

# THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

WHEN the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights last December, the world's response, apart from the rejoicings of certain noble minds, was a general and regrettable attitude of scepticism or apathy. The distance that always separates the ideal from the reality brings disillusion and there were not a few who echoed the recurrent question: "What is there in this new Declaration which was not contained in the Republican Manifestoes of the 18th Century?" or again "What guarantee have we that this list is anything more than a dusty catalogue of dead promises?"

Such scepticism is easy. As though the rights which guarantee our lives and liberties as men and citizens to-day did not, one after the other, emerge from those earlier documents, judged in their day to be utopian. As though the universal character of the Declaration did not make it a fundamentally new statement. And as though it did not contain definitions unknown to all the texts preceding it, as well as ideas and affirmations truly revolutionary.

The Articles on labour, protection against unemployment and on social security have been cited as examples of these innovations, and there are other such articles. I should like to read and analyse with you articles 26 and 27, which deal with education.

"Everyone," declare the United Nations, "has the right to education." Let us stop there for a moment. In some countries such a statement appears self-evident, but we must remember certain hard facts. At the present time, in the middle of the 20th Century, more than half of mankind is illiterate. There are countries where the proportion of illiterates is 60 or 70 per cent. and those are not the figures for Asia or Africa, where they often rise to 98 or 99 per cent.

It is for that reason that no man worthy of the name, no man conscious of that solidarity of the human species which knows neither race nor frontiers, could, I think, read the rest of the article without a blush; "education shall be free, at least in so far as elementary and fundamental education are concerned. Elementary education shall be compulsory." Those, of course, are words which have long been associated, and we repeat them so mechanically that we cease to see exactly what they mean. Is there not something bitterly ironical in gravely declaring that we must go to school, that school is compulsory, when half the children of the world, because they have had the misfortune to be born in a "backward" or "devastated" country, have no schools, have no teachers, no books, no education?

## Fallow Field

And each man, without much surprise even, goes on repeating what the national budgets teach him; that the most prosperous countries spend so much money, so much effort and intelligence on armaments and luxuries that not enough is left over for the schools.

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*It is not by coincidence that this article, written by DR. JAIME TORRES BODET, Director-General of UNESCO, follows one concerned with education in New Zealand. What Dr. Bodet has to say may serve to correct the facile assumption that a nation's educational responsibilities lie solely within its own borders.*

What future does an age deserve which neglects its children? After all, society only exists as a group of separate individuals, and its worth is determined by the individual worth of its members. What harvest can be hoped for when half the field is left to lie fallow? This is to found the future on the most intolerable of inequalities.

Nor does the trouble end with primary teaching, which should never be more than the basis of a true and full education. Society has not discharged its obligations towards children when it has taught them to read and write and add up. Those children will not become men and women unless they can grow up to do a man's job, train themselves for a freely chosen occupation and develop their gifts and aptitudes to the highest point of excellence. It is obvious that by the pursuit of such a purpose we are working for peace and social progress alike; only by the discharge of his creative functions can the individual be effectively integrated within the com-

munity. Hence, as the Declaration of Human Rights states, technical and vocational education must be made generally available. It is time that our civilisations realised their duty to furnish every child with the guidance and the tools which will secure for him his place among the builders of the future.

But that again is only a stage on the road. These children and young people, to whom we look to create a better and more peaceful world than our own, have a right to more than the rudiments of knowledge and more even than the best of working tools. They need a culture. They long for their share in man's spiritual inheritance, to experience in their own persons its growth and its changes, and to work for its enrichment. That is a necessary condition if they are to be complete men and if the culture of their nation is to be a living reality.

In our days, unfortunately, this culture appears to be the preserve of the universities. It was not always so. No

doubt "higher education" has always existed as a privilege of the rich and a reward for the most gifted, and it used to be thought that only the study of the classics could make virtuous men and the best brains. And yet the mass of unlearned artisans, manual workers and peasants were not on that account without culture. Fine traditions, a living folklore, a common faith and popular arts still full of vital impulse held the place of the book learning dispensed by our schools. For better or for worse, times have changed; the industrial revolution, better communications, over-urbanisation, even the spread of shallow teaching have very often and very quickly sterilised that peasant culture, discredited its traditions, destroyed its beliefs and dried up the sources of its inspiration. And nothing has replaced it.

This, perhaps, is the greatest of all the evils of our age. The future historian will admire our scientists, our poets, painters and musicians, but he will be compelled to add that these great men were isolated instances. They delivered what was asked of them, the sciences, the art and the literature of a chosen few. They lived apart, unknown to the masses, as they were called. Those masses were born, worked and died without taking the smallest

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PRESIDENT TRUMAN confers with Dr. Bodet, Director-General of UNESCO. Standing are (left) George V. Allen, Assistant-Secretary of State for Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State, and Morrill Gody, Chief of the American Republics Area of the Public Affairs Overseas Programme Staff, also of the State Department.