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THE GOOD TEACHER

In the course of a person's life, he meets different kinds of people. The meeting may be brief or may span a good part of his life. But, to a great extent, such meetings leave him just a little different — a little better or a little worse — than before. It has thus been said that the sum total of a person's associations constitute his character.

One kind of meeting which most everyone experiences in those impressible stages of his life involves an older person — the teacher. Indeed such an experience would account to a very large degree for the person's attitudes, outlook in life, mode of thinking, and personality in the later part of his life, when he is actively grappling with various social forces to exist and find his happiness.

The teacher — and of course the parent — play major roles in shaping a person's

character in those years of his life when he is most receptive to external influences — good or bad. Although such things as heredity have their own parts to play in a person's development, the external forces brought to bear upon them guide him as he chooses some path in his society. The good teacher may not make a brilliant student out of an inherently dull person, nor can he add anything more to the native talent of a gifted one. But the good teacher can and should lead the sluggish pupil, inspire the brilliant and ambitious student, and instil in the others a love for learning.

One need not point out here the possibility that a person may meet a poor teacher and that such a meeting can inflict damage on his character. But certainly it should be remembered that one recalls, later in his life, those teachers who have in-

spired him and pointed out to him the good and beautiful things in life. Long after he has forgotten that he had particularly difficult times with a bad or temperamental teacher, he remembers how one teacher showed him where to go that he may best make use of his native potentials.

Indeed, while he should never forget how to derive an equation or how to analyze a piece of literature, he always remembers though vaguely that one teacher out of many others had been able to remove the subject — be it mathematics, literature, or law — out of its dim and musty nook and place it alongside other fields of knowledge thereby impressing upon him its particular significance and beauty.

One writer has succinctly described the essence of a good teacher — “a teacher of men, not surveyor of mere facts.” He is one who regards his pupils and students as human beings and holds himself before them as one. He is one who has succeeded in resolving this dilemma — that of being objective, presenting to his pupils aspects and pro-

blems of truth and learning without advocating for one or the other and, at the same time, being able to make his pupils understand that certain values and concepts must be respected and that he himself has deep convictions about them.

Take one kind of teacher — that one who concerns himself with man's history and man-made institutions. Certainly, the good teacher is able to take the records of ancient men and events and give them life — not simply by forceful and vivid discussion of factors which caused this civilization to flourish and that one to crumble. He distills from the archaic and the dim past the values and truths which are as valid then as now. At the same time, he is able to point out that absolutes have little significance but that ideas and concepts change with every change of society and with every passing generation. And yet, the good teacher makes his pupils realize that certain values — “good” ones — have a certain attraction such that men in practically every stage of history have espoused them and built civil-

izations, or at least, social groups with them.

Or take the scientist — that teacher who has spent his life learning the physical forces, seen and unseen, constituting the universe. Here, as in other fields of knowledge, the function of the good teacher, as well as his value in a person's spiritual and intellectual growth, is to show that science is but one aspect of knowledge and that it represents by himself the efforts of men from different societies and generations. As such — that is to say, as part of a greater man-made whole and as the result of different minds — science has values associated with man. The scientist, however, realizes and makes his pupils so realize it, that the forces of the universe have been at work long before an animal such as man came into existence and will subsist long after he has become extinct. Humility, therefore, is only one of the many virtues which the scientist inculcates in his pupils.

While the scientist, as a good teacher, has an obligation to lay bare the facts, he has the more important responsibility of making his pupils realize that there are physical forces which can destroy or improve men. This, one ultimately discovers, is the primary function of the good teacher. He does not merely convey men's thoughts, words, and deeds. The study of this, one writer has said, does not in itself help man to do, say and think what is right. The good teacher helps the pupil develop a sense of judgment and perspective which, the same writer has said, will enable the student to evaluate his own experience. This is, he said, a task which must be own his responsibility and which no teacher can do for him. One may however add that the good teacher can prepare the student for this task. And one realizes much later in one's life that this is how some teachers are remembered and others forgotten.

Viewed from the heights of reason, all life looks like some malignant disease and the world like a madhouse. — Goethe.