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COMMERCE AND CULTURE

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and discusses the whole subject with commendable realism and detachment. Wisely, he is not in favour of any straight-out ban on bloods and poor literature generally. "It is debatable," he says mildly, "whether the adult's habit of reading thrillers or the child's habit of reading bloods is really harmless," but he admits that "the problem requires more careful analysis than it seems to have yet received." He is temperate, and his case is well-argued. Its real strength appears when he deals with the commercial background of the popular culture of to-day:

The hope entertained by the apostles of an educated democracy when universal education was introduced was that the richest fruits of English and European culture, hitherto enjoyed by the privileged few, would be eagerly seized and assimilated by all classes of the people. There has undoubtedly been some diffusion; the works of the masters in music, art, and literature have been made available in various ways to the people, some of whom have made full use of the opportunity of enjoying them. But the practice of "giving the public what it wants," initiated by Northcliffe in his *Daily Mail* in 1896, and by film magnates, has tended to create a mass taste at a level very much below the best, and to make the public want, and be satisfied with, what it is given. . . . It can be said, in fact, that a vast lower-middle-class urban culture is in process of formation, superseding on the one hand the aristocratic one which produced Shakespeare and even Shaw, and on the other the rural one largely destroyed by industrialisation.

* * *

The distinction here is, I think, not a real one; as H. M. Massingham shows in his essay *William Shakespeare of Warwickshire*, Shakespeare was firmly rooted in the rural tradition. But the main point stands. The Culture of to-day is flattening out into mediocrity all the time. "For this," says Mr. Scott, "the heavy downward pressure of our commercialised culture which depends for its financial success on mass support is largely responsible." He suggests elsewhere that popular taste "may be to some extent an artificial thing, created not by giving the public what it wants, but by skilfully making it want what it is given." Although there is much truth in this I think the public must bear its full share of the blame.

Another important point he makes—one that will not have escaped the notice of the alert radio listener—is that nowadays "the popular culture has to a large extent ironed out the distinction between what is for the adult and what is for the child, and produced books, films, magazines and radio items that deeply interest both at once." The belief held by some psychologists that most people are mentally about 12 years old is accepted in practice by most of the purveyors of mass-entertainment. The trouble is that this sort of stuff can be turned out in such quantities with modern machinery that it tends to smother everything better than itself by its sheer bulk and weight.

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MR. SCOTT puts his finger on what is perhaps the central problem when he says of the means of mass-entertainment:

Most of them are provided . . . by enterprising men of business, who having discovered that it is very profitable to sell culture to the masses, have invested immense sums of money in the extensive concerns that manufacture and distribute it. This

commercialisation and mass production of culture is comparatively new in our history. In its most powerful forms and methods not yet more than 30 years old. It has developed side by side with the mass education undertaken by the State—naturally enough, since both are inevitable results of industrialisation. The situation then is that the State, in the official sense, educates the masses, the producer entertains them.

Agreed. The implications of that situation have not yet been faced. In New Zealand the position is even more complicated, for the State itself has entered the mass-entertainment business; and although we have set up a National Orchestra, a large proportion of our expenditure on broadcasting must be considered, in cultural terms, as a debit item to set against the eight million pounds we spend on education. In a word, the State is driving its educational vehicle with the brakes half on.

There is one possible implication of all this that Mr. Scott does not discuss. If the chief effect of universal education has been to provide a rich field for the commercial culture-monger and the propagandist to work; and if the fixed I.Q. of each individual sets a limit to his ability to make use of imparted knowledge; then we may very easily be driven to the unpalatable conclusion that the whole attempt to provide universal education beyond a certain point is mistaken—a piece of political sentimentality. Is it possible that in providing the "benefits" of education to certain people who are incapable, through lack of mental capacity or lack of character, of using them with judgment, we are doing something analogous to handing out large supplies of brandy to South Sea Islanders? It is outrageous to ask that question, of course. But I am afraid it will force itself on our attention before we are finished. Most University teachers would agree, I think, that their classes are too big and that many of their students have no right to be taking courses.

It all depends, needless to say, on what sort of education is in question. Universal education of a certain kind is indispensable. I have the impression that our educational policy at the present time is working towards a more realistic approach to the general problem with which it is faced. So far as I can judge, education at the junior levels is being treated more as a sort of general social "conditioning" than as, in the past, a specific preparation for advanced studies that are in most cases not, and in some cases wrongly, undertaken. There seems to be much more emphasis on individual self-development according to temperament and capability; on physical education; on aesthetic training through "free expression" in art; and on training in the use of the hands. All this represents a healthy trend, but it has not yet gone far. I think that as time passes we shall be compelled to re-define most of our educational ideas and practices in the realistic light of individual human needs and capabilities. Nobody, reading Mr. Scott's report on the results of universal education, could feel complacent about the principles and methods we have used in the past.

Perhaps we may eventually arrive at a notion of universal education as a system that concerns itself, in the main, with self-development and social adjustment. The "higher education," in any of its forms, would then be regarded as

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