

Textbook



The Text-Book Scandal

The quality of text-books in use in our schools and colleges, schools in particular, is, to say the least, a scandal which has so far been treated with an apathy almost unbelievable. We keep repeating the platitude that children represent the future; we have established, at great cost, a Children's Academy designed to encourage their talent, but little has been done to provide them with text-books which will ensure a sound education for them. Badly printed mostly on newsprint, insufficiently proof-read, wretchedly bound, and incompetently written and edited, these books should be a reproach to any community with a sense of its obligations to the younger generation.

To a large extent, this state of affairs is due to the policies of the text-book boards. They do not apparently believe in careful and long-term planning. Announcements about the kind of books to be prescribed are made regularly at the beginning of each year, and publishers are required to submit their products for approval towards the end of the same year. This arrangement gives the publishers barely six to seven months in which to engage a writer, find an editor, and get the books printed and bound. No wonder the outcome is something ludicrously short of perfection. But however imperfect the books, that is, a selection of them, are duly approved and prescribed and have to be purchased by the parents for their charges. Since there is no free market in books and schools must teach prescribed material for public examinations, thousands of children are forced to swallow intellectual food of a revolting nature.

We have never understood why quality cannot be insisted upon by giving the publishers a minimum period of three years, as in some states in the U.S.A. for preparation and then enforcing the highest possible standards. The only net result of current practice is to ensure fat profits for those in the business with the minimum investment possible. An industrialist worries more about the quality of his production than publishers and text-book boards do about the material they solemnly prescribe for study by young impressionable children who have not learnt to discriminate between right and wrong and do not realise till it is too late, that their minds have been damaged beyond repair.