belief and convictions in enduring values and standard of human life. There can be no remedy for inadequacy at this level. These values must become incarnate in all our activities of life, if we are to be called educated in the real sense of the term.

There has always been education but there have not always been schools. In Shakespeare's time in England, as history tell us, few people in England went to schools or learnt

to read or write which is today supposed to be the key of all social and economic progress. But this lack of literacy did not mean that people, in Shakespeare's time were undeducated. They make bold to say that in some ways they were better educated than their representatives today. The peasant in the village learnt the art and skills of farming, together with much traditional wisdom, about earth and sky and living things. In the town they boy was apprenticed to master craftsman in whose household he lived with other apprentices and where he learnt not only a trade but the ways of business and the rules and customs of the Guild. For the girls, the home with its loom, and herb garden, its poultry and its flock of sheep, and its wheat grinding stone mills, offered a better domestic education than it does in these days of canned food, ready made clothes and queuing before ration-shops. The whole people shared a true, indigenous popular culture with a rich heritage of customs, beliefs, tales, games and music.

It is not out of plan to mention the following incident, in passing.

The teacher from the school of Domestic Economy was giving a cooking demonstration before a women's Guild "Take an egg" she explained and carefully perforate the basal end. Duplicate the process in the apex, then applying the lips to one of the apertures, by forcibly exhaling the breath, discharge the shell of its contents".

Old Granne Thomson turned to her neighbour and said "It beats me how all these new-fangled,

ways work. When I was a girl we just poked a hole in the ends and blowed". Perhaps the old Granne was better educated at home than the modern teacher of Domestic Science.

Schools and universities were, nevertheless, a very important part of Elizabethan England, though few attended them, but the society prospered and the country gained power in all spheres of life.

At a certain stage in the development of civilisation schools became necessary. But the school is inevitably a artifice, separated from the rest of the life of the community. From the first establishment of special institutions for conducting education, and of a special class of professional teachers, education becomes artificial and a divorce occurs between school and life.

Realistic Curriculum:

If the purpose of education is purely academic, a divorce between school and life need not be a matter of grave concern. Instructions in the three R's or at higher level, advanced scholarship in classical languages or mathematics or even pure science, needs little or no contact with life. It is possible under certain conditions for a culture to endure for centuries in which the material of education has nothing to do with the business of life. Thus in old China public officials were required to pass a test in archery long after fire arms had become the established means of warfare. For centuries the ideally educated man in old China was the scholar. To be sure the scholar was also the civil servant, but most of what he had to learn

was quite unrelated to civil affairs.

The separation of the school from life and the unreality of curriculum became matters of grave concern when education undertakes the responsibility of explaining the world in which we live. It has become necessary to bring the world into the school and the school out into the world. A century ago the aim of elementary education was to produce literate people. Today literacy is not enough, and it is clear that society cannot properly function without an educated people—educated, in the sense of being capable of intelligent and responsible behaviour.

Behind all modern experiments in the reform of the curriculum is the principle that education should be grounded in the genuine concerns of the pupil and should help him by means of activities appropriate to his present stage of development, to get his bearing in the world.

Education as the Community in Action

It is not too much to say that education can never be fully and properly related to the life of the community—the school can never do its jobs—until the whole community takes its share in the work of education. By that means alone can education recover, in the context of civilised society, something of the primitive naturalness of growing up in the life of the community, which is the main thesis of Rousseau's philosophy of education.

But this engagement of society at large in the work of education must go farther still and we ought to make some efforts to see what

the ideal of education as the whole community in action would mean. The education of the young have to be more closely connected with the recreational activities of the adult community. Above all, there is the educational responsibility of the parents and the home. The home where worthwhile books are never read, where parents are constantly out in the evenings, where dubious moral standards are accepted (prayers at home and corruption outside) and where conversation never rises above triviality, is not the kind of home that it helps the school to do its work. Nor can the school bear the whole burden. The mother who replied to a criticism of her small child's bad behaviour "Oh, I know, I can't do anything with her. But I don't care. You see, she starts school next week", and was making an unfair demand of the school. Parents must be partners with the school and everything possible should be done to help them to appreciate the need for their contribution to this partnership, so that the school and home can deal together with problems arising either at school or at home.

The full participation of the community in school means much more than what our educationists think. It means more than the development of a number of specific connections between school and community. It means nothing less than the acceptance of the priority of educational values throughout the community—that is to say, the belief that the purpose of society is the good life in the ethical sense. It means, in other words, a

kind of society different from the which exists and in which people are treated as ends in themselves and not means for achieving some ulterior goals of the corrupt society. The approach towards a kind of society whose purpose is the good life and in which all members are treated as ends can only be gradual and there are certain prerequisites for any substantial advance in that direction of which perhaps the chief are; a certain basic economic security, a reasonable measure of international security and a common belief in certain moral and spiritual values which have the force of binding the members of society in a cohesive bond of brotherhood and the feeling of fellowship.

The school can do nothing better for the education of citizens than to make its boys and girls members of a true community in which are combined liberty and order, freedom and responsibility; in which human personality is respected for its own sake.

It is no good schools prescribing virtue when the moment children left school, they found the general climate of opinion hostile to virtue.

The great shock of going out from school into life is that at school they have been taught to be honest and clean living and when they go out into life they hear a howl like the open pit and they say to themselves 'what we have learnt of school is pure nonsense'.

The school teachers virtue, no doubt, but the population as a whole must be held responsible for the falling away of the young people from it.

It is well to remind ourselves of what master of Balliol said that there is no road to moral or intellectual improvement like the knowledge of our own defects. It is this knowledge we lamentably lack.

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