

Education And Responsibility

One of the virtues that a 'reasonable' system of education is expected to teach is a sense of responsibility, which really means being able to overcome individualistic selfishness and to imbibe the feeling that all one's acts have repercussions on others and consequently call for restraint and care lest others should come to harm. This is as important in small details as in big things.

The officer who neglects his duties which may involve the destiny of millions displays on a larger scale the same attitude of mind as the person who leaves a bathroom in a mess or throws banana peel on the street or scatters chewed sugarcane about. That rubbish of this kind could vex someone else or even cause an accident bothers him as little as the official who may cause death or famine by failing to arrange for the timely distribution of grain.

Unfortunately the education that our schools and colleges provide does little to instil this sense of responsibility in the young. An academically brilliant student is apt to betray the same indifference in the matter as one less educated. On the other hand, children growing up in adversity, who may have had no access to formal instruction, have been known to demonstrate, in their own sphere, an astonishing awareness of their responsibilities. When they have some food to eat, they share it with their families, rather than succumb to the temptation to eat it all. Young boys and girls of 12 or 13, reduced to working in domestic service, show an attachment to their families which is absent among more affluent classes.

One tends to think that all developments in formal education in recent times are calculated to foster the very opposite idea, that society owes every thing to the young and must not expect them to respond. When college boys invade a cinema and demand to be shown a film free or when their friends walk into a restaurant and demand to be entertained to food without charge, (incidents which have become too frequent not to be noticed), the spectator cannot help drawing a mental contrast between them and the unfortunate slum children to whom it never occurs to indulge in the same sort of behaviour.

The sooner our educationists restructure the content of syllabuses in the light of these unsavoury facts, the better for all.

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