

For Greater Understanding

MA YEE YEE

Ma Yee Yee has been in this country for over a year on a Government of the Union of Burma State Scholarship. During this time she earned a Master's Degree at the University of Michigan, visited school systems, and participated in conferences. In answer to our request for an article on the importance of exchange of professional people, Miss Yee Yee gives her views on ways in which understanding and respect for the peoples of the world can be promoted.

IN THIS AIR-AGE no part of the world is really very far from another part. At no time in the world's history have people of the world been brought so closely together. Isolationism is impossible. It is, therefore, highly desirable that there be sympathetic understanding and friendly relationship among the peoples of the world.

To promote sympathetic understanding and international friendly relationships, the possible way seems to be through giving better education to the general public of the various countries. The responsibility for such a task lies with educators of respective countries. It is essential that such people have unbiased views and authentic information about other countries.

Personal Angles Enlighten

Here the question arises as to how to obtain the right kind of information. Although books and magazines can give some information about a country, they do not provide a personal viewpoint and understanding. But, once a person has been to a country and has come to know the people well, personal interest in and knowledge of that country increases. With this basic knowledge, there will be further understand-

ing derived from economic, cultural, and social standpoints.

Since I have been in this country I have made quite a number of friends. To these friends, Burma did not mean anything until they had met and come to know me. Through friendship they have learned a great deal about Burma from me, and I, in turn, have learned more about the United States and her people. Thus, we have achieved very close and friendly ties.

Since I have studied here a year, I have some idea about the philosophy, aims, and purposes of the educational system in the United States. With this knowledge of the American school system, I can appraise our own schools in Burma more objectively. I realize the degree of success we have achieved and the extent of improvement that is still required to bring our educational system in line with modern views and practices. I can now make a better assessment of the ideas to be worked into the pattern of our educational system.

There Is Inaccurate Information

Everywhere I go I find people very interested in my country. This is not limited to school children—adults are greatly interested in the Burmese people.

Judging from the questions I have been asked, I realize how little we know and understand one another. So I tried to discover what information on Burma is available at adult and school levels in textbooks and magazines. I find that most of the information on Burma is either prejudiced or very superficial and inadequate. Sometimes there are many inaccuracies. It is not very unusual to find out-of-date information in some books and magazines. So long as countries are misrepresented, the idea of promoting international peace and friendship will be difficult of achievement.

We must set about to remove inaccuracies and misrepresentations in the descriptions of other countries and other peoples as soon as possible. Sympathetic understanding is absolutely essential and should be promoted by all means of publicity so that the desired goal of international understanding be reached. To be able to achieve this aim, the study of the underlying forces in the cultural, economic, and social structure should be pursued. Presentation of such influencing forces will help in reaching understanding between nations.

One of the most important benefits of intervisitation by educators is that we have an opportunity of getting the personal contact. In this way we are able to clear up the misnomers and explain the fundamental causes which underlie our own culture and society. Through exchange of teachers and educators, information which is not available in the printed form can be shared. Questions and discussion are possible. Close friendship and clear understanding grow out of these conversations and discussions; with greater knowledge and understanding come increased chances for peace.

Emphasize the Similarities

In one of my school visits I was asked by some fifth grade children whether people in Burma are civilized and if they wear any clothes. Some wished to know whether there are head-hunters. When these questions were raised, the class teacher was embarrassed, but I assured her that it was perfectly all right with me to have and answer these questions. I believe that it is better to give actual facts and clear the misunderstandings. So I told them that there are still some backward people in the mountainous part of Burma, comparatively recently migrated into our boundary. These are a minority group in our population.

I understand why such questions are raised. In the first place, Burma is a long way from the United States and, second, there is a tendency to present only peculiar and unusual accounts of people from different countries. Differences rather than similarities are more often brought out and, hence, there is such a tendency for misunderstanding. One effective way to clear up these misconceptions is by actually meeting people of other lands and getting from them a true description of the country and the people.

Interchange at the CIER Seminar

I am writing this while attending the International Educational Seminar of the Commission on International Educational Reconstruction. There are forty-nine of us. Eighteen countries are represented—America, Austria, Burma, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, The Philippines, and Sweden. During the two weeks we have

spent together we have established close friendships.

As representatives of various countries give talks on their own education systems, we get a chance to compare our own with those of other countries. We rejoice in hearing of the progress they have made in their school systems; and, at the same time, when their current problems are brought out, we try to work out the solutions jointly. We are not only interested in trying to help each other in striving toward greater success in each country; but we are discussing on a world-wide basis how to promote international understanding. We are here trying to find out the best ways of extending educational opportunities for such understanding. Every-

one is trying his level best to contribute some ideas in order to reach the desired goal. Here we are having the opportunity to suggest and to discuss so that we reach a common decision. The main success of this whole seminar lies in the fact that we have understood each other and that we have established bonds of friendship.

This is one instance of the advantages of having conferences of educators of other lands. Exchange of personnel in many fields is one way to overcome the differences and misunderstandings that exist among various countries. It will contribute to a healthy international relationship which is bound to lead to international understanding and peace.

*We Can Learn from Austria*_____

E. BOYD GRAVES

A specialist in elementary education, E. Boyd Graves writes from Austria some observations he has made in the school systems there, and describes briefly some sound Austrian practices. Mr. Graves is on leave from Mary Washington College, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

THE VIEW that educational problems in Austria may be solved by substituting American practices for European ones is, in my opinion, only partially correct. The judicious adoption of some characteristics of Austrian education would improve our own programs. Other characteristics, of course, we should eye with suspicion and discourage their development in our schools.

Customs Based on Courtesy

One favorable impression of Austrian ways occurred on my first visit to the office of a superintendent of schools.

When I entered his office, he arose from his desk in the corner and, after exchanging greetings, motioned me to be seated at a table at one side of the room. Surrounding it were three upholstered chairs and a small sofa. I noticed that the table was small and round and held a convenient ash tray. I was also aware of an informal, conversational atmosphere.

Later, when I discovered that this was standard Austrian office practice, I learned that the round table is used because it has no head or foot, and that the custom is based on courtesy. Although I have visited the offices of many Austrian officials since that time, I have

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