

THE CHANGING SCHOOL

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PREFACE

THOUGH schools are always changing they are not always changing at the same rate, nor always in the same direction, nor always with the same significance. Sometimes the alterations mean no more than do the caprices of fashion; at other times they point to a profound change of heart or of creed in the great mass of the teaching profession. And nobody who has kept his finger on the pulse of education for the last few decades can fail to have noticed the peculiar restlessness of the period. The profession has been astir with movements: movements that really move, and move nearly, if not exactly, towards the same goal—the goal of freedom for the scholars. A great wave of fervour for freedom rose in the infant school, passed with diminishing force through the schools for higher learning, and broke unheeded on the walls of the university. Another great wave of enthusiasm for individual work followed the same course and stopped at the same point. Everywhere, except in the most conservative seats of learning, there has been a transfer of emphasis from teaching to learning,

everywhere a shifting of responsibility from the shoulders of the staff to the shoulders of the scholars. And the many minor changes that have concomitantly taken place have but served to swell the common current that has been heading steadily towards freedom and individualism.

The psychology of the Victorian age can make no great boast of having illumined the path of learning. But within the present century light has broken through at two distinct points. Mental tests have given us a calculus by which research may be rendered more exact and scientific; and the new psychology of the unconscious has cast some measure of light on the deeper wells of feeling and the subtler springs of conduct.

Mental tests I have already dealt with in other books, and I refer to them here merely to remove a misunderstanding. The mental tester is supposed to be a withering materialist who ignores spiritual values and teaches that the most important things in schooling are the most measurable. Nothing could be farther from the truth. He holds, in fact, that the relative importance of factors in education is often in inverse proportion to their measurability. He does not, as his opponents do, say that the higher things in education are immeasurable and forthwith proceed to measure them. He either measures them as accurately as he can, taking good care to discover

the probability of his estimate being true, or else he leaves them alone. He does not claim to be on the side of the angels merely on the strength of doing badly that which he says cannot be done at all. He knows that the last bird that is likely to soar is the ostrich. Thorndike has reminded us that a mother does not love her baby any the less for having weighed him. Nor, we may add, does she think any the less of his immortal soul by the fact that she finds it manifested in a ponderable body. Be that as it may, the reader will find little in this book about weighing the baby, though he will find a great deal about loving him, and understanding him; and incidentally about feeding him (mentally), and even about smacking him.

It will be observed that I call the baby "him." And the reader, if he reads far enough, will discover that I also call the teacher "him" and the child "him." All masculine. Madam, I crave your indulgence. It is not through lack of respect for you that I do this. It is through a love of simplicity. Suppose I wish to say: If a teacher finds that he readily loses his temper he should take himself seriously in hand. I put it like that, not because I think the man alone has the privilege of losing his temper, but because I wish to avoid saying: If a teacher finds that he or she readily loses his or her temper, he or she

should take himself or herself seriously in hand. This, you will admit, madam, is intolerable. It is true that I can sometimes, though not always, take refuge in the plural; and it is also true that I may call the child "it." I have also on occasion heard the teacher called "it." But I do not care to call the child "it," and I will not dare to call the teacher "it." So until the day arrives, as it has already arrived in America, when the noun "teacher" becomes feminine, I beg leave to treat it as an all-embracing masculine.

After this digression from mental tests and babies into the briar-patch of English grammar, I will return to the second point at which light has recently broken through from the realm of pure psychology. The new theory of the unconscious has given us fresh clues to the interpretation of human conduct; it has enabled us to know a little more about the non-rational part of man, and it has brought home to us again the fact that if we wish to improve the mind we must pay great heed to the things that move the mind—emotions, passions, and motivating ideals. And that is why so much space is devoted in this book to problems of discipline; for the school is here regarded not merely as a place where lessons are given—and forgotten; but rather as a place where little human beings with warm blood

coursing through their veins act and react on one another and on the teacher, and shape, for good or ill, each other's characters. Happiness is made there, and misery ; as well as bookishness and a love of learning.

A few brief excursions have been made into the distant past to point a contrast with the present ; but most of the changes of which I treat have taken place within my own memory. And they are still going on as fast as ever. And they will continue. They will perhaps slow down ; they will certainly veer and vacillate ; but they will not stop till the last teacher has given his last lesson and the last learner learns no more. It follows that the word "finality" finds no place in this book. To believe that we have reached a fixed and final system of education, or indeed of anything else, betrays a curiously weak sense of historical perspective. We are prone to picture ourselves as living towards the end of things. We look back and see a long line of human evolution beginning far away in the mists and ending in "these latter days." But the oldest school in the land, University College, Oxford, goes no farther back, even in tradition, than a thousand years—a small fraction of the time that has elapsed since man first appeared upon the planet. Educationally we are but babes. We are at the beginning of things. The

historian of a hundred thousand years hence will refer to us as children of the dawn ; and he will be at great pains to explain to his readers (if reading will have survived as a mode of disseminating thought) the meaning of our little systems and sects, and the significance of names that had almost passed out of the memory of man.

Changes are inevitable. New ideas, large and small, will press upon us from all quarters. How are we to receive them ? The obvious answer is : With an open mind. Certainly not with a closed mind. Nor with the mind that is open at both ends, so that when a new idea gets in at one end it pushes out an old idea at the other. The ideal mind is biassed neither towards the old, nor towards the new ; it is biassed only towards the true. It will hospitably receive new ideas even though they quarrel with the old—as they almost certainly will. It will somehow or other make peace ; and this means a constant readjustment of opinions and convictions. When in any man's mind this readjustment no longer takes place he has ceased to learn by experience. He has become in his own eyes a pundit ; in the eyes of others an old fogey. From this fate may a kind Heaven preserve both the reader and the author.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Editor of *The Times Educational Supplement* for permis-

sion to make use, in some of the chapters, of material which has already appeared in the columns of his journal; to Professor Cyril Burt for his helpful criticism of the chapter on The Unconscious; and to Mr. John Brown for his kindness in correcting the proofs.

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CHAPTER I

FLOGGERS ANCIENT AND MODERN

WHEN William Pitt junior wrote from school to his father he began with "Honoured Sir" and ended with an assurance of his continued respect and obedience; when the modern school-boy writes to his father he begins with "Dear old Bean" and ends with a request for more tin.

Mr. Frederick Locker-Lampson tells us in *My Confidences* how much he feared his father and how anxious he was to carry out his orders so as to avoid censure. "Now and then," he goes on to say, "I propose to send my children on an errand, and apologise for doing so. They accept the apology, but they do not go."

These examples indicate a profound change in the relationship between the old and the young.

It seems a simple and obvious truth that a child has a right to get as much profit and as

much joy out of life as he can, so long as he does not encroach on the liberties of others. He has, with this limitation, a right to enjoy himself in his own way, and a right to develop his own powers. But it was not till the nineteenth century that these elementary rights were conceded, even theoretically. In the classic days of Greece and Rome a child had no rights at all—not even the right to live. Being the property of his parents he was liable as a baby to be exposed on the hill-side. Infanticide was not in those days a crime, but a recognised social custom. And even till quite modern times it was tacitly assumed that the social system was run in the sole interests of adults. Children were to be seen and not heard. They should not speak till they were spoken to. It is true that children did not as a rule follow these injunctions, which were in fact flung at them in moments of adult exasperation; and it is fortunate for their sanity that they did not. The fact, however, remains that children in the past were at the mercy of their parents, teachers, or guardians, and were subjected to an unnecessary amount of tyranny.

And it is largely true of the present. Mr. Bernard Shaw bases what educational theory he may be said to possess on the fundamental fact that children are a nuisance—a nuisance, that is, to adults. Not that he champions the adults:

if anything he champions the children. At any rate he points out in his preface to *Misalliance* that there is a conflict of interests, of tastes, and of pursuits between the young and the old. And he shows with his usual acumen and wit the consequences of this conflict. Distinct from the duel of sex there is here a duel between the child and his parent in which the parent holds all the weapons, whether it be the real parent or the schoolmaster who stands in his place. And in the past he used at least one of these weapons freely. The rod was regarded as inseparable from instruction. We find abundant evidence of this all through the ages, from the "Orbilius plagosus" of Horace down to innumerable floggers in our schools to-day. Saint Augustine's first prayer was an earnest petition that he might not be whipped at school. Saint Louis of France, when he was a small boy, was daily thrashed by his tutor as a matter of discipline. If he did not deserve it at the time it was believed that he might some day, and the punishment was merely payment in advance. There is a tradition that John Milton was flogged at the University of Cambridge. Samuel Johnson said of his old schoolmaster at the Lichfield Grammar School: "He never taught a boy in his life; he whipped, and they learned." Tennyson was badly treated at school, and so was Thackeray. Thackeray

was so unhappy at Walpole House in Chiswick Mall, a place which he pilloried in *Vanity Fair* under the name of Miss Pinkerton's Academy, that he tried to run away. Nor did he fare much better at Charterhouse, for he writes: "The only prize I ever remember to have got was in a kind of lottery in which I was obliged to subscribe with seventeen other competitors, and of which the prize was a flogging. That I won."

Thackeray's account of the way in which his headmaster used to reprimand him appears under the guise of fiction in *Pendennis*. It is so typical of the heavy-handed pedagogue that I quote it here:

"Your idleness is incorrigible, and your stupidity beyond example. You are a disgrace to your school and to your family, and I have no doubt will prove so in after life to your country. A boy, sir, who does not learn his Greek play, cheats his parent who spends money for his education. A boy who cheats his parent is not very far from robbing or forging upon his neighbour. A man who forges on his neighbour pays the penalty of his crime on the gallows. And it is not such a one that I pity (for he will be deservedly cut off), but his maddened and broken-hearted parents, who are driven to a premature grave by his crimes, or if they live, drag on a wretched and dishonoured old age. Go on, sir,

and I warn you that the very next mistake you make shall subject you to the punishment of the rod."

Heine tells us in his *Reisebilder* how wretched he was at school, and how for him the irregular verbs in Latin were distinguished from the regular verbs by the fact that in learning them he got more whippings. Sir John Everett Millais, before he was admitted at the age of ten as a student of the Royal Academy, where he carried off all the prizes, had only been two days at school. He was sent home in disgrace for biting the hand of the master, who was about to thrash him. And this tale of great men who suffered in childhood from the floggings of their schoolmasters is but part of a long story.

Sir Robert Blair tells us of a Scottish schoolmaster who had a simple and effective way of dealing with a boy who asked him a question which he could not answer. He flogged the boy. A story is told of a Yorkshire schoolmaster who caned a whole class of fifty boys because they spelled "pigeon" without a "d."

England alone has produced a good crop of floggers. There was Nicholas Udall in the sixteenth century who was headmaster of Eton and then of Westminster, and who was described by a contemporary as "the best schoolmaster and the greatest beater of our time." Then there

was the renowned Busby of Westminster, who is reported to have kept his hat on in the presence of Charles the Second lest his boys should think there was a greater man in the world than he. Busby's reputation as a flogger was as great as his reputation as a schoolmaster, which is saying a great deal. It was not without a touch of pride that men of a later generation could say: "Busby, sir, was a great man; he flogged my grandfather." Harrow, Winchester, and indeed all our great Public Schools, can each produce its list of masters renowned for their liberal use of the birch. It was Eton, however, that got the larger share of opprobrium, mainly no doubt because it got the larger share of publicity. The school's tradition for frequent flogging established in the earlier days by Udall and Malim was, after a period of comparative clemency, fully revived by John Keate.

Dr. John Keate was in many ways a remarkable man. Starting in 1809, a year that marks the birth of a number of great Victorians, he ruled at Eton longer than any other headmaster before or since, and he ruled with greater austerity than ever did Nicholas Udall or Richard Busby. His voice never lost its harsh note of authority, nor his temper its even quality of ill-humour. His remedy for everything was flogging—flogging in the good old-fashioned English way. He flogged