

HISTORICAL SURVEY
OF
PRE-CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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PREFACE

THIS book is a historical survey, not a history. At the same time I believe that nothing essential to the understanding of pre-Christian education has been omitted.

In traversing so wide a field, I cannot expect to have escaped errors: I hope these are of a minor kind and that they will be pointed out. Certain opinions may be considered erroneous by some of the experts in the various departments of historical inquiry in which I have involved myself: but until experts are themselves at one, I may be allowed to form my own judgment.

The greatest difficulty that presented itself was the giving expression, within the limits of a few pages, to the religious and ethical attitude of the various nations of antiquity to life and its duties. Brief statements on so all-important a matter cannot fail to be inadequate, and this all the more because the gradual historical development of religious beliefs has, for our purposes, to be ignored.

My aim has been to seize the leading religious and social characteristics of pre-Christian societies as these were actually found *operative in the life of the people* of each nation taken as a whole. For example, the purified and abstract religious

conceptions of the Greek dramatists and philosophers are in the history of thought of surpassing value, but they had little to do with the religious and moral forces which governed the actual life of the Hellenic races. The general current of religious belief and emotion on which Greece was carried forward to the manifestation of a supreme activity in arts and arms is what chiefly concerns the educational historian. For it was on this broad current alone that the life, and consequently the education, of the people was borne along.

So with the Hindus. The doctrines of Brahmanical philosophical sects are part of the history of thought, but it is only the governing idea of Brahmanism and the moral sentiments and convictions flowing from this, that are reflected in the life, character, and education of the race. I hope that the reader will bear these things in mind and not expect from me more than I profess to give.

Further, in estimating the civilisation of a people, I have had to confine myself to that point of time at which they were approaching the highest expression of the national idea.

As regards Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria, I have formed my own judgment on the materials at present available. Every reader will understand that the history of these countries is now in the process of reconstruction. Professor Flinders Petrie's History, now being published, when followed by a history and estimate of Egyptian civilisation, will doubtless place Egyptology on a firmer basis.

S. S. LAURIE.

NOTE.

THE various chapters are based on the authorities enumerated, with references to many others not named (including Encyclopædias). In the final revision before printing, I kept before me, and took occasional assistance from, Schmidt's *Geschichte der Pädagogik*, 1870, and Schmid's *Geschichte der Erziehung*, &c., 1885, chiefly in the chapters on Greek education.

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH, April, 1895.

NOTE TO SECOND EDITION

IN this second edition I have made corrections — these, however, verbal except in the chapter on the Jews.

S. S. L.

EDINBURGH, 1900.

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HISTORICAL SURVEY OF PRE-CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

THE PLACE OF THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION IN UNIVERSAL HISTORY

THE history of education is involved in the general history of the world. No adequate survey of it is possible which does not presume a considerable acquaintance with the history of the leading races which have occupied and subdued the earth and formed themselves into civilised societies.

At what successive periods did these races enter on a progressive civilisation ; what were the leading intellectual and moral characteristics of each ; under what circumstances of climate, soil, and contention with other nascent or dying nations were these native characteristics developed and moulded ; and what was the issue of all to the wealth, the life, the thought, the art of humanity ? — these are questions which concern us intimately as students of the history of education. For the history of the education of a people is not the history of its schools, but the history of its civilisation ; and its civilisation finds its record mainly in its intellectual, moral, and æsthetic products, and only in a subordinate way in its material successes, and its achievements in war.

To treat of the education of the human race in this its broadest conception would be to attempt a philosophy of

history. We have accordingly to narrow our view, and this we can do only by first narrowing the scope of the word education. The education of the ancient Egyptians, for example, is not precisely synonymous with the history of the civilisation of that race as a factor in the universal history of man. At the same time, it certainly embraces an estimate of the civilising forces at work among that remarkable people, and involves our forming a pretty clear conception of their social organisation and of the ideal of life and character to which they unconsciously attained, or after which they consciously strove. For by education, even in the narrow sense in which the word must be employed here, I understand the means which a nation, with more or less consciousness, takes for bringing up its citizens to maintain the tradition of national character, and for promoting the welfare of the whole as an organised ethical community. It is essential, therefore, that we should understand the objects which the nation, as such, desired to secure; in brief, its own more or less conscious ideal of national and civic life, of personal character, and of ideal political justice. If we can ascertain this by the study of its highest products in men, deeds, thought and arts, we have made a great step towards interpreting the course of training to which it would naturally endeavour to subject its youth by means of its laws and institutions.

In a historical survey we can afford to ignore the vast variety of tribes which are still in a savage state, and which, either by innate incapacity for development, or by the force of irresistible external circumstances, have risen little above the beasts that perish. The human possibilities of such tribes may be, in germ, as high as those of many more favoured races; but this is doubtful. They labour to acquire skill in getting food by the exercise either of bodily vigour or successful cunning, and they cherish the virtue of bravery in warding off the attacks of others like themselves. As they have, however, no political or ethical ideal, they can

have no education in the sense in which we use the term in this book. They can teach us nothing. For, training to expertness in the use of the weapons of the chase or of war is not education, except in a narrow technical sense. It is only when the *ideas* of bodily vigour, of bravery, of strength, bodily beauty, or personal morality, become desired for themselves, or as the necessary conditions of political life and national conservation, that education begins. The training which the national idea gives has then an ideal aim more or less conscious. An education which contemplates an ideal of life for each man, as distinct from the state organism as a whole, is, necessarily, of later growth.

It is only, then, with those nations which, by virtue of their ordered civilisation, had an idea of individual or of national life, and which, by virtue of their having this idea, possessed a civilisation, that we have to do. The races which chiefly interest us are the Indo-European or Aryan, to which we ourselves belong, and it might be sufficient to trace the history of education among the peoples who bear the Aryan character as that has developed itself west of the Caucasus. But we should feel the survey of educational history to be imperfect if we did so. It is desirable, therefore, to comprehend other races, such as the Hamitic, the Semitic, and Uro-Altaic; and not wholly to omit the Aryan element south-east of the Caucasus. We are, of course, compelled to confine ourselves, in dealing with the education of almost all these races, to the highest and most generalised expression of their national life; and this, frequently, for want of materials to do anything else.

As the ideal of life grows in a nation, its idea of education grows and it begins to ask more and more in a self-conscious way, How can we attain this ideal in the persons of our children? Thus arise *systems* of education in civilised countries. Such systems or customs as may have existed prior to the asking of this question are not consciously constructed with a view to a specific result. Nations feel their way, by slow degrees, to the highest expression of

their corporate life and to the best machinery for sustaining and promoting it, taught by the results of experience and their ever-growing thought on the nature and destiny of man and the conditions of national permanence. Thus it is that the education of a nation has always been determined mainly by its moral and spiritual leaders. These, as the historians of its experience and the conservators of its thought, rightfully govern. They have in all ages, till recent times, been more or less identified with a church or priesthood in one form or other; and if there be no distinctive organised priesthood as among the Chinese, Greeks, and Romans, then by that which takes its place — a political aristocracy which always embodies in its scheme of civil life, moral and religious, if not also theological, conceptions. In such cases the State is the church.

The educational aim, we shall find, is always practical in the large sense of that word; for, even in its highest aspects, it has always to do with life in some form or other, and indeed presumes a certain philosophy of life. Even philosophy, religion and poetry have a practical aim — the nobler life of a man as an individual and as a citizen; and, when they forget this aim, they degenerate into verbal frivolities or empty forms. This higher form of the practical aim is 'liberal' education.

But not only in this larger sense is the educational aim always practical, but till the time of the Athenians it was always practical in the narrower sense of the word. Indeed, in every form of national education, the 'practical' in the restricted sense of the term, in other words, the professional and technical, always occupied (and must always occupy) the greater part of the field, thwarting or promoting the larger general aim. It is this narrower aim, which statesmen and politicians generally contemplate in their public acts; for all civilised societies demand services of a specific kind, which can fitly be discharged only by those who are trained to discharge them. The division of occupations, all of which

are in their degree serviceable to the community, makes specific training necessary, if service is to be efficiently rendered. Thus we have classes of the population trained and devoted to the various industrial arts; to the fine arts; to the service of man's body—the medical art; to the service of mutual rights—the legal art; to the service of man's spirit—the priestly art, of which last the teaching art, in the highest conception of it, is a branch; to the military art; and so forth.

The education of a man as a member of a nation and for manhood simply, is what we mean by 'liberal' education, and this, I have said, is to be identified with the 'practical' in its highest sense, which may be summed up in the word 'ethical': the training for specific services, again, is technical, whether we dignify some of these services by calling them professions or not. The stress of competition among individuals and nations compels us, unhappily, more and more to give a specific character to our training, and to ignore the larger national and human aims. It is clear, however, that in so far as we lose sight of the latter in the interest of the former we err: because it is the broad human and national element in education that gives character and power and makes itself felt in every department of work. If we fail in giving this, all specific activities of mind will be weakened by the weakening of their foundation in the man as a man. In the systematisation of education accordingly, the real problem amounts in these days to this: How shall we rear specific aptitudes on the basis of a common instruction and discipline which shall contemplate the man and the citizen, and only in the second place the worker? 'This (ideal perfection of citizenship) is,' says Plato,¹ 'the only education which in our view deserves the name; that other sort of training which aims at the acquisition of wealth or bodily strength or mere cleverness, apart from intelligence and justice, is mean and illiberal and not worthy to be called education at all.'

¹ *Laws*, i. 465, as rendered by Jowett.

The modern educational problem may, perhaps, be put thus:—How shall we conserve the national type, tradition, and ideal, and, while training for specific arts, educate all to such manhood as their racial possibilities and historical tradition admit of?

In the historical evolution of the educational idea we may note at least three stages. First of all, we have the unpremeditated education of national character and institutions, and of instinctive ideals of personal and community life in contact with definite external conditions, and moulding or being moulded by these. Secondly, we find that the education of the citizen becomes a matter of public concern, and means, often inadequate, are taken by individuals or societies within the State for handing down the national tradition by the agency of the family and the school, and by public institutions and ceremonials; but there is no systematised purpose. Thirdly: Education passes out of the hands of irregular agencies, and, from being a merely public and voluntary, becomes a political or State interest. We then have a more or less conscious ideal of national life, determining the organisation of educational agencies and reducing these to an elaborate system designed to meet the wants of the citizen at every age from infancy to manhood.

Education, in the third stage of development, is to a large extent taken out of the hands of the family. But at all stages of educational history (and notwithstanding the action of the State) the family is the chief agency in the education of the young, and as such, it ought never to be superseded. The State is made up of families rather than of individuals: the family is the true moral unit. We are what our fathers have made us, and future generations are what we are even now making our children. There is a continuity in the life of a nation, and the individual, here and now, is a mere transition point from the past to the future. It is in truth the family tradition, along with civil and religious institutions, which chiefly educates. Whatever tradition there may be of

opinion and conduct, whatever may be the laws and institutions by which the State protects itself as an organised body, it must rely on the family to hand down and perpetuate these and to give them the support of the affections and sentiments of our nature. And where, owing to the social necessities of a complex civilisation, it is found necessary to set apart a class to help in the work which it is the primary duty of parents to discharge, that class should regard itself as, in every sense, *in loco parentis*: that is to say, the aims, instruments, and methods of the school should always be those of a humane and enlightened parent. The moral and religious influence of the school ought to be, for example, as far as possible, a mere continuation and extension of the family conception of education, and not an alien substitute for it. If this be understood and accepted, the deductions from it will be found to be numerous and significant.

As we survey the annals of education we see that it is the national tradition through the family that constitutes the earliest form. The Romans had thus moulded themselves and their State and were already marked for empire, before they had any schools. So the Persians were a brilliant and imperial nation, though destitute of schools in any modern sense of the word. Hellenic education, again, for probably two centuries before Socrates, was an illustration of the second period of national education in which State tradition and institutions combined with schools (existing but as yet undeveloped) to form the Greek mind and body. In post-Socratic times the Greek became self-conscious in his educational aims — he had a type of man whom he aimed at producing. The Romans towards the end of the Republic followed, with some differences, the leading of Greece; but it cannot be said that education was ever systematised by either people.

The only nations in pre-Christian times, who had attained to the third stage of national education before the Christian era, were the Chinese and the Doric Greeks as represented by the Spartans. The former had, and have, a definite ideal

of human excellence, such as it is; but always with a view to the service of a bureaucratic State. So with the Spartans, where the whole organisation (but the Spartans were, after all, a mere tribe) was educational, and where every freeborn citizen was deliberately formed to a certain ideal — also (as in China) in the interests of civic continuity.

The Hellenic races, however, much as we owe them, had no conception of education as a *human* need and a *human* right; they thought only of the free, pure Greeks who formed an aristocracy among a body of servile inferiors. This characteristic of the Greeks was specially emphasised in Sparta. The Romans, also, thought chiefly of the upper half of society. In Egypt, Judæa, Persia, and China, on the other hand, nothing stood, *theoretically at least*, between the lowest member of the community and the best the State could offer in the way of education, except poverty. It was the Stoics in the earlier imperial times who first rose to the conception of humanity and of human, as distinct from local and national rights; and Christianity about the same time proclaimed these. The Stoic and Christian were the first humanitarians, and consequently the first to believe in the inherent right of each citizen to claim education for himself.

In taking a survey of educational history we have to bear in mind the distinctions I have made in these introductory remarks (and which might with advantage be even further elaborated) and carry them always with us. If we do not, we shall certainly fail to interpret facts aright and to learn the lessons which the past has to teach.

THE HAMITIC RACES