

## VII. THE NEW EDUCATION

Some few months ago Mr. Harold Spender, in the Daily News, was calling attention to a very significant fact indeed. The higher education in England, and more particularly the educational process of Oxford and Cambridge, which has been going on continuously since the Middle Ages, is practically in a state of suspense. Oxford and Cambridge have stopped. They have stopped so completely that Mr. Spender can speculate whether they can ever pick up again and resume upon the old lines.

For my own part, as the father of two sons who are at present in mid-school, I hope with all my heart that they will not. I hope that the Oxford and Cambridge of unphilosophical classics and Little-go Greek for everybody, don's mathematics, bad French, ignorance of all Europe except Switzerland, forensic exercises in the Union Debating Society, and cant about the Gothic, the Oxford and Cambridge that turned boys full of life and hope and infinite possibility into barristers, politicians, mono-lingual diplomatists, bishops, schoolmasters, company directors, and remittance men, are even now dead.

Quite recently I passed through Cambridge, and, with the suggestions of Mr. Spender in my mind, I paused to savour the atmosphere of the place. He had very greatly understated the facts of the case. He laid stress upon the fact that instead of the normal four thousand undergraduates or so, there are now scarcely four hundred. But before I was fairly in

Cambridge I realised that that gives no idea of the real cessation of English education. Of the first seven undergraduates I saw upon the Trumpington road, one was black, three were coloured, and one of the remaining three was certainly not British, but, I should guess, Spanish-American. And it isn't only the undergraduates who have gone. All the dons of military age and quality have gone too, or are staying up not in caps and gowns, but in khaki; all the vigorous teachers are soldiering; there are no dons left except those who are unfit for service--and the clergy. Buildings, libraries, empty laboratories, empty lecture theatres, vestiges, refugees, neutrals, khaki; that is Cambridge to-day.

There never was before, there never may be again, so wonderful an opportunity for a cleaning-up and sweeping-out of those two places, and for a profitable new start in British education.

The cessation of Oxford and Cambridge does not give the full measure of the present occasion. All the other British universities are in a like case. And the schools which feed them have been practically swept clean of their senior boys. And not a tithe of any of this war class of schoolboys will ever go to the universities now, not a tithe of the war class of undergraduates will ever return. Between the new education and the old there will be a break of two school generations. For the next thirty or forty years an exceptional class of men will play a leading part in British affairs, men who will have learnt more from reality and less from lectures than either the generations that preceded or the

generations that will follow them. The subalterns of the great war will form a distinct generation and mark an epoch. Their experiences of need, their sense of deficiencies, will certainly play a large part in the reconstitution of British education. The stamp of the old system will not be on them.

Now is the time to ask what sort of training should a university give to produce the ruling, directing, and leading men which it exists to produce? Upon that Great Britain will need to make up its mind speedily. It is not a matter for to-morrow or the day after; it is necessary to decide now what it is the Britain that is coming will need and want, and to set to work revising the admission and degree requirements, and reconstructing all those systems of public examinations for the public services that necessarily dominate school and university teaching, before the universities and schools reassemble. If the rotten old things once get together again, the rotten old things will have a new lease of life. This and no other is the hour for educational reconstruction. And it is in the decisions and readjustments of schools and lectures and courses, far more than anywhere else, that the real future of Great Britain will be decided. Equally true is this of all the belligerent countries. Much of the future has a kind of mechanical inevitableness, but here far more than anywhere else, can a few resolute and capable men mould the spirit and determine the quality of the Europe to come.

Now surely the chief things that are needed in the education of a ruling

class are these--first, the selection and development of Character, then the selection and development of Capacity, and, thirdly, the imparting of Knowledge upon broad and comprehensive lines, and the power of rapidly taking up and using such detailed knowledge as may be needed for special occasions. It is upon the first count that the British schools and universities have been most open to criticism. We have found the British university-trained class under the fiery tests of this war an evasive, temporising class of people, individualistic, ungenerous, and unable either to produce or obey vigorous leadership. On the whole, it is a matter for congratulation, it says wonderful things for the inherent natural qualities of the English-speaking peoples, that things have proved no worse than they are, considering the nature of the higher education under which they have suffered.

Consider in what that educational process has consisted. Its backbone has been the teaching of Latin by men who can read, write, and speak it rather worse than a third-rate Babu speaks English, and of Ancient Greek by teachers who at best half know this fine lost language. They do not expect any real mastery of either tongue by their students, and naturally, therefore, no real mastery is ever attained. The boys and young men just muff about at it for three times as long as would be needed to master completely both those tongues if they had "live" teachers, and so they acquire habits of busy futility and petty pedantry in all intellectual processes that haunt them throughout life. There are also sterile mathematical studies that never get from "exercises" to practice. There is a pretence of studying philosophy

based on Greek texts that few of the teachers and none of the taught can read comfortably, and a certain amount of history. The Modern History School at Oxford, for example, is the queerest collection of chunks of reading. English history from the beginning, with occasional glances at Continental affairs, European history for about a century, bits of economics, and--the Politics of Aristotle! It is not education; it is a jack-daw collection....This sort of jumble has been the essentials of the more pretentious type of "higher education" available in Great Britain up to the present.

In this manner, through all the most sensitive and receptive years of life, our boys have been trained in "how not to get there," in a variety of disconnected subjects, by men who have never "got there," and it would be difficult to imagine any curriculum more calculated to produce a miscellaneous incompetence. They have also, it happens, received a certain training in savoir faire through the collective necessities of school life, and a certain sharpening in the arts of advocacy through the debating society. Except for these latter helps, they have had to face the world with minds neither more braced, nor more trained, nor more informed than any "uneducated" man's.

Surely the first condition that should be laid down for the new education in Europe is that whatever is undertaken must be undertaken in grim earnest and done. It is ridiculous to talk about the "character-forming" value of any study that does not go through to an end. Manifestly Greek must be dropped as a part of the general

curriculum for a highly educated man, for the simple reason that now there are scarcely any competent teachers, and because the sham of teaching it partially and pretentiously demoralises student and school alike. The claim of the clergy and so forth to "know" Greek is one of the many corrupting lies in British intellectual life. English comic writers never weary of sneering at the Hindu who claimed to be a "failed B.A.," but what is the ordinary classical degree man of an English university but a "failed" Greek scholar? Latin, too, must be either reduced to the position of a study supplementary to the native tongue, or brought up to an honest level of efficiency.

French and German in the case of the English, and English in the case of the French and Russians, are essentially governess languages; any intelligent boy or girl from a reasonably prosperous home ought to be able to read, write, and speak either before fifteen; they are to be taken by the way rather than regarded as a fundamental part of education. The French, German, or English literature and literary development up to and including contemporary work is, of course, an entirely different matter. But there can be no doubt of the great educational value of some highly inflected and well-developed language taught by men to whom it is a genuine means of expression. Educational needs and public necessity point alike to such languages as Russian or, in the case of Great Britain, Hindustani to supply this sound training.

If Great Britain means business after this war, if she is to do her duty by the Eastern world she controls, she will not stick at the petty

expense of getting a few hundreds of good Russian and Hindu teachers into the country, and she will place Russian and Hindustani upon at least an equal footing with Greek in all her university and competitive examinations. Moreover, it is necessary to set a definite aim of application before university mathematical teaching. As the first condition of character-building in all these things, the student should do what he ostensibly sets out to do. No degree and no position should be attainable by half accomplishment.

Of course, languages and mathematics do not by any means round off the education of a man of the leading classes. There is no doubt much exercise in their attainment, much value in their possession. But the essence of the higher education is now, as it always has been, philosophy; not the antiquated pretence of "reading" Plato and Aristotle, but the thorough and subtle examination of those great questions of life that most exercise and strengthen the mind. Surely that is the essential difference of the "educated" and the "common" man. The former has thought, and thought out thoroughly and clearly, the relations of his mind to the universe as a whole, and of himself to the State and life. A mind untrained in swift and adequate criticism is essentially an uneducated mind, though it has as many languages as a courier and as much computation as a bookie.

And what is our fundamental purpose in all this reform of our higher education? It is neither knowledge nor technical skill, but to make our young men talk less and think more, and to think more swiftly, surely,

and exactly. For that we want less debating society and more philosophy, fewer prizes for forensic ability and more for strength and vigour of analysis. The central seat of character is the mind. A man of weak character thinks vaguely, a man of clear intellectual decisions acts with precision and is free from vacillation. A country of educated men acts coherently, smites swiftly, plans ahead; a country of confused education is a country of essential muddle.

It is as the third factor in education that the handling and experience of knowledge comes, and of all knowledge that which is most accessible, most capable of being handled with the greatest variety of educational benefit, so as to include the criticism of evidence, the massing of facts, the extraction and testing of generalisations, lies in the two groups of the biological sciences and the exact sciences. No doubt a well-planned system of education will permit of much varied specialisation, will, indeed, specialise those who have special gifts from a very early age, will have corners for Greek, Hebrew, Sanscrit, philology, archaeology, Christian theology, and so on, and so on; nevertheless, for that great mass of sound men of indeterminate all-round ability who are the intellectual and moral backbone of a nation, it is in scientific studies that their best training lies, studies most convenient to undertake and most readily applied in life. From either of the two groups of the sciences one may pass on to research or to technical applications leading directly to the public service. The biological sciences broaden out through psychology and sociology to the theory and practice of law, and to political life. They



lead also to medical and agricultural administration. The exact sciences lead to the administrative work of industrialism, and to general economics.

These are the broad, clear lines of the educational necessities of a modern community, plain enough to see, so that every man who is not blinded by prejudice and self-interest can see them to-day. We have now before us a phase of opportunity in educational organisation that will never recur again. Now that the apostolic succession of the old pedagogy is broken, and the entire system discredited, it seems incredible that it can ever again be reconstituted in its old seats upon the old lines. In these raw, harsh days of boundless opportunity, the opportunity of the new education, because it is the most fundamental, is assuredly the greatest of all.