

When I received the invitation to talk to your group about conservation education, I hesitated to accept. The mere fact that conservation has been an avocation of mine for many years, and for most of that period I have considered conservation education to be a vital and necessary part of any school curriculum, does not mean I am qualified to speak on the subject or that I am an expert on it.

However, I decided to accept on the theory that as one who is on the "outside of the fence, looking in", so to speak, I might see some things which you on the "inside of the fence" might not see, simply because of our different points of view.

On May 24th, 1969, at a State convention of the Izaak Walton League at Fond du Lac, Wis., Mr. Russ Lynch of the State Natural Resource Board gave an outstanding talk on environmental resource matters which I think <sup>is</sup> relevant to the subject of conservation education. Mr. Lynch is one of the outstanding conservationist in the State and unfortunately he is being replaced on the board for what appears to be purely political reasons. He said, quote, "Conservation today has become an inadequate word. Today natural resource problems are more urgent than when most of us became interested in conservation and accepted a responsibility to work for it. Now it is the environment we are concerned about--the rapid, tremendous changes and the slow, insidious ones that have become monumental. The need now is to control these changes, to protect and renovate our living space. When I talk about environment, I am talking about limitations to which all living things are subject. Even man, although I think most of mankind overlooks or denies, this subjection to nature's laws. We live and work with the aid of electronics, cybernetics, cryogenics and many other things that many of us may not really understand, if even we know what the words mean. On land we travel faster than any creature can run; in the air, faster than any bird can fly. We are partners, thru taxes in the development of space travel and atomic energy and in sea bottom exploration. But we are animals, and we must never forget it! In the simplest sense,

environment means the surroundings in which we live, but it really goes beyond the physical and it includes the economic and cultural atmosphere. In our civilization, the three are inseparable. Many overlook this fact, and that is the root of our problems. The total environment is of vital importance. Life depends on it--the kind of life we live, how long we live, and with the atomic bomb and air and water pollution, whether there can be life at all on earth for many creatures." Quoting further, he says, "Man also has an advantage over other socially tolerant animals in that he can to some extent control parasites and predators and treat bodily ills. Note I say "to some extent". We can look upon crime, particularly/ in the core areas, as predation. The cheaters in our welfare program surely are parasites and we can all think of others. The tremendous market for pills affords reason to wonder about the health of our people. Ulcers, tension produced ailments, allergies and various diseases must be attributed to the condition of our environment; pollution, overcrowding, pressure and technological tampering with natural things.---In our land today, we have a good deal of rebellion. Writers call it rebellion against the Establishment. But the Establishment is responsible for the environment, and these rebellions, there are several different kinds, are really against the physical, cultural and economic environment.-----I leave you now with the thought that many of our problems today arise, most probably, from the fact that the faceless, mindless, countless multitude senses what is happening and does not like it at all. Isn't the multitude frustrated and uneasy about being managed into an extremely complex, competitive and restless way of living, full of things it comprehend<sup>dimly</sup>, if at all? A life full of pressure and tension? What we call youth problems, labor problems, civil rights problems, welfare problems, even the 'god is dead' problem--are these really different manifestations of rebellion against the environment?" End of quotes, from Mr. Lynch's brilliant analysis.

I quoted so extensively from his talk because he said much better than I could, many problems facing us today which very probably can be attributed to the type of values which our culture appears to have adopted. And what he has said opens the door for the question I have to raise, "Are these values the products of our educational system? Are the great magnificent school structures we are building nothing more than manufacturing plants for the mass production of values which can destroy our very society?"

In the old Webster International dictionary, education is described as "an act or process of learning; the impartation or acquisition of knowledge, skill or discipline of character; also the act or process of training by a prescribed or customary course of study or discipline". And under the word "teach" it says "to impart the knowledge of ;to instruct in the rules, principles, practices or the like". Note the use of the words "principles and discipline, and the phrase, "discipline of character".

In thinking about this definition, it occurred to me that education today, and as long as I can remember, has concerned itself primarily with that part of the definition which describes it as "as impartation or acquisition of knowledge and skill" but has neglected that part which refers to "discipline of character and principles".

You may ask, "what has this to do with conservation education"? My answer is that I believe it to be the key to the solution of the many problems which Mr. Lynch mentioned, problems which do threaten the destiny and well being of the people of this nation. The prime objective of conservation education must be to instill within the individual a deep feeling of responsibility and duty, or in other words an "ethical conscience" towards his total environment. Responsibility is the foundation upon which all character is built. Without it there can be no honesty of purpose nor any of the human virtues which distinguish man from the beast. Without a feeling of responsibility toward his God, there is no morality, -without a feeling of responsibility toward his environment, man destroys it.

We know that the mere acquisition of knowledge or skills by an individual does not by itself guarantee his value as a fine citizen, -there are a lot of educated crooks around. But even more significant, knowledge such as our education imparts is not necessarily a criterion for intelligence, -look at the mess of things some of our most educated can make simply because education is no substitute for intelligence. In fact, without an ingrained feeling of responsibility, education can be misused to enhance the individuals capacity for self indulgence. Where better to start to build an individuals sense of responsibility than with the things he can see, feel, smell, taste and enjoy, those tangible things of life we call our environment.

I think that the man of today is very much like the human being who lived at the time of the first written records. Human nature appears to be unchanged. The conflicts between individuals, cultures and nations, then as now, stem from the same forces which seem inherent within mankind and control his actions.

However, over the years man has acquired a certain degree of knowledge of the forces of nature and his aim appears to be to use them in such a way as to make them his servants for more and more material benefits. Thus by reason of his increasing knowledge of these forces, he created what we call the industrial age. In this age, concerned primarily with the material benefits he could produce and the wealth he could create, he neglected to recognize, identify or even try to understand the impact these forces of materialism he unleashed would have upon those inherent characteristics of human nature. He is content and proud to call "progress" anything that adds to his immediate wealth, anything from the leveling of a mountain, the destruction of counties by strip mining or the destruction of a huge body of water like Green Bay by pollution. He also fails to recognize that the unleashing of these forces for the values in material things they can bring about, also can relegate him as an individual to nothing more than a number on a government or corporate computer.

So that today as a result of the knowledge man has acquired thru the values taught him thru our educational systems, he has learned enough about the forces of nature, and has employed them in such a way as to threaten the very existence of life itself on his mother earth.

The question is, will he have the intelligence and the discipline of character not to use his knowledge for that purpose.

Nor can we ignore the part our corporate structure is playing in the values we have placed upon materialism (which is just another word for the biblical words "golden calf"). We created the corporation as a vehicle to carry on more effectively and efficiently the intricacies of the business of our industrial age. We gave it all the rights we possess, except perhaps, the political right to vote, although corporate servants appear to have been able to circumvent that limitation. But we gave it some<sup>thing</sup> more, something even we don't possess, namely, the right to perpetual life dependant upon it's business success. And because financial success has become the only reason for it's existence, and because not only managment

stockholders and labor as well as the government itself are dependant on it's success for their material welfare, there is great danger it can lose it's roll as a servant and actually become the master. As a corporate entity, it does not need clean air to breathe or clean water to drink. As an entity it does not concern itself with aesthetic or environmental problems, and too often water and air are polluted and environment destroyed only because of the financial reasons involved.

Of course, the corporation of it's own volition cannot destroy water, air or the environment. It's course is set by the values and the "ethical conscience" of it's human directors, the values which education has such a tremendous hand in shaping and creating.

But the corporation is not alone in it's lack of an "ethical conscience" in relation to it's environment. The individual land owner is just as much to blame for the environmental crisis we are creating. Look at the valuable soils which are lost forever because poor farming practices encourage erosion. Look at the fertilization of our waterways because of half hazzard fertilizing practices. Look at the "outdoor slums" we are permitting to grow, particularly around beautiful northern lakes, often because of the values held by so called "developers." Look at the marshes being drained and the building of unnecessary dams all for the satisfaction of the values our educational practices are encouraging.

I think it is time to reevaluate our entire educational concepts and objectives. According to the ads we see, the young are encouraged not to drop out of school but to obtain an education so they can prepare themselves for better jobs and to earn more money. These are, no doubt, desirable objectives. More skills help industry to obtain more qualified help, and more money means more can be spent on the products of industry thus helping to keep the economy in high gear and taxes rolling in for the politicians. Important as these things may be, is it not just as important to teach the student he is but a part of a fantastically intricate community of nature toward which he has a deep and grave responsibility? Does not the philosophy of "learn more to earn more" as

the primary goal of education, lead to the very exploitation of our soils, water, air, minerals and environment which threaten the very existence of man on this earth? Does it not lead to those values we see so rampant today, viz., "lets fill our pockets today and get what we can while we can?" Does it not lead to the encouragement of the worship of the very forces which tend to make the corporation the master rather than the servant of man? Could it be that the lack of the values contemplated by true conservation education are one of the principal causes of the rebellion by youth?

Where in our educational curriculum do we find that other part of the definition of education which refers to "discipline of character", that discipline of character which would automatically come from a young conscience awakened and alerted by educational principles emphasizing that the right to earn more also imposes upon the student the duty not to ~~be~~ befoul the air and water, not to destroy the soils and environment, not to unbalance the ecological pattern of nature. Certainly it must be the function of education to create a proper balance between the educational goal of "learn more to earn more" and the responsibilities <sup>has toward his total environment</sup> the student/when he applies his skills and knowledge after graduation.

There must be a place in the curriculum to teach the duties of a citizen toward the protection, proper use and conservation of the very resources his country must have if it is to continue to prosper and be worth living in. Education must divorce itself from any philosophy which consciously or unconsciously tends to foster exploitation of resources and confuse free enterprise with exploitation. And certainly it must indoctrinate the student with an ethical conscience relating to his duties and responsibilities toward his environment as well as to himself and his fellowmen. ☆

Now, if these things are desirable goals of education, how do we go about implementing them? Some say this is the duty of the parents. But the parents today are generally the products of our educational

system. Neither they nor our teachers have had an education which included the indoctrination of an ethical conscience toward our environment, and as individuals, to recognize their duties and responsibilities to maintain a quality natural environment for themselves and the future. To try and start an educational program embodying these principles is almost like trying to build a house by starting with the roof instead of the foundation. I think the initiative<sup>ive</sup> must come from the highest educational levels both on a State and National plane. Teachers like yourselves, if you are dedicated, must talk about it and try to get things started. And, the start must come soon, so that the children of today, who will be the parents of tomorrow, will not be as poorly educated in these principles as their parents were. Teachers colleges must develop the proper courses to indoctrinate the future teachers with the values suggested here.

Most of us I think, believe in some type of moral law. We know what human nature is and how it responds to temptation, particularly if material things are involved. I see a parallel between our material values and what they are doing to us and the prodigal son. The father having lavished the son with all the things, gifts, wealth and material gadgets he wanted. He paid no attention to what his generosity was doing to his son, even tho it was destroying the sons sense of responsibility and dulling his character until he turned out to be a bum. In accepting these gifts and using them for his own destruction, did the son really love his father? Do we not act very much like the prodigal son when we exploit, destroy, waste and abuse all the wealth in natural resources God has given us?

I believe that conservation education embodying the philosophy of duty, responsibility and an ethical conscience toward our environment can not only give our youth the skills and knowledge need to make more money, but will also teach him to be a better citizen with a more disciplined character with the capacity to enjoy many more constructive values in life than mere monetary ones. Anything less can hardly be called a complete education.

Education should be the vehicle to carry man to his highest cultural achievements. I doubt if the true culture of a nation can be measured by it's gross national product or the average annual income of it's people. I doubt if it can be measured by the height of it's skyscrapers, the architectural splendor of it's churches, or the capacity of it's stadiums, or the number of television antennas sticking out of it's roof tops. I don't think it's real strength can be measured by the size of it's military force, or it's nuclear bomb reservoir. Rather, I think, the true level of culture of a people and the real strength of a nation can be measured only in the sum total of the strength of character of it's average citizen, since it is the sum total which makes the whole nation.

The primary aim of education should be to strengthen the character of the individual student. It can't be done when the aim is to "learn more to earn more". But it can be done with the development of the "ethical conscience" in conservation education along with all the needed values which would automatically stem from an educational philosophy which emphasized man's duty for the preservation of a quality environment for himself and the future.

V. J. Muench  
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