CHILDHOOD IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE

Work, health and education among the 'classes populaires'

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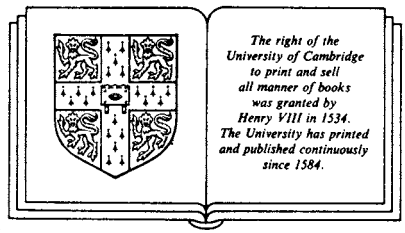

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Introduction

Children from peasant and working-class backgrounds were highly visible in France during the nineteenth century. The street, the workshop and the farm were still very much part of their territory, where they mingled freely with the world of adults. Even the most haughty members of the bourgeoisie could hardly fail to notice several of their activities. Venturing out in a city, they risked being accosted by the local *gamins*: poor, scruffy children who would beg the odd coin, or offer to do little jobs, such as opening a carriage door or scraping mud off boots during bad weather. All around, they would feel the bustle of young people plying their trades. These included peasant girls on their way to food markets; hawkers shouting their wares; delivery boys doing the rounds for tradesmen; apprentice *couturières* and *blanchisseuses* shuffling back and forth between their customers and their 'sweatshops'; *saltimbanques* doing street-shows with other members of their families; and soot-blackened *petits savoyards* touting for business beside the chimney sweeps. Other sights were more disturbing for the bourgeoisie, but equally unavoidable. Passing near to a working-class *quartier*, they were bound to observe the spectacle of small groups of children playing in the streets. Almost invariably, these urchins would be shorter, paler and less robust than their own sons and daughters. And then there were the gangs of older lads, approaching adolescence, to be seen marauding the slums, or wandering through gardens and orchards on the outskirts of town. These were the 'vagabonds', viewed with considerable apprehension by middle-class observers. The *notables* were convinced that idleness in youth led inexorably to dissipation, vice, petty crime – and political subversion. Long after the ferment of 1830 had died down, they were haunted by the awful image of the revolutionary *gamin*, so vividly depicted by Delacroix and Victor Hugo.

This genteel perspective on children in the towns was necessarily a partial one: the vast majority of comfortable bourgeois had little idea of

what went on behind the walls of a slum tenement or a workshop. The proletariat itself knew the realities of this existence all too well. Children made their presence felt in a rather different way at this level of society. Outside the home, the labouring classes were likely to think of the young above all as assistants at work. Many of them started their day in the company of their own or neighbours' children with a hurried walk to work. During the 1830s, Louis Villermé was struck by the appearance of mill hands he observed streaming into Mulhouse from outlying villages:

> There are among them a multitude of women, pale, thin, walking barefoot through the mud, and being without umbrellas, pulling their underskirts over their heads to protect their faces and necks from the rain. There are even greater numbers of young children, no less dirty, no less drawn, covered in rags well greased by the machine-oil which splashes on them as they work.[1]

Once in the workshops, adults often worked closely with both male and female juveniles – the two sexes usually being employed interchangeably at this stage of life. The *canut* of Lyons needed his *lanceur* and his *tireur* beside him to operate a Jacquard loom; the potter used a *gamin* to turn his wheel; the mule spinner had his (or her) team of *bobineurs* and *rattacheurs*; the calico printer employed a *tireur* to prepare his dyestuffs and mordants; and the glassblower was served by his *gamins* and *porteurs*. At the end of the working day, the crowds of labourers formed up again to go home, families in the domestic workshops assembled for their meals, and the only refuge from the babble of children was the *cabaret* (bar) – exclusively adult male territory.

In rural areas, children were if anything drawn into the mainstream of communal life more quickly than in the towns. The younger villagers sometimes gave the impression of being less sharp than their urban counterparts, for they lacked the stimulus of a more commercial culture. At the beginning of the century, most still spoke a *patois* or dialect that would have isolated them from their compatriots, and there was always a certain reserve towards outsiders. Nonetheless, they were much in evidence around the farms and villages. Passing travellers would have seen youthful shepherds and shepherdesses scattered around the fields with their livestock, or at least heard them calling to each other with long, yodelling cries. From time to time, they were likely to meet a child on the road, leading a farm animal, or collecting dung for manuring the fields. And should they happen to arrive on a holiday, they would have observed the young joining in all forms of celebration: the mass, the feasting, the

[1] Dr Louis R. Villermé, *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de coton, de laine et de soie* (2 vols., Paris, 1840), vol. 1, p. 26. All translations from the French, unless stated otherwise, are by the author. On the background to this passage, see W. M. Reddy, *The Rise of Market Culture* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 178–80.

games and the dancing. In short, peasants regularly worked, ate and relaxed with their own or other peoples' children. The latter were taken on as farm servants, lodging with their employers in much the same way as apprentices and domestic servants did in the towns.

This whole régime for children did not go unchallenged. From the time of the French Revolution onwards, a populist stream began to emerge in educational thinking, canvassing for some form of instruction as the birthright of every citizen. In the 1820s and 1830s, the practice of child labour in industry came under fire from various quarters, appalled by revelations of conditions in the manufacturing centres. A new domestic ideology, associated with the middle classes, also began to make an impact. The ideal here was for women and children to remain at home, away from the corrupting influence of the workplace. Eventually, a profound transformation of the rôle of children from the *classes populaires* took place. Over the course of the nineteenth century, they slowly abandoned their work in the fields and workshops, in order to move, definitively, to the school benches. Henceforth they were destined for an existence more segregated from society at large: a change that had already begun to occur among middle-class children a century or so before.[2] The emphasis would be on developing basic skills and character within the institutional framework of the school, rather than *sur le tas*, in an adult world now deemed unsuitable for the young.

The transition from work to school was never a complete one. During the eighteenth century, the work expected from children was not always exacting: young shepherds had plenty of time for play while out in the fields with their flocks, and, in the domestic workshops, the younger members of the family usually only put in a few hours beside their parents each day. At the same period, the *petites écoles* of the Catholic Church had attempted to bring some instruction to the *menu peuple*, while priests often ran classes for their parishioners. However, if the commitment of the ruling élites to the education of their own children was never in doubt, that of the lower orders was another matter. The Church was principally interested in the religious instruction of the population, and even in Enlightenment circles, there was no suggestion that peasants and artisans should have the same educational opportunities as members of the middle and upper classes.[3] The provision of schools was therefore very uneven

[2] This is a thesis, much contested in various areas, associated with the name of Philippe Ariès, and his *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth, 1973).

[3] James A. Leith, 'Modernisation, Mass Education and Social Mobility in French Thought, 1750–1789', in R. F. Brissenden (ed.), *Studies in the Eighteenth Century* (Toronto, 1973), vol. 2, pp. 223–38; Harvey Chisick, *The Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment: Attitudes towards the Education of the Lower Classes in Eighteenth-Century France* (Princeton, NJ, 1981), *passim*; Louis-Henri Parias (ed.), *Histoire générale de l'enseig-*

across the country, and the fact that the mass of the population had little or no time for school did not give rise to public concern.[4]

Latterly, during the second half of the twentieth century, the school system and the notion of a cloistered childhood have still not gained a total ascendency. Children have not been driven from playing in the streets entirely; truancy among those in the final years of compulsory education remains a problem; and even child labour itself flourishes in the 'black economy'. The law currently allows children to assist in a family enterprise, as long as school obligations are fulfilled, and to work part time during the holidays. An Enquiry in 1979 revealed the possibilities of abuse. Children were found working beside their parents on the land, in small shops, in *la biffe* (the rag-and-bone trade) and in domestic workshops, where they assembled electric plugs, jewellery-boxes and various other knick-knacks. This could involve a heavy burden on their free time, with work expected before and after school, and on holidays. There were even examples of incitement to miss school.[5] Yet there is no escaping the fact that in the highly developed economy of post-war France, children have been removed from regular employment and their work relegated to marginal significance. Since 1967, the school-leaving age has been sixteen in France and families defying the law risk facing stiff penalties: infringements have consequently been rare. A lingering resentment in some quarters over the prolonged period of compulsory attendance has not prevented the school being accepted as a useful source of skills and as a channel for social mobility. Complementing this bid to confine children to the classroom for much of their time, has been the growing desire to keep them in the home. The break-up of the old working-class communities by new housing developments in the twentieth century has encouraged the tendency for children to have their own room, their own toys and their own garden or play areas, away from the alleged dangers and 'promiscuity' of the slum street. The provision of crêches and *écoles maternelles* (nursery schools) has further helped this isolation during the early years.[6]

One can therefore talk of a sea change in the lives of peasant and

nement et de l'éducation en France, vol. 2, *De Gutenberg aux Lumières* (Paris, 1981), pp. 385–96.

[4] Yves Poutet, 'L'Enseignement des pauvres dans la France du XVII[e] siècle', *XVII[e] siècle*, 90–1 (1971), 87–110; Roger Chartier, Marie-Madeleine Compère and Dominique Julia, *L'Education en France du XVI[e] au XVIII[e] siècle* (Paris, 1976), pp. 3–44; Maurice Gontard, *L'Enseignement primaire en France de la Révolution à la loi Guizot, 1789–1833* (Paris, 1959), pp. 5–68; Parias, *Histoire générale*, vol. 2, pp. 416–27.

[5] D. Rouard, 'Enfants au travail', *Le Monde de l'éducation*, 53 (1979), 9–18; Christiane Rimbaud, *52 millions d'enfants au travail* (Paris, 1980), p. 12.

[6] J. Gélis, M. Laget and M.-F. Morel, *Entrer dans la vie: naissances et enfances dans la France traditionnelle* (Paris, 1978), pp. 232–4.

working-class children, which for the latter in particular had its crucial stages during the nineteenth century. This is the focus of our study. Three key questions underpin its various sections. First, why did the employment of children, a custom that had been accepted without question for centuries, suddenly become a public issue during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and decline in importance thereafter? Secondly, why did informal methods of educating the young in the family and the local community give way to the formal education system of the schools? And thirdly, how effective was the State in its efforts to promote the welfare of children? The existing historical literature has answers to these questions. The sufferings of factory children are after all as firmly implanted in the popular image of the Industrial Revolution as the steam engine, and the long struggle of the school system to establish itself has never lacked its historians. Yet the literature is not above criticism for its interpretations, nor is its coverage of the area at all comprehensive.

In reply to the first question, on child labour reform, a straight-forward pattern of challenge-and-response is presented.[7] The challenge came from the introduction of steam power and machinery into industry, which permitted a substitution of women and children for adult males. Employment in the mills is shown to have taken a heavy toll on the physical, moral and intellectual development of the young. Evidence can readily be marshalled on child 'martyrs' succumbing to tuberculosis or industrial accidents; deplorable military recruitment figures in manufacturing areas; widespread illiteracy among factory operatives; and the vice-ridden atmosphere of the workshops. Georges Dupeux provides a succinct, textbook summary:

> Industrialists, above all in the textile industry, discovered that physical strength was not needed for certain simple tasks such as refastening broken threads, and even for starting up and watching over some of the machines. This led to the employment of female and child labour. Women were much cheaper to employ: they were paid between half and one-third less than men and children received

[7] We may cite two generations of historians here. The first appeared in the inter-war period: L. Guéneau, 'La Législation restrictive du travail des enfants: la loi française du 22 mars 1841', *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale*, 15 (1927), 420–503; Suzanne Touren, *La Loi de 1841 sur le travail des enfants dans les manufactures* (Paris, 1931); Simone Béziers, *La Protection de l'enfance ouvrière* (Montpellier, 1935); and F. Evrard, 'Le Travail des enfants dans l'industrie, 1780–1870', *Bulletin de la société d'études historiques, geographiques et scientifiques de la région parisienne*, 37 (1936), 1–14. Among post-war historians, see Edouard Dolléans and Georges Dehove, *Histoire du travail en France* (2 vols., Paris, 1953), vol. 1, pp. 148–9, 160–1; Maurice Bouvier-Ajam, *Histoire du travail en France depuis la Révolution* (Paris, 1969), pp. 90–2, 134–7; Claude Fohlen, 'Révolution industrielle et travail des enfants', *Annales de démographie historique* (1973), 319–25; Jean Sandrin, 'Le Travail des enfants au XIX^{e} siècle', *Le Peuple français*, 21 (January–March 1976), 12–16, and 22 (April–June 1976), 27–30; and *idem*, *Enfants trouvés, enfants ouvriers, XVII^{e}–XIX^{e} siècle* (Paris, 1982).

absurdly low wages ... The effect of this kind of work on the health of children was disastrous ... Their only apprenticeship was a precocious introduction to the sexual promiscuity of factory life.[8]

The response came in the form of child labour legislation. Some reference is usually made to new machinery making child workers redundant but the emphasis is more on the intervention of the State. The first *loi sur le travail des enfants*, indeed arguably the first piece of social legislation in France, was passed on 22 March 1841. Its failure to make much of an impact has been amply documented: Pierre Pierrard writes of the 'pourissement de la loi' in Lille; Roger Magraw describes it as 'virtually worthless'.[9] New laws and a more effective inspection system came in 1874 and 1892. At this point, the issue of child labour simply fades from the history books: none of the major texts concerned with the late nineteenth century can find much to say on the subject.[10] The impression is even given that the problem has been solved by the legislature: in the words of Suzanne Touren: 'Since 1874, the laws have succeeded each other, and the little worker has finally obtained reasonable protection. Today he has the right to have a real childhood before being harnessed to work, and the workshop has now been made human.'[11]

This interpretation undoubtedly gives a number of insights into the fate of child labour under industrial capitalism and the origins of the 1841 law. But it must still be asked whether the early nineteenth century really did bring a substantial change in the composition of the industrial labour force. The extent of the deterioration in the physical and intellectual condition of children is unclear. And it is still an open question whether it was the law or underlying conditions in the labour market that did most to pull children out of industrial employment.[12] We might accuse historians of following too closely the line taken by child labour reformers in the 1830s and 1840s.

There is the same fixation on the influence of the factory system, which naturally attracted early observers on account of its spectacular departure from earlier methods of production. Yet in 1851 the census found only 1.3 million people employed in 'manufacturing industry', dominated by

[8] *French Society, 1789–1970* (London, 1976), p. 131.

[9] Pierre Pierrard, *La Vie ouvrière à Lille sous le Second Empire* (Paris, 1965), p. 173; Roger Magraw, *France, 1815–1914: The Bourgeois Century* (London, 1983), p. 66.

[10] The textbooks, of course, reflect the lack of published material in this area. See, for example, Fernand Braudel and Ernest Labrousse (eds.), *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, vol. 4, *L'Ere industrielle et la société d'aujourd'hui, siècle 1880–1980* (Paris, 1979), part 1, pp. 454–534; and Pierre Sorlin, *La Société française* (2 vols., Paris, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 161–203.

[11] Touren, *La Loi de 1841*, p. 133.

[12] See, in the British context, Clark Nardinelli, 'Child Labor and the Factory Acts', *Journal of Economic History*, 40 (1980), 739–55.

mining, metallurgy and above all textiles, compared to 4.7 million in small-scale industry and commerce, not to mention 14.3 million in agriculture.[13] There is too the assumption that the health and morals of children were better in the countryside than in the town. Contemporaries took this for granted. In 1837, Villeneuve-Bargemont solemnly recommended young people to seek work in agriculture when they left school, on the grounds that its customs were purer, and its wages more secure.[14] Jules Michelet followed suit a decade later, asserting that in the countryside, the child was happy:

> Almost naked, without clogs, with a piece of black bread, he keeps an eye on a cow or a few geese, he lives in the open air, he plays. The agricultural work with which he is gradually associated only serves to strengthen him. The precious years during which a man develops his body and his strength for the rest of his life are therefore passed in great freedom, in the gentle surroundings of the family.

In the factory areas, by contrast, Michelet alleged that children were weakened and often corrupted by their surroundings.[15] A plausible case can certainly be made out along these lines. But the risk of idealizing the peasant existence, or 'leading civilized man back to the charms of a primitive life', as George Sand put it during the 1840s, needs constantly to be borne in mind.[16] Correspondingly, there is the potential for overdoing the 'pathological' character of factory and city life. William Sewell has recently drawn attention to the prejudice evident in the much-quoted work of Louis Villermé. The emphasis in his study of the textile workers is very much on the poorest of the poor, the inhabitants of the dirtiest and most crowded slums, rather than on the more numerous urban craftsmen. The factory workers and the slum dwellers are highlighted, according to Sewell, because for middle-class observers like Villermé they seemed to epitomize the labour problem of the nineteenth century, and to provide an ominous pointer to the future of the working class as a whole. Furthermore, the moral degradation of the workers emerges as more shocking for Villermé than their physical degradation. Yet the moral lapses of the poor are often more a matter of conjecture than direct description. Sewell takes as an example the subtle imputation of incest among working-class

[13] Statistique de la France, *Territoire et population* (Paris, 1855), pp. xx–xxiv.
[14] *Economie politique chrétienne* (Brussels, 1837), p. 440.
[15] *Le Peuple* (Paris, 1974), pp. 103–4.
[16] George Sand, 'Notice' preceding *La Mare au diable* (Paris, 1962), p. 4, originally published in 1846 as one of her four *romans champêtres*. This theme is also discussed in Hervé Carrier, 'Le Manichéisme urbain–rural: quelques stéréotypes de la société heureuse', in Hervé Carrier and Emile Pin (eds.), *Essais de sociologie religieuse* (Paris, 1967), pp. 147–65; Marie-José Chombart de Lauwe, *Un monde autre: l'enfance* (Paris, 1971), *passim*; and, in the context of English literature, Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London, 1973).

families in Lille. A careful reading of the text shows Villermé to be *assuming* that sexual promiscuity must logically have followed from the squalid conditions of slum housing, rather than to be relying on his own observations.[17]

The high moral tone that marked the discourse of child labour reformers during the mid-nineteenth century has also continued in the writings of many historians. F. Evrard, author of an early study in this area, contrasted the humanity of the 1841 law with the selfishness of employers, and concluded that 'The improvement of the destiny of working children posed a moral as much as an economic problem.' Suzanne Touren wrote of the 'egoism' and 'cynicism' of the bourgoisie, and the 'greed' of working-class parents in her study of the 1841 law. During the 1970s, Jean Sandrin described working-class children being handed over to 'the ogres of industry' under the First Empire, and the heavy mortality they suffered as a consequence. And Douailler and Vermeren have taken a leaf from the polemics of Karl Marx, highlighting the 'immoral agreement' between fathers and employers of child workers, likening it to a contract between a slave-dealer and a slave-master.[18] There is no denying the moral dimension to the issue, and it is entirely right that historians make clear their abhorrence of the exploitation of children. The central rôle of self-interest in the workings of the capitalist system is also not in dispute. At the same time, it is all too easy to adopt a self-righteous attitude in our own, twentieth-century European society, where child labour has been reduced to tolerable proportions.[19] Moral judgements on the various interested parties should not be allowed to obscure the pressures they faced in their daily lives, for poverty was still endemic in French society during the early nineteenth century, and labour for the new textile mills difficult to recruit. The problem of finding alternatives to work for the children of the poor should also be considered, given the near-impossibility of supervising children in a slum, and the shortage of school facilities.

The second question posed in this book, concerning the transformation of educational methods, has attracted a great deal of attention from historians in the last few years. The outline answer is now clear. In the broadest context, historians have documented the shift from a 'popular' to a 'mass' culture: in other words, from a culture that was essentially oral, community-based and traditional to one that was more literate,

[17] William H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 223–32.

[18] Evrard, 'Le Travail des enfants', 14; Touren, *La Loi de 1841*, pp. 18, 65, 134; Sandrin, 'Le Travail des enfants', 12; S. Douailler and P. Vermeren, 'Les Enfants du capital', *Les Révoltes logiques*, 3 (1976), 25–6.

[19] This is a point made by Anna Davin, in 'Child Labour, the Working-Class Family, and Domestic Ideology in 19th Century Britain', *Development and Change*, 13 (1982), 650.

national and (formally at least) rational. They have all agreed that from the seventeenth century onwards, the popular culture was attacked from within and without. The post-tridentine Catholic Church and the centralizing State set out to 'civilize' the population, attempting to repress what they called 'superstition', 'ignorance' and 'disorder'. More insidiously, underlying changes in society, such as improved communications, the growth of the towns and the extension of market relations, caused many of the old beliefs to appear redundant. In the narrower context of educational practice, these upheavals discredited the traditional methods of transmitting skills and values through the family and the community, paving the way for a specialized institution: the school.[20] This is all very well, but in our view the nature of the transition is not always interpreted correctly. Two particular reservations may be suggested.

In the first place, the emphasis in most of the studies of cultural change is on a crisis, a rupture, a fundamental discontinuity during the nineteenth century. In his fine study of the peasantry, Eugen Weber presents an unflattering picture of the popular culture at the beginning of the century. An early chapter entitled 'The Mad Beliefs' on peasant 'superstition' gives a hint of the conclusion to come: 'Deprived of the support of élite thought, popular belief broke into a thousand subsystems unintegrated into a comprehensive view of the world. Popular wisdom was bitsy – a collection of recipes, ceremonies, rituals – and popular religion was little more.'[21] With a popular culture so moribund, the peasant in the nineteenth century is shown to be ripe for emancipation through the school system. Weber ends with the assertion that 'The rural convert to rationalism could throw away his ragbag of traditional contrivances, dodges in an unequal battle to stay alive, with the heady conviction that, far from being a helpless witness of natural processes, he was himself an agent of change.'[22] Robert Muchembled diverges from Weber in so far as he sees the school as a repressive agency, used to impose an alien culture on the masses: that of the dominant classes. But there is the same stress on the 'ideological gap' which opens up when the popular culture is 'assassinated' from above, leaving only 'the shameful survivals of old mentalities'.[23] Among the urban working class, the process of *déculturation* in the nineteenth century can be depicted even more spectacularly. Maurice Crubellier points to various mechanisms having this effect, notably

[20] Information from Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978); Maurice Crubellier, *Histoire culturelle de la France, XIX^e–XX^e siècle* (Paris, 1974); *idem, L'Enfance et la jeunesse dans la société française, 1800–1950* (Paris, 1979); Yves Marie Bercé, *Fête et révolte* (Paris, 1976); Robert Muchembled, *Culture populaire et culture des élites dans la France moderne, XV^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1978).

[21] *Peasants into Frenchmen* (London, 1979), p. 495. [22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Culture populaire, passim.*

migrations uprooting young people from the villages, slum housing weakening family relationships, and the dead weight of long hours of monotonous work in the factories. Despite extended sections on resistance from old forms, and on the rise of new innovations, he insists that during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the working class was 'culturally destitute'.[24] But can one really consign three or four generations of Frenchmen to some kind of 'cultural void', leaving them in limbo between two great systems: the traditional popular culture of the Medieval towns and villages on the one hand, and the mass culture (or 'pseudo-culture') of industrial capitalism on the other? This strains credibility, and rests on an unduly monolithic view of social and cultural change at this period. If one proposes instead that popular culture was highly adaptable to its changing environment, and that important elements of continuity allowed a smoother transition, this has major implications for the history of education.[25]

The long shadow of the struggle between the Catholic Church and the Republic for the 'soul of French youth' lay heavily over the work of earlier generations of historians in the field of education. The Republican interpretation began with the Revolutionary ideal of emancipating the people through education, and gradually built up to the climax of the 1880s, with the establishment of a free, compulsory and egalitarian primary school system. An element of what the British would call 'Whig history' inevitably crept in, the tendency being to denigrate anything outside the evolving State-run system. Catholic historians countered by emphasizing the achievements of Church Schools and teachers under the *ancien régime*. The Preface to one such work by the Abbé Allain, written during the 1880s, attacked the notion that it was the Revolution which invented primary instruction, thundering instead against 'the outrages the Revolution dared to commit against Christian primary instruction'. The author went on to assert a decline in teaching standards from the Republican influence. Under the *ancien régime*, he noted, the schools gave an important place to Christian teaching, whereas under the Third Republic religious instruction by means of the catechism had been dropped entirely:

> It has been said, with reason, that the catechism is the philosophy of the people. Through it they became acquainted with the great rational and Christian truths which are the basis of our intelligence. A little reading and writing, a little

[24] *Histoire culturelle, passim*; and his chapter on 'Les Citadins et leurs cultures', in Georges Duby (ed.), *Histoire de la France urbaine*, vol. 4, *La Ville de l'âge industriel: le cycle haussmanien* (Paris, 1983), pp. 359–470.

[25] See the debate in the British literature: R. W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1975); and H. Cunningham, *Leisure in the Industrial Revolution, c.1780–1880* (London, 1980).

arithmetic and grammar, a little geography and history, that is the curriculum for popular instruction today ... I was forgetting the gymnastics![26]

Now that the dust has begun to settle on this *lutte scolaire*, a more dispassionate account of events has emerged. Historians have come to recognize the common ground between the two sides, in their passion for education, and the elements of continuity running through the legislation of successive political régimes.[27]

The delicate problem remains of being able to record promising new developments in education, without undervaluing the contribution of earlier institutions. We now know, for example, that the future lay with purpose-built schools, teachers trained in *écoles normales* and full-time education into adolescence. But the makeshift classes run by an assortment of part-time or untrained teachers in their homes and workshops could be well adapted to the requirements of the poor, in the same way that para-medics today can be more appropriate than fully trained doctors in the villages of a less developed country. A recent work by Robert Gildea illustrates the difficulty. On the one hand, the author is prepared to override the criticisms made by reformers of *maîtres de pension*, artisan-teachers and 'dame schools' run by penniless spinsters, acknowledging their 'indispensable service at the margins of history at the beginning of the nineteenth century'. On the other hand, he occasionally adopts the full-blooded missionary fervour characteristic of an older Republican orthodoxy. In the Ile-et-Vilaine, for example, he asserts that until the Restoration, there was 'no real progress', the reason being that initiative was abandoned to 'charity and speculation'. And, in the same department, the Liberals of the July Monarchy are honoured as an 'exposed column of vanguard-fighters', who struggle against the 'nefarious influence of the parish clergy'.[28]

There remains too the problem of assessing the limits to the influence of the school. During the nineteenth century, Catholics and Republicans alike pinned their faith in the institution of the school, in their slightly desperate bids to produce good Christians or good citizens. Time-honoured methods of instruction within the family and the local commu-

[26] E. Allain, *L'Instruction primaire en France avant la Révolution* (Geneva, 1970; first publ. 1881). Preface by the Archevêque de Perga, coadjuteur de Bordeaux, pp. i–vi.

[27] See in particular Chartier *et al.*, *L'Education en France*, pp. 39–40; François Furet and Jacques Ozouf, *Reading and Writing* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 1–4; Lous-Henri Parias (ed.), *Histoire générale de l'enseignement et de l'éducation en France*, vol. 3, *De la Révolution à l'école républicaine* (Paris, 1981), p. 297. Exemplary modern studies include Antoine Prost, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France, 1800–1967* (Paris, 1968); Gontard, *L'Enseignement primaire*; and *idem*, *Les Ecoles primaires de la France bourgeoise, 1833–1875* (Toulouse, 1957).

[28] *Education in Provincial France, 1800–1914* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 88–94, 172.