

THE IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE

Coordinator: O. L. Davis, Jr.

One morning last spring, I found this manuscript on my desk. The paper was enclosed in a brown envelope marked only, "Important" and "Please read carefully . . . and soon." No name. Its first and final pages had a piece torn away; enough printing remained that I could discern what I take to have been a security classification. Several days of concentrated sleuthing turned up the messenger who brought the manuscript to my desk. When I asked if, just perhaps, she had "written" the report, she just looked at me and answered not a word. She deserves identification. She is Grace A. Kirkwood, this year an instructor in music education, The University of Texas at Austin. Even if Grace never reveals absolute authorship, her friends know her to observe acutely, to listen discriminatingly, and to analyze perceptively.—O. L. Davis, Jr.

An Intercepted Communication

GRACE A. KIRKWOOD

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Agent XI
Planet Earth
Middleamerica

A BREATHLESS student handed me the following document saying, "Look at what I found; it must have been written by a Russian spy!" After examining the strange, squiggly characters, I thought it might be from my supervisor. Finally, we decided that it must be some type of code.

As a class project (it *could* be linguistics) we broke the code. After reading and rereading the strange report that follows, I felt that I understood what the author was attempting to say. At first I laughed, but then. . . . Well, read for yourself.

The Most Honorable Xanthis
Planet Althus
Corpinchdq

Dear Xan:

Sorry my report is late, but I encountered some difficulty in locating the slaves. Since our agents last visited this planet changes have occurred, or their reports were in error. According to our previous information, all the slaves had black skins and thus were easily recognizable. Once I realized our error, I have been able to proceed as planned—observing the rulers' techniques of

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handling their large slave class without creating a revolution. I must confess I am amazed at their sophistication of technique.

As we had surmised, we can gain much valuable information from this society, for its long history of slavery has necessitated highly developed methods of maintaining control and fostering productivity. So specialized have these techniques become that there are large institutions devoted entirely to training members of the slave class to take their place in society.

Normally, slaves enter the training institutions at six or seven years of age and attend until they are eighteen. There is some indication that entrance age will be lowered to age four or five. Apparently, some of the slaves may become too individualized in those early uninstitutionalized years to be able to adapt readily to training.

In my observations of their play I have noted that the young ones often choose to play by themselves, without direction, and are wildly imaginative and free in their activities. Within a year at the institution this harmful individualism has given way to orderly and structured group activity directed by the master. Earlier induction into the training institution should effectively stifle those individualistic tendencies.

Safely Mindless

At first, I was taken aback to observe that the slaves were being taught to read and write. Surely a literate slave population would turn upon its masters! I soon learned, however, that these skills are taught merely to increase the slaves' value to society, for the young slaves are taught to *believe* everything in the books rather than to think. The ingenuity exhibited by the society's rulers in this instance is staggering. An entire class made literate, thus more useful to society, and yet safely mindless!

Of course, as in our society, there are some problems. There are bad slaves as well as good slaves. The good slaves are politely subservient, careful to answer "yes, ma'am" and "no, ma'am" to their masters. In the training institutions a good slave never pushes in

line or goes to the bathroom without permission (this biological fact about the species I will explain later). The good slave has learned all the rules, knows his place, and is rewarded for this mastery by high marks (a reward greatly sought in these institutions) and special signs of favoritism, such as being allowed to walk freely in the halls carrying messages or being chosen to turn in the names of bad slaves when the master is out of the room. Perhaps we should instigate such a reward system on our planet. It seems to function very well here. The good slave is not resented by the others. His slightly superior air is accepted as justified—the deserved fruits of conformity to the code.

Bad slaves, on the other hand, demonstrate the same rebellious spirit and insolence so common to our planet. In the training institutions they push in line, answer out of turn, and generally act as if their feelings and opinions had some worth. Such a gross misconception of their place in society is quickly punished. Instead of being allowed to go outdoors and play games with the other slaves, they stay inside to finish or redo their work. During class time they often sit in a corner or near the master to be handy for a quick reprimand. If their behavior shows no improvement, they may be sent to the head master of the institution for a beating. If they remain recalcitrant, they are often consigned to another institution where they receive "special education."

At first, I assumed that the masters in the schools, called "teachers," were of the ruling class, but this is not so; they are merely specially trained slaves. Their dress is carefully prescribed and the limits of their

power are narrowly circumscribed. They have little voice in what will be taught to the younger slaves, or how it will be taught. When an occasional teacher goes beyond the limits of his authority he is relieved of duty and not allowed to teach again. I heard rumors that some of these teachers go to "free" schools where they teach runaway slaves, but I have been unable to learn more.

There seems to be a small but persistent pressure group advocating more freedom in the training institutions. Their spokesmen talk recklessly about allowing slaves to *choose* what they will study, *choose* their teachers or institutions, even *choose* whether to attend these institutions at all! Why anyone could assume that such freedom would be desirable for slaves is beyond my comprehension. As we well know—give a slave an inch and he'll take a mile!

Fortunately, the wiser institutional rulers have prevailed. Some insignificant concessions have been made to appease the radicals, but the institutions are essentially unchanged.

As you have noted, many of the training methods mentioned might be implemented quite successfully on our planet. You will receive further reports soon. I plan to investigate the "special education" mentioned earlier and another type of institution I have heard something about called "Sunday schools."

Submitted most respectfully,
XI

—GRACE A. KIRKWOOD, *Teaching Associate in Curriculum and Instruction, The University of Texas at Austin.*

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