

The Real Interests of the Peasant Boy: The Development of Education by Austin Gaskell, O.P.

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'Do you consider that the aid or interference of the legislature is required for promoting general education in this country? I am of the opinion that much good may be done by judicious assistance; but legislative interference is in many respects to be either altogether avoided or very cautiously employed because it may produce mischievous effects.'

(From the evidence of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Brougham and Vaux, before the Parliamentary Committee on the State of Education, 1834.)

'... Any universal compulsory system appears to us neither attainable nor desirable.'

(Report of the Newcastle Commission, 1861.)

'... Even if it were possible, I doubt whether it would be desirable, with a view to the real interests of the peasant boy, to keep him at school till he was 14 or 15 years of age. But it is not possible. We must make up our minds to see the last of him, as far as the day school is concerned, at 10 or 11. We must frame our system of education upon this hypothesis; and I venture to maintain that it is quite possible to teach a child soundly and thoroughly, in a way that he shall not forget it, all that is necessary for him to possess in the shape of intellectual attainment, by the time he is 10 years old. . . .'

(Evidence of the Rev. James Fraser, later Bishop of Manchester, quoted with approval by the Newcastle Commission, 1861.)

The above passages, quoted from *Educational Documents, England and Wales, 1816-1963*, by J. Stuart Maclure (London, Chapman and Hall, 1965; 50s.) illustrate how ideas about education have changed in the past century or so. Mr Maclure has selected extracts from official documents—the Reports of Royal Commissions, of Select Committees and of Advisory Councils, the Education Acts, speeches in Parliament, etc.—and provided editorial notes to set them in context. This perhaps sounds as if it would be of little interest to the ordinary reader. But in fact these well-chosen passages give a vivid picture of the development of public opinion—or, to be more exact, of 'official' public opinion. The interest lies not only in what is said, but in how it is said, and quite often in what is simply assumed. Mr Maclure does not comment or interpret, but leaves the reader to form his own judgments. His book helps to put our present educational situation in historical perspective.

Three main themes may be traced in this book which are particularly significant, as reflecting profound changes of social attitude. First the transition from the laissez-faire concept of education as the responsibility of the individual parent to that of education as a matter of national concern, requiring all the resources of the community. Secondly, and consequently, the transition from the idea of education as a process for selecting and training leaders to a concept of education as concerned with the fullest development of all members of the community, giving particular attention to those whose need is greatest. Thirdly, the gradual integration of the Church schools into the public system, and the relative diminution of the role of the Churches in educational administration. It is this third development which has most often given concern to Catholic leaders. Perhaps we have not been concerned enough with the other two lines of development—though we surely ought to be, since it is those which really show the love of one's neighbour in practice.

II

The principal theme which emerges from this book, is, as the editor remarks, 'the slow and often tortuous process by which a public system of education has been built'. England was behind most other European countries in developing a public educational system. (Scotland, a much poorer country, had established an efficient system by an Act of 1696.) It is the reasons for this delay which are interesting. Throughout the nineteenth century the view which predominated was that of laissez-faire individualism. Education was something for the parent to provide. If he could not afford to, there would be an opportunity for individual or corporate beneficence—in other words, 'charity schools' for the poor. Only in the last resort would public funds be made available. In 1861 a majority of the Newcastle Commission approved of the very limited 'public assistance' which had been given to elementary education, and held that 'it would not be desirable either to withdraw it or largely to diminish its amount'. This was the more 'progressive' view. There was a minority on the Commission which maintained that the Government 'has, ordinarily speaking, no educational duties', and held that it would have been better 'had the Government abstained from interference and given free course to the sense of duty and the benevolence which . . . have spontaneously achieved great results in other directions'. Here, as elsewhere, the choice of words ('public assistance', 'abstained from interference') is significant.

The Taunton Commission of 1868 was more forward-looking. It recognized that educational opportunity depended on one's ability to pay fees, and went on to recommend (very cautiously) that local authorities should be *permitted* to raise a rate for secondary education. The Report gives a summary of the arguments for and against:

In recommending a recourse to rates we are touching on a

matter of much controversy. Whilst there are many who would strongly deprecate rates for education altogether, there are others who would advocate a system similar to the American, and propose, as the goal to be ultimately attained, the provision of free public schools of every grade, at which the best education, that the country could give, would be put within the reach of every child without charge. There are many and weighty arguments on both sides.

In favour of the American plan it is urged, that no other so effectually stamps the education of the people with its true value, as a great national duty, to be put on a level with the defence of the country or the administration of justice; that the experience of New England proves that gratuitous education does not of necessity in any degree pauperize those who receive it; that it is a matter of national interest, that intellectual ability, in whatever rank it may be found, should have the fullest opportunities of cultivation, and that none of it should be lost to the country because poverty has prevented its attaining due development; that a system of free schools secures better than any other that general diffusion of education, which all now concur in considering almost a necessity to the happiness and prosperity of the country.

On the other hand it is maintained, that the parental obligation to educate is prior to the national, and that it would be in the highest degree inexpedient to weaken the sense of that obligation by removing from parents the burden of discharging it; that the experience of America, with its comparatively homogeneous society, cannot be taken as a guide in dealing with the complex society of England; that English experience as far as it goes, is distinctly against gratuitous education, and that even in elementary schools it is found better to charge low fees than to admit the scholars free of all cost; that under present circumstances it seems more likely that people will learn the value of education by being perpetually urged to make the sacrifices necessary to procure it for their children . . . that the burden cast on ratepayers as far as they were distinct from the parents would be so heavy . . . that the money given grudgingly would be administered grudgingly, and rate-supported schools would be bad themselves and would keep others out of the field.

But the Taunton Commission was in advance of public opinion. When the Act of 1870 was introduced it was aimed simply at 'filling up the vacuum which voluntary effort had left empty', and it retained the fee-paying principle, even in elementary schools.

The next seventy years saw the gradual development of a national system of elementary education, and of secondary education for a small minority. What of the others? The Lewis Commission of 1917 reported:

The story amounts to this. . . . Practically . . . public education after the Elementary School leaving age is a part-time affair. And there is very little of it. In 1911-12 there were about 2,700,000 juveniles between 14 and 18, and of these about 2,200,000 or

81.5 per cent were enrolled neither in day schools nor in evening schools. . . .

What then are the remedies? In a sense there is only one remedy. . . . But it is a pretty thorough-going one; nothing less than a complete change of temper and outlook on the part of the people of this country as to what they mean, through the forces of industry and society, to make of their boys and girls. Can the age of adolescence be brought out of the purview of economic exploitation and into that of the social conscience? Can the conception of the juvenile as primarily a little wage-earner be replaced by the conception of the juvenile as primarily the workman and the citizen in training? Can it be established that the educational purpose is to be the dominating one, without as well as within the school doors, during those formative years between 12 and 18? If not, clearly no remedies at all are possible in the absence of the will by which alone they could be rendered effective. . . .

But this opinion too was in advance of its time, and in spite of similar recommendations in the Hadow Reports, it was not until the Education Act of 1944 that 'secondary education for all' began to change from a slogan into a possibility, though one which is still only in process of realization.

The developments of the past twenty years have been the most rapid of all. The Act of 1944 abolished the 'free place' system, and required that secondary education should be available to all according to 'age, ability and aptitude'. From 1945, grants for the resettlement and further education of ex-service men and women led to the present practice by which nearly all students in Universities and colleges of further education are financed out of public funds. The Robbins Report (1963) accepted public provision as a basic principle. 'Throughout our Report we have assumed as an axiom that courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so.' The wheel has come full circle.

The principle of education as a public service, then, has now been fully accepted, at all levels of education, and this is particularly a matter of the last twenty years. One reason for this acceptance is the changed attitude of the economists. Until 1940 or thereabouts, education was seen as a heavy drain on public funds which also reduced the number of young people available on the labour market. More recently, Sir Geoffrey Crowther and Lord Robbins, both distinguished economists, have justified increased educational expenditure on a quite unprecedented scale in terms of capital investment for the future of the country, now that change and technological development are increasingly rapid. There is more to it than that, of course, since education concerns human development and human happiness. The Crowther Report, like the Hadow Report many years earlier, endorsed John Dewey's principle: what a wise and good parent would desire for his own children, that a nation

must desire for all children. This is the moral principle, now accepted at long last. But its acceptance has certainly been helped by the fact that the economists have come to consider education a sound investment.

III

The second line of development—from education as a selective process, concerned only with a *chosen few*, to education as helping everyone to make the most of his life—follows from, and depends on, the establishment of a basic public system of education for all. And this in turn presupposes a certain level of economic prosperity.

So long as education is available only to a few—or adequately only to a few—there must be selection of some kind. One can in fact set out deliberately to select and train an élite. Plato was the supreme exponent of this policy, especially in *The Republic*, and his influence has been incalculable. But Plato was ruthless in his social engineering, and in concentrating his attention on the future leaders he leaves the uncomfortable impression that he would be quite content to relegate the remainder to an inferior training fitting them only for inferior positions.

Karl Mannheim, in *Man and Society*, distinguished three sociological processes by which cultural and governing élites may be selected: he called them selection by blood, by property, and by achievement. Historically, we have moved through these three stages in chronological order, though of course with a good deal of overlapping.

The first process, selection by blood, was the aristocratic or feudal method of selection. It has almost disappeared today, though another and more rigid form of 'selection by blood' takes place in some countries through racial segregation.

Selection by property may be called the bourgeois principle. It became important in the later middle ages. Generally speaking, ability to pay has been the chief determinant of educational opportunity in England ever since, though to a diminishing extent in recent years. Mr Maclure's book shows vividly how, educationally, nineteenth-century England was divided into Disraeli's 'two nations'. The first document quoted is the Report of a Committee appointed in 1816 'to inquire into the Education of the Lower Orders in the Metropolis'. The Newcastle Commission (1861), whose object was 'the extension of sound and cheap elementary instruction to all classes of the people', estimated that only one-eighth of the potential school population was 'above the condition of such as are commonly comprehended in the expression "poorer classes"'—and so beyond their terms of reference. It was taken for granted that there should be one school for the rich and another for the poor. The effects of this sharp division were to be felt down to our own times, in the distinction between the independent schools and the maintained schools, and the system of fee-paying

extended by 'free places' which made admission to the grammar school as much a matter of social as educational prestige.

The third selection process, by ability, may be called the democratic method. At all times, the child of genius has been able to succeed, with the help of luck or patronage. But to make educational opportunities available to everyone who can benefit from them is another matter. It has been the national policy in Scotland since the seventeenth century, even if it has not always been fully implemented. In England, it has been accepted as a principle only in the present century, and really effected only by the Education Act of 1944, which made 'age, ability and aptitude' the criteria for selection. This was the kind of thing Mannheim desired: he maintained, on the basis of his first-hand knowledge of the growth of the Nazi movement in Germany, that 'unless the principle of equalizing opportunities is linked up with objective criteria of achievement and just principles of social selection, mass society is bound to degenerate into Fascism'. Social mobility on an unprecedented scale has come to stay, and if selection is to be just, ability rather than privilege must be the criterion.

The Act of 1944, then, opened a new era of opportunity for all children with the necessary ability, and the results have already been immense. It is now clear, as never before, that educational legislation is an instrument of social policy, whether we like it nor not. But already since 1944 a trend has been developing which Mannheim did not live to see, an uneasiness about the very idea of selection. This is not due simply to dissatisfaction with the predictive value of selection tests, nor to the danger that the new meritocracy would soon develop its own academic kind of snobbery. It was rather that as investigators studied the process of educational selection more closely, they became increasingly conscious that natural intelligence and good teaching were not the only elements in the full development of the child—not even in his intellectual development. The influence of the environment, both the home and the neighbourhood, is obviously very great. Children from homes where language is used inadequately and inaccurately are handicapped in developing their own use of language, and consequently in the formation of concepts.¹ And this in turn means an impoverished development of the emotional and imaginative life. Similarly there has been an increased awareness of the handicaps which have to be faced by children who are deprived in various other ways: by poverty or ill-health, by physical or mental handicaps, by lack of security or affection in the home.

It follows from this that if the aim of education is to enable everyone to develop his personal resources to the full, then we have a special obligation, as a matter of justice and not simply of charity, to

¹A corollary to Basil Bernstein's linguistic studies, 'Language and Moral Education', by K. D. Nicholls, appeared in *New Blackfriars* in February 1965.

help those whose need is greatest—those who are deprived or handicapped in some way. Education, in this sense, is not concerned so much with the traditional goals of intellectual excellence or of the selection and training of future leaders, but is rather a ‘pastoral’ concern for the younger and especially the weaker members of the community. This concern is reflected in the Crowther Report’s considerations on the importance of raising the leaving age, and of course in the Newsom Report, with its significant title, *Half Our Future*.¹

Similar developments have taken place in the other services dealing with children. Probation work, child care and child guidance, the youth service, all began as works of charity sponsored by voluntary societies. They have more and more become statutory services maintained out of public funds, now that the need has been more recognized and the economy of the country is better able to support them. Delinquency, which has always been a matter of public concern, is now seen rather as an educational rather than a penal problem. All these are tending to become specialized branches of the public system of education. And naturally so, now that education is being taken in a larger sense, as concerned not just with academic training but with the whole upbringing and development of children as people.

This implies a change in the aim of education, or rather a shift in the emphasis on the different purposes served by the public system of education. We are still concerned (rightly) that higher education should be open to all. But education is not concerned only with academic success. It is concerned with human happiness, with the right development of the emotions and the imagination, with individuation and human relationships; in fact, with the full development of each individual simply because he is a human person. This conviction is not a specifically Christian one—it has arisen in practice rather from the insights of psychology and psychiatry—but it is surely one which all Christians ought to share. It means encouraging a spirit of mutual help, of cooperation rather than competition. And it is in this context that we should see the movement towards a system of comprehensive schools.

IV

The third of the themes we have noticed in Mr Maclure’s book is the transition from a time when nearly all schools were run by the churches to the present situation in which the ‘voluntary’ schools have a limited place in the national system of education. The churches of course were first in the field of education, and they wanted to maintain that position. The Established Church, in particular, was jealous of its own rights, and this could sometimes lead to a dog-in-the-manger attitude. ‘There was, indeed, a desperate

¹This note has, of course, been even more forcefully struck in the Plowden Report.

need for better educational provision; and in 1807 Samuel Whitbread introduced a Bill designed to secure a national system of rate-aided elementary education. Alas! it was rejected by the House of Lords largely upon the advice of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who objected to any system that put the control of education elsewhere than in the hands of the bishop of the diocese.¹ The representatives of the National Schools Society who gave evidence before the Parliamentary Commission of 1834 were even more uncompromising. All pupils were to be taught the Church of England catechism, and no exception could be made for the children of dissenters on grounds of conscience. As late as 1888 the Cross Commission was recommending that a conscience clause should always operate where children had of necessity to attend a denominational school. (In many rural areas the Church school was the only one available.) This uncompromising attitude of the Established Church, with its claim to exclusive rights, caused deep resentment among dissenters. The bitter inter-denominational rivalry which followed wrecked many attempts at educational legislation in the nineteenth century, and led to the complicated compromise of the Dual System.

Need this ever have happened? Perhaps if the leading representatives of the Established Church in the early part of the nineteenth century had been able to face the fact that they were already living in a pluralist society, we might have had interdenominational schools, as Father Michael Gaine has suggested.² There is some evidence of this possibility too in Mr Maclure's book. He quotes the Report of the Parliamentary Committee of 1818, as follows:

Another point to which it is material to direct the attention of Parliament, regards the two opposite principles, of founding schools for children of all sorts, and for those only who belong to the established church. Where the means exist of erecting two schools, one upon each principle, education is not checked by the exclusive plan being adopted in one of them, because the other may comprehend the children of sectaries. In places where only one school can be supported, it is manifest that any regulations which exclude dissenters, deprive the Poor of that body of all means of education.

Your Committee, however, have the greatest satisfaction in observing that in many schools where the national system is adopted, an increasing degree of liberality prevails, and that the church catechism is only taught, and attendance at the established place of worship only required, of those whose parents belong to the establishment; due assurance being obtained that the children of sectaries shall learn the principles and attend the ordinances of religion, according to doctrines and forms to which their families are attached.

¹W. O. Lester Smith, *Government of Education*, 1965, pp. 77-8.

²'Why Catholic Schools?' *Spode House Review*, Vol. I, No. 6 (May 1965); Cf. James Murphy, *The Religious Problem in English Education: the crucial experiment*. Liverpool University Press, 1959.

It is with equal pleasure that Your Committee have found reason to conclude, that the Roman Catholic poor are anxious to avail themselves of those Protestant Schools established in their neighbourhood, in which no catechism is taught; and they indulge a hope, that the clergy of that persuasion may offer no discouragement to their attendance, more especially as they appear, in one instance, to have contributed to the support of schools, provided that no catechism was taught, and no religious observances exacted. It is contrary to the doctrine as well as the discipline of the Romish Church, to allow any protestant to interfere with those matters, and consequently it is impossible for Romanists to send their children to any school where they form part of the plan.

But this situation did not last. Denominational rivalries hardened, and the educational expansion of the next fifty years took place along denominational lines. By Manning's time the slogan had become 'Catholic schools for Catholic children', and the struggle to achieve this has absorbed much of the energy of the Catholic body in this country for the past century or more. Today this policy is being increasingly questioned. Need we keep our Catholic schools?

The building of the voluntay schools in the nineteenth century required strenuous financial efforts, and these schools were naturally controlled and administered by the churches concerned. (The first Government aid to education was in the form of subsidies to Church schools—partly because there was no alternative machinery of local government to run the schools.) So, by an accident of history, we have arrived at the acceptance of a principle: that a system of Catholic schools implies ecclesiastical control and administration. But in fact this is not so, as the experience of Scotland shows. In 1918 the Scottish bishops accepted an agreement by which the existing Catholic schools were transferred to the local authorities, who were obliged to build, staff and administer whatever Catholic schools were required from then on. In the appointment of teachers, the bishop has in effect a power of veto, since candidates must have his certificate of approval. The Scottish system, with this minimal degree of ecclesiastical control, has proved very successful. The Catholic schools there have been integrated into the statutory system.

V

There are two outstanding characteristics, then, of the educational development of the past hundred years. It is now concerned with all the children of the country, not least with the poor and the handicapped; and it operates through the statutory system, because it requires all the resources of the community to achieve its aim. But when we look at the Catholic schools in England it is difficult to escape the conclusion that we are lagging behind, not only in organization but also in ideas. Many Catholic schools were established in the nineteenth century as independent fee-paying schools

run by religious orders, and this form of educational provision retains its place more tenaciously among Catholics than elsewhere. The educational philosophy it presupposes, represented by the second part of the extract from the Taunton Report quoted above, was one commonly advanced by Catholics until quite recent times. (It may be regarded as advocating a sturdy independence—or, equally justly, as saying ‘The devil take the hindmost’.) And since Catholics were comparatively well supplied with independent fee-paying schools for the children of middle-class parents (chiefly of course through the work of the religious orders), the consequence was selection largely according to one’s ability to pay, with the parish schools relegated to the status of a poor relation. (Until 1905, in fact, the predecessor of the Catholic Education Council was known as the ‘Catholic Poor Schools’ Commission’.) The effects of this are still to be felt in Catholic education today. Mr R. F. Cunningham, secretary of the Catholic Education Council, pointed out (in the *Wiseman Review*, Spring 1962) that over 20 per cent of the Catholic schools in England and Wales were ‘independent’, and that they educated about 17 per cent of all the children in Catholic schools.¹ (In the country as a whole, about 6 per cent are in independent schools.) Mr Cunningham went on: ‘The inevitable conclusion is that the continued independent status of many of the existing independent schools reflects the conditions of pre-war England when fee-paying was more widespread, particularly at the secondary education level, rather than the conditions of the post-1944 world. It may not be easy for all these schools to become aided, for a variety of reasons including their premises and the need of capital expenditure, but if they did the fee barrier would be removed and the schools would be able to provide more effectively for the Catholic children of the neighbourhood, and at the same time escape from the condition of uneconomic operation which hampers so many of them at the moment.’

This vested interest in sites and buildings is certainly one reason for the massive inertia of Catholic education. Similarly, the prospect of further expenditure on extension is the chief reason why the churches, as Mr Maclure records, have so often held out against such changes as the raising of the leaving age or the reorganization of secondary education. And since control remains in the hands of the Catholic body, on a decentralized basis, parishes and dioceses, as well as religious congregations, have an interest in holding on to their own schools. (In Scotland, where almost all the schools are now owned and run by the local authority, this resistance to change is not felt to anything like the same degree.)

Another element making for resistance to change is the large

¹In 1964, there were 23,433 teachers in Catholic maintained schools, of whom 9.6 per cent were religious; 883 teachers in direct grant schools, of whom 40 per cent were religious; 6,024 in independent schools, of whom 45.5 per cent were religious.

number of religious congregations engaged in education. Religious communities, like all human institutions with a strong communal feeling, develop an interest in self-perpetuation; in fact this may become the dominant motive, over-riding the original purpose of the group. St Augustine, in his Rule, says that we should understand the phrase 'Charity seeks not her own' as meaning that we should be concerned with the common good rather than our own personal interests. But what is the 'common good' for a religious? There is an ever-present danger that the interests of the order or community may be given too large a place, at the expense of the greater common good. St Augustine's principle ought to apply to organized groups as well as individuals. But it is more difficult to apply it in practice, because the group *itself* may be seen as the common good, and because the possibilities of self-deception are greater.

Clearly, one of the principal tasks facing the religious orders and congregations in the years following the Council is to examine their own functions within the life of the Church and in human society as a whole. And this will have to be done from the point of view of sociology as well as theology. Those engaged in teaching, in particular, will need to consider not only whether they have been faithful to the ideals which originally inspired them, but also what work they can most suitably do in a world very different from that in which they were founded. And this will require serious re-thinking.

For example, a year or two ago, a West African bishop visiting this country appealed for young Catholic teachers, lay men and women, to go and work in his schools for a limited period. They should be unmarried and free from family ties, he explained, because they must be fairly mobile and prepared to rough it, alone or with one or two companions. This sort of freedom from the ties of family and career should be one of the effects of the three vows of religious, making them readily available for an enterprise of this kind. But in practice religious have become so restricted by custom and canon law that such an undertaking would scarcely be thinkable, except perhaps to a secular institute.

Again, teaching religious are not engaging in a career, and have renounced personal ambition. But in schools and colleges run by religious the headship and many of the key positions are often held by members of the order. For example, Joan Brothers reported¹ (without comment) that Liverpool had ten Catholic grammar schools, four for boys and six for girls. In every case the head was a priest or religious, though the majority of the teaching staff were lay people. A situation of that kind does not encourage young Catholic graduates to think of teaching as a profession.

Again, the teaching orders were often founded as a sort of charitable organization (in the legal as much as the theological sense) to make a

¹*Church and School, a study of the impact of education on religion*, Liverpool University Press, 1964.

Catholic education available as widely as possible, to those least able to pay, when little or no help was available from public funds. The schools they established, often on a shoestring budget, have become successful. But do they still serve those whose need is greatest? What do people understand by the term 'convent school'? All too often an independent school, supported out of fees and consequently available only to a minority, and economically viable only because many of the pupils are not Catholics.

All this is not to question the value of Catholic schools or the work of teaching religious. But we do need to re-examine some situations we have come to take for granted. Have we been too greatly concerned with the ownership and control of the schools by the parish, the diocese or the religious congregation? Is the present practice, by which a particular community 'runs', and often owns, its own school, really desirable? Would it not be more in accordance with the vow of poverty if religious were simply employed as teachers in schools owned by someone else (perhaps the local authority)? Would they not have a wider influence, and a greater range of interests and experience, if the members of a community were teaching in several different schools? Finally, since the love of one's neighbour is at the heart of education, we should consider whether our concept of 'neighbour' has not been too narrow and restricted. Have we not perhaps been concerned too exclusively with our own schools (of the parish, the order, or 'our Catholic schools'), and not with those of the whole community?

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