

REAL EDUCATION

WHAT I have long wanted to say may have been said before by many people better qualified than I to say it, but it has not been said often enough. There are too many critics and potential pioneers ready to rush into print to condemn existing school systems and propose exciting new ones: there are too few who consider their attitude towards three fundamental questions.

First of these questions is, What are we educating boys *for*?—or—Do we aim at turning out boys to live in the world as it is, or as we think it ought to be, or as we hope it will be?

The question is the more important because many parents will think it silly. They provide so little or so impoverished a home-life for their children that the only discipline boys now experience is what they are subjected to at school, and if parents' ambition is that their children shall be fitted to share in the prevalent laxness of modern life, our present system of education with its irksome rules and obligations offers unsuitable training.

If parents wish their children to change the world they must realise their own obligations: they must cease to baulk the efforts of the schools by permitting indiscipline in their homes; they must co-operate with those upon whom they thrust the burden of bringing up their children, and I fear that few of them would come out well if reports were written on their conduct in this respect during the holidays. They have already seen to it that school-life is incomparably more comfortable, more free and more pleasurable than it has ever been, so they cannot fairly excuse themselves in their over-indulgence by pretending that school-days are very onerous.

School authorities have not accepted their heavy responsibility of seeking and fostering the necessary collaboration with parents, and parents take too limited a view of education to recognise it. No school can provide an adequate substitute for home life, and the majority of troublesome boys at school are those who suffer from a bad home life or have none at all. Parents must co-operate with and help their boys if they wish them to prepare for the world as it ought to be.

Secondly, what do parents consider is the value of their sons' education? They recognise the subsequent commercial value of attending 'a good school', but they are unwilling to pay the premium for that insurance.

Education is so expensive a business that it usually has to be run on lines of mass production: for the sake of economy a school

takes as many boys as possible; to secure them against the competition of other schools, fees are set as low as possible and are made elastic; parents, aware of the competition and the conciliation, bargain with schools and send their sons to the lowest bidder; but if fees are reduced, expenses must be reduced, and just as parents economise on their sons' education before anything else, so schools first economise on masters' salaries; the result is that education is in the hands of the poorest paid of all professional men—men whose life is exceptionally full of responsibility and strain and who are frequently handicapped in their work by private financial worries; many well-qualified men seek other employment rather than receive remuneration disproportionate to such arduous duties.

Parents are easily impressed by school 'window-dressing'. They more readily select a school that can show a variety of extraneous attractions than one well equipped to teach and train the boys.

Commercialism must either be discarded—headmasters in conference could do that by agreeing on set terms, no bargaining, and a pension proper to maintain a staff in reasonable comfort—or education must be completely commercialised like other big businesses, the financial side of it being left in the hands of financial experts and the cultural side to the professional men.

The third question is—What is to be the place of religion in schools? The Catholic Church constantly urges parents to send their sons to Catholic schools, and few Protestants care to send theirs to any but Protestant schools. But parents too often assume that their obligation is fulfilled when they have assigned their boys to the care of members of the same church as themselves. That arrangement can be sheer mockery; it can do incalculable harm to the boys who may come to despise their parents for hypocrisy or to regard religion as an extra and tiresome school subject.

Religion is in a more anomalous position in schools at present than is any cultural subject that is cramped by examination exigencies. Boys may be sent to schools where religious exercises take priority of place, where those in charge of them are punctilious and admirable in the performance of their religious duties, then they may go home to parents who live in circles where religion is little practised and where most of the precepts taught by their creed are violated as a matter of course. The bearing of this question on the first is obvious and serious.

I believe that until a sane, honest and reasonable attitude is taken up on all sides on these matters, education will be largely unreal and ineffective.

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