

Colin Woodman
Teacher of History,
Notre Dame
Comprehensive

When asked to select a book that had influenced me I chose T.S. Eliot's selection from Rudyard Kipling's verse, letting this volume represent his works in general. I chose Kipling because of the way he expresses a regard for the individual value and responsibility of men and women going about their daily tasks, for the virtues which he praises and for his sense of the past pervading the present.

It is easy to parody "You're a better man than I am Gunga Din", or to see the triteness of "The Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under the skin", but these are the uncomfortable themes of human value that run through his work. The mutual respect of the 2 scholars, one a mendicant Tibetan lama and the other the European curator, meeting in the Wonder House at Lahore, is a theme repeated again and again. An individual's worth is not measured by race, social status or wealth, but by what he does. "Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made by singing 'Oh, how beautiful!' and sitting in the shade, while better men than we go out and start their working lives at grubbing weeds from gravel paths with broken dinner knives." Tomlinson, living in Berkeley Square, is condemned because he has done nothing positively good and even his evil is another's responsibility, but he must learn that "the sin they do by two and two they must pay for one by one." "If" succinctly gives a code of conduct for the individual who is to live on his own terms, doing what he perceives as right and not what everyone else is doing, "being lied about, don't deal in lies, or being hated don't give way to hating; ... meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two impostors just the same." In the wider context of the British Empire he does not preach white superiority. He does indeed assume the existence of that superiority and preaches the responsibility that goes with that fact. "Take up the white man's burden" - it is a duty because the white man has the technical ability to "go, bid the famine cease", to check pestilence and provide the basis for civilised government. And what are the rewards to be expected from this? Not gratitude but "the blame of those ye better, the hate of those ye guard". Certainly not earthly glory. "The tumult and the shouting dies: The captains and the kings depart: Still stands thine ancient sacrifice, An humble and a contrite heart. Lord God of Hosts be with us yet, Lest we forget - lest we forget!"

What has all this to do with education? Simply that Kipling expresses some of the ideas about human conduct that I believe are valuable. Does this mean that I see the teacher's role as that of an indoctrinator? I think not. My aims are humbler. I am in the position of someone who has something of value and would like to share it. There is no fundamental difference from the dinghy-sailer (or the hill-walker or the cyclist) who encourages others to try his activity because of the enhanced enjoyment of life that he believes it may bring to the participant. The enthusiast cannot demand or enforce participation and he cannot guarantee success or enjoyment but he is still eager to offer the chance.

The teacher, however, can demand (and can try to enforce) participation in the formal subject that he claims to teach. In my case, this is History. It would be possible to produce a high flown statement on the philosophy of History, but I find that this breaks down before what I call the "Hooper factor". (See the Prologue to Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited".) Don't just refer to 'children' or 'students', but think of a particular name. It may be that Tracy is a potential Professor of History but there is also Mary Anne, who is going to assemble TV sets and raise a happy family. For both, I would say that a knowledge of the past is a requisite for the understanding of the present, that it is a necessary part of self awareness and that is an object of education. I would hope also that both would be aware that the past can be used to prove anything or nothing; that the selection of evidence can be as bad as the falsification of it; that - for example - arms races, appeasement, alliance systems and non-alignment can all be shown to have led to or to have prevented war; that there are no easy answers.

To return to the idea of the teacher as an enthusiast who wishes to share. In the contemporary world of supply and demand economics, it is here that he becomes his own enemy. He wants to teach. If he is ill-paid, it is hard to "work to rule", since that prevents him teaching as effectively as possible; if a parsimonious employer will not provide adequate resources, he improvises or even provides them out of his own pocket; and he continues to do all this while a society lacking in parental responsibility makes his task increasingly difficult. It is no wonder that fears are expressed that the teachers' enthusiasm is going to be lost and that education will suffer irreparable loss. I hope it will not, and I believe it will not. There will be a continuing cost in nervous breakdowns (in my personal experience they seem to be running at 2% a year), and in defensive cynicism, but we will survive because we believe in ourselves. Perhaps those lines are an appropriate conclusion:

"If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,

And stoop and build them up with worn out tools."
If we can do that, perhaps we can survive Sir Keith Joseph and all he stands for.