The Teacher and the New World

Introduction:

People who have passed 40 and take life soberly are called upon to do some humble thinking, particularly if they are parents, teachers or journalists. These three classes are popularly believed to be the makers of what is called public opinion. They generally accept this assumption. It is they who largely frame the attitude of mind with which the young principally face active life.

If this be true, those of us who belong in these three classes have very little to be proud of in the public's present attitude of mind towards the two or three greatest matters in the present world. It is an attitude when not frankly indifferent, so acrimonious, so partisan, and so unfair that it is hopeless to expect from it any constructive action.

Not the least of the unhappy features of the present state of mind towards public affairs, not only in this but in other countries, is the orgy of accusations in which those who love to class themselves as the intellectuals have fallen. Far from humbly searching their minds to see in what respect they are responsible for the general degradation of thinking and feeling, each seems to be intent on blaming somebody else for present woes. Each loudly claims that if his opinion had been followed, all would have been well. The more liberal or radical the intellectual considers himself, the more illiberal and
he is in his denunciations.

The intellectuals of the world today are certainly making a pretty poor show of themselves. Their exhibitions of intolerance, of vanity of opinion, of unwillingness to co-operate in undertakings which are obviously directed to a larger co-operation and union in the world if their sponsors are people of a different creed from themselves—all of this makes a bad showing for us who have been busy the last forty years or so trying to help people to see straight and think honestly.

The Teacher:

Admitting humbly that we have bungled badly in our efforts to produce really tolerant, unselfish and honest minds, what should be our line of reform? There are certain lines in this matter of reform which apply to all of us—parents, teachers and journalists; but which, if you will allow me, I should like to point up for the teachers, since it is to teachers I am talking. And please understand I do this with all humility, without exonerating my own profession in the least.

You teachers have a advantage over the journalist in the framing of public opinion for the reason that you deal with life and men not only from the point of view of the day but from the point of view of all time. It is your business to employ both history and philosophy in all that you teach. The journalist is by the nature of the material that he handles more of an opportunist. He must help in producing a temporary result, and generally one which
he frankly admits is a mixture of good and evil, though on the whole he feels it makes for good. Now, you have nothing to do with results, your whole business is with principles. You work on the greatest of all theses and the soundest, that if you can instill the sound principle the results will take care of themselves. Wherever the teacher fails to concentrate on the principle back of whatever matter he is handling, whether it be history, natural or human; whether it be psychology or current events—he is sacrifcing his opportunity for securing the most permanent of results.

Accepting this, what should be the principles upon which the teacher should be putting his emphasis in this matter of paramount of importance, which we speak of as The New World?

The New World:

Run back to the War, and recall how, through all that terror, we spurred ourselves to endurance by a conviction that out of it all was to come what we spoke of as a New World. Go back and read French and English literature in particular. Read those wonderful documents that came from our own soldiers, and see how insistently the phrase recurs—The New World. That was the thing that justified the unspeakable suffering, the intolerable duty to which they were called. It was this feeling, so strong in a great part of the allied world, that led to that amazing outburst of optimism after the armistice, that outburst that welcomed the President of the United States when he went to Europe with his program of reconstruction. Men believed. The tragedy was
that they believed so much that they visualized the thing as being achieved, or they forget in the exaltation of their great hope those profound laws, through the operation of which alone a new world can be created. Now it is certain of these laws, things which are the very essence of the universe, things you cannot get away from, which we going to make this new world. And it is the laws or principles, if you call them that, which the teacher must somehow get over to the young. It is in proportion to the thoroughness with which they grasp the meaning of these principles and the fidelity with which they follow them that they will make their contribution to this New World.

The Changing World:

The danger in the failure of the immediate realization of the great vision is that the disappointed sink back into cynicism; and when they do this they join a great company of the world's people. In Paris during the making of the treaty and the construction of the League of Nations, one of the strong obstacles was the massing of cynicism with which the attempt was greeted by those people who believed that the world is a static thing, that it does not change.

Now, there is no law more essential for the teacher to get into the minds of the pupils than that this is a changing world. And along with this should go the repeated demonstration, hourly and daily, of the change for the better. All history, all science illustrates this. In spite of all the discouraging exhibits of life, the appalling defects of society and government, if you view life in long
enough periods you are able to prove your point, that the changes that take place on the whole are for the better.

The child naturally accepts the world into which it is born as the only world. If it sees a world of peace and good will and prosperity, it believes that to be the universal world; if it is born to one of war and hate and hand-to-mouth living, that is the world. The child who believes all is for the best in the best possible of worlds, unless he somehow has been trained to understand the inequalities of life, is very apt in his first contacts with actuality to lose moral and intellectual balance, to see nothing but the worst and no method but revolution. But he who has seen nothing but ill and never been familiar with the civilizing and humanizing tendency of society, brings a great doubt and cynicism as to their genuineness and their efficacy. That is, the teacher has as his first business, to establish in the minds of the pupils the facts of both the good and evil of the world and of the laws which are working out gradually a change.

Evolution:

It is most essential to establish the relation in the pupils' minds between the relative value in change of the revolutionary and the evolutionary methods. Great masses of men and women in the world today are committing themselves to revolution as the true method of securing changes in the structure of society and government which will give mankind the fair opportunity which is its right. (See notes on Revolution)
The comparative merits of revolution and evolution in securing results is illustrated not only in the history of mankind as we know it, but in the biographies of men and women, in natural science, in contemporary events. Nature employs revolution in the earthquake, in the volcano, in the tornado and the flood. It is the comparative value of the results that we get from the slow evolutionary process of repairing social wrongs and in the violent effort to uproot permanently those wrongs that the teacher must somehow get over to his pupils, if he is to have the kind of thinkers who must in the future grapple with the problem of making a new world.

Sacrifice:

The relation of sacrifice—individually and nationally, to making a New World must not be overlooked. It is a vastly important thing to get into your pupils' minds. Sacrifice is admitted by all revolutionists—sacrifice not only of those who do not agree with them but of themselves and of those who do agree with them, if necessary. The true revolutionists does not flinch at the idea of death for himself or anybody else. The very weakness of those who believe in evolutionary and peaceful methods is that they do not realize that if they are to succeed, continued, day by day, sacrifice is involved in it. We know that war means sacrifice. We have not learned that peace no less than war has its sacrifices.

The fundamental difficulty so far in making effective the League of Nations—a League which is the noblest and most comprehensive
plan for realizing the century-old dream of mankind of a union of all peoples, has been to realize that for every country, it did mean sacrifice. I remember how at the very first gathering of the representatives of all the nations at the Peace Conference, when it was agreed that the first work of that Conference should be a league of nations, that very astute and great old man, Clemenceau, said, with a depth of feeling which I fear was not recognized by many, what we must not forget, all of us, in this attempt to make a league is that it means for every one of us sacrifice. So far as I know, he was the only one in all that great assembly at Paris that in those early days thought at all of what they would have to give up in going into this thing. They are learning it, those 43 nations that have gone in, one by one, that for each of them it means sacrifice. It was one of the first demonstrations we had

Banat of Temesvir – Transvaal – Persia

The fundamental trouble with Poland was her failure to realize that she must sacrifice some of her territorial ambitions and hopes, sacrifice some of her desires to revenge old wrongs if she was to do her part in making this great world union through which she was brought into being, a success. Somehow there must be carried over to your pupils, in connection with this principle of sacrifice as a part of the technique, if I may so use it, of securing a new world, the understanding and the conviction that there is in sacrifice for noble purposes a spiritual reward. Nothing is more necessary at this moment than to be able to include in the answer which you give to the question on every
youth's lips. What am I to get out it? some sense that the great values are not material values, after all, but that there is a kind of knowledge, of experience, of satisfaction coming out of this thing from which we all shrink that can be obtained in no other way. The law of sacrifice is a law of the universe. All it means is giving up the lesser for the greater.

[Signature]

Co-operation:
The Personal Responsibility:

The relation of the unit in things to the whole must be understood if we are to get an effective body of citizens for pushing on this New World. The world of course bristles with proof that the whole is no better than its parts, the chain no stronger than its links. It is the care of each individual apple tree that preserves the orchard. It is in proportion to the faith in a new world and a willingness to sacrifice for it that you secure workers for it. We can all of us learn something from the German method of bringing a whole nation to thinking as one on the proposition that the world belonged to her and that it was by force that it should be won. What succeeded with her in regard to war, will succeed equally if intelligently applied in this nation in regard to peace.

Supremacy of Moral Force:

If we are to bring our body of youth to believe in this new world of peace and order we must bring them to believe as fundamental in bringing it about that the moral law is the strongest thing in the universe. No league of nations can ever be carried out based on anything else but moral force. The present League has certain underlying principles. First, bringing representatives of nations together in an organization where they will become informed and interested in one another's ambitions and points of view and where they will mutually cure and soften one another's animosities. It is based on cutting out all economic and labor irritations, in
bringing all nations to admit a certain code of law, in pledging them to cut down their armaments, to arbitrate their differences, to publish all their understandings and treaties, to correct their treaties and covenants as rapidly as they are shown to threaten the peace of the world—that is, the whole force of the League is its moral structure.

Much of the complaint against the League in every country has been due to a scepticism of the power of moral obligation. We need no further argument of that power than what we have seen demonstrated in the last five years. A friend of mine recently told me of a talk which he had in September, 1914, with one of the greatest civil engineers in America. "Give Germany 60 days to reach Paris. It is like this. If Jack Johnson should suddenly attack a half dozen prosperous, good humored, well fed gentlemen, it would not take him five minutes to have them all on the floor. He is prepared, understands efficiency, the efficiency of attack; the prosperous gentlemen do not. That is England and the Allies."

Two years later, he meets the engineer. "What do you think now?"

"I was like Germany—I didn't realize that my prosperous gentlemen had an unseen weapon, that of moral indignation and revolt in their power—a weapon which I have concluded from what has happened in the last two years, is the most powerful thing in the world."