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IF I HAD MY WAY

English Unconfined

by R. S. FAIR

IN the free world of education in which I have been invited to deploy my declining energies, there would be, on the part of the pupils, unceasing activity in the original use of whole English for real ends.

Of all the devices for the development and sharpening of thought, none is more effective than lively discussion and good talk, which promote not only the ability to communicate but also a readiness to listen. The young people leaving our schools should take with them the ability to communicate their ideas and experience in clear spirited speech that shows no trace of aggressive assertiveness, self-consciousness or fear. Adequate exercise in the arts of discussion and civilised talk would endow them with this ability; it would endow them also with a desire to receive the ideas of others, thus widening the field of their own perceptiveness and sympathies. The pupils in my ideal schools would spend at least a third of their time practising the art of spoken English. To the stifling of this art in our schools and universities may be ascribed most of the currently deplored low standards in English. Only teachers and lecturers practise it — to excess.

Writing, like talk, is a major means whereby the self is enriched and enlightened. Young people must write about their own experience of life: they must in this way be led to develop their thinking about human nature, human destiny, education, love, religion, society, politics and human relationships. They will become more richly aware of themselves as conscious beings, alive in a fascinating universe, as they write about what they observe, what they feel, what affects their senses, what happens to them and what they do. Most of their themes must be of their own choice, drawn from their own unique converse with life. Such writing — and the reading of it to and by each other and myself — would absorb a third of the time.

Good talk and good writing demand the use of the higher intellectual powers; and develop them. They liberate and enrich the spirit. They serve for delight and entertainment. So do books; but books can extend the range of our minds beyond our own narrowly conceived and experienced worlds in a way which can hardly be achieved by any other means. They should be read for the value of their immediate impact. What happens to us while we read is what matters. The effects enter the fibre of our minds, and endure; the facts and the form are expendable, and soon fade. I should endeavour to promote free, eager and untrammelled reading of a wide range of all kinds of books representing all the literary forms.

In all the activity involved in the talking, writing and reading, I hope I might prove to be an interested, responsive, delighted and stimulating participator, guide and adviser. It would add zest to my old age to cease to have to be an awarder of marks and a coach (a poor one) for examinations. If I have omitted anything of value, the reader may add it. Anything, that is, except classroom grammar, the barren futilities of which would have no place in my free world.

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