



IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST

'Importance of being earnest' was a play written by the American playwright Arthur Miller, if my memory is correct. I remember seeing it on the Lionel Vendt stage when Lylie Colridge produced it some thirty odd years ago. Even at that time I wondered whether any of our dramatists, including Sarachchandra and Henry Jayasena, could do something similar.

Perhaps I was wrong, for now we hear of the most recent drama that has taken the island by surprise and even shocked the world.

Lo and behold, it comes from an out-back village, made famous by one of our illustri-

ous writers. Simon, better known by the name of the village itself, Nawagattegama.

Enacted on a humble stage in that rural school, by a so-far unknown dramatist, it is a wonder that it has not already found a place in the Guinness Book of World Records,

Do you know that it is the shortest drama ever produced any where in the world? The shortest one act play. It begins and ends in just one minute, or even less. Dramatic effect is terrific. Only two actors, one the writer, director, producer, all in one. Never has such drama seen the light of day. Who can beat Sri Lanka when it comes to novel creations or new theories?

Sorry, I forgot to give the name of this wonderful Sri Lankan creation. Name is my own, for I do not like to borrow other's names.

IMPORTANCE OF BEING A TEACHER.

That is the name of the play in question.

You do not need a Winston Serasinghe to act in this play although he did the major role in the other one I mentioned at the beginning. Here it is the playwright himself who does the acting. He portrays the typical political thug, who invades any place with no qualms, because he has a sense of security given by his position.

Main character can be called the villain, which he really is. The victim is an innocent teacher who is taken by surprise and does not know what she does. Actor is vocal and abusive, while the actress is non-loquacious and submissive.

It is the story of the boy and the girl, but they are grown-ups, and not playing the traditional 'boy falls in love with the girl' story. Girl would not even look at the boy hereafter. Such is the traumatic effect of the drama.

It is a national pity that no one ever thought of reviewing this tragi-drama, which must have been given world acclaim by now.

One cannot help going back, in mind at least, to the good old days when politicians in Sri Lanka did appreciate teachers who punished their children.

One was a Prime Minister of the island by the name of Bandaranaike, whose son studied in the prestigious school called Royal College. When Anura was punished by his teacher, old Banda was gracious enough to thank him in writing. Then came another Minister by the name of Nissanka Wijeyaratna who sent a similar letter of thanks to his son's teacher who punished him, not knowing he was handling the minister's son.

Both these politicians respected their chil-

drten's Guru, as our tradition has taught us. There is a difference though, in that both these people were educated men, one a product of Oxford and the other a retired Civil Servant. Perhaps decency and decorum go with education.

My generation had the advantage or disadvantage of being drilled to fall at the feet of our teacher and worship him, unlike the present day children who are almost forced to fall at the feet of every petty politician and government officer.

I had a pleasant experience once in London where I was following training program in one of its institutions. One participant observing my deference to our trainer remarked that he understood my attitude and behaviour having been to our country once earlier. He said that with some appreciation and with no malice or cynicism. Mine was not an exception. I have met many who have had similar experiences.

I am pretty certain that at least people like me would be now copying notes trying to make out what has been happening all this while from the days SWRD and NW operated in our motherland.

One does not have to look far, there is the maveric from the holy city of Kelaniya, Mervyn by name, he has already broken all world records by becoming the only politician to survive, and survive in his ministerial position, after rushing to a government corporation such as the Rupavahini Corporation and physically attacking some of its officers. This 'bull in the china shop' has tremendous capacity to do any thing and get away with no injuries or even a reprimand.

Not only has he set an example for others to follow, he has also shown the way to get out of tricky situations. Remember the unlucky Samurdi officer who had to make a confes-



sion which again is world first,

'I tied myself to the tree in order to say that I was sorry for what I did.'

Is there a more disgusting and deceitful way to dehumanize an individual?

It did happen in our own 'Land of pure Buddhism,' with the blessings of powers that be. And the country celebrated the 2600 years of Buddhism in that country, with a lot of fanfare.

Before concluding my article with the popular Buddhist Blessing, sabbe satta havantu shkhittatta, let me narrate another experience of mine.

I was teaching in a rural school not far from Nawagattegama, in Koswatta close to Wennappuwa. One of my colleagues there, a man of real village upbringing, told me what he did to a parent who came to his school shouting because he had caned this man's son.

'I took the cane and chased the man shouting louder.'

Nawagattegama could not boast of such teachers. Or maybe they did want to face a kangaroo court.

That is Buddhism for you, Sri Lankan style, and the place the teacher has been dumped into.

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