

(April 30, 1929)

Education and Business

BY SIR AUBREY SYMONDS, K.C.B.

PRESIDENT DALY:—It is a pleasure and an honor to welcome as our guest to this club today, Sir Aubrey Symonds, K.C.B., Permanent Secretary, British Board of Education, and delegate of the British Government at the recent meeting of the National Council of Education held at Vancouver.

SIR AUBREY SYMONDS:—Mr. President and gentlemen, in the short period during which I have been in Canada, I have found many things I have learned to admire and many things I have learned to love, but there is one thing that I have learned most actively to dislike and that is the sound of my own voice. So you must blame your able and energetic secretary who approached me in Vancouver if I crave your indulgence for a few minutes. I am not sure whether it was Mr. Philp or myself who suggested that I should talk on "Education and Business."

Now you may very properly and legitimately put to me two questions: the first being, what are my qualifications for talking about education and, secondly, what is the connection between education and business? I will deal with the first question first and answer in as few words as possible. I say that my qualifications are extremely slender. I certainly do not dream of posing as an educational expert. There are gentlemen round this table, who, I am sure, have forgotten more about education than I shall ever learn. If I have any qualification at all for speaking to you on this subject, I am greatly daring to suggest that I have greater claim as a man of business because in our great Departments of State in England we have been forced to follow, to the best of our ability, up-to-date business methods. I am, myself, personally responsible to the

Public Accounts Committee of the British House of Commons for the expenditure of more than forty million pounds a year. It is clearly, therefore, my function to see as best I can that that money is efficiently and economically spent. But I had better pass from this rather delicate subject and come to the second question.

Now, not so very long ago, certainly within my memory, in England at any rate, the connection between education and business would have been almost vehemently disputed by quite a considerable number of business men. It was quite a common phrase, it was certainly quite a common belief, or said to be among certain business men, that the only way to succeed in business was to begin as an office boy by sweeping out the floor. I can remember when I was an undergraduate at Oxford, now, I regret, some thirty odd years ago, that the then Vice-Chancellor of one of our big northern universities came to Oxford and told some of us that he had been commissioned by some business men to try to find some graduates at Oxford University to come in as apprentices to their business because they had begun to see that the old idea of beginning with the office boy would not do. I need not tell you how that conception has grown quite apart from the demand that there is now for experts in business. Quite apart from that there has grown up a demand for men of training—the trained and educated mind, to take part in the great administration of great business. We have overcome that very largely, but we had another great difficulty to contend with in England and that was the dislike of a great many people to what they were pleased to call vocational education. I need not refrain from telling you that, at one time, the trade unions of Great Britain were bitterly opposed to anything in the nature of vocational training. That is not so now. That is why I can tell you that quite freely. I think they have come to see what most of us have come to see, that the distinction between vocational and academic education is past. The chief function of the old universities of England was mainly to train men to take part in public life, which to a large extent meant in those days parliamentary life.

But let me tell you a little story which perhaps will

illustrate, even better than anything I have said, the fallacy of this supposed distinction between vocational and academic instruction. Two years ago we had an imperial education conference in London. We were discussing this question of vocational education. Speakers got up from all parts of the civilized world, at any rate all parts of civilization within the Empire, and that is the greatest part of it. And they told us their experiences and their views; and then there got up a gentleman from the far end of the room whose voice, I think, had not been heard in the conference. He told us that he was an administrator of some province or some department of a province in West Africa. He was instructed to go and visit the tribe of the area, and give them the rudiments of vocational education. Well, our friend went there and he summoned the chiefs of the tribe. They met in a tent, and apart from himself the only clothing they wore was a spear. They had rather disgusting habits, but otherwise they seemed interested, and he asked them what was their vocation. They answered as much as to say, "There is only one vocation, of course, that is worthy of a chief and that is raiding our neighbors and stealing their wives and cattle!" Well, that is a bit of a problem. How to give them vocation education, suitable for the vocation of stealing your neighbors' wives and cattle; but he succeeded. He persuaded them that unless they could begin to count, they could be perfectly certain that fellow members of their own tribe were going to cheat them in cattle and take their own women and so he taught them to count up to ten. And there you have a perfect blend of vocational and academic education. Well, now we have got over that difficulty.

It has been part of my business to do my best to bring educationists and the business men face to face in order that the business man might tell the educationist what sort of material he wanted—what sort of human material he wanted, that the educationist might do his best to turn out from our schools and universities the kind of boy and girl and young man and young woman that was best fitted to discharge his or her part in business. We have been pursuing that subject with considerable care in our schools. We aim at making a definite break in the education of our children at about eleven years. We have gone further

than that. We have set up two or three committees in primary education; such committees as the committee of which you may possibly have heard presided over by Sir Arthur Balfour. All these committees have taken the same point of view, viz., the absolute necessity of obtaining some adjustment between the needs of business and the needs of commerce and industry and the facilities of the education authorities for providing them. Quite recently, within the last few months, the department of education has taken still a further step. We have appointed a committee of education for salesmanship with special reference to export trade and I am happy to say that we have succeeded in obtaining the support of some of the most prominent and ablest brains in the business community in Great Britain. Business men, in fact every man in Great Britain and, I have no doubt, in Canada is realizing that in the stress and strain of modern competition it is no longer possible to produce even the best goods and say to the foreign markets, "take them or leave them." There is no doubt that that was a habit of mind. Certainly prior to 1914. It is no longer so.

But there is room, so it seems to me, and so it seems to a great many people in the Old Country, there is room for further research and enquiry into the best methods of salesmanship—salesmanship for the home market, salesmanship for the Empire market and salesmanship for the foreign market. Now this committee has already started work and has already produced some interesting results. It has found out, I think, among other things, that the teaching of foreign languages is deficient. That is to say, it has been too academic and not sufficiently attuned to the language of commerce and industry in the country in which we wish to supply our goods. They came to us after a very few weeks and they asked us at once to go into that question. I need not say we quickly promised to do so.

The interest of the business men in England in this subject is, I won't say surprising, but extraordinarily welcome, extraordinarily encouraging. I might just say that the lead was given to them in this matter by one who is perhaps the surest in the whole Empire—the Prince of Wales. The very first speech that the Prince made after

his return from Africa during the King's illness was a speech on this very question of salesmanship. This is a movement from which I am sanguine enough to expect results, not merely for British trade but for Empire trade as a whole. My friend, Sir William Clark, has, I believe, been speaking in various parts of your Dominion of co-operation in business. I am sure that he would join with me in urging co-operation on this particular question—this question of training and research into the best methods of salesmanship.

Now, there is one thing I want to say. I know that education, in perhaps rather a broader sense even than the sense with which I have been dealing, is a question of what I must, for the moment, call so-called cultural propaganda. Now, the word culture is a most unfortunate word. It conjures up in one's mind visions of high-brows, a general air of superiority and a priggishness which is distasteful to the ordinary Britisher. But the fact of cultural propaganda is one, I suggest to you, that has to be seriously faced. I have been talking within the past twelve months to our ambassadors and British representatives in foreign countries. I have taken the pains to consult our British Foreign Office and I have kept my eyes open in travelling about, and I assure you that the amount of this kind of cultural propaganda that is being carried on by a number of our foreign competitors is almost stupendous. I think I had better not mention names, but I can give you one or two instances. There is one country where there are distinct openings for British and British Empire trade. And to that country, this year, approximately 100 university students have been sent by another country with the avowed object of cultural propaganda. In another case, in Europe, one of our competitors has lent something like fifty of its finest pictures from its great national museum for exhibition in another country. That kind of thing is going on all over the place. And what is the object? This object is quite clearly to impress upon other nations with whom they wish to do business, the superiority of their own civilization above any other. Now, I do suggest to you, especially those of you who are business men, that this is a menace which we have got to meet. The British nation is being called, as you know, by

this trite phrase, "the nation of shopkeepers." Well we have been proud of that nickname, but do not let us be a nation of shopkeepers and nothing else; and do not let us be a nation of bad shopkeepers. If we are to hold our own, I believe myself that we have got to tell these foreign people that we have got British stock and a civilization which is at least the equal of any other civilization in the world.

It may sound strange to you, but I assure you it is a fact. I have this on the authority of some of our keenest-minded representatives abroad, that some of these people in their foreign countries do not know that we have literature or art; they do not know that we have a sense of culture that is worth their knowing something about.

In my opinion, this is one of the most important things that educationists and business men can do in co-operation. We have, I believe, still a tradition of fine workmanship. What we have got to do is to impress upon these people that we also have an artistic sense; that we have got the sympathy to see and to understand their needs and requirements. But, above all, we have got to impress upon them, year in and year out, what you know, what we know, what perhaps they do not know, that great tradition of square dealing in business.

THE PRESIDENT:—Gentlemen, in this city and province, where the future of industry is so bright, we are naturally interested in the discussion of business and educational methods. We are all anxious to see Canada develop commercially, but we are equally anxious that the development and commercial expansion should not be carried on at the expense of our civilization. We, therefore, welcome an address of the kind which we have been privileged to hear today and, on your behalf, I have much pleasure in expressing to Sir Aubrey Symonds, this Club's appreciation.