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John William Adamson
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by

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PREFACE

In 1789 it could not be said that England possessed an educational system; yet there was provision for all stages of education, from the university to the school which taught the rudiments. In the two Universities the Church was paramount and all schools of a public character were Church institutions. The uniform control involved a common aim; the great outstanding purpose to be realized was the religious purpose, to which other objects, however important, were ostensibly subordinate. The situation was not novel; ever since England had had any educational organization whatever, its direction had been the business of the Church which had framed the organization and, directly or indirectly, had brought into being its concrete instruments—colleges, schools, teachers.

In 1902 a national system had at length been organized, but direction had then passed from the Church to the State. As a consequence of political and social conditions, religion could no longer be said to be the leading aim of English education. Indeed, it might be said that the religious purpose had virtually disappeared, while no other had definitely taken its place, except perhaps that, in the earlier days of this social revolution, the aim had been the attainment of knowledge and ever more knowledge.

The present work seeks to trace amidst conflicting opinions the slow development of this revolutionary change in the national life. The stages of that development become most evident when its progress is surveyed from the side of administration; hence the frequent reference in the following pages to legislation, and to attempts at, or preparation for, law-making—in a word, to machinery. But behind the slow building of the machine stood ideas and a creed, which owed their existence to thoughts and beliefs that had acquired momentum from the French Revolution. The study of nineteenth-century education begins in the *Emile* of Rousseau and in the *Essai d'éducation nationale* of La Chalotais, that is, in the origin of the lay school controlled by the State, the substitution of moral instruction for Christian divinity, and other changes in a curriculum which hitherto had suffered little or no change, for some three centuries at least. The seed sown by Rousseau

and La Chalotais bore fruit in the formula of the French revolutionaries which, in its final form, ran, “public instruction, universal, compulsory, gratuitous, secular”. With some vacillation in reference to the word “secular”, the formula expresses the Radical policy which directed the development of English education during the century, until it gained an imperfect triumph in the Act of 1902, passed by a Conservative Government in the teeth of bitter Radical and Liberal opposition.

In the England of the early nineteenth century the Radical educational policy was identified with the Benthamites, the “education-mad party”, and with the doctrines of utilitarianism which the party held. Schooling, it was said, should aim above everything else at imparting knowledge, “*useful knowledge*”; “Knowledge is power” was a constant theme of public speeches, leading articles, and the like. But when that policy was at length embodied in material institutions, “knowledge” had manifestly outgrown the possibility of any one’s mastery; knowledge, moreover, was still in the making. Concurrently, utilitarianism had lost much of its authority as a doctrine of practice; men cherished other ends and their desires multiplied in direction. Neither religion nor utility was accepted as the dominant purpose in education. The revolution had displaced one educational end only to lose another, while putting nothing commensurable in place of either. The consequent confusion of purposes and ideals was at first masked by the belief that any kind of movement is necessarily movement forward. “Progress” was a convenient catch-word; if it could be said that education was “making progress”, all was well. The enlargement of the machine and the increasing numbers subjected to it were from this point of view reassuring.

The growing interest in the study of psychology on experimental lines, and the attainment by the study of a position more independent of philosophy, took immediate effect upon educational theorizing. But the effect was necessarily upon means, not upon ends. Here again the *Émile* was potent. Rousseau saw in a child’s disposition and instincts keys to a correct method of educating him, a view which assumes that the educational end is an open question. Means and ends are susceptible of being confused; and for many the satisfaction of instincts was regarded as the great thing to aim at in education. This return to the jungle is by no means absent from the educational practice of to-day.

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But it is in vain to seek the educational end in the means of educating; what is wanted is an objective, not a purely subjective, standard. To demand a comprehensive standard is to ask for a statement of the *summum bonum*, and the experience of the ages teaches that agreement on that head cannot be expected. Yet a purposeless system is a contradiction in terms, and the State system, having displaced the paramount purpose of its predecessor, could only offer a number of diverse, subordinate aims such as commend themselves to the individual educator or administrator.

While the great fact of English educational history during the period is an administrative revolution, it is of course possible to view the story from other standpoints. On the political plane, it is a phase of the relations existing between the State and the citizen. How to reach a compulsory system of instruction while maintaining due respect for personal freedom, especially religious freedom, was the problem whose difficulty is reflected in the length of time which it took to attain, not a solution, but the compromises of 1870 and 1902.

Again, the immense advance in knowledge of the physical world which was made in the nineteenth century was reflected by the changes wrought in the curricula of schools of all grades. These changes are especially, but by no means exclusively, noticeable in schools above the elementary grade. The literatures of Greece and of Rome, from being an education in themselves, have become mere "subjects" in a long list of other subjects, most of which concern the human environment rather than humanity itself. Briefly, the history of the curriculum is the advance of modern, at the expense of classical, studies.

Viewed simply as the growth of an administrative scheme, the changes of a century are impressive, whether we consider the money expended, the numbers instructed, the undoubted progress in knowledge made by the population generally, the wide diffusion of culture, or the extension of discipline. But the weak spot lies in the absence of any generally recognized purpose for all this activity, beneficent as the activity was so far as it went. The consequence is that a responsibility is thrown upon the individual educator which can only be fully discharged by men and women who are not only well-informed, skilful instructors, but who are also persons who bring to their task wisdom, the habit of reflexion and an experience of life as it is outside the schoolroom.

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Psychology is an indispensable foundation for a sound method of education; on the other hand, aims, purposes, ends, can only be understood in the light of philosophy illustrated by history. But the history should be that of the national education, and the philosophy ought to envisage the national conditions. The cardinal sin of schools has always been the creation of a world for themselves remote more or less from the general, and theory has often encouraged the evil. Apart from history, educational theorizing may flourish in *Platonis Republica*, but it will be of limited value in English school-rooms. Attention lavished upon “educational reformers”, without reference to the type of education they would reform, often ends in a confused eclecticism, and always in an altogether distorted picture of social history, for the student is apt to conclude that education in the past has been invariably bad. Theories of equal application to the young Japanese, the youthful American and the English boy or girl are not calculated to help any one of them very much, saving the help which is to be got from the widest generalizations. In the study of educational principles a place must therefore be found for a due consideration of the aims which have directed the national education in the past and of their relation to contemporary needs and conditions. This book is presented in the hope that it may be helpful to that end.

J. W. A.

August, 1930