

NEW EDUCATION FOR GIRLS

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SOME time ago the educational world was startled by the announcement from Moscow that the Soviet Government has published new educational decrees which are no less than "a revolution towards conservatism": in all types of school but the lowest grade the principle of co-education was abandoned categorically. Remembering the enthusiasm and even fanaticism with which the Bolshevist Revolution of 1917 proclaimed and embraced the system of the most liberal and—as it was then called—most modern education, one feels that the new decree of Stalin is even more revolutionary than that of Lenin then was. But it is well in line with Stalin's new policy in regard to family-life, marriage and divorce, family-allowances for children and medals for mothers of five and more children.

Even more impressive than the abandoning of co-education itself is the reasoning which the Soviet Government gives for it. According to a newspaper-dispatch in the *New York Times*, the decree declares flatly that this fundamental change in the Soviet educational system is caused by the natural differences of the sexes and their different places and responsibilities in society. Natural, logical and clear sighted as this is, it sounds, nevertheless, like a revelation to zealots for the "liberal" educational system as it is prevailing in most of the western civilizations and especially in the democracies.

The Soviet Government follows in its fundamental change a trend which Fascism and National Socialism in their early stage have preached—but which they quickly abandoned in favor of total mobilization. This trend itself, and its new formulation by Moscow, is but an expression of the crisis felt by sensitive observers for a long time and now coming into the open.

Alarming articles like that of Dorothy Thompson in the October issue of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, public controversies like those between Professor Butler and Professor Dewey, have recently given proof of this, whereas prophetic books by famous authors like George Santayana and Lewis Mumford have foreshadowed the crisis for years and have gone deep to its roots.

Basically, they all agree that the fundamental weakness of the "liberal" system of education is its over-emphasis on knowledge and its under-emphasis on character. The ideal of education in the last decades was not character-forming, but accumulation of knowledge by the child.

Santayana writes in his book, *Persons and Places*:

Education such as I received in Boston was steadier and my associations more regular and calmer than they would have been in Spain; but there was a terrible moral disinheritance involved, an emotional and intellectual chill, a pettiness and practicality of outlook and ambition, which I should not have encountered amid the complex passions and intrigues of a Spanish environment. From the point of view of learning, my education at the Boston Latin school and at Harvard College was not solid or thorough; it would not have been solid or thorough in Spain; yet what scraps of learning or ideas I might have gathered there would have been vital, the wind of politics and of poetry would have swelled them, and allied them with notions of honor . . .

There he gives not only a very distinct difference between the educational aims and systems of Spain and the United States, but a condemnation of the whole liberal system of education itself.

This system, developed out of the French Revolution and the epoch of secularization, has completely ignored what in former times was formulated so perfectly in the *Outlines for Education*, for the Austrian school-teachers under Francis I. There the teachers were admonished never to forget that "the formation of a good moral character is the chief aim." Otherwise education becomes almost exclusively identical with mechanical collecting of knowledge from all fields of science, like bees collecting honey from all the flowers without effect upon the bees themselves. It was only a consequence of this kind of procedure that the mechanical progress of life in the last decades was as surprisingly high as its standard of morale and wisdom was low. We have now in all countries a youth with sound training in technique and science, but sadly ignorant of philosophy, art and religion.

Here, in my opinion, begins the great task of the new education for girls! I cannot overlook the fact that our technical era demands the utmost of technical ability and schooling of our boys, but to keep the world in balance we need for girls a totally different education. It was for this reason that I—and certainly thousands of mothers with me—felt intensely an announcement on the front-page of one and the same newspaper (*New York Times* of November 18, 1944) that even on this continent two great countries, the U. S. A. and Argentina, are planning military education for girls, after the war.

What a horrible thought! Have not we all been shocked by the Fascist idea and practice of extending military education and training to girls and women? Are we not all witnesses of

the growing danger to family life and childhood in the absence of wives and mothers in the armed forces and the war-factories? To continue voluntarily such war-emergency method, and to make it a compulsory part of the future education of our girls and women, must bring deadly danger to the nation, to culture and to civilization. Rather, by far, would I—in agreement with Stalin—base education for girls on the differences which nature itself and the rôle of womanhood in society trace out.

To me it was no joke when one newspaper man asked President Roosevelt after the first announcement of the youth-training whether we should teach cooking to girls. From a good look into many countries and many, many homes I can emphatically confirm the necessity of such a teaching. The decree of the Soviet Government confirmed it too. This does not mean that I suggest the revival of the old "housewife-ideal", which certainly was too narrow in scope and therefore rejected by a growing number of girls and women. No! The new education for girls must give them an equal share in wisdom, in culture, in civilization—equal, but not identical.

We have seen, and shall continue to see, that education for males out of necessity goes along the line of practical science, technique, mathematics, engineering, etc. Education for the other half of mankind must, therefore, take up the neglected fields of art and its history, music and its history, painting and its history, philosophy and its history and, last but not least religion and its history.

In connection with my teaching of Spanish at Montreal I met quite a number of girls, mostly university-students, and I was struck by two things: their excellent record in all fields of science, and their complete failure in nearly all fields of cultural life. There was none to whom Pascal was known; none who knew something about the *quattrocento*; and when I asked them about the differences in the doctrines of Catholicism and Protestantism, there was a complete wondering. How can we, then, wonder that so many writers and poets complain about the declining of our cultural life in the last 150 years; about the disappearing of chamber music, the absence of private libraries, the emptiness of art exhibitions?

If we need a proof how urgently the soul of mankind and, I may say, especially of our womanhood is longing for such spiritual food, we need only to look on the numberless clubs for adult education—clearly implying the lack in our educational system for youth and especially for girls. All the complaints that family life in our time has vanished, that the children are

striving for jitterbug or the movies, are to no small degree an accusation of our woman folk's inability to make home-life pleasant and attractive. At no time was this necessity greater than it will be after this war. If out of these years of suffering and darkness shall come, as we all hope and pray, a better time, a brighter and happier time, it will be only by the saving hands of our women.

Let us prepare our girls for this task. Let us enable them to bring to their husbands and children happiness and the healing power of eternal values!