

1/34

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VI. 1

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EDUCATION FOR THE AGE OF SCIENCE

Some time before the atomic age was ushered in by the mushrooms of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, H. G. Wells published a book The Outlook of Homo Sapiens in which he stressed the necessity of a radical change in education. He explained that the new education we need in future should differ from the traditional one as much as our electric lights differ from the oil lamps and candlesticks of our ancestors.

The Cultural Lag and Its Consequences

Nearly two decades have elapsed since Wells wrote his warnings but, in spite of all good intentions of UNESCO, only slight amendments were made in the school curricula of most countries and no radical change has occurred anywhere. While science is progressing by leaps and bounds, our concepts of general education are basically the same as those of our great-grandfathers. The result is that the cultural lag - that is the sharp discrepancy between scientific accomplishments and the art of human understanding and social cooperation - is still increasing. While modern science and technology could provide a standard of living for all civilized men which is uncommensurably better than the present average, the actual situation is that while two thirds of the world's population is living under miserable conditions the armament race costs about two billion dollars a week. This expenditure is either wasted money, or, if the armaments are really used, would lead to the extinction of civilized mankind.

To retain the obsolete method of settling international disputes by military pressure is, however, only one of the human errors connected with the cultural lag. Another tragic consequence is the disproportionate ratio of human sufferings caused by basically avoidable evils. A certain percentage of evils to which mankind at the present state of our knowledge is subjected must be accepted as an inevitable fate. Earthquakes, famines caused by natural catastrophes, floods, diseases such as cancer, are a few examples of that kind. However, if we observe our neighbours and mankind at large we find that too many people - and in particular also many among the wealthy ones - are thoroughly unhappy for quite different reasons. Petty quarrels with one's fellow men and everlasting worries with one's self, the frustrated desires and ambitions resulting from a wrong order of values or from overevaluation of imaginary aims - all that causes in its totality far more unhappiness in our present world than all the major natural catastrophes, poverty or disasters.

In this respect, as well as in many others, human society as a whole is worse off than some of its well organized parts. Let us take as an example a big industrial undertaking. It has to take into