

Address delivered by
Principal G. C. BOSE

AT THE

Conference of Teachers of High Schools of District Birbhum
December 13th 1926.

I thank you most sincerely for having asked me to take the chair on this occasion. I am a *bona fide* teacher myself with fifty years' experience on my back and it is possible my age and experience might be of some slight use to you in your deliberations.

With the objects and principles of your organisation I have very full sympathy. The All-Bengal Teachers' Association has come to stay: it is already a power for good and its counsels and resolutions have to be treated with consideration by both University and Government. It is good for you, gentlemen of the teaching profession of this historic district, to be joined on to a powerful organisation like this which has already done something and promises to do more to improve the status and usefulness of Bengal Teachers. I hope you will make up for lost time by bringing added zeal to the cause, by strengthening the membership of the Association's journal. I trust you will set an example of disciplined loyalty and unflagging effort which will be emulated by older Branches.

Gentlemen, remember these are the days when group-organisation is going to be a lever of power; and your effectiveness as social units can only be brought into full play when you have an organisation, strong in numbers, stronger still in the support of the rank and file to their own elected Executive and specially strong in an abounding faith in your mission. No profession, gentlemen, is to-day secure in the enjoyment of prescriptive rights and privileges and immune from unwarranted encroachment and curtailment of privilege, that does not combine, that does not defend itself when attacked, that does not conquer fresh territory for itself.

The time is come when Education has to be saved from the invasion of official and red-tape control on the one hand and the incursion of the turbid whirl-pools of party politics. I have always through my long life strenuously fought for the principle of the Independence of Education—the principle that Education is an end in itself and not a mere means to an end, however high it be. The manufacturing of so-called efficiency or the making of fashionable heroes is not the end of education. I have always held that Education, the ends of culture and breeding, transcend even the needs of the State and I have always fought those who have by subtle methods attempted to make the teacher a mere tool of the State and to make Education itself a mere spoke in the wheel of administrative machinery.

Those of you who have eyes to see and ears to hear—who above all have a lively educational sense—must be aware of the many snares and wiles that are slowly but silently being laid across the paths of the genuine teacher, of the red-herring that is being drawn across the trail. You as a body of men imbued with high purpose and a true missionary spirit must not permit yourselves to fall into the trap. For you there is only one shining goal—the development in intellect and character of the young committed to your charge, the drawing out of the best that is in them and the instilling in them of the joy and the beauty and the mystery of this wonderful world, through Poetry, through Music, through Art, and last but not least through Science. You have to subordinate your persona, ambitions, your personal claims to greater monetary rewards and more spacious leisure, to this duty towards the rising generation of your country. On you devolves the task of educating public opinion throughout the length and breadth of the land about Education—its aims and its methods, its curricula and its tests. On you primarily, will fall the burden of securing greater and more helpful co-operation between Home and School on the one hand and the popular and official blocs on the other. You have to agitate for the immediate

vernacularising of the entire system (which has been shuffled up and down, evaded and avoided for a century); you have to have the Press and the Politician to join forces with you in an insistent, unyielding demand for *adequate finance*. You have to teach as well as to learn—teach other professions the beauty of honourable poverty, the possibility of plain living and high thinking even in these degenerate days of money-worship and learn fresh methods from the fascinating experiments carried on, for example, at Rabindra Nath's deservedly renowned educational colony at Santi-Niketana, at Mahatma Gandhi's world-famous Asrama at Sabarmati, at growing centres like the Abhoy Asrama at Comilla. You have to put yourselves in the stream of national upheavals in all directions but at the same time keep your feet steady and your eyes clear. To be *in* the world and yet not *of* it—to cultivate a fine sense of philosophic detachment—is indeed the most difficult of human achievements and yet the ideal teacher can never attain the maximum usefulness till he evolves and diffuses such a spirit, the apex and summation indeed of culture as understood specially in India.

Gentlemen, from *principles* let us descend to *facts*. We have had a century of English education in Bengal: the historic Hindu College was founded as early as 1817: there has been much troubling of the waters since! Commissions and Committees have sat in periodic succession and added pile upon pile of thick-bound "blue-books" reposing in godly serenity in our Libraries: but has the cause of Secondary Education, our primary objective here in this Association, really progressed? The question is of fundamental importance and has to be faced.

Has our instruction been practically useful and intellectually stimulating? Has it developed a tradition of fine *nuances*, has it fostered an atmosphere of high placidity and strenuous courage? Has it educed character, the capacity, that is, to rise superior to circumstances and to create opportunities where none appear to exist? Has it evolved a sane and balanced, a

high-soaring yet clear-visioned patriotism? Has it had any living and loving contacts with the needs and problems of the country? Have we tackled the varied problems of agricultural improvement and conservation in our schools in any form? Have we taught our boys the elements of science? The mysteries of the modern world of industry—the secrets of pulley and pump, the marvels of gas and electricity and telephony and wireless—the poetry of Botany and Chemistry—have any facilities been given to our boys of entering into this world of high romance? Have we taught them the history of our own land even to any purpose? Is there any real provision in this system for teaching the rudiments of commercial and economic Geography and the elementary concept of the growing science of Economics? Is there any place whatsoever for music, for painting and sketching, for hygiene and nursing, for physical drill and discipline?

The system is an antiquated, hybrid muddle where the beautiful language of Bengal with to-day an assured place in world-culture has received cold, step motherly treatment, where gerund-grinding and initiation into the intricacies of spelling in a foreign tongue have sucked the brain of the learner dry—a system in fact, which is vapid, inane, outworn and medieval in its blindman's buff of set instruction through a highly obscuring medium, of mass-teaching without any differentiation of talent and capacity, of insistence on the trivialities of linguistics and grammar, and total neglect of science, art, handicraft, music, manual training. The tools of the carpenter, the forge of the smith, the potter's wheel, the spinner's *charka* and the weaver's loom have as effectively and ruthlessly been banished from this system as the chemist's test-tube and the botanist's knife. It argues a very high power of intellectual resistance indeed in the race that the Bengali mind has not been absolutely atrophied by such a regimentation extending over a century.

Look at the environs of an average school: the squalid proximity of law-courts and police stations, the oppressive atmosphere of business firms divorced from high aims. Consi-

der the average school-house—miserable corrugated-iron shanties in rural areas and damp, cheerless brick-houses without play-fields and compounds in cities. Consider the pittance paid to most teachers—less than starvation-wages and how the poor devil of a teacher has to eke out his scanty income by drudging as house-tutor and coach. Remember the game at battledore and shuttle-cock played between the Departmental Inspector and the School Managing Committees, of which the victim is in many cases the teacher. Remember also how the teacher in the village areas is dragged willy nilly into the petty factions of village politics and made to participate in scandalous law suits.

Look at the truncated curriculum—at the inordinate importance paid to examinations. Can we wonder that the products are clerks and parrots and automatons—and hardly men? I leave aside the vexed question of girl's education: for the education given to the prospective mothers of the race is in many points such a slavish trucking to western conceptions, so very divorced from the realities of home life and the demands of family and community, with often such disastrous results on their mental make up, their physical health and general outlook on life—that it offers to me the tragic spectacle of lives stunted and stamina and will-power steadily impoverished.

Happily, however, even these dark clouds have a silver lining; and of late some real thinking about principles and methods and some strenuous attempts at novel experimentations have been in evidence. The new Matriculation regulations drawn up by the Senate of the University in which I also had a humble share are steps in the right direction: their most notable features are the emphasis on teaching and examining in Bengali (with suitable exceptions made for non-Bengali-speaking students) in a country where Bengali is the mother-tongue of 99 per cent. of the population, the insistence on manual training and the study of history (Indian and English) and geography and opening out of possibilities for the study of Science and practical subjects—and the abolition of the cri-

ficial age-limit. The Government seem to be taking their own time to accord official sanction to these healthy changes which have been long over-due. I commend them to your diligent attention and trust you will give them wide publicity throughout the District.

The control of Secondary education is another moot-point and is on the anvil: recently the University has submitted to Government a detailed scheme drawn up after great care. In this connection the old adage that he who pays the piper must call for the tune is apposite: and as the bulk of finance for secondary education is borne by the people in the shape of scholars' fees and public benefactions, it is meet and proper that the people's men have the final voice in it. Of one thing I am absolutely certain—that any attempt, direct or veiled to officialise secondary education will be bound to evoke a storm of organised protest and the country expects your Association, to stir up the politician's and the journalist's conscience in the matter.

Gentlemen, the problems of Education are so varied and interesting and so much waits to be done in our country in this branch that I could, if I chose, weary out of the patience of you all. I believe in work much more than in talk and I ask you all to sharpen your swords and be ready to smite the Dragon of uninstructed prudery and blatant loudness and deliver the Fair Captive of Sound Education from her suppressors.

"Sound bodies in sound minds," 'the nation in the cottage'—to my mind these may very well be your war-cries in the new fight you will be called to launch upon in the near future. Unless your learners grow strong and healthy in body, of what use will all their virile intellect be in these days of hardy strife? Unless your system and curricula are growingly adapted to the needs of the broad country and unless enlarged idea and improved practice filter down from the classes to the masses, how can you hope to revive your decayed villages and push your arts and industries? Without these linkings, I

assure you, Education is but a Monstrous Product gnawing at her own vitals! For how long, gentlemen, are we to officiate at the baptism of puny manikins and sickly starvelings? For how long is the Educational system to throw up by the thousands men of rabid imaginations and muddy understandings—men without joy in life, men who cannot create but only consume, men who for want of constructive ability find a morbid pleasure in reckless destruction? We must make our schools the nerve-centres of our social polity—from whence will come forth a valiant band of workers, practical idealists, sufferers who will sweep and scour, polish and brighten, wash and clean till Bengal shines like a plate of burnished gold.

Gentlemen, a new spirit is abroad in the country—not for nothing did Ashutosh Mookherji and Chittaranjan Das live and die: not for nothing are Rabindranath and Jagadis and Prafulla Chandra working and dreaming. Not for nothing is the country's service being taken up by groups of young sacrificers, hard as steel and yielding like the willow. Verily the spirit is moving the waters—and it is a high privilege and rare blessing to have been born in this generation.

Gentlemen, my voice is losing in pitch and timbre: I am a link between the old and the new. Your voices are the voices of soaring youth: Ye are builders of the new. Let me tell you from the experience of three score years and ten, no genuine effort is wasted in God's world. We have been making rapid strides—through mistakes, through many acts of omission—towards a new orientation and a new gospel. The Genius of the Race calls—will you not march to the Gime, heads upraised, eyes shining, muscles brawny and hearts pure? In purity, in sincerity, in high energising will be your salvation. To such a high ideal of living and dying for a new world, therefore, do you address yourselves and even if you appear to fail, such failures will be more precious than short-cut triumphs of a day. May God speed your work!