

I

THE AIM OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM

By J. L. PATON

High Master of Manchester Grammar School

The last century, with all its brilliant achievement in scientific discovery and increase of production, was spiritually a failure. The sadness of that spiritual failure crushed the heart of Clough, turned Carlyle from a thinker into a scold, and Matthew Arnold from a poet into a writer of prose.

The secret of failure was that the great forces which move mankind were out of touch with each other, and furnished no mutual support. Art had no vital relation with industry; work was dissociated from joy; political economy was at issue with humanity; science was at daggers drawn with religion; action did not correspond to thought, being to seeming; and finally the individual was conceived as having claims and interests at variance with the claims and interests of the society of which he formed a part, in fact as standing out against it, in an opposition so sharply marked that one of the greatest thinkers could write a book with the title "Man *versus* the State." As a result, nation was divided against nation, labour against capital, town

against country, sex against sex, the hearts of the children were set against the fathers, the Church fought against the State, and, worst of all, Church fought against Church.

The discords of the great society were reflected inevitably in the sphere of education. The elementary schools of the nation were divided into two conflicting groups, and both were separated by an estranging gulf from the grammar schools and high schools, as the grammar schools in turn were shut off from the public schools on the one hand, and from the schools of art, music, and of technology on the other. There was no cohesion, no concerted effort, no mutual support, no great plan of advance, no homologating idea.

This fact in itself is sufficient to account for the ineffectiveness, the despondencies, the insincerities, and ceaseless unrest of Western civilisation in the nineteenth century. The tree of human life cannot flower and bear fruit for the healing of the nations, when its great life-forces spend themselves in making war on each other.

If the experience of the century which lies before us is to be different, it must be made so by means of education. Education is the science which deals with the world as it is capable of becoming. Other sciences deal with things as they are, and formulate the laws which they find to prevail in things as they are. The eyes of education are fixed always upon the future, and philosophy of whatever kind, directly it adumbrates a Utopia, thinks on educational lines.

The Aim of Educational Reform 3

The aim of education must therefore be as wide as it is high, it must be co-extensive with life. The advance must be along the whole front, not on a small sector only. William Morris, when he tried his hand at painting, used to say, that what bothered him always was the frame: he could not conceive of art as something “framed off” and isolated from life. Just as William Morris wanted to turn all life into art, so with education. It cannot be “framed off” and detached from the larger aspects of political and social well-being; it takes all life for its province. It is not an end in itself, any more than the individuals with whom it deals; it acts upon the individual, but through the individual it acts upon the mass, and its aim is nothing less than the right ordering of human society.

To cope with a task which can be stated in these terms, education must be free. A new age postulates a new education. The traditions which have dominated hitherto must one by one be challenged to render account of themselves, that which is good in them must be conserved and assimilated, that which is effete must be scrapped and rejected. Neither can the administrative machinery, as it exists, be taken for granted; unless it shows those powers of adaptation and growth which show it to be alive and not dead, it too must be scrapped and rejected; new wine is fatal to old skins. Education must regain once more what she possessed at the time of the Renaissance—the power of direction; she must be mistress of her fate.

Further, if education is to be a force which makes for co-operation in place of conflict, she must not be divided against herself. She must leave behind for ever the separations and snobberies, the misunderstandings, the wordy battles beloved of pedants and politicians. The smoke and dust of controversy obscures her vision, and she needs all her energies to tackle the great task which confronts her. In this regard nothing is so full of promise for the future as the new sense of unity which is beginning both to animate and actuate the whole teaching profession, from the University to the Kindergarten, and has already eventuated in the formation of a Teachers Registration Council, on which all sorts and conditions of education are represented.

The materialists have not been slow to see their chance, to challenge the old tradition of literary education, and to urge the claims of science. But the aim which they place before us is frankly stated—it is the acquisition of wealth; they are “on manna bent and mortal ends,” and their conception of the future is a world in which one nation competes against another for the acquisition of markets and commodities. In effect, therefore, materialism challenges the classics, but it accepts the self-seeking ideals of the past generations, and accepts also, as an integral part of the future, the scramble of conflicting interests, labour against capital, nation against nation, man against man. Now the first characteristic of the genuine scientific mind is the power of learning by experience. Real science never makes the same

The Aim of Educational Reform 5

mistake twice. Obviously the repetition of the past can only eventuate in the repetition of the present. And that is precisely what education sets itself to counteract. The materialist forgets three outstanding and obvious facts. Firstly, science cannot be the whole of knowledge, because “science” (in his limited sense of the term) deals only with what appears. Secondly, power of insight depends not so much upon the senses as on moral qualities, the sense of sympathy and of fairness; it needs self-discipline as well as knowledge both of oneself and one’s fellow-man. “How can a man,” says Carlyle, “without clear vision in his heart first of all, have any clear vision in the head?” “Eyes and ears,” said the ancient philosopher, “are bad witnesses for such as have barbarian souls.” Thirdly, the tragedy of the past generation was not its failure to accumulate wealth; in that respect it was more successful than any generation which preceded it. The tragedy of the nineteenth century was that, when it had acquired wealth, it had no clear idea, either individually or collectively, what to do with it.

And yet the house of humanity faces both ways; it looks out towards the world of appearances as well as to the world of spirit, and is, in fact, the meeting-place of both. Materialism is not wrong because it deals with material things. It is wrong because it deals with nothing else. It is wrong, also, in education because taking the point of view of the adult, it makes the material product itself the all-important thing. In every right conception of education the child is

central. The child is interested in things. It wants first to *sense* them, or as Froebel would say “to make the outer inner”; it wants to play with them, to construct with them, and along the line of this inward propulsion the educational process has to act. The “thing-studies” if one may so term them, which have been introduced into the curriculum, such as gardening, manual training (with cardboard, wood, metal), cooking, painting, modelling, games and dramatisation, are it is true later introductions, adopted mainly from utilitarian motive; and they have been ingrafted on the original trunk, being at first regarded as detachable extras, but they quickly showed that they were an organic part of the real educative process; they have already reacted on the other subjects of the curriculum, and have, in the earlier stages of education become central. In the same way, vocation is having great influence upon the higher terminal stages of education. All this is part of the most important of all correlations, the correlation of school with life.

But the child’s interest in things is social. Through the primitive occupations of mankind, he is entering step by step into the heritage of the race, and into a richer fuller personal experience. The science which enlists a child’s interest is not that which is presented from the logical, abstract point of view. The way in which the child acquires it is the same as that in which mankind acquired it—his occupation presents certain difficulties, to overcome these difficulties he has to exercise his thought, he

The Aim of Educational Reform 7

invents and experiments; and so thought reacts upon occupation, occupation reacts upon thought. And out of that reciprocal action science is born. In the same way his play is social—in his games too he enters into the heritage of the race, and in playing them he is learning unconsciously the greatest of all arts, the art of living with others. In his play as well as in his school work the lines of his natural development show how he can be trained to co-operate with the law of human progress.

This fitness and readiness to co-operate with the great movement of human progress, all-round fitness of body, mind and spirit, provides the formula which fuses and reconciles two growing tendencies in modern education.

There is in the first place the movement towards self-expression and self-development—postulating for the scholar a larger measure of liberty in thought and action, and self-direction than hitherto—this movement is represented mainly by Dr Montessori, and by “What is and what might be”; it is a movement which is spreading upwards from the infant school to the higher standards. Side by side with it is the movement towards the fuller development of corporate life in the school, the movement which trains the child to put the school first in his thoughts, to live for the society to which he belongs and find his own personal well-being in the well-being of that society. This has been, ever since Arnold, sedulously fostered in the games of the public schools, and fruitful of good results in that limited sphere; it has been applied

with conspicuous success to the development of self-government, and it has reached its fullest expression in the little Commonwealth of Mr Homer Lane. But we are beginning to recognise its wider applications, it is capable of transforming the spirit of the classroom activities as well as the activities of a playing field, it is in every way as applicable to the elementary school as to Eton, or Rugby, or Harrow, and to girls as well as to boys.

These two movements towards a fuller liberty of self-fulfilment, and towards a fuller and stronger social life, are convergent, and supplement, or rather complement, each other. Personality, after all, is best defined as “capacity for fellowship,” and only in the social milieu can the individual find his real self-fulfilling. Unless he functions socially, the individual develops into eccentricity, negative criticism, and the cynical aloofness of the “superior person.” On the other hand without freedom of individual development, the organisation of life becomes the death of the soul. Prussia has shown how the psychology of the crowd can be skilfully manipulated for the most sinister ends. It is a happy omen for our democracy that both these complementary movements are combined in the new life of the schools. To both appeals, the appeal of personal freedom, and the appeal of the corporate life, the British child is peculiarly responsive. Round these two health-centres the form of the new system will take shape and grow.

And growth it must be, not building. The body is not built up on the skeleton, the skeleton is

The Aim of Educational Reform 9

secreted by the growing body. The hope of education is in the living principle of hope and enthusiasm, which stretches out towards perfection. One distrusts instinctively at the present time anything schematic. There are men, able enough as organisers, who will be ready to sit down and produce at two days' notice a full cut-and-dried scheme of educational reconstruction. They will take our present resources, and make the best of them, no doubt, re-arranging and re-manipulating them, and making them go as far as they can. They will shape the whole thing out in wood, and the result will be wooden. It will be static and stratified, with no upward lift. But that is not the way. Education is a thing of the spirit, it is instinct with life, *θερμόν τι πρᾶγμα*, as Aristotle would say, drawing upon resources that are not its own, "unseen yet crescive in its faculty" and in its growth taking to itself such outward form as it needs for the purpose of its inward life. Six years at least it will take for the new spirit to work itself out into the definite larger forms.

That does not mean that it will come without hard purposeful thinking and much patient effort. Education does not "happen" any more than "art happens," —and just as with the arts of the middle ages, so the well-being of education depends not on the chance appearance of a few men of genius but on the right training and love of the ordinary workman for his work. Education is a spiritual endeavour, and it will come, as the things of the spirit come, through patience in well-doing, through concentration of

purpose on the highest, through drawing continually on the inexhaustible resources of the spiritual world. The supreme “maker” is the poet, the man of vision. For the administrator, the task is different from what it has been. It is for him to watch and help experiments, to prevent the abuse of freedom, not to preserve uniformities but to select variations. But he is handling a power which, as George Meredith says, “is a heaven-sent steeple-chaser, and takes a flying leap of the ordinary barriers.”

To-morrow is the day of opportunity. To-day is the day of preparation. Yesterday’s ideals have become the practical politics of the present hour. Our countrymen recognise now as they have never done before that the problem of national reconstruction is in the main a problem of national education: “the future welfare of the nation,” to use Mr Fisher’s words, “depends upon its schools.” Men make light now of the extra millions which a few years ago seemed to bar the way of progress. At the same time the discipline of the last three years has hammered into us a new consciousness of national solidarity and social obligation. As the whole energies of a united people are at this moment concentrated on the duty of destruction which is laid upon us, so after the war with no less urgency and no less oneness of heart the whole energies of a united nation must be concentrated on the upbuilding of life. That upbuilding is to be economic as well as spiritual, but those who think out most deeply the need