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ADDRESS

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BY

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EDUCATION AFTER THE WAR

SIR OLIVER LODGE, F.R.S., D.Sc., LL.D.

IN what way should education after the war differ from education before the war? What difference has the war made?

I believe it has opened the eyes of the nation to certain perils which during the long era of peace had been overlooked, or if not overlooked, accepted in a conservative spirit. Europe is going through a dark period. We may be said to be travelling through a tunnel, out of which we shall emerge, I hope, into daylight; and it will feel as if our mental and spiritual eyes had been opened. We shall have changed an old landscape for a new one—I hope a brighter and better one—and we shall see things clearer than before. A spirit of conservatism has its merits, but, like most other things, its dangers too. It often needs a shock to make us recognise what we have grown thoroughly used to.

Conservatism is natural in education. We have all been through a certain mill, we are all ground more or less to a pattern, and we think it proper that our children should go through the same process. Similarity of early training establishes a fellow feeling; and if a great school were subjected to sweeping reforms, a whole generation of fathers and grandfathers would feel themselves aggrieved—defrauded of their natural right—the right of basking again in the queer half-forgotten traditions of their boyhood.

Conservatism is natural to parents; it is also natural to teachers. We who are teachers have been taught traditional subjects on traditional lines, and the natural tendency is to pass on a similar kind of information in the same, or something like the same manner. Changes have to be made in deference to modern opinion, but the changes are half-resented, half-lamented, even when it is admitted that they may possibly be improvements. Subjects and customs hoary with age are regarded with respect, and even with affection, now we no longer have to suffer under them. New subjects, of which in our youth we never heard, cannot evoke the same feelings: they seem by comparison barely respectable.

There is a sort of religious conservatism about the traditions of a school ; and conservatism in religion is the most human thing in the world. Our emotions are touched by the ancient and long customary. Novelties may stimulate, but they rouse no reverence ; a bad old custom may be affectionately regarded. New-fangled notions appeal to the intellect only ; they are like cold and alien disturbers of family life.

The so-called apathy of parents, which schoolmasters regret, is explicable in some such way as this ; and to understand is more than half to pardon. Some of it is not really apathy, but modesty and self-distrust, and a hope that those high in authority at schools know better than ourselves what is right and proper for the coming generation.

But there come times when old customs must be ruthlessly examined, and many of them changed ; the present epoch is such a time. An axe has been laid at the root of old traditions, and, like root-pruning applied to fruit trees, the result may be a richer crop in the future.

In the eloquent words of Professor Sir Henry Jones :—

“The world of sense is now being revaluated: the whole scheme, including man, is being interpreted anew. It is maintained, with a confidence which is growing, that sense and the things of sense, and the whole scheme of finitude, do not obscure but reveal the eternal verities. The temporal is not secular any more, nor is there anything in this wide world which is common and unclean ; unless, alas ! man has made it so.”

DANGERS.

Two danger signals have been conspicuous—one sent up by this country, one sent up by our foes.

The heavy mechanical pedagogical grind, the desperate worship of material good, the soulless *ad hoc* preparation for business, the concentration on a purely material ideal, and its elevation into the region of worship and sentiment—that is one danger: that is the warning signal issued by Germany. The old sentimental delightful Germany, with a message to the soul of the human race, has been slain, and a ruthless monster has taken its place. Until the dragon has been exterminated, neither Germany nor the rest of the world can have peace.

But our country has unconsciously hoisted its own danger signal too. Nothing so bad as the other, thank goodness, not soul-destroying, but bad enough, and desperately unwise. The