

"Without Vision, This People Will Perish"

(The final talk in a recent series from Station 3AR by J. D. G. MEDLEY, M.A., Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University)

IN my second talk I said that there are four general prerequisites for the continued existence of any kind of democracy in the world of to-morrow, and that our systems of education must be remodelled to the extent that these prerequisites necessitate. The first is an efficient technique of quality control, and I concluded with some remarks on of the factors necessary to secure it—extended educational subsidy to individuals and the disappearance of the idea that education is something to be over and done with at the first possible opportunity.

There is a third which is equally important—a really efficient system of Adult Education. We have so far merely played with this all-important question. As a result once again of our economic absorptions, the average product of our educational systems has a narrow and incurious mind. It should not be the business of an Adult Educator to have to create the appetite for knowledge *ab initio*. That should accompany a child into life as the principal result of his education. During the war, the Army Education Service has conducted an Adult Education experiment on a very wide scale, which has to my mind conclusively proved two things—first, that there is in the ordinary Australian an appetite for enlightenment not only upon the current issues of the day, but upon the cultural side of life towards which his education neglected to direct him; and second, that the satisfaction of this appetite is an undertaking so much worth while that we cannot afford to relegate it to the comparatively minor position which it occupies to-day.

I believe that the business of Adult Education should in the future be largely a Federal matter in Australia, and that in close conjunction with the States an organisation should be developed on a permanent basis out of the Army Education system.

Service for the Community

I come now to the second of my prerequisites for the continued existence of democracy—the creation for the ordinary person of the possibility of communal and disinterested effort. I have by the exercise of stern self-control made no effort to offer you any definition of democracy. It is, however, safe to say that its existence depends upon a certain minimum contribution of disinterested effort on the part of its citizens. To what extent this has been a feature of our social life, you can judge as well as I. You will agree that it is not a prominent feature. But we need not despair, provided we are prepared to erect some kind of machinery which will enable ordinary citizens to have, as citizens, greater administrative opportunities in the course of their ordinary lives. The first essential is to accustom them to community effort as

an essential part of their education: schools should be—and I am glad to say to an increasing extent are—run as communities and not as collections of isolated classrooms. Excellent work has been done along these lines of late in both State and Private schools.

The second essential is to encourage by every imaginable means the erection of Community Centres in both urban and rural localities—centres in which the local social services are centralised and run to such extent as is practicable by the voluntary efforts of residents in the neighbourhood. Such centres, are, in my view, the necessary hub of any living democracy under modern conditions. They are an essential adjunct to an Adult Education system, and their core should be a good library. Libraries are vehicles for a revival of the local loyalties which could and should mean so much to the ordinary man. The setting up of community centres on a large scale would do much to counteract the spirit that casts its burden upon the Government and waits about with its mouth open—a menace to itself and a standing invitation for the provision of the bread and circuses that are the prelude to revolution. No one can blame the ordinary citizen for adopting a selfish attitude if no opportunity is given to him to be otherwise. It is the business of any Reconstruction that means business to provide those opportunities, and in so doing to preserve practical democracy as a living possibility. There is no other way, as far as I can see, but the provision of something besides a general election that can act as a focus of citizenship for large numbers of ordinary people.

Culture Nonsense

My third prerequisite is that a living and relevant culture should be actively fostered. There has been few greater educational disasters than the implicit theory that some subjects are cultural and others are not. English is commonly supposed to be cultural, but Mathematics not. Dead languages are cultural, but Science isn't. What nonsense it all is! The theory is, to some extent, a reflection of the fact that teachers vary in capacity, but the truth lies deeper than that. What is culture? I do not mean by it the precious possession of a minority. I mean by it what happens when men and women spend their formative years in the study of a curriculum relevant to the world actually around them, and go out into it with some background for the appreciation of its problems in their proper perspective.

Three Pictures

Let me conjure up before you three pictures—a young Elizabethan, nurtured on tales of adventure in an expanding world—roaring at Falstaff among the groundlings; a young Whig aristocrat of the 18th century, nurtured on the classics and the authorised version of

(continued on next page)



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