

The Right to Education

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part in that brilliant civilisation, although from time to time they would be asked to sacrifice for it their lives and their belongings.

Access to Education

If we are not to merit the same condemnation, we must all of us—every state, every community and every social unit—envisage profound educational reforms. It would, of course, be absurd to impose the discipline of the universities on all, or to try to fill the gaps in men's hearts and minds with encyclopaedic knowledge. But it is becoming every day more unjust and more dangerous to reserve intellectual and spiritual culture for a few, while distributing to the majority, and that sparingly, the rudiments of a purely utilitarian training. "Everyone," says article 27, "has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits." But that right will remain a dead letter until we give everyone the means of participating. Who to-day would dare to speak of that right to the workers of our cities and our countryside, when all the culture they are offered consists of picture papers and detective films?

Accordingly, the Declaration adopted by the United Nations has here a particular force: "There shall be equal access to higher education on the basis of merit." Such a declaration must not be addressed only to the schools; it applies also to peoples' universities. It applies to every museum keeper, every librarian, every theatre manager, every concert impresario. It is addressed to cinema workers and to press and radio journalists. To all, in fact, who are responsible for education at any level. It is addressed to all those whose profession, social position, and the very privileges of their education have made them repositories of that culture which would soon cease to mean anything if it were not shared with their brethren.

Freedom is Fragile

That is the community to which we must constantly return. It will then be seen that to a large extent the peace of humanity will depend upon the quality of teaching and the value of the teachers. Each of the rights listed in the Universal Declaration is founded upon human freedom. Appalling experiences have shown us that freedom is never a permanent acquisition; it is a fragile possession to be cared for and defended. In the face of threats, under stress of want or even in an access of enthusiasm worse than coercion, whole nations have been known to sacrifice it. We have to teach children that they are free, that they are free so far as they wish to be; and to teach them at the same time that their liberty assumes the liberty of others. In other words, their first duty, and it is sometimes a very hard one, is to be free; after that, every right that they demand has as its counterpart the obligation to ensure that right for all. That untiring rediscovery of freedom, the learning and the teaching of it, are the essence of the educators' task. And that applies to

all branches of knowledge, at all times, and to all subjects.

More precise, however, and more immediate are the last aims assigned to education by the Declaration: it "shall be directed . . . to the promotion of understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace."

It is sad to observe that these definitions are to-day mere aspirations, a still remote ideal. For that our teachers are not to blame and I know as well as anyone the trust we must place in them. But in face of such a mass of ignorance and prejudice to be abolished and of so much sloth to be overcome, our teachers will not be equal to their task, unless they are firmly and steadily backed by public opinion.

Fatal Anachronisms

One of our first endeavours must surely be directed towards the teaching of history. As things are to-day, no child has a chance to learn the history of the nations; there is no one to reveal to him the slow evolution of cultures, languages, religions and sciences, that vast collaboration between civilisations and races which have woven and still weave the fabric of his destiny. On the contrary, all that he is told is the story of the petty triumphs of his own province, his own armies, and his own incomparable country, which ends by appearing to him as an island set amidst a void. What is that but a betrayal of trust?

At the same time prejudices, even when challenged in the school, survive outside it and often find strong bulwarks in the family, the workshop, the factory and their customary mouthpiece, the leading article. Hatred for the "hereditary foes," many in number and continually added to, the countryman's distrust of foreigners, scorn for "inferior" races, these are fatal anachronisms, which still poison much of the reading matter widely reproduced, both for adults and for children. They are met with everywhere, barring the road to the finest of international enterprises.

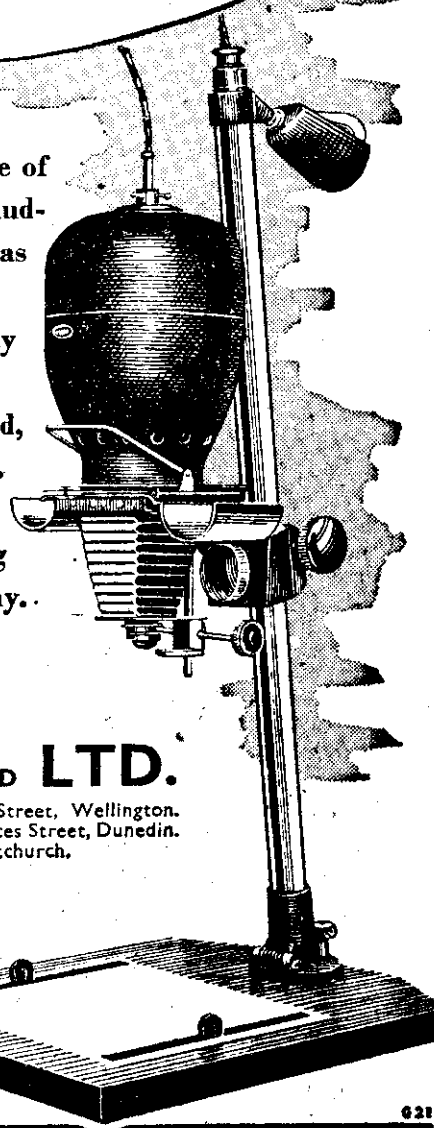
I call those prejudices anachronistic. They survive with renewed virulence every time each of us reacts in his heart, even without clearly understanding them, against the numerous links which bind us to the whole human community. Just as we owe our food and our clothing to distant climates, so there is not one of our thoughts, our joys and our sufferings which does not derive from the collaboration of the whole vast universe. Above all, we know now that there is no really independent nation, that no man has the right to say that he is without responsibilities; we know that the lives of all of us are involved in a single skein, that, in a word, society is striving towards universality. It follows that false pride and selfishness, together with scorn for other nations, classes, sects and races, must vanish from a world which has at last resolved to stamp out war. That is the goal towards which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is leading us.

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