1. “A flower for your window”

In the window beside which we are writing this article, there is a geranium shining with its scarlet tops in the sun, the red of it being the more red for a background of lime-trees which are at the same time breathing and panting like airy plenitudes of joy, and developing their shifting depths of light and shade of russet brown and sunny inward gold.

It seems to say, “Paint me!” So here it is.

Every now and then some anxious fly comes near it: - we hear the sound of a bee, though we see none; and upon looking closer at the flowers, we observe that some of the petals are transparent with the light, while others are left in shade; the leaves are equally adorned after their opaquer fashion, with those effects of the sky, showing their dark-brown rims; and on one of them a red petal has fallen, where it lies on the brighter half of the shallow green cup, making its own red redder, and the green greener. We perceive, in imagination, the scent of those good-natured leaves, which allow you to carry off their perfume on your fingers; for good-natured they are, in that respect above almost all plants, and fittest for the hospitalities of your rooms. The very feel of the leaf has a household warmth in it something analogous to clothing and comfort.

Why does not everybody (who can afford it) have a geranium in his window, or some other flower? It is very cheap; its cheapness is next to nothing if you raise it from seed, or from a slip; and it is a beauty and a companion. It sweetens the air, rejoices the eye, links you with nature and innocence, and is something to love. And if it cannot love you in return, it cannot hate you; it cannot utter a hateful thing, even for your neglecting it; for though it is all beauty, it has no vanity: and such being the case, and living as it does purely to do you good and afford you pleasure, how will you be able to neglect it?

“A flower for your window” by Leigh Hunt
2. “On Education”

Before considering how to educate, it is well to be clear as to the sort of result which we wish to achieve. Dr. Arnold wanted ‘humbleness of mind’, a quality not possessed by Aristotle’s ‘magnanimous man’. Nietzsche’s ideal is not that of Christianity. No more is Kant’s: for while Christ enjoins love, Kant teaches that no action of which love is the motive can be truly virtuous. And even people who agree as to the ingredients of a good character may differ as to their relative importance. One man will emphasize courage, another learning, another kindliness, and another rectitude. One man, like the elder Brutus, will put duty to the state above family affection; another, like Confucius, will put family affection first. All these divergences will produce differences as to education. We must have some conception of the kind of person we wish to produce, before we can have any definite opinion as to the education which we consider best.

Of course, an educator may be foolish, in the sense that he produces results other than those at which he was aiming. Uriah Heep was the outcome of lessons in humility at a charity school, which had had an effect quite different from what was intended. But in the main the ablest educators have been fairly successful. Take as examples the Chinese literati, the modern Japanese, the Jesuits, Dr. Arnold, and the men who direct the policy of the American public schools. All these, in their various ways, have been highly successful. The results aimed at in the different cases were utterly different, but in the main the results were achieved. It may be worth while to spend a few moments on these different systems, before attempting to decide what we should ourselves regard as the aims which education should have in view.

— Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)
“On Education”, 1926
3. “Charles Dickens”

Plenty of people have found him [Charles Dickens] unreadable, but very few seem to have felt any hostility towards the general spirit of his work. Some years later Mr. Bechhofer Roberts published a full-length attack on Dickens in the form of a novel (This Side Idolatry), but it was a merely personal attack, concerned for the most part with Dickens’s treatment of his wife. It dealt with incidents which not one in a thousand of Dickens’s readers would ever hear about, and which no more invalidates his work than the second-best bed invalidates Hamlet. All that the book really demonstrated was that a writer’s literary personality has little or nothing to do with his private character. It is quite possible that in private life Dickens was just the kind of insensitive egoist that Mr. Bechhofer Roberts makes him appear. But in his published work there is implied a personality quite different from this, a personality which has won him far more friends than enemies. It might well have been otherwise, for even if Dickens was a bourgeois, he was certainly a subversive writer, a radical, one might truthfully say a rebel. Everyone who has read widely in his work has felt this. Gissing, for instance, the best of the writers on Dickens, was anything but a radical himself, and he disapproved of this strain in Dickens and wished it were not there, but it never occurred to him to deny it. In Oliver Twist, Hard Times, Bleak House, Little Dorrit, Dickens attacked English institutions with a ferocity that has never since been approached. Yet he managed to do it without making himself hated, and, more than this, the very people he attacked have swallowed him so completely that he has become a national institution himself. In its attitude towards Dickens the English public has always been a little like the elephant which feels a blow with a walking-stick as a delightful tickling. Before I was ten years old I was having Dickens ladled down my throat by schoolmasters in whom even at that age I could see a strong resemblance to Mr. Creakle, and one knows without needing to be told that lawyers delight in Sergeant Buzfuz and that Little Dorrit is a favourite in the Home Office.