

**STRAY THOUGHTS
ON
EDUCATION**

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The last year has brought about fundamental and almost revolutionary changes in the entire life of our country. Politically, we have shaken off the foreign domination and entered on our heritage of freedom, of which we have yet to prove ourselves worthy by our thoughts and deeds alike. Economically we are faced with the threat of an ever expanding spiral of inflation. The sense of our civic responsibilities which is a pre-requisite for successfully fighting inflation by the united efforts of the Government and the public is largely lacking. A government which controls the necessities of life at one stage, removes the controls at a later stage, and then again changes its mind in favour of recontrol shows all the symptoms which mark a halting, day to day, hand to mouth economic policy. Geographically, the map of India has been redrawn, with the rapid disappearance of the patches of territory hitherto administered by medieval methods. The educational institutions have likewise been faced with the imminent risk of being uprooted from their foundations by ministers in a hurry who issue diversified instructions from day to day, and carry through legislation whose long term reactions are scarcely taken into account. The ardent zeal of a youthful nationalism centred in the desire to create a new life, and open out a new era in the history of the country, is to be marked by a definite break with the immediate past. Old names of towns are to be changed. Earlier ways of life are to be abandoned. Laws are to transform the degraded and lax morals of this generation by limiting the hours of night revelry, forbidding the use of strong drinks, and censoring objectionable phrases and expressions from cinema shows. The ordinary ways of addressing each other by the courteous prefix of Mr. and Mrs. are to be replaced in official terminology by the equivalent Indian expressions. One is reminded of the days of revolutionary France in 1792 and 1793 when the Girondists and the Jacobins named their children after the

old Roman heroes and changed the January and February of the Gregorian calendar into the Brumaires and Frimaires of the new calendar.

In this rapidly changing environment it is but natural that our new rulers of a free India should turn their attention to University education and examine its bearings and relations to our new born national life. A Universities Commission is even now going the round of the country with a view to advising the Government of India on the changes that may be needed to adapt the Universities to the new conditions of life. Education, it has been said, is like the law; it reflects the socio-economic order which has given it its birth. It seeks to give a rational basis to the objectives of the particular society which supports it. Its main endeavour is centred on producing in the rising generation, in schools and Universities alike, the habits of mind and character which would reconcile them to the ethos of the Society concerned. Since the ethos of any Society is largely dependent on the productive processes by which the society is maintained, it is not unreasonable to assume that no fundamental change in the educational purpose and outlook in any country can be attempted, unless there is a fundamental change in the economic institutions. Thus the difference between the educational ideals for which Locke stands and those of John Dewey in our times can only be accounted for by remembering that Locke was writing for an age of rising industrialism whilst Dewey was enunciating his views in an age of growing collectivism. Newman's ideal of a University was based upon the assumption that its chief function was to provide by its training a ruling and leisured class, whilst La Follett in Wisconsin had in mind the service which the University could render to the community which supports it. The General Secretary of the Co-operative League of the U.S.A. regards the co-operative movement as the very foundation of an economic democracy in America, and pleads for prominence being given in American education to the study of co-operation.

In an age when the governing class feels secure about

its power, it can afford to take risks and gives to its educational institutions opportunities for expansion and creative work and expression. But when this sense of security is not yet gained, or where it is threatened by what it regards as the disruptive elements of society, there is always a tendency to regard the Universities as the nursing ground of dangerous ideas; and the Universities are, therefore, to be reorganised for the training of leaders who will have "sound" ideas, not the preparation of men who will be ready to create or lay the foundations in the world of thought and practice of a new social order. Not long ago in Italy and Germany freedom of thought was deliberately suppressed in the schools and Universities and the Professors who diverged from political orthodoxy did so at the peril of their bodies. But even in the U.S.A. to-day there are evidences of the same kind, though not in so patently obvious a form of intolerance. A Nicholas Murray Butler in Columbia University could express in a gentler form the same sense of social insecurity which elsewhere in the States was manifest in the heresy-hunt that penalised all independence of mind in University teachers. We in India are passing through a stage when the feeling of insecurity seems to have gripped the minds of our rulers; it is not unnatural, when we remember the trials and tribulations which have attended our birth throes during the past year. We do not know what the immediate future has in store for us. Freedom—the freedom that we have recently won—has to be preserved through eternal vigilance. Academic freedom is a vital element in the growth of human personality; and at a time when all our institutions are to be refashioned and adapted to the new environment, we should see to it that our Universities are also so refashioned as to serve and not obstruct the purposes of life.

We are told, and rightly told, that we need more education and a different education; that we need more schools and more teachers. We need courses of study of which the foundations are interwoven into the fabric of the new world. We need teachers who are fully alive to the new issues we have to face—men and women who will be able and above all

free to make the rising generation capable of facing the problems of the new life. A democratic way of life implies freedom to experiment on the part of teachers, freedom to make mistakes, freedom in the pursuit of truth. We must be on our guard against the tendency, in these critical days, to translate into the educational institutions of our country the dogmatic views of any particular socio-economic school of thought, because that school wields the authority of the rulers.

We have been told that education is a process of adjustment. Those who talk in this way point to the products of our Universities; they believe that there must be something fundamentally wrong with a system of education, that creates thousands of unemployed graduates, who have no opportunities to obtain employment under the conditions set by the present economic order. Probably the members of the Universities Commission which is now at work believe that the need of the hour is that of adjusting the younger generation to the world as it is. To be adjusted to civilisation is to be civilised, regardless of the character of contemporary civilisation. Are we so satisfied with the world as it is, that we can regard the aim of education to be adjustment to this world? Is it better to be a moron properly adjusted to the world as it is than a person who is unadjusted, because he has a vision that makes him strive to make it better? If the object of education is the development of personality, all the efforts of Universities founded with the best of intentions will result in sending forth mal-contents who will refuse to be adjusted to an environment which does not provide for the expression of their personality. After all, as Mill observed, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."

Leaving aside for a moment those wider questions that affect the very life and functions of the Universities and the responsibilities of those who man them, let us turn to the students. There are grave problems that face you both in the institutions during the period of your studies and outside these institutions in the life of your country. These problems can

best be faced by organisation—by the spirit of co-operation and mutual help that underlies any effective organisation. Are you in the first place conscious of these problems? Have you asked yourselves the question as to why you have preferred to enter the portals of the University? Have you in doing so the one desire to obtain a degree which will enable you to fit into a job? or have you been urged by a thirst for knowledge which will enable you to grow into the fulness of your personality? Are you seeking in your studies the shortest cut to satisfying an examiner who will declare you to be qualified for the degree, or are you seeking the truth that will make you free, a vision of life that will enable you to retain your poise and balance amidst the shocks of fortune and misfortune that time may bring in a constantly changing world? It is on the answer that you give to these questions that the success of any corporate efforts that you make, any organisation that you form, will depend. In the past you have had your college unions; you have also belonged to inter-collegiate organisations with their affiliations to a country-wide union. Have you in your college unions and in the wider unions to which they are affiliated aimed at a co-operative search for knowledge and truth, a co-operative endeavour that knows no distinction between Hindus and Moslim, between community and community, between region and region? or have you allowed yourselves to be carried away by regional and communal considerations into activities that involve disloyalty to the very purpose for which you enter academic institutions?

I ask you to put these questions to yourselves. I have known occasions like domestic college elections when you have voted on communal lines; in the name of developing your regional languages you have formed societies which have accentuated differences and divided you, when you should have remained united in the common purpose of liberalising your minds and developing your personality. You have been led to form rival organisations, in this city and outside, engineered by elderly people whose idealism has been smothered and choked by the drab and muddied atmosphere of poli-

tical activities. Your youthful enthusiasm has been conveniently utilised for non-academic purposes by representatives of political parties, with the regrettable consequence that in the one field of human life where love and mutual understanding should have made you conscious of your common human heritage, over-riding all distinctions of race and creed, you have indulged in mutual recriminations, and have been driven apart from one another by considerations that are irrelevant to the pursuit of whatsoever things are true and just and lovely and of good report.

I am now told that many of you are growing alive and rebellious about the ways in which your elders have treated you—that a sense of what you owe to yourselves as students is dawning on you—that you have come together in this Conference to lay the foundations of a Students' Union in which the principle of mutual help and united efforts will enable you to prepare yourselves for the life on which you will enter at a later stage.

Whilst I rejoice with all my heart at this sign of a new awakening amongst you, I would be lacking in honesty and candour if I did not place before you a few considerations which will make you realise the difficulties that will face you in the realisation of your ideals. In the first place most of you are degree hunters, preparing yourselves for jobs which your society denies to you; whatsoever idealism and romance belong to you as youths are dried up in you under the stress of economic competition, or under the uninspiring influence of teachers and professors for whom life is an unceasing struggle for obtaining the decencies, if not the comforts of life. You have been brought up from childhood upward in schools where the functions of teaching are punctuated by the clock; where your senses have been starved, where the museum and models take the place of the concrete, and a written description the place of a landscape and of life with all its deep pulsations. You are living in an age of machinery which is wedded to uniformity and standardisation in mass production; your education is in keeping with this process of mass produc-

tion. To add to it all, your political leaders have taught you methods of crying mass slogans, of going on mass strikes for the remedy of grievances imaginary or actual, connected with your spheres of interest or irrelevant to this sphere. If your leaders are talking of a charter of human rights, you like sheep in a fold begin also talking of a charter of student rights, forgetting the elementary fact that rights is a meaningless expression apart from duties. You measure your success in the educational world by the quantitative quota of credits that you obtain in an examination that tests your memory, as you measure success in life by your adaptation as mass produced machines which can fit into the grooves of the socio-economic order.

You are about to form a new organisation of students. Shall I ask you to keep in mind one or two principles? They may appear to you novel, if not heretical. Institutions, whether they are religious or social or bearing on student life and activities, are regarded as devices of human ingenuity for suppressing and driving underground abuses which should find a channel for expression, in order that we may search for methods of redressing them. How many of those who are outraged in infancy when they grow up become unsocial, or as we call them, in our self-righteousness, criminals! Hooliganism in years of immaturity often implies the working of spontaneous activities which demand opportunities for self-expression. It is only on the basis of such opportunities that one can hope to carry conviction to those hooligans that there may be greater self-satisfaction in making things than in breaking them. To suppress such activities in the earlier years of life is to drive them underground till they burst out in later life in crimes. There may be more of the making of a good life in hooligans than in those who condemn them.

We think in our educational institutions too much in terms of good forms, rather than in terms of good feelings. For the school teacher or the college professor the young personality brought under his influence is only a mind and not a soul; a gramophone record that can reproduce the notes

dictated in the class room. His emotional experiences and upsurges are to be set aside or choked in their budding. There is no stupidity in our present system of education so fraught with mischief as the attitude of the teacher who disregards, if he does not treat with contempt, the vital emotional life associated with adolescence. And we are horrified when the results of such disregard manifest themselves in later life in the worship of a god of power, whether this god is a Hitler, or a communist deity or a representative of the Indian National Congress.

If you, assembled here, aim at setting up an organisation that is founded on mutual help and co-operation, you have an uphill task. You will have to break the traditions of the past, which have instilled into your minds the idea that you have rights without duties. You will have to face a sense of frustration in battling against an environment rooted in the past and holding you in its grip from day to day. If you are determined to do good to your fellow students, you will have to transcend, if not to forfeit, your own standard of values, to realise that the effort to do good pursued as an end is fundamentally immoral, that your purpose in life is to grow into the fulness of your stature, and to rejoice in the appreciation of growth in others. You will likewise have to control those archaic characteristics of human behaviour which are still to be found amongst you and your leaders,—the shrill and the violent, the purely animal shouting and foot-stamping—the Swastika and the goose step, the outbursts of uncritical self-love and uncontrolled hate, whose exhibition to-day is a reminder to us of the life of the cave men, nay of the still more primitive lives of the huge reptiles who once flourished upon the surface of the earth. You will have to out-grow that view which makes even your sports an exhibition, and not a drama, in which you sacrifice fair play to success at any cost, in which even as spectators you subordinate all other considerations to making possible the victory of your popular and favourite hero.

If you desire, therefore, to lay the foundations of your new association deep and strong, you will have to shed all

your past prejudices; you will have to be tolerant and understanding. No human relationships that bring men into groups are possible except on a basis of mutual respect and tolerance. It has been said that tolerance is only possible where there is agreement on fundamentals; but the only fundamentals that matter in life are reverence for human personality; the only fundamentals that matter in your student organisations are the opportunities that are offered to you or that you have to create in the search for truth and beauty and goodness, the elements that enter into the growth of human personality. You will be undermining the very foundations of the structure that you propose to raise if you start with the prejudices of the past, the mistrust and suspicion suggested by labels like Congress and Socialists and Communists, or even give rise to such prejudices and suspicions by any words that you utter or any resolutions that you move in this Conference, or any activities that you hereafter enter upon in the name of your organisation. Are you prepared for this re-birth of your student life? "How can I enter my mother's womb and be born again"? And yet the difficulties associated with a re-birth of mind and heart are greater and more insurmountable than the difficulties of a physical re-birth. You may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but if you have not love in your hearts, you are but as sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. If you are not prepared for this re-birth you can only look for failure and fresh trials; you may trip and fall and rise again.

One note of warning seems to be necessary in view of what you, in your youthful enthusiasm, are proposing in one of your principal resolutions. I refer to a resolution in which you are proposing the outlines of a fully developed educational policy for our country. You desire to throw the entire burden of education right from the nursery school to the University on the State; where private agencies are at work you would like them to be strictly supervised and controlled by the State. You seem to be entirely unmindful of the possible dangers to which such a system of public education is liable. The present state of public education in America

might well be a reminder to us of this danger. It is the danger of institutionalism. It is a danger that is common to all social agencies. But it becomes exceedingly grave in a matter like education. If the entire work of controlling and conducting educational institutions is to be centred in the State, it may act, it invariably acts as if it were no longer answerable for its plans and programmes to the living, throbbing, aspiring millions whom it is established to serve. In the U.S.A. for example, the State-conducted schools and Universities have become so nearly universal that any questioning of their usefulness in any way is to lay the questioner open to the charge of traitor and heretic. Any attempt on the part of a few progressive schools to impart education on their own lines has been beset by a horde of heresy hunters. The professional casualties that have resulted in the U.S.A. may be accepted as a grim reminder to us in a country like our own as to what might happen to those educators, the teachers and professors—who sensed the need for change and would devote their lives to this task. In a social setting where the State establishes schools as instruments of social progress, and at the same time frustrates that purpose by doing what prevents the very possibility of progress, the safest thing for professors and teachers to do is to devote their energies to the tools of learning,—to text books and examinations and questions of discipline—rather than to the noble work of education. Let us not, in our eagerness to throw the burden of educating us upon the State, forget that it is in proportion as we educate ourselves, and cease to offer lip service to democracy, that we shall befit ourselves for democracy as a way of life. If we can read only official reports of current events, if we can hear only one voice in the class room and over the radio, if all critical opposition is to be branded as sedition and as a threat to peace and public tranquillity, to be eradicated by detention in prison without trial, we have no more freedom of action than we can enjoy under a totalitarian State.

One thing more. In a democracy one of the conditions of progress is academic freedom. It is through the clash of

views in a self-governing community that progress becomes possible. There can be no enlightened citizenship without freedom to teach and to learn. Criticism of the present state of affairs in a democracy is a safety valve against violent revolution; and our ability to criticise will depend on what we have taught and learned.

The place of myth in the history of human evolution has been too often overlooked, particularly in an age which prides itself on its scientific outlook. A myth is the symbolic expression of truth through images that transcend the conceptual understanding. Too often there is a tendency in our age to discredit the function of myths by laying stress on what man has achieved by his processes of reasoning. We define nature as part of our experience which is neutral and indifferent to our desires and interests, our ideals and dreams. We forget that we are parts of nature, that our ideals and dreams are the products of a long and evolutionary process of nature, that science is itself a product of art, the result of a creative process in which we pick and choose in the light of our human purposes. Myths are equally a product of creative imagination; their value in life depends on the same methods of trial and error and experimenting as we associate with the sciences. Biology may give an intellectual account in terms of the conceptual understanding of the processes which led to the emergence of the sun-flower. But Greek Mythology symbolised through the sun flower the ideal of unshaken fidelity inspired by love. The transformation of the Medieval Legend of Dr. Faustus into the Faust of Goethe as a builder of canals and a drainer of swamps, and discovering the meaning of life in sheer activity, is testimony to the value of myths as interpreting in imaginative terms the complex problems that face humanity to-day. "Notre Dame" might have been written by a historian; the volumes on War and Peace by a Sociologist; and Salammbo might have been the work of an archæologist. In myths we have a consciousness of the universe as a whole; for truth depends on intensity of imagination much more than on awareness of facts. Thorns are facts and are real, and so are roses. If we start gathering the thorns we

may be "weaving them for the brow of the Son of Man".

What makes me wander off into this digression, you may ask? It is because I want you, who are entering on the working out of a new enterprise in your student life, to go forth to your work in the spirit of adventure, with the vision of artists creating a mythos which will enable you to transcend the doubts of the reason and overcome the paradoxes of life. Millions of years ago the world was dominated by forms of life which were exceedingly big in size and strong but with very small brains. They have now disappeared whereas the things which were smaller and weaker survived, because they had larger brains. With the more complex development of life brain defeated muscle; judgment and reasoning proved stronger than the brute instincts. In the course of evolution we discovered, as certain animals had done, the art of co-operation which is the foundation of all civilised life. And I want you to go forth in faith that as surely as brain once proved the better of muscles in the life of the jungle, so some day if the human race is not to commit suicide the heart is going to prove the better of the head and to make the head its servant, that co-operation will prevail where competition threatens, and that the right to live and to live more abundantly is the right to serve. If God uses the weak men of the world to confound the strong, and the foolish ones to confound the wise, it is not impossible for us to believe that He may use the young ones of the world to confound the old.
