

The Changing World

Harold C Hand

OUR INCREDIBLE BLIND SPOT

"WELL, BOYS, we're past the sonic wall."

"Yes—and well into the ionosphere, I'd guess."

"If you fellows are right we might as well turn this radio off. We won't be getting a thing until we hit our own stratosphere."

The three members of the Educational Commission from Mars settled back in their rocket ship seats and drew happily on their cigars—the parting gift of the superintendent of schools in the city from which they had just taken off for home.

"Nice guy, that Harold Hunte," said Zid.

"And with a keen nose for a good cigar," added Zad. "I'm saving one of mine for my tobacconist to analyze. Don't you think this brand tops anything we've got at home, Zud?"

"Yes, it probably does," replied Zud. "But I can't let you fellows dawdle away your time talking about cigars. We've got to map out our report before we land."

"That's right," agreed Zid. "How shall we organize it—by countries, or by themes or topics of some sort?"

"What do you say, Zad?"

"I don't know what kind of organization you'd call it, but I think one of the sections ought to be on the weird things we ran into. You know, the stuff that looked stupid."

"What do you say to that, Zid?"

"I say let's see what Zad has in mind before we decide. Suppose you give us a sample of what you call stupid stuff."

"That's easy, Zid. Which country do you want your sample from?"

"Let Zud pick it."

"Let's take the one that says it has the most schools and the best education."

"You mean the U.S.A., of course?"

"Certainly. Didn't we find less modesty per square mile there than any other place on Earth?"

"Well, I don't know. I thought the Scots and the Americans wound up in a photo finish. But I'll use the U.S.A. as you suggest. Do you want something so weird our folks won't believe it, or something that they might be capable of imagining—like, for example, the way Americans pay nursery school teachers less than they do college professors?"

"I'd like to hear your most fantastic example, wouldn't you, Zid?"

"Yes, we might as well go the 'whole pig,' as the Americans so quaintly say."

"The expression is 'whole hog,' I believe. But let's have Zad's worst example and see what we think of it."

"All right, gentlemen, here goes. I'll start by asking you what you found most of the American educators worrying or complaining about most?"

"That's easy. Something they call 'public relations.'"

"Yes, they keep saying the public doesn't understand education and that they can't make the changes that ought to be made in the schools until they first 'educate the public about education.'"

"Not only that. Nearly everybody told us that he always had to start at the very bottom—at the most elementary level—to get across even a faint appreciation of what education can and should do as a community building process."

"And didn't they all say that they could 'get at' only a relatively small number of

the adults, and at best but very briefly, so that their 'education about education' was pretty thin and scattered and really didn't amount to very much?"

"Yes, as one chap put it, the density of public ignorance about the real potentialities of education is exceeded only by its mass."

"Now, I ask you, gentlemen, isn't it unbelievably weird that it never seems to occur to these American educators that they should and could 'educate about education' in their schools? Virtually every adult whose ignorance about education they deplore is a product of their schools. Yet almost without exception they include nothing about education in their curriculum. They see to it that their youngsters are at least made literate about the why's and the wherefore's of the post office, the airport, the railroads and bus lines, the courts, community recreation, community health, community safeguards against accidents, and many more—even the dog pound and sewage disposal are studied. But when it comes to education, potentially the most important community enterprise of all—and the one they should know the most about—American educators are strangely silent until the pupils have left school. Then they knock themselves out trying to do, under almost impossible circumstances, what they could easily have done when the adults were kids in their elementary and high schools."

"I saw the same thing keep bobbing up in another way. It was perfectly apparent that all the better American schools were aware of the fact that the youngsters would one day be workers, employers, neighbors, spenders of money, users of leisure time, drivers of automobiles and airplanes, husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers—and shaped their curriculum accordingly. But most of the educators even in these better schools seem blinded to the fact that all their pupils will become patrons of the school in some sense, and that all are destined to play some part in shaping the character of that school. Like Zad, I saw practically nothing in the

curriculum of any school to prepare youngsters for their one future role in which the school has the largest stake."

"But aren't you fellows overlooking the American colleges and universities. They all seem to have Departments or Colleges of Education, you know."

"That's right, Zid, they do. But could anyone possibly imagine anything more fantastic than what we saw in those American universities? Only the students who are preparing to teach are encouraged—you might almost say permitted—to study education. And these relatively few students are precisely the ones who will *not* sit on boards of education and who will *not* be laymen in reference to the schools. The other students—the vast majority who will be bankers, lawyers, doctors, dentists, engineers, and business men and who *will* be the boards of education and the patrons of the school—continue their study of all community functions *except education*.

No wonder that American hod carriers and ditch diggers are scarcely more ignorant than American bankers, lawyers, and doctors so far as knowing anything about education as a community function—to say nothing of education as a process—is concerned. Don't you agree, gentlemen, that all this is about as weird as anyone could possibly imagine?"

"Yes, Zad, I do. In fact, I'm convinced that it goes far beyond what we can expect any reasonable person to believe. So I don't think we ought to mention it in our report."

"Why not, Zid?" objected Zid. "What Zad has described we all saw, didn't we? And over and over again, with almost no exceptions?"

"Yes, we certainly did," admitted Zid. "But we can't afford to have our fellow Martians think that we went crazy while we were on Earth, can we? What else could our people possibly believe about us if we try to make them swallow such a seemingly impossible tall tale? If you hadn't seen it with your own eyes, you'd never believe it, would you—either of you? Neither would I."

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