

*The Teacher and his Function in Society**

ALTHOUGH Education is a subject on which everyone feels himself to be an expert it is undeniable that, despite the prevalence of experts, it is in a state of chaos. Its aims are unclear, its methods confused and its foundations rooted not in philosophy, but frustration. This is not merely my view, it has been put forward in many places, even in Ceylon by your Minister of Education on October 22nd. It was a view common in the past too. Educational history shows that most of those whom we now consider to be the greatest educational thinkers, were critics of education in their day.

But, and it is an important "but"—these critics, men like Plato, Aristotle, Quintilian, Comenius and others had also something to offer. They had a closely reasoned theory for their educational practices. Is this true today? Have our critics something positive to offer, or are they merely negative? Why was it possible, in the past, to be positive—and so much more difficult to be so today? Life of course was more simple, populations were smaller, economic relations less complex—and education the preserve of a favoured few—such things made it more easy to talk about education. The one thing, however, which made the great thinkers of the past so positive, so outstanding—so that today expressions of belief made hundreds of years ago still ring with the challenge of truth—was the men they were. They were great men, and sincere men—we have such today. But Plato and the others were men who "saw life steadily and saw it whole"—they were participants in life as well as onlookers, they were students of Life as well as of Thought. They were sociologists as well as philosophers, indeed thought appeared only to have value for them when it became the basis of social action.

The problems of education today result from the divorce between education and its social setting. The content of education is divorced from social functions and purpose—just as the worker is removed from contact with primary production. Our methods in education are divorced from our common experience of how children live and grow. We have come to think of our task in education as being the fitting of children to Society—whereas for Plato and others the task of education was to remodel, reconstruct, society. We have tended to overlook this social function of education. What is worse, there are many who are able to think of education only as a means of preserving existing social structures and others who would deny that education can ever affect social structure.

The relationship between social conditions and education appear to be demonstrated in many ways—by the times when men wrote—or by the dates

*Abridged from the Inaugural Address delivered at King George's Hall, on October 25th, 1949.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

of the Education Acts in England 1870, 1902, 1918, 1944, all times of social upheaval related to War. The relation between educational practice and social structures and belief—the use of education to recast society—has been demonstrated by Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin. Unfortunately so few people are aware of the fact that the same relationship has been demonstrated in the peaceful ways of education in rural societies and towns.

It appears an inescapable belief that Education is Social Philosophy in action. The sociologist studies and plans for society—only the educationist, as administrator, student, and above all, teacher, can put those plans into action. Such a view point has many implications. My task here in Ceylon relates only to one of these—the teacher.

We might consider teachers from many points of view. As the most numerous group of government servants. As people who have become teachers because they have failed to get what they look on as better jobs. As the guardians of youth or the disseminators of culture. Our picture of the teacher depends on the view point we choose, and the stereotype held by the public has been built up from many sources, from history, the novel, the stage, the film, the newspaper—and from what teachers do and are. The status afforded by society to the teacher is a significant index—and in few countries is it commensurate with the social importance of his task.

It is essential for the status of the teacher to be improved. In England we put this bluntly in financial terms because, unless we compete with the higher incomes offered in industry and commerce we shall continue to lose good potential material. Science teaching in England is already in jeopardy I believe however that the first move towards improved status lies less with society than with the teacher, and all associated with teachers. The teacher must see himself as a social worker in society's greatest, and gravest, task, that of Education. Society too must learn, especially that the true results of education lie not only in the immediate present but in the more remote future, in the men and women into whom our boys and girls grow. These ideas must be thought of in relation to conditions in Ceylon.

Teacher-training is a convenient phrase, though it carries a hint of learning tricks-of-the-trade. We ought to be more concerned perhaps with teacher-education, for it is difficult not to believe that culture, education, appreciation and attitudes are not at least as important as training. What we actually do is the result of past years of experience and, like much which is of venerable age, it shows some degree of fossilization. Our mainstay is the "Principles of Education", often but nibblings at history, philosophy and psychology—put them each in their place and the professor may have nothing left to talk about! We have Educational Psychology which started with sense physiology and fatigue and then became lost in the arid desert of studies of learning, usually of nonsense material, made by those who seemed unaware that

THE TEACHER AND HIS FUNCTION IN SOCIETY

knowledge has meaning and learning needs a motive. Today psychology is concerned with measurement though it has yet to be shown that education has magnitudes susceptible to numerical expression. Methods of teaching also receive attention, and the artificial presentation of learning and knowledge as "method" and "matter" has come to be accepted as the most natural thing in the world. Our newest interests, graced with the title of "Modern Teaching Media", are film and radio, and there is more than a little danger that we shall forget that children still have to learn, in the end, with an old fashioned apparatus—the human mind.

We cannot dismiss these, but we need a new synthesis, a new orientation, to weave them into a unity which has relation to reality. Nor must we forget that the realities of education are children and the society to which they belong, not theories about children or about society. Our study must be of functional wholes, expediency will for ever drive us to the study of parts, to intelligence testing, methods of teaching and the like. Somewhere and somehow we must put the pieces together, seek unifying relations, turn in fact to philosophy and sociology.

The training of teachers in England is slowly changing under the influence of new social attitudes. Instead of trying to turn out polished practitioners, full of techniques for the particular moment, we are seeking to produce men and women with general principles, with a philosophy which can guide in every situation. We are studying children and society and, while we seek knowledge from books we are also seeking experience from reality. Our students are using the child's world as a laboratory, in school, playground, street, club and home. Where we cannot approach reality directly we seek it by vicarious means, by radio and film. It is in the light of this experience that I think we must look at teacher-training here in Ceylon.

I believe strongly that a Department of Education should look beyond its walls at the society which it serves. What this means in some ways I have already suggested. I think it means other things. There are teachers in service to whom I feel I owe a due. They cannot come to the University as full time students, but I believe they would welcome the chance of attending conferences, lecture courses and refresher courses. I hope that it will prove possible to arrange these. At such meetings we could push forward our pure educational work as well as explore the vast *hinterland* of related causes and problems—in art, in rural education, in craft work, in activity methods, in juvenile delinquency, education of the handicapped and in many other spheres which have, as yet, received little attention in Ceylon.

Our work lies mostly in the school world. But education in Ceylon has vast ranges in adult education yet to explore. Here too I hope that my Department will be able to join in, not merely in technical problems related to dealing with illiteracy or agricultural methods, but in its social aspects. Parti-

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

cularly in connection with the subtle problems of attitudes and values. In Ceylon I believe you need to study how to change attitudes, how to get a man to break with tradition and yet respect the manual job he does and find satisfaction in it. You'll get better crops of paddy or coconuts not merely by better manures—but by making better men.

As we look at the outer world we must not forget that there are others in Ceylon engaged in Teacher Training, Colleges with a long history and in a growing number. With them it should be our aim to achieve collaboration. In England we have an Association of Training College Lecturers and, under the McNair Committee Report, we have developed Institutes of Education. It may be that these have significance for Ceylon as a way of bringing together, for mutual benefit, staff engaged in the same job.

There are many problems in education about which we have remarkably little knowledge, this we must seek in the field of research, a field almost untouched in Ceylon, and so vast that one might well not know where to start. Elsewhere it has been shown that educational research is neither easy to conduct nor easy to organise. Teaching and research may go on together, they sometimes do, but usually research is centred in a university department. I hope that we shall achieve that in Ceylon. I want to stress the place of the University in research. Universities have always been the centres of research, not exclusively, I know, but on a large scale, and particularly in the liberal arts and humanities. The main reason however is something else. Research can only flourish in an atmosphere of academic freedom. Under every other condition vested interest comes. Unfortunately education is still a matter of vested interest. Education, in no country in the world, is free of political influence. In many countries the political factor is slight, but research soon brings to light facts and ideas which conflict with political expediency. In England, although research was mentioned in the Education Act of 1944 for the first time, no Local Education Authority has done much about it—because it is too dangerous. Research however, is the life blood of progress. Elsewhere, as for example in Scotland, England and New Zealand, it is organised by a Research Council, conducted chiefly in universities, supported by the government and education authorities; but left free of control, left to control itself.

The problems awaiting investigation are very numerous and their very variety again suggests that Universities, where experts of many kind work, is the true home for research. Among so many problems selection of a few as illustrations is difficult and one is likely to leave out what others think urgent. However I might mention the conduct of a nationwide survey of intelligence together with a study of the effects of socio-economic and cultural factors on performance. This would demand the preparation of suitable tests, in itself a formidable task. In a country where educational facilities and opportunities

THE TEACHER AND HIS FUNCTION IN SOCIETY

vary widely there is need for standardized tests of aptitude. You need record cards as guides in selection and differentiation. There are many problems in educational sociology, ranging from studies of delinquency to seeking ways of harmonising the conflict between tradition and modern educational practice. In the teaching of languages—classical and European—we have both experience and research results. In the teaching of Oriental Languages you have nothing to guide you, yet here is one of your important problems. The same is true in connection with the teaching of English, as a foreign language, in Ceylon. In broadcasting, in visual aids—in sphere after sphere of education we are forced to take action before thought. One of the largest and most important of all such spheres is what is called Child Development. What factors affect the development of your children, their health, physique, their intelligence, attitudes and beliefs? Such work is but young in the west, so far as real experiment is concerned. But its results should have a great significance for the East, where it has not yet started. I hope the day will come when Ceylon University may have its own Child Study Centre, its Pre-school Laboratory and perhaps even its Experimental School. With such a centre you could contribute to the solution of your own problems and give a guide to the whole of S.E. Asia. These are but a few of the research problems which are in need of exploration—and in tackling them you will find that even though they are in education, they have extensions into other aspects of living. They will take you beyond education into economics, sociology, criminology, psycho-pathology, legislation and probation. If you need an Educational Research Council do you not equally need a National Social Research Council which can initiate, conduct, direct and collate research over the whole field of social affairs? Without such an all-embracing Council you may, by studying educational problems out of their full social setting, be contributing to that atomistic approach which I have deplored.

Important though I consider research to be, I do not think that it can solve all our difficulties. I believe there is need for some administrative machinery which will bring together on equal terms, all concerned with education. The politician, the State expert, the research worker, the teacher, the parent and even the pupil if need be. Here theory and practice could be collated, What Is could be compared with What Might Be, needs could be looked at in terms of opportunity, philosophy seen against finance. It is our responsibility to ensure that our actions shall do the greatest justice to the greatest number. To this end I believe that in Ceylon you might turn to consider the functions of the Central Advisory Council for Education in England which brings together representatives of all who are concerned with education. Such a Council, with its roots in the culture of Ceylon, could ensure that education did not thrust a purely western pattern on you.

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON REVIEW

All these developments, so urgently required, need time and money, amenities, staff, accommodation. You cannot start research in Ceylon until you have the journals and books which are essential. The University has proved very willing to acquire them. They will cost a great deal—and they will take up a great deal of space, Research will require highly-trained staff. Teacher training needs staff with experience, with ability; men and women who have proved, in the eyes of other teachers, that they possess beyond all doubt qualities which make them stand out in the profession. If you think of the subjects I have mentioned as part of teacher education you will see that the staff needed is large—and looking back I remember that I paid no attention to many school subjects, nor to educational history or comparative education. Teacher training is doomed to failure from the start unless the staff, because of its ability and experience, its quality as men and women, its devotion to the cause of education, commands the respect of students. Moreover, teaching how to teach is an exacting art. There cannot be continual and often easy escape in the lecture room. Theory must be put to proof by demonstration in the class room, it must be tested by discussion in tutorial periods and there must be teaching practice with adequate supervision. Moreover the staff must continually be up-to-date with educational development and always in close and recent contact with teaching. Those who would teach the art of teaching must themselves have come fresh from the exercise of teaching—because, above all, teaching is an activity and not merely a theory.

Accommodation is needed, for lectures, for tutorials, for those informal discussions which can be so rich in educational value. I would like to have space for experimentation and for practical work so that students who have for years used books, chalk and talk, could feel some of the thrill of doing a practical job. Where they could model, paint, build, print, do all the things which are so important a part of the learning process—and which have for so long been neglected in Ceylon. One of the greatest needs here is to put more practical work into all kinds of schools—not in vocational, but in cultural terms.

It is along such lines as this that I see the work of a University Department of Education. Its first task is to train teachers, not merely in the narrow terms of technique, but in the broader fields of culture and learning. In England we have had as students those who had but just graduated, they come to our Departments of Education hoping to find out what to teach, and how to teach it. With changing conceptions we are trying to encourage them to seek answers to the more difficult question of *why* to teach. Unless its aims, purposes and motivations are clear there can be but superficial achievements in education. I believe that to be as true here in Ceylon as it is in my own country.

THE TEACHER AND HIS FUNCTION IN SOCIETY

The invitation to occupy your first Chair of Education is a distinction I appreciate. It makes me think that there are some among who share my belief that in English Education there is something of good. I take it to be my job here in Ceylon to try to tell you, and demonstrate to you, what that good is, and to help you to adapt it to your own ends. Above all to try to help you to develop methods of your own. I believe that education—and therefore teachers also—must play a great part in determining the future of Ceylon. In setting up this new Department of Education the University of Ceylon has accepted an even greater responsibility for the future. A responsibility to be discharged only at the cost of time, effort and money and to be undertaken only by those who can bring to their task a passionate interest in a great cause. Those of us who work in this new Department will do all that we can to help in the discharge of this responsibility to the children of today, who tomorrow will be the citizens of Ceylon.

T. L. GREEN