

The Importance of People

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The author of the following allegory voices some of the wonder that five years of war and five years of teaching have brought him. Student, marine, teacher, inquirer, and dreamer; he combines them all in the sharp questions underlying this story.

Harold Benjamin

Whither We Go and How To Supervise It

AND THE PEOPLE, having left the serenity and security of the valley wherein they labored in the vineyard and rested in the shade of the sturdy oak, ventured forth following false prophets. At length they came to a vast desert wherein were barrenness and desolation, and a great thirst set in among the people. This Sahara was called Education, and the people wandered forth in the desert devoid of purpose and destination. Now the people thirsted, for there were few wells, and there were many among them who longed to return to the security and sanity of the valley and the sturdy oak, but the masses cried, "This is all experience! What if we are lost? Experience is the thing."

Some few of the people, under shadow of darkness crept out of camp and stole back to the valley and the oak, and they were pronounced Anathema by the false prophets, who urged the people farther and farther into the desert. Finally the prophets gathered the people around them in the sands and pronounced that here they would build. Tired of their aimless wanderings, the people fell to with a will and upon the sands began to build their cities and plant their trees, but first they apportioned parts of the desert wherein to build temples to pay homage to the prophets who had led them hence.

These temples with their idols were called Schools.

Now the cities and especially the temples called Schools began to prosper. Then a slight tremor shook the sands and the cities without proper foundations began to disappear, and the trees without roots began to fall, but the greatest havoc was wrought upon the temples called Schools and they soon fell into complete ruin.

New Prophets Arise

Whereupon a great fear seized the people and the false prophets were stoned and driven out and new prophets were brought forth. These new prophets cried that they had known all the time the people were going in the wrong direction, but out of forbearance and deference they had not said anything. The new prophets advocated a complete reversal, a new direction of travel, but a deep distrust seized the people because the new direction still lay across the shifting sands. The prophets soothed the people saying the reason their cities fell and their temples called Schools disappeared was because the temples were defiled by having traces and vestiges of the curriculum of the land of the valley and the oak. The people were horrified to learn this. Faithfully, blindly they followed the new prophets on their new Odyssey.

The new search was attended by thirst and famine, but suddenly a stranger appeared and the people gathered around. He was a man from the land of the valley and the oak. When questioned about the tremor, he replied that even though it had been felt, the cities with their firm foundations had withstood the shock easily, the oak was shaken slightly, a few branches and leaves had fallen, but its great strength and deep roots had absorbed the tremor easily. To this good news the people listened gladly. The stranger would have continued had not the prophets, feeling their precarious position, driven him away. Then the prophets reprimanded the people for listening to an emissary from the land which was guided by a *genus hominum superstitiosum et vecors* (a superstitious and senseless race of professors) who make their pupils swear never to contradict Aristotle.

Then to add further ignominy to their ignorance, the new prophets scoffed and laughed at the masters and doctors, the *hominum multarum literatum*, who rave and invent absurdities and new sorts of languages that only they themselves can understand. They expressed their pity for all who devoted themselves to those miserable scholastic subtilities and syllogisms that consist more in words than in things; they made merry over Duns Scotus and Albertus Magnus in whom they found only vain precisions and a metaphysic which every man of common sense reflects, and of whom it might be said that a man who would know fully all they had written would know nothing. They continued that the age which produced the great doctors of Scholasticism was an age of sophistry worthy only of contempt. "Three centuries at the bottom of that gloomy abyss did not add a single idea to man's intellec-

tual inheritance," they cried, and it was far better to jump clean across the Middle Ages regarding them as a disgrace to human thought than to entertain ideas of the eternal truths and the dignity of man. These and many other declarations the new prophets uttered to hide their own cloudy thinking and insecurity. The people accepted these fallacies and hailed the brayings of the prophets as the New Truth and prepared to follow them. So the record of Gullible's Travels is written in the shambles and ruins of the temples which are called Schools in this vast Sahara called American Education.

Then the people continued their aimless wanderings until at length they found fertile green superimposed upon the sands. "Here," cried the prophets, "we shall build our cities and once again rear our temples." And the people, tired of their aimless existence cried, "Amen," and the young women cried "Ah-men," because already strange utterings such as libido, repressions, social adjustments, and other such nonsense were being heard from a new prophet recently come out of the East.

Temples Called Schools

At long last the people felt they were no longer to be deluded because here was seemingly fertile land, deep, clear water, and most of all, shade wherein one could rest. True, it was not the shade of the lofty, luxuriant oak because here were only small bamboo trees, but the very number of the bamboo compensated for their lack of height! And the people fell to work and reared cities and created new and larger temples called Schools in order to perpetuate their folly in their own offspring.

Soon after the cities and temples were reared the strong winds of adversity and misfortune blew and the little

bamboo shivered and shook, and as it bent over almost reaching the ground it swept everything in its path before it. And the people on the side of the bamboo who had lost everything were disconsolate, but the people on the other side of the bamboo who were unharmed offered sympathy, exclaiming that conditions were only half as bad as formerly because only half the people had lost their possessions.

So one half of the people began rebuilding and the other half remained complacent until suddenly the winds changed direction and the bamboo trembled again and at length the tremblings reached such violence that the remaining buildings were swept away. The people were affrighted, but the prophets appeared and reassured them with these words: "See how clever we are? Even the strongest storms and the worst winds cannot uproot the bamboo trees. They may shiver and shake, tremble and bend, but they can never be uprooted." The people observed this, but asked, "What of our cities and temples?" "Ah," cried the prophets, "once again that is your fault. You build your cities and temples with foundations. Observe the bamboo—each little breath of wind makes a change and you can observe that the only thing constant is that change. Like the bamboo, you too must build your cities and temples, ay, arrange your whole life and thinking so that you can change too." So in time there sprang up a race of men, who being trained to accept change as the only constant value, grew to be supreme opportunists, but had so little sense of values that each small wind of adversity changed their whole viewpoint and aim.

The First Pragmatist

About that time there was another clever fellow come out of the East.

Being hailed as the latest and the best of the prophets, his name was pronounced with reverence, and in the temples called Schools he was regarded as a savior and his devotees genuflected three times daily as they turned their faces Columbia-ward, whence he had come. His new Koran, *Human Nature and Conduct*, was pronounced *The Rock of Ages*.

Even though this latest and best of the prophets reacted against tradition, his own system contained traditional elements. In a direct line back through Bergson of the late 19th century and his idea that all knowledge comes from experience, who in turn probably borrowed from Heraclitus of Ephesus, at the end of the 6th century, B.C., who held that being is an illusion and that there is no reality except the process of becoming, the new prophet held that all is a state of flux and change. But instead of identifying his system as being in continuity with the past, he set himself up as the first pragmatist.

The new system ran something like this. Since the only thing constant is change (or the process of becoming) everything must be in a constant state of flux. This presupposes that anything traditional or fundamental is stereotyped; anything that has definite objectives or values changes. Constant motion is change and it matters not where that motion leads. Just so things change! Now since we have no definite goals or aims, because we are continually changing them, the element of confusion and chaos creeps in. But a mild state of confusion and chaos is good, (they say) because it presupposes a conflict between the new and the old. Now out of this welter of flux, change, confusion, and chaos is supposed to grow Progress, because we are no longer static. And since Progress is the aim of Civilization, we all have to be properly

confused to enjoy it or contribute anything to it.

Changes Overtake the People

And to continue, the latest and best of the prophets said that the purpose of the temples called Schools was to develop skills so that they may satisfy the needs brought about by confusion and chaos. Offer Home Economics and Homemaking to the boys, and Woodwork and Shop to the girls; offer Printing and Bricklaying to minds that could do well in declensions, and Earth Science and Salesmanship to hands that rock the cradle. And in the advanced courses offer Japanese Flower Arrangement where the ultimate will be A Rebellious Branch Brought Into Balance, so the student will be fostering a skill in sublimating his own Ego. Or offer Basket Weaving Among the Aborigines so by the dextrous use of the hands and the reeds youth will be taught the dignity of human labor.

And so the people in the Land of the Bamboo Trees continued their pointless existence and great changes overtook the people, because in their midst emerged new, but lesser, prophets who

were called Supervisors. Now it was strange that in this vast desert called American Education which had no beginning and no end but only the everlasting Present that there should be Supervisors, but among the lesser, lesser Prophets who were called Teachers a strange new language came into existence filled with terms like ultimate ends, proximate ends, and biogenic needs. Such a strange tongue demanded of itself Supervisors, if only to define its terms.

And so the people and prophets got together and decided that in their temples called Schools they should strive for three things: worthy home membership, social adjustment, and a love of one's country. The lesser, lesser prophets called Teachers went back to the temples called Schools and developed a myriad of techniques on how to teach the three fundamentals. And the lesser prophets called Supervisors went to the temples to observe, correct or condemn these techniques. All were happy—except perhaps the people who had children in these temples. They could not notice any change.—*Walter J. Burke*, Fort Lupton, Colorado, High Schools.

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