

## I

## INTRODUCTION

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THE object of this volume of Essays is to bring before the public some of the principal subjects which are dealt with in the Report of the Committee on Adult Education (Cd. 321, 1919). That Report is so far unique in the history of education in Great Britain, as it forms a definite, and to a large extent, exhaustive record of the vast amount of voluntary enthusiasm and effort which has been devoted to the cause of adult education, and asserts principles and makes proposals, which, if wholeheartedly adopted and consistently acted upon, will undoubtedly transform the whole character of the national life. The expression of such a hope may seem to be the dream of an enthusiast. But it is the expression of more than a hope: it marks a widespread and practical effort, actually existing and vigorously supported in every class: and this effort is the culmination of an almost infinite variety of movements, of which the record, given in the Report, covers a period of more than a century. The tide has had its ebbs and flows: but there has been on the whole, a steady advance and an increasing volume. The review of the past and the summary of present conditions alike justify the hope,

that the time has come when considered and combined action on the part of the various education authorities may give the opportunity to multiply, in practical ways, effective channels for widespread and deep interest in the better education of people in all ages and classes of the nation.

Our present national conditions emphasise with tremendous force the imperative need for such an advance. Whether we look to our international obligations, or to the mutual relations of that Commonwealth of Nations, which is the new and lasting form of the British Empire, or to our charge of less developed races within the Commonwealth, or to the reorganisation of internal conditions of class relations at home and abroad, it must be obvious to the most casual observer that a high level of knowledge and character must be secured, if the sovereign democracy is not to break down under the burden of its responsibilities. Thoughtful advocates of democracy have from the beginning insisted that democracy can only survive in an educated nation. It may be said that for long the official view has been that such an end can be secured by provision for elementary, secondary, and University education: there has been an implied, if not always explicit, assumption that education ends at the highest with the University, and for the vast majority with the elementary school. But this assumption has never lacked protests. And the protests have become stronger, it is worth observing, with every advance in the provision for the more limited range of education. The foundation must indeed be laid in the schools and colleges for children and

## INTRODUCTION

3

adolescents. But the more sane and the more widespread this provision grows, the more insistent is the demand for continued, and lifelong education. It is most significant that the passing of the most complete Education Act that this country has yet seen should be practically coincident with this Report, which insists uncompromisingly on the necessity of a comprehensive effort to make it possible that grown-up men and women of all ages and classes may fit themselves, by continued study in subjects as various as human nature itself, to maintain their own personal lives at a high level, and to take everyone his due part in the community of citizens and in the community of mankind.

It may be worth while to call attention to some of the principal assumptions which are made in this Report, and some of the main lines laid down for dealing with its subject.

Perhaps the fundamental assumption is that in all adults there is a capacity for continued education of a high order, granted the right method of approach. This assumption is based upon a double experience. On the one hand, the records of more than a century show a steadily recurring effort of individuals and groups, particularly among the working classes, to secure for themselves the means of such education: and these efforts have had a considerable measure of success, although from various causes particular institutions, in which they have taken form, have from time to time failed in, or departed from, their original object. But a careful consideration of the Historical Survey<sup>1</sup> given in

<sup>1</sup> *Report*, Ch. II. and Appendix I.

the Report will show that the failures have been due, not to mistakes in the assumption on which the movements were based, but to defective method and lack of adequate experience. The history of the Mechanics' Institutes and of the Working Men's Colleges<sup>1</sup>, both in their success and in their failure, illustrates this assertion by way both of warning and of encouragement.

On the other hand, the years of the Great War have given an opportunity for a fresh and most important experiment. Whatever were the faults that attended the experiments made both at the front, and in camps and hospitals at home, it cannot be doubted that there was a very large and genuine response to the educational appeal. The response was not limited to any age or any class of men on service. Some of the most interesting results were obtained in training camps for young conscripts<sup>2</sup>. But even amidst the disturbing conditions of active service during the winter months and the period of demobilisation after the armistice, important evidence was obtained both as to this desire and as to the capacity for continued education.

It may be said, generally, that, while it is admitted that in proportion to the mass of the population the quantitative results have never been more than fractional, there is more than sufficient evidence to support our assumption already on record in all classes throughout the country. Well considered methods have always elicited a most encouraging response. Spon-

<sup>1</sup> See Essay III.

<sup>2</sup> *Report*, pp. 26 f., Appendix I. Part II and the Second Interim Report Cd. 9225, 1918).

## INTRODUCTION

5

taneous efforts have been frequent over a long period of years.

A second principle, which is maintained in the Report, is the essential importance of trusting and encouraging voluntary effort. It is characteristic of the growth of education in these islands that it has till the last few years depended almost exclusively on voluntary effort, inspired by religious or humanitarian motives. The whole structure of our secondary schools and Universities has sprung from the public spirit and enthusiasm of individuals or groups.

Not till the vast growth of the population and the increasing complexity of later social order outstripped the capacity of voluntary interest, was the assistance of the State invoked: and although it is fully recognised that such assistance is necessary and right, and that the more generous provision which is now being made for it, in all departments of education, is wise and proper, it is maintained that full provision must be made for the continuance and encouragement of the spontaneous service of voluntary enthusiasm, unless we are to cut adrift from our best traditions. Above all in adult education is this essential. For the adult, continuous study depends upon conviction and spontaneity. The grown man or woman cannot be driven to school<sup>1</sup>. The sense of personal need and the sense of public duty must be present; and, if not present, must be aroused. The life conditions of classes, groups and even individuals must form the basis of education<sup>2</sup>; and to take adequate

<sup>1</sup> *Report*, pp. 2, 3, §§ (vi) (vii).

<sup>2</sup> See Essay VI.

account of such conditions requires intimate local knowledge and intelligent sympathy. Such a demand cannot be satisfied by a merely official organisation. Voluntary assistance will be required in increasing amount, and in even more intelligent devotion. Further, the temper in which such assistance can alone be satisfactorily cultivated and rendered must colour the necessary official action. It must be fully and generously recognised by the official element as equal partner in the great business. The difficulties of such co-operation are great. But unless they are solved, we shall see the failure of another great educational ideal, and a failure perhaps more disastrous than any we have yet experienced. But there is no reason to be apprehensive on this score. There is every sign in the central authority of the State of a generous recognition both of the necessity and of the essential conditions of adult education: and such signs are not wanting among the local authorities<sup>1</sup>. But the creation and maintenance of the right temper and methods in this co-operation will need constant vigilance and make great demands on the public spirit and devotion of men and women throughout the country.

It may be worth while to dwell briefly on some special characteristics and problems which come into view on a survey of the past and forecast of the future of adult education. One of the most striking features which occurs in almost every experiment recorded is the intense sense of fellowship created by common study spontaneously undertaken. The experience of our

<sup>1</sup> See Essay VIII.

## INTRODUCTION

7

colleges and schools ought to have prepared us to expect this: but in them the *esprit de corps* is inwoven of so many diverse strands, that it is often hard to detect in the completed fabric the strain of common intellectual enthusiasm. In the old Sunday Schools, Adult Schools, Mechanics' Institutes, and in the modern Extension Lectures and Tutorial Classes, it is the thirst for knowledge which is the main bond of union, and it is in the common attempt to satisfy an intellectual need that the sense of fellowship is developed. "We began as students and ended as friends" expresses an almost invariable experience in this kind of class.

Nor is this merely an instance of the natural gregariousness of man. It is the result of enthusiasm shared, and of gains secured by common effort and mutual exchange. Mr Cobham's essay on a Student's Experience brings out this factor with great force. Another essay records the opinion that "a Tutorial Class is not deemed successful unless it produces offspring<sup>1</sup>": the acquisition of their object makes missionaries of the students. This moral or, I would rather say, spiritual quality, which so constantly attends these efforts, is obviously beyond price in our social and national life. It constitutes in itself a stirring appeal to all who have it in their power to give what in the giving produces so fine a flower of character. It holds the promise of the creation of the atmosphere in which there is most hope of a wise solution of our social and national problems.

An essential condition of success in any experiment in adult education is that it should start from, and take

<sup>1</sup> See p. 59 and p. 185.

full account of, the special conditions of life and immediate intellectual requirements of the particular students. This involves beginning with a specialised form of study, which in our regular school and college courses we have been accustomed to put last. But where the effort demanded must be voluntary and spontaneous it is the natural and the only course to take. It is natural that a class of mothers should begin with “The History of the Home<sup>1</sup>”: that a class of young conscripts from the woollen trade of Yorkshire should be found interested in the study of wool, its history and its treatment<sup>2</sup>: that economics and the history of industry should be the favourite subjects of Tutorial Classes for working men<sup>3</sup>. The wider implications of this principle are put with great force in Mr Greenwood’s essay. This is natural: and experience shows that it is not in any way to be deprecated. “A little knowledge is a dangerous thing”: but it is not nearly so dangerous as total ignorance. If the right atmosphere is created in a class, by the sincerity of the students, and mutual trust and sympathy between the students themselves and the student and the tutor, the mental training which is given by the thorough study of a subject, under whatever limitations and even prejudices it is begun, is itself a good thing and may be trusted itself to correct the prejudices and widen the limits within which it began. This is a process within the experience of all who have taken part in such work. The record of

<sup>1</sup> See Essay VII.

<sup>2</sup> *Report*, pp. 2 f.

<sup>3</sup> See Essay IX.



## INTRODUCTION

9

the gradual enlargement of the range of subjects chosen by Tutorial Classes<sup>1</sup> is important evidence.

These considerations raise the burning question of bias: in particular, the question of allowing public assistance to efforts of education inspired by definite sectarian, social or political views and objects. The line which the Committee take on this subject<sup>2</sup> will probably be regarded as the most disputable of all their contentions. They maintain that a scheme, or class, or college, should not be debarred from public assistance merely on the ground that they are primarily devised by, or under the control of, particular interests. This proposition goes counter to traditional educational policy and involves the abandonment of much educational practice. And yet it is based on simple principles. It starts from the assertion that the public authority has to consider, not the institution which does the work, but the quality of the work done: it has to be satisfied as to the competence of the tutor, and the seriousness of the student: if it attempts at the same time to dictate or to proscribe the opinions of tutor or student or of the body under which they work, it is establishing at once a state censorship, in which, when we discover it in another nation, we easily detect a potent source of corruption in the national life. In fact, the fundamental question is raised whether public assistance is consistent with the essential liberty of teaching and liberty of study. The almost exclusively voluntary character of English education in the past, to which attention has already been called, is both a cause and an outcome of suspicion

<sup>1</sup> See Essay IX.

<sup>2</sup> *Report*, §§ 215, 216.

of state interference deep-rooted in the English character. Such a suspicion is amply justified when the Government itself is in the hands of a class: and the dangers, which it signals, will always arise when that is the case, whatever class may be uppermost. Contemporary history provides varied instances of this fact. But to be forewarned is to be forearmed. This is one of many instances which show that the enemy of freedom is government by a class in the interests of a class. The remedy is to oust that enemy from its position, not to attempt to hedge round particular interests against its threats, while allowing the central stronghold to be occupied. Further, the liberty of education must not be defended by restricting its area. Education itself is a powerful ally of freedom. It is this quality which justifies us in claiming a large allowance of public assistance, in the confidence that an educated people is the surest guarantee of its own liberties. It is this same confidence in education which leads us to maintain that it is itself the antidote to limited views and prejudices in its promoters. This truth is illustrated by the common reaction of students against bias in their teachers, and the as frequent widening of opinion and interests in both teacher and learners in the progress of their studies. The essential condition, and the only essential condition, of public assistance is that the authority should be satisfied as to the quality of the work done in relation to the student's opportunities, as to the competence of the tutor and the serious interest of the students. If we can get this principle established, as the basis of all state regulation of education, we shall both