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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

THE contribution which France has made towards the cause of education during the last four centuries is one of her brightest glories. It is true that her services have been to a large extent devoted to secondary education and that the important work of the elementary school was for long comparatively neglected. But in the cause of higher education and of the education of girls, France maintained a widespread and unrelaxing activity at a time when other nations were content to put forth sporadic and half-hearted efforts. Again, there exists in the French language an educational literature distributed over 400 years or more; and this testifies to a sustained and deeply-felt interest on the part of the French people in the work of the school. To the German race we owe the greatest services rendered to the cause of elementary education, for no other nation can furnish a rival to Pestalozzi or Froebel. But their activity, together with that of Kant and Herbart, is confined to a period of some 50 years; for a German educationalist of real note previous to them we must go back to Ratke, or perhaps even to Sturm. Similarly in England there was a period of some 150 years during which were published Elyot's *Governour*, Ascham's *Scholemaster*, Mulcaster's *Positions*, Brinsley's *Ludus Literarius*, Milton's *Tractate*, and Locke's *Thoughts on Education*. This was succeeded by another century and a half or more which saw no educational treatise of importance published in this country. The works already mentioned produced very little effect on English secondary education; the grammar schools for the most part went on in a state of complacent satisfaction with existing methods, until they were rudely awakened in 1861 by the Public



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Schools' Commission and the vigorous onslaughts of Herbert Spencer's *Essay on Education*.

The history of French education presents a very different picture. There is a series of school reformers and educational writers, stretching almost continuously from the time of the Renaissance down to our own days. More than this, the reformers, unlike so many of their English brethren, often made their influence felt; while many of the writers on education (though there are obvious exceptions) set forth in an attractive manner views of great practical value to those engaged in the work of teaching. It is at times hard to set great store by some of our classical English educational treatises; they too frequently savour of being mere second-rate by-products of men of genius whose chief interests lay elsewhere. When reading Milton's *Tractate* we seem to have the Rabelaisian curriculum for Gargantua set forth in all seriousness as meet, not for a giant in a fairy-tale, but for an English schoolboy—though of special aptitude, it is true. Locke's *Thoughts on Education* are more practical and teem with common sense; but the plan of the book is incoherent, the same thing is often repeated several times, and the reader wearies long before he reaches the end. Spencer's *Essay on Education* is full of interest and is attractively written; but it lacks in philosophic analysis and tends at times to degenerate into a mere party pamphlet. Those of our educational writers who were most in touch with school-realities are too little known; Ascham certainly borrows some fame from his connection with Queen Elizabeth, but who, save the specialist, reads Brinsley or Mulcaster?

In England, then, we lack a continuous tradition of educational thinkers and writers and we are too apt to disregard the inheritance that we do possess. We are proud—and rightly so—of our ancient public and grammar schools, which have educated generations of the ablest Englishmen and which to-day help to maintain that sense of solidarity with the past which is one of the most precious possessions of an old-established nation. But to their uncompromisingly conservative attitude has been largely due the stagnation of educational interest and the lack of progress in teaching methods which characterised a large part

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of English secondary education from the Tudor period until the middle of the nineteenth century.

In France at the present day there is a far keener and more general public interest in education and perhaps a greater average efficiency in teaching than with us. This is to a considerable extent the outcome of the more potent educational tradition which the French inherit. In the history of France, matters educational have more often been mixed up with politics and have thus claimed more of public attention than in our own case until within recent times. The Jesuits did an important educational work, but they also had great influence at court and among the people; the causes of their expulsion in 1762, again, were pedagogic as well as political. Some of the most learned Frenchmen of the seventeenth century concerned themselves with the education of members of the royal house or of the sons of those in authority; the University of Paris, which had a European reputation, was reformed by Henri IV; the Revolution was marked by innumerable educational projects—Mirabeau, Talleyrand, Condorcet, and the Convention in 1792 and 1793 were all concerned with proposals for educational reform; while under the Napoleonic *régime* the matter was discussed and legislated upon with vigour. In this manner, education and politics in France have tended to react the one upon the other, and this has in several ways stimulated the French people to be interested in education and to give ear to proposals of reform which were often exaggerated or impracticable. But it has also resulted in continuous educational activity and a gradual improvement of methods; often false moves have been made, retrogressive steps have been taken, and disturbance and disorganisation have troubled the peaceful work of the schools. But on the whole the movement has been one of progress and since the Renaissance there has been in France no period of educational somnolence such as that which we in this country have to deplore. Education was regarded as a matter of vital national significance by the French at a time when in England there prevailed an exaggerated *laissez-faire* policy which discouraged public and professional interest alike. It is only within the last half-century that the importance of



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the problem has been realised among us and even yet we have not caught up the lead set us by France and Germany.

In many ways the seventeenth century was one of the most striking periods in the whole history of French education. Its beginning was marked by the reform of the University of Paris; it saw the establishment of the elementary schools of S. Jean-Baptiste De La Salle, and the notable achievements of Madame De Maintenon in the education of girls; in the course of it secondary education was set forth in one of its most remarkable forms in the 'collèges' of the Jesuits. It was thus in France a century of exceptional activity in every department of education. In the present volume our concern is chiefly with one aspect of this many-sided movement—with the Jansenist Port-Royal schools. The Port-Royalists are in some respects the most interesting of all the French school-reformers of the seventeenth century, partly because their educational doctrines were in many respects far in advance of those of any of their contemporaries, and partly on account of their intense earnestness, their complete disinterestedness, their courage in the face of persecution, their pathetic but not inglorious fate. Moreover, though the failure of their schools—due rather to the malignant *odium theologicum* of the Jesuits than to any inherent educational weakness—seemed complete and even ignominious at the time when it occurred, yet this failure was more apparent than real. The spirit of their doctrines has had a very real influence on subsequent French education and has not yet ceased to operate. Through Rollin, the Port-Royalists inspired the University; their use of the vernacular was adopted by S. Jean-Baptiste De La Salle and has since become universal; their treatises were 'devoured' by Rousseau; their cultivation of their mother-tongue laid the foundations of modern French prose; their school-books have been in use down to our own days, not only in France, but in several other European countries; according to Compayré, their theories inspired the Circular issued in 1872 by the Minister of Public Instruction; and we may justly regard them as being in no small degree responsible for that discriminate appreciation of good literature and power of clear, forceful, and beautiful expression which is so

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eminently characteristic of the educated Frenchman of the present day.

The educational work of the Port-Royalists then is worthy of study, both for its own sake and for the importance of its subsequent influence in France and elsewhere. At the same time it is true to say that the doctrines and practice of the Little Schools are but little known not only in this country but even in France itself. The reason is not far to seek. Port-Royal's chief importance has been theological and literary, rather than educational. Its best known representatives are Pascal and Arnauld, not Coustel or De Beaupuis. Thus, owing to the interest which the Jansenist controversy has for the theologian, or the style of the *Provincial Letters* for the *littérateur*, the value of the Port-Royalists' contribution to education has been very generally overlooked. This is due also to the fact that the treatises, in which their educational theories are expounded and the practice of their schools is recorded, are for the most part rare and not easily accessible; again these details are to some extent scattered throughout 'Mémoires' and histories and letters where it is not easy to find them and where they are often intermingled with extraneous matter of every kind. But, for all this, a sympathetic study of the methods used in the Little Schools and of the educational theories which underlie those methods cannot fail to be a source of inspiration even to teachers of the present day, if they can be persuaded to evince some interest in the history of their profession.

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# CHAPTER II

## HISTORY AND PERSONNEL OF THE SCHOOLS

TO trace the origin of Port-Royal it is necessary to go back to the year 1204. At that date an abbey was founded at the head of the valley of the Rhodon near Chevreuse (about 18 miles to the south-west of Paris) by Eudes De Sully, Bishop of Paris, and a lady named Mathilde De Garlande. The object of this community, which consisted of twelve or fourteen women, was to ensure prayers for the safe return of Matthieu De Marly De Montmorenci, Mathilde's husband, who had gone to take part in the fourth crusade; but the nuns from the first concerned themselves also with the education of girls. The site of this abbey was known as Port-Royal, a name of which the etymology is uncertain; probably it is a corruption of 'porrois' from the Low Latin 'porra,' meaning a 'stagnant pond.' This would indeed well fit the facts of the case, for the abbey was built in a marshy and unhealthy valley by the side of one of those large ponds[1] or 'mares' which abound in the neighbourhood. The abbey was put in charge of the monks of S. Bernard who had a monastery at Cîteaux[2] near Dijon; and they acted as confessors for the nuns of Port-Royal. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the community flourished and seems to have attained a certain amount of fame. But the English wars and the religious wars of the sixteenth century tended to relax the discipline of religious houses in France, and the Gallican Church had never accepted those decrees of the

[1] This pond can be seen in the Bird's-eye View of Port-Royal des Champs facing page 49. It was subsequently drained by the solitaries. Copies of the original print are preserved at Sion College and in the small museum at Port-Royal des Champs.

[2] This was the original house of the famous Cistercian order (*Cistercium* is the Latin name for Cîteaux). The society was founded in 1098 and placed under the rule of S. Benedict. In 1113 S. Bernard joined the order and thenceforward it spread widely and flourished greatly.

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Council of Trent which dealt with ecclesiastical discipline and organisation. Hence abuses were rife, and Port-Royal did not escape the infection. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the abbey had for its 'confessor' a Bernardine monk who was so ignorant, it was said, that he could not understand the Paternoster. He knew not a word of the Catechism and never opened a book except his Breviary; for he spent his time in the hunting field. For over thirty years no sermon had been preached at Port-Royal, save at seven or eight professions. "The rule of S. Benedict was practically forgotten; even seclusion was no longer practised and the spirit of the world had entirely banished the strict conventual rules. Ignorance of religion at this monastery was deplorable; sermons were scarcely ever preached and even the confessors were no better educated than the nuns. The sacrament was taken only from month to month and at high festivals. This did not apply to the feast of the Purification because it took place during the carnival, when the house was entirely given over to revels and the confessor took part in them along with the servants[1]."

We are surely justified in conjecturing that in an abbey thus given over to worldliness, the arduous work of educating girls had for some time been given up. But at a time when things seemed at their worst an event occurred of great importance to the religious life of Port-Royal, and also indirectly to its educational work. In 1602 Jacqueline-Marie Arnauld was appointed abbess; she was at the time a child of eleven, but in the Papal Bull appointing her to this charge her age was deliberately falsified and she was described as 'religieuse professe, âgée de dix-sept ans.' Such a beginning might not seem to augur well for the moral regeneration of Port-Royal, and indeed at first Jacqueline, who assumed the name of Angélique, seems much to have disliked conventual life. But in 1608, after hearing an eloquent sermon preached by a disreputable Capuchin monk named Basil, she underwent a conversion and immediately set about reforming Port-Royal on the most rigorous lines. We are told that the community at this time consisted of ten professed nuns, of whom three were 'imbéciles,' and two novices[2]. The rule of seclusion

[1] Poullain, pp. 4—5.

[2] Tronchay, p. 7.

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was no longer observed and there was no kind of strictness or regularity. After her conversion Angélique succeeded in introducing vows of poverty and seclusion, and it seems probable that the teaching work of the abbey was resumed[1]. Angélique came of a notable family, many members of which had become illustrious at the bar or on the field of battle. The introduction by her of the vow of seclusion at Port-Royal at first caused a rupture with her family, but this was soon healed and eventually she became the instrument whereby twenty-one other members of the Arnauld family entered Port-Royal, either as nuns or as solitaries. She was indeed a true daughter of a long line of famous soldiers and scholars; she had a gift for administration and was willing to suffer persecution rather than be false to her principles. Cousin calls her the equal of the great Dr Arnauld by her intrepidity of soul and elevation of thought; Sainte-Beuve describes her character as 'truly royal.' Her energy and steadfastness of purpose overcame all obstacles; she not only won her family to Port-Royal, of which they became the backbone, but the influence of her reforms made itself felt in other religious houses, and there was a widespread revival of those primitive austerities for which the Cistercian order had been particularly renowned. The whole movement was fostered by Richelieu himself; he attempted to make the decrees of the Council of Trent binding upon the Church of France and also secured his own nomination as general of several of the great religious orders, including that of Cîteaux.

As time went on the number of nuns at Port-Royal increased and by the year 1626 there were not less than 80. But the unhealthy site of the abbey bred fevers, and the well which supplied the convent with water was situated in the middle of the

[1] Cadet (*L'Éducation à Port-Royal*, note on p. 54) says that Sister Louise Sainte-Praxède De Lamoignon was appointed mistress of the 'pensionnaires' (i.e. girl boarders) in 1609. If this is true it proves that the educational work of the community was being carried on at this time. But according to the big *Nécrologe*, p. 36, and the *Supplément*, p. 327, Sister Louise Sainte-Praxède De Lamoignon was born in 1564 and entered the Abbey of S. Antoine at the age of nine. There she remained till her 60th year and did not enter Port-Royal till 1624. She died there on Jan. 20, 1638. If this is so she could not have taken charge of the Port-Royal girls' school in 1609, and I am at a loss to explain whence Cadet has got his apparently erroneous information.

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nuns' burying ground; hence the infirmary was always full, and in two years 15 of the nuns had died. At the beginning of 1626 therefore the community was removed from the neighbourhood of Chevreuse to Paris; this was rendered possible by the liberality of Angélique's mother, Catherine Arnauld, who had become a widow in 1619, and who subsequently in 1629 entered Port-Royal and took the name Catherine De Sainte Félicité. The new abbey fronted on to the rue de la Bourbe (now Boulevard de Port-Royal) and was bounded west and east by the rue d'Enfer (now Avenue de l'Observatoire and rue Denfert Rochereau) and the rue du Faubourg S. Jacques[1]. A large part of the original building still survives; during the Revolution it was used as a prison and is to-day a lying-in hospital. Henceforth then we have to distinguish two Port-Royals—that near Chevreuse known as Port-Royal des Champs, and that in the rue de la Bourbe, called Port-Royal de Paris.

In 1620 one of Angélique's brothers, D'Andilly, who was at that time attached to the Court, was passing through Poitiers and there met for the first time the Abbot of Saint-Cyran, who was destined to play a most important part in the subsequent history of Port-Royal, and above all of its schools. Saint-Cyran seems to have made a great impression upon D'Andilly and a close friendship sprang up between them; through her brother Angélique soon came into contact with this remarkable man. In a letter of hers to D'Andilly, dated January 7, 1621, we read: "I received M. De Saint-Cyran's letter with an unspeakable delight. I thank you with all my heart for having procured for me the happiness of so holy a friendship[2]"; and it is interesting to notice in her letters how as time goes on and she gets to know Saint-Cyran better, her praises of him become more and more enthusiastic. Angélique evidently saw how valuable would be the influence of Saint-Cyran upon Port-Royal, but she did not dare at first to ask him to 'abase himself' by becoming confessor to the abbey. However, in 1633 there appeared a little book of devotions to the Holy Sacrament (*Le Chapelet Secret*) which had been written by Agnès, Angélique's sister and coadjutor at Port-

[1] See plan facing page 20.
[2] *Lettres de la Mère Angélique*, p. 13.

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Royal. It created a most unexpected stir in the theological world, for it was condemned by the Sorbonne and suppressed by the Pope. At this juncture Saint-Cyran took up the cudgels on behalf of Port-Royal, and his action seems to have brought him into closer touch with the community. In 1635 the proposal was at last made to him through the Bishop of Langres, who was one of the 'superiors' of Port-Royal, that he should undertake the spiritual direction of the abbey; at first he refused, but finally, believing that he would be acting in accordance with the will of God, he accepted the position. Saint-Cyran thus became 'director' of the community, and in the following year he introduced as his second-in-command, and under the title of 'confessor,' Singlin, who also exerted an important influence upon the subsequent history of Port-Royal.

At this stage it will not be out of place to consider in brief the history and character of Saint-Cyran, for it is only in the light of a thorough and sympathetic knowledge of his life and his doctrines that the essential spirit of Port-Royal education can be understood. Saint-Cyran has been called 'the soul of Port-Royal,' and it is certain that the Port-Royal schools were not only due in the first instance to his initiative, but were carried on largely in the spirit of his ideas even after his death, by his faithful disciples.

Jean Du Vergier De Hauranne, afterwards Abbot of Saint-Cyran, was born at Bayonne in 1581. He studied at the University of Louvain and there met the famous Jansen, afterwards Bishop of Ypres and founder of a famous heresy. Jansen and De Hauranne studied together both at Paris and at Bayonne, occupying themselves chiefly with S. Augustine and developing the Jansenist doctrines of original sin and grace. Five years were spent thus and in 1616 Jansen returned to Louvain, while four years later De Hauranne was appointed Abbot of Saint-Cyran, an abbey in Brenne, to the east of Poitiers. The two friends, though separated, kept up their intimacy by means of letters or visits, and together worked out their 'new theology.' For twelve years or more they were thus occupied, and during this time Saint-Cyran wrote several theological treatises; among

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