

INTRODUCTION

Public education spreads its roots in many different directions and draws its life from many different sources. In settled countries at least it is a growth whose beginning lies far back in the country's history. There is therefore a certain hesitation in selecting a starting-place when the comparatively recent history of education is being considered. The choice of a particular year, even of a particular century, is more or less arbitrary. The story of English education during the nineteenth century does not begin in 1801, nor is it confined to the doings of schools and universities.

Amongst the many factors which go to the making of educational practice, ideas are certainly not the least influential. It may therefore be well to begin a study of the period, 1789-1902, by a brief review of certain thoughts which were current in the preceding generation, conceptions which may be traced back to John Locke and to others of his way of thinking. In this connexion *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) naturally suggests itself, as also to a less degree does the unrevised and somewhat fragmentary *Of the Conduct of the Understanding*, which appeared in print in 1706, two years after its author's death. But neither of these equalled in effect the great truly epoch-making *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, a seminal book in philosophy which Locke published in 1690. Its psychology in particular governed thought respecting education throughout the eighteenth century and during most of the hundred years which followed.

That psychology may be summarily expressed as the doctrine that mental development is conditioned almost entirely by the experience of the individual. The mind at birth is as a blank sheet; subsequent experience, especially the experience of which the sense organs are the channels, changes the blank into a written document, a mind more or less developed. It is in this sense that most of Locke's contemporaries and their immediate successors appear to have interpreted his teaching; the modifications tending to assign a part in development to nature as well as to nurture, which Locke introduced into his books, were commonly disregarded.

Inferences of the first importance were drawn from this doctrine of the *tabula rasa*. In the first place humanitarian feeling was fostered.

If every human being entered life unaffected by antecedent conditions, it might be hoped to ameliorate the human lot simply by improving the environment. In the eighteenth century philanthropy became almost a catch-word, and its practice influenced both private persons and statesmen. It extended to education. Pestalozzi was deeply troubled by the miserable state of the Swiss peasants of his neighbourhood long years before he sought a remedy in educating them. Joseph Lancaster was as much a philanthropist as an educator. Robert Owen's educational theory and practice grew from sympathy with his work-people and a whole-hearted acceptance of the *tabula rasa* doctrine. This earliest of British Socialists argued that, if the particular mode of experience called education could do everything, then it was within its power to frame a new order of society. From the same premises the autocratic princes of the Continent, "the benevolent despots", as they have been termed, deduced that public education might be employed to maintain autocracy. The belief that nurture is everything led all such optimists to endorse the truth of Helvétius' emphatic assertion, "L'éducation peut tout" (*De l'esprit*, 1758).

Locke taught that experience worked in two ways to bring about the development of mind, namely, through sensation and reflection. The psychologists, English and French, who derived their inspiration from the *Essay*, tended to concentrate upon the first and to minimize or ignore the second. Thus, David Hartley (*Observations on Man*, 1749) traces all ideas to sensation, either directly, as in perception, or mediately through the force of association, as in the forming of general notions. The simpler ideas acquired through the senses are combined, compounded or otherwise reshaped in consequence of their similarity, dissimilarity or mere frequent juxtaposition. A sensationalist psychology and the doctrine of association as a sufficient explanation of intellectual and emotional life were the generally accepted foundations for the educational theorizing of the nineteenth century.

Locke's best-known educational work, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, assigns great importance to utility as a standard of value amongst branches of study. "Since it cannot be hoped that the pupil should have time and strength to learn all things, most pains should be taken about that which is most necessary; and that principally looked after which will be of most and frequentest use to him in the world" (Section 94). This doctrine was pushed to extreme lengths by Basedow

INTRODUCTION

3

and the “Philanthropists” of the last decade of the eighteenth century. It dominated most of the suggestions which came from the “education-mad party” in England during the half-century which followed. The economic situation, dependent as it was upon mechanical, industrial and commercial progress, seemed more than to justify it; and, whatever its intrinsic short-comings, considerations of usefulness certainly helped to break down the monopoly held by Latin and Greek and so favoured the introduction of modern studies.

The principle of utility regarded as the criterion in morals, otherwise “the greatest happiness principle”, is by some traced back to Locke as its originator. Leslie Stephen deduced it from Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government*; Henry Sidgwick thought Locke’s utilitarianism was “latent or unconscious”. However that may be, the student of nineteenth-century affairs is constantly reminded of the vogue attained by the philosophy which saw the standard of moral value in “the greatest happiness of the greatest number”. The principle is more closely associated with the names of Bentham, the two Mills and the members of the group known as the “Philosophical Radicals”. In point of fact it is the teaching of their eighteenth-century predecessors. Francis Hutcheson, who died in 1747, said in his *Inquiry concerning moral good and evil*, “Moral evil or vice is as the degree of misery and number of sufferers; so that action is best which procures the greatest happiness of the greatest number”. These are the words of an academic teacher; but much the same was being written by a widely read publicist, Dr John Brown, Vicar of Newcastle. In 1751 Brown published *Essays on the “Characteristics” of the Earl of Shaftesbury*, a work which reached its fifth edition in 1764. The second of the three essays (“On the motives to virtue”, etc.) defines virtue (“which is no other than the conformity of our affections with the public good”) as “the voluntary production of the greatest happiness”, “of the greatest public happiness”. *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785; 7th edition, 1790) by William Paley, Archdeacon of Carlisle, was a book which was very familiar to the early nineteenth-century reader. As a text-book prescribed to Cambridge undergraduates, “Paley” like “Euclid” almost ceased to be a personal name and designated a subject of examination. Paley’s position in the Church and in the University gave a sort of religious sanction to the utilitarian philosophy. “So then actions are to be estimated by their tendency. Whatever is

4

INTRODUCTION

expedient is right. It is the utility of any moral rule alone which constitutes the obligation of it." When Paley speaks of "our principle that the criterion of right is utility", he is asserting Bentham's "fundamental axiom" that "the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the measure of right and wrong". In the early nineteenth century the utilitarian theory of morals and the cult of useful knowledge (in Locke's sense) were championed by the same persons.

The utilitarians argued that a man best served the common good by pursuing his own real as distinguished from his apparent good; enlightened self-interest in the individual tended to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The theory of individualism when translated into practice underlay the many triumphs, as well as some of the failures, of the nineteenth century. It forms the woof and warp of an eighteenth-century book which still remains a leading authority in economics and politics, a book which was a veritable oracle for the majority of those who dealt in public business. *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), safely based upon a humble estimate of human nature, regarded self-interest as the mainspring of behaviour, and competition as a necessary stimulus to exertion. Its standpoint was thus strongly individualist; "natural liberty" meant freedom to exercise individual preference in most if not in all fields. Compulsion is contrary to "natural liberty". In the fifth book of the treatise Adam Smith discusses the matter of public instruction, which was at that time to be found on a comprehensive scale north of the Tweed and there only in Great Britain. Schooling should pay its own way, because endowments make for inefficiency, and dependence upon public funds renders the teachers obsequious to the public authorities who may direct in matters of which they are ignorant. "The labouring poor, that is, the great body of the people" tends to become "as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. . . because no exertion of understanding" is needed to perform the simple, monotonous daily task.

Now a man "without the proper use of the intellectual faculties. . . seems to be mutilated and deformed in an essential part of the character of human nature", a momentous statement which remained little regarded by England for another century. The State derives "from the instruction of the inferior ranks of people" the advantage that, when instructed, these humble ranks are less liable "to the delusions of enthusiasm and superstition which among ignorant nations frequently

INTRODUCTION

5

occasion the most dreadful disorders. An instructed and intelligent people, besides, are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one". The main argument then for the instruction of "the labouring poor" seems to be one of police. But a Scot could scarcely leave it at that; so Adam Smith associates himself with Comenius in asserting that instruction is a human necessity. It is but a short step to assert that it is a human right. Kant and Pestalozzi ranged themselves in this matter with the author of *The Wealth of Nations*, but English public opinion was slow to follow their example.

Smith outlines the organization of public instruction which he would approve. For "a very small expense", the community can facilitate, encourage and even compel the general mastery of the three R's. In every parish there should be a little school, whose master should be paid in part by voluntary contributions, in part by the pupil's fees, these being such as to be within the means of "a common labourer". The contribution from public funds to the upkeep of the school and the payment of the teacher must only make good any deficiency in these other sources. The school should teach the elements of geometry and mechanics as well as reading, writing and arithmetic. Small prizes for attainment should be paid for by public money; those who failed to pass an examination ought not to be permitted to practise a trade. A more difficult State examination should guard entrance to the professions.

Smith sets so high a value on utility that he finds great merit in the meagre education customarily given to girls at that time. "There are no public institutions for the education of women, and there is accordingly nothing useless, absurd or fantastical in the common course of their education. They are taught what their parents or guardians judge it necessary for them to learn and they are taught nothing else. Every part of their education tends evidently to some useful purpose; either to improve the natural attractions of their person or to form their mind to reserve, to modesty, to chastity and to economy; to render them both likely to become the mistresses of a family, and to behave properly when they have become such. In every part of her life a woman feels some conveniency or advantage from every part of her education" (Bk. V, article ij).

The eighteenth century abounded in examples of the "give and take" between this country and France which has so long marked the cultural relations of the two countries. John Locke, when made

6

INTRODUCTION

widely known to Frenchmen by Voltaire, became the leading philosophic thinker of Western Europe; and Locke's philosophy found a natural development in the deism, naturalism and political conceptions of Rousseau and of those Frenchmen whose writings did so much to precipitate and direct the French Revolution. That great upheaval in turn reacted upon English thinking; and English ideas respecting education, its purpose, character and public organization were influenced by what was happening across the Channel.

Although Rousseau has much in common with Locke, especially in psychology and educational theory, the French writer in some important respects represents a reaction from the rationalism of his English predecessor. Both are agreed as to the duty incumbent upon the educator to observe the character of mental development as exhibited in children, and to base method on such observation. Both find the root of the development in the exercise of the sense organs. Both denounce the curriculum of their time for its purely literary character and its omission of modern studies. But while Locke is all for trusting reason, Rousseau looks for enlightenment to feeling and sentiment; the preference shown by many educators to-day for the indulgence of instincts, rather than for their rational control and the discipline of reason, is a legacy from Rousseau quite foreign to Locke. In spite of the tendency of his thought, Locke was personally one whose religion rested upon the assumption of the supernatural. Rousseau's naturalism, on the other hand, is so literal that it explains, but does not excuse, the patent defect in his suggestions for moral training. The sentimentality of Rousseau had an earlier parallel in the English romantic literature represented by Richardson's novels; it is reflected in the birth, or rebirth, of German literature in the writings of Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, and in the almost contemporary movement in England.

The *Emile* of Rousseau appeared in 1762; in the following year La Chalotais published his *Essai d'Éducation nationale*. Rousseau influenced subsequent educational theory and method; La Chalotais suggested the idea of the lay, secular school and so introduced a revolutionary train of thought into educational administration. Hitherto public instruction had been considered the business, even the monopoly, of the Church; La Chalotais would transfer the monopoly to the State. The teachers were to be laymen, religious teaching was to be excluded

INTRODUCTION

7

from the schools and confined to the home and the clergy; but the schools were to give moral and civic instruction.

The politicians of the French Revolution were not very successful in establishing educational institutions, but they succeeded in framing a formula which for a hundred years after their time defined Liberal policy in the administration of public instruction. "Education, universal, compulsory, gratuitous and secular", was the statement of policy which was gradually developed through discussion under the different types of French revolutionary government. With one exception (if it be an exception) this formula describes the aim in the educational sphere which English Radicals and Liberals strove to attain throughout the nineteenth century. The exception is the principle that public education must be "secular", that is, must not include religious instruction. The English substitute ran, "education, as to religious teaching, must be undenominational, but such teaching may be omitted at the option of the child's guardian".

The compromise called undenominationalism was in effect a denial of an essential corollary of Liberal doctrine, namely, the freedom of the individual to be of what religion he pleased, or none; and the vagueness of what Joseph Lancaster called "general Christianity" proved to be as potent a solvent as secularism itself in destroying any belief in the possibility of a common end attainable by national education. The French were more logical: on Liberal principles public education must be lay, "secular"; and this has been an agreed policy in English higher education for the past fifty years.

State control of education was a principle familiar to Greek thinkers, and it had been discussed in England before La Chalotais mooted it in France. But whereas Plato and Aristotle virtually take the principle for granted, in England it met with adverse criticism. Englishmen were not blind to the fact that State-controlled instruction, not one whit less than Church-controlled instruction, involved very much more than an administrative arrangement for economizing spiritual forces and material supplies. The teaching of the *Republic* of Plato and of the *Politics* of Aristotle was not forgotten; the point at issue was the precise nature of the relation between the individual and the community.

The *locus classicus* occurs at the opening of the fifth book of the *Politics*. "That the education of the young is a matter which has a paramount claim upon the attention of the legislator will not be disputed.

The neglect of it in existing states is prejudicial to their politics. For the educational system... must always be relative to the particular polity which is its habitual preservative, as it is in fact the original cause of its creation, e.g. a democratic character of a democracy, an oligarchical of an oligarchy and so on. . . . Again, as the end proposed to the State as a whole is one, it is clear that the education of all the citizens must be one and the same, and the superintendence of it a public affair rather than in private hands, as it now is, when each individual superintends his own children privately and with such private instruction as he thinks good. . . . And further, it is not right to suppose that any citizen is his own master, but rather that all belong to the State; for each individual is a member of the State, and the superintendence of any part is naturally relative to that of the whole. This is one point in which the Lacedaemonians deserve praise; they devote a great deal of attention to the educational needs of their children and the attention takes the form of action on the part of the State.”¹

That is, the State, or community, once established, should remain static in character; Sparta is praised to the detriment of Athens. Education is intended to *preserve* the established order; the State undertakes it, and allows no private agency or the wishes of an individual to intervene. The doctrine that education is a political preservative is one which has been acted upon time and again, although it has not always been frankly avowed. Montesquieu held “that the laws of education should be relative to the principles of the Government”. The doctrine was repeated by Thomas Sheridan (*British Education*, 1756) and by Dr John Brown (*Thoughts on Civil Liberty, Licentiousness and Faction*, 1765), both of whom asserted it emphatically. Contradiction promptly came from Joseph Priestley (*Essay on the First Principles of Government and on the Nature of Civil and Religious Liberty*, 1768), who held that an education administered on that principle would cramp the growth of a community and destroy its civil and religious freedom; the principle should be resisted in the interest alike of the individual and of the community.

The extreme length to which some of the French revolutionary leaders would take the Aristotelian principle is illustrated in the proposal of Michel le Peletier, that all children between the ages of five and eleven, if girls, or twelve, if boys, should be brought up in

¹ Welldon’s translation, pp. 222–3.

INTRODUCTION

9

common by the Republic, clothed, fed and taught on one uniform plan. The alleged ground for this proposal was that in a public institution “the entire existence of the child belongs to us”. But there were prominent revolutionaries who saw to what end such a declaration tended. Condorcet, reporting to the National Assembly in April, 1792, said, “no public body should have authority to prevent the development of new truths, the teaching of theories contrary to its own policy or to its interests of the moment... A power which would prohibit the teaching of an opinion contrary to that which had served as basis for established laws would directly attack the liberty of thought, would contradict the purpose of every social institution, the perfection of the laws, which is a necessary consequence of the conflict of opinion and of the march of enlightenment”.¹

In the same year Romme agreed that it is of the essence of executive power to possess very great authority, “yet it should never direct public opinion at its will, for only opinion can keep ward efficaciously over the executive”. A Government possessing such unrestricted power could poison the very source of social life long before the mischief could be detected and remedied.²

This was a view of State-controlled education which could not fail to be appreciated in contemporary England, particularly by Non-conformists (Protestant or Catholic) who still suffered political or educational disabilities, notwithstanding the partial relief afforded by the Acts of 1778, and 1779, 1791, parliamentary measures which permitted Protestant Dissenters and Roman Catholics to teach publicly but not in the Universities and older Public Schools. They were, however, debarred from university education; Roman Catholics were in addition excluded from political office and the public services. Jews shared these disabilities to the full.

In England the Dissenter was in a minority which was made to feel its position and which might well fear that that position would become worse. The French revolutionary, if not in a numerical majority, was in possession of the executive power which he meant to use to turn the tables on the old *régime*. Add to this difference in the point of view the strong individualism of the Englishman, and we have the explana-

¹ C. Hippeau, *L'instruction publique en France pendant la Révolution: Discours et Rapports*, pp. 190 and 248.

² For the sequel see *Modern France*, 1922 (Arthur Tilley, ed.), pp. 376–82.

tion of the paradox, that those English Radicals who were the friends, even the enthusiastic friends, of the French Revolution were precisely the men who most strenuously opposed State-controlled education in England as being opposed to religious and political freedom.

Thomas Paine had a ready ear for the abstract principles of the Revolution, whose most redoubtable propagandist in England he was generally accounted. In *The Rights of Man* (1791–2), on whose publication he found it expedient to fly to France, he affirms that “a nation under a well-regulated government should permit none to remain uninstructed”. Yet he is careful to limit the State’s action either to compelling parents to pay their children’s school fees or to remitting taxes as a set-off to fees; in needy cases a State grant might be paid for the purpose to the individual parent. This is a roundabout way by which the State avoids responsibility for the particular kind of instruction given. In April, 1791, Joseph Priestley publicly used the phrase “the glorious revolution in France”; but he remained of the same opinion concerning State-controlled education as that which he held in 1768, when he unreservedly condemned it. The general principle advocated in William Godwin’s *Enquiry concerning political justice* (1796) is an anarchistic individualism—a principle which would forbid any form of public instruction; “the project of national education ought uniformly to be discouraged on account of its obvious alliance with national government”. Paine, Priestley and Godwin are all of dissenting origin and breeding.

Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792) was singular amongst English friends of the Revolution in giving whole-hearted support to national or State-directed instruction; but she was also singular amongst French admirers of that plan in her advocacy of co-education.

The fears of Priestley and his friends were justified by so unpromising an utterance as that made by John Bowles in *A Letter addressed to Samuel Whitbread* (1807). “With regard even to the very few who feel any concern upon this subject [the religious education of their children] and who wish their children to be brought up in a particular persuasion, if they would obtain for them the advantages of charitable instruction, they cannot reasonably expect any deviation on their account from the system of religious education which is adopted in the school where that advantage is bestowed.” Bowles