

I think it a fair assumption that the majority see the family tree of the Education Service with the Department of Education and Science as the topmost branches, the major Education Authorities a little lower, the divisional offices within climbing distance, the actual schools just head high and the children within those schools as the sap which nourishes the whole. If one cuts off the sap the tree withers and dies but, apart from a very brief excursion in this direction in Athens in the fifth century B.C., we have always had a steady supply of our professional lifeblood. Unequivocally each child within our schools is as precious as the blood within our own bodies and equally precious to my analogous Educational Tree.

First let us look at today's children. Let us view them not through eyes biased by media misrepresentation but as fathers and mothers (either actual or *in loco parentis*), as adults responsible for their education within our schools whether they be few in number or a multitude. Physically these children are superior and more mature than the children I remember from the pre-1940 era. Where there are physical defects the facilities for a full and worth-while education are even more advanced than many of us envisaged. In this particular area technology to assist the teacher has made unprecedented strides. That it is not yet matched by adequate recognition for the teachers involved is a matter for very real regret but this in no way detracts from the enormity of the task in all our Special Schools and the dedication of those who serve in them.

Although there is a marked improvement in the physical field one could not expect today's child to be born with any degree of difference in his mental ability. The "mix" is as it always was, the largest percentage attracting the label "average", a smaller percentage above this norm and a number below it. It is in the development of this basic inheritance that one sees a very marked change. I am, perhaps, impinging a little upon the contents of Bullock but I believe that the initial fault, if fault there be, with today's child is committed by the parents, not deliberately, but because their minds are continually conditioned by external influences and they quite literally do not realise what a disservice they are committing to the child. The family discussion, the family excursion, the family expressing certain standards of behaviour, speech and bearing have been abrogated to an alarming degree. They have been replaced by worship of material possessions and division of the family, as a unit, to this end. Except possibly in the fast disappearing truly rural areas the pre-school child has a decreasing knowledge of the actual natural world, the sights, the sounds and the feel of God's creatures and God's creation. He is assailed from early childhood with the electronic substitute version of our heritage and his senses are expected to grow to fruition on this ersatz cultural diet. Parents have forgotten how to talk to their children, to read to their children or to guide their children's first steps along the path of literacy. All too often even the difference between what is right and what is wrong is left for somebody else to deal with at a later stage of the child's life. He is weaned on daily doses of the most awful cacophony which today so often passes for music but which bears little resemblance to the art of that name. The sound of silence is something almost unknown to him.

I live on the very edge of the Dartmoor National Park - a vast wilderness where one can, if one wishes, become isolated from all the wonders of the twentieth century. On many journeys onto the Moor I frequently meet groups of youngsters striding along intent upon conquering this or that Tor, enjoying the wonderful unpolluted air but, so indicative of the age, usually with a transistor-radio held to their ear or carried in their hand. The silence of the Moor is so foreign to their nature that the sounds which they might hear are lost in the din which has become almost part of their lives.

It is not my intention to say that this is so for all children or for all families. I merely report on what I see as a disturbing trend in the relationship between parents and children, a relationship which throws an increasing burden on those responsible for the next stage of the child's development, our special kingdom - the School.

It seems that everyone who ever attended school does, at some time or other, become a self-designated "expert" on education. In like manner the Police Force is hag-ridden by people who are ever ready to pontificate on how best to preserve law and order in this country. The man or woman who commences with "As a ratepayer" seems to forget that we also pay and are therefore equally keen to obtain value for money. What is more we are in a far better position to see that value is obtained, and, even more important, our entire training and experience is guided towards that end.

Teaching methods have come a long way from the era of "chalk and talk". During their journey they have collected some wonderful new phraseology. Is "Phonic attack" virtually the same as teaching a child to read? Are "Open-ended timetables" so open that everything of value has fallen out? Is "Family grouping" another name for a smaller edition of what used to happen in village schools? "School experience" now

replaces teaching practice - we all know what the latter meant but perhaps its definition was too exact.

I have quoted a very few examples but of one thing I am positive - whichever method is used, our prime duty is to promote as high a standard of literacy and numeracy as is humanly possible in whichever of the stages of education we are employed. These are the basics without which there can be no complete fulfilment in any other subject discipline. You may think this is too well known to bear repetition but all too often do these fundamentals founder under pressure of gimmickry and commercial exploitation or a sickening attitude of indifference. Inherent under the blanket cover of teaching method is naturally school discipline. Discipline does not come naturally to children, it has to be taught. Not only does it have to be taught but it must be an understood system with which each child, each teacher and each parent is fully conversant. All relationships, indeed the child's very future as an adult is governed by a measure of discipline both self-imposed and that which normal society expects. If we abdicate our responsibilities in these directions then we are simply failing to carry out one of the major roles incumbent upon us as Head Teachers.

Society, as a whole, expects the Education Service to work miracles. No matter what calibre of child starts at one end of the system from the other end should emerge a well orientated, well educated future citizen of this country. Education itself has taken on this challenge - we are teachers and proud to be so known - but by the same token when the end product fails to measure up to our own and Society's standards we are naturally open to criticism. When one thinks of the explosion of curriculum content in conjunction with our efforts to produce the worthwhile citizen perhaps we have overreached ourselves and overlooked the very disciplines upon which all learning must be based. This is a cautionary observation, an appeal for a return to values which so many consider outmoded but whose absence will be regretted by our children and regretted even more by their children. Today's child is tomorrow's parent; that is why those of you here of my vintage can now look at children whose parents who also saw earlier in your career and you can, and must, evaluate what you see in terms of your own beliefs and in terms of what the country expects from you as a member of an honourable profession. It is a daunting task which, until recently, had scant material reward but which, nevertheless, gives that intangible satisfaction which can only be experienced by dedicated teachers.

Let us now look briefly at our third arboreal limb - the Educational Administration. I believe it was that great golfer Gary Player who once observed that tall trees catch the wind. We are now far enough up our own tree to realise the truth of this observation. It is at this level that major policy decisions are taken which directly affect us as Heads and equally the children for whom we are responsible. Very often these are decisions which the trained Educational Administrator finds abhorrent but they are forced upon him by committees totally committed to perpetuating a doctrinal line irrespective of educational value or educational viability. Your Educational Administrators have a continual running battle on their hands - not only are they fighting for their educational budget but they then have to try to reconcile their ideas of priority with those of our friend the ratepayer now wearing his County Council or Metropolitan District Council hat. In the majority of authorities it is at this stage that there is real consultation with teacher representatives which is as it should be. The present financial stringency, however, coupled with measures which are politically rather than educationally motivated, makes this reconciliation an unenviable task. In real terms the present financial budget does not even allow authorities to mark time, a growth rate of nil per cent measured against the present rate of inflation must surely qualify those responsible for permanent residence in Cloud Cuckoo Land.

This is for this year alone. My thoughts for the future are not culled from any little red book - they are determined by the recent proposals to cut #1,033 million from the educational budget in the period 1976-79. In simple terms this will mean a further worsening of the pupil/teacher ratio, a lowering of the per capita grant, a lack of nursery school provision, virtually no replacement of outmoded and outdated buildings, minimal repairs and renovations of those already in existence and the training of fewer teachers, many of whom will join those already qualified for whom there is no hope of employment within our schools. My friends, we are living on borrowed money but for our children you cannot borrow time. Steel can be stockpiled to await the upturn in the economy but decreased educational opportunity can never be regained. To believe otherwise is not logic but lunacy. British education has always been considered the yardstick by which other countries measured their own service. If these standards are diminished, then, by the same degree, is the future prosperity of this country. My plea, therefore, is for the fullest co-operation between the Education Officers and ourselves. The attitude of "them" and "us" in this present context has no place in my philosophy. Each needs the fullest support and understanding of the other, if we are to make the best use of the very limited resources available.

Finally, let us cast our eyes to the very top of our tree, the place where, incidentally, one looks for the first signs of Dutch Elm disease or any other indigenous illness. It is here that children become statistics, not only when they are born but even before this event takes place. There are times when we have an abundance of our raw materials known, rather descriptively, as the bulge years, but the statisticians now predict a diminishing birth-rate running into the 1980s. I do not know all the factors which contribute to these forecasts but we can rest assured that, should they be wrong, then firstly it will come as no great surprise and secondly there will be another set of statistics published which will consolidate the initial error. Statistics alone are but one part of the work in these topmost echelons.

Our tree then, despite its need for a little judicious pruning, will survive. I say judicious because so far those who prune seem incapable of reaching the branches above our own particular level. They chop away at the very area least able to sustain such mutilation. I repeat that pupil/teacher ratios especially and capitation allowances are but two instances which directly affect the quality of the service to the children, although it is these same children who sustain the whole tree.

I have always felt what a great pity it is that Education should be a party political issue in this country and I have no doubt at all, in my mind, that Education has suffered, is suffering and will continue to suffer while this situation exists. I do not believe that the Education Service as a whole should be set apart from the stringencies inherent in the present financial dilemma in which this country finds itself but neither do I believe

that this is the time to impose political dogma in the name of education when there is an abundant and self-evident need for every pound of our due in areas which are truly educational. Finance is the inescapable problem for all sectors of the public service - let our service have its just share to spend in the fields where we, as Heads, and our immediate administrators know that it is most urgently needed.

Education is primarily concerned with CHILDREN. Children who represent the future prosperity or decline of this nation. Let the day soon come when this basic truth becomes the guiding principle for those who control our destiny because I see, and I am sure you see, far too many signs that a multitude of mini- empires are being created which are based on the numbers of children in our schools but from which the children themselves derive precious little benefit.

It remains for us to emulate the greatest Teacher of them all who exhorted that the little children should come to Him. In 1976 we, as Head Teachers, must see that this faith is never betrayed.