EDUCATION
AND THE
GOOD LIFE

BERTRAND RUSSELL

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INTRODUCTION

THERE must be in the world many parents who, like the present author, have young children whom they are anxious to educate as well as possible, but reluctant to expose to the evils of most existing educational institutions. The difficulties of such parents are not soluble by any effort on the part of isolated individuals. It is of course possible to bring up children at home by means of governesses and tutors, but this plan deprives them of the companionship which their nature craves, and without which some essential elements of education must be lacking. Moreover it is extremely bad for a boy or girl to be made to feel "odd" and different from other boys and girls: this feeling, when traced to parents as its cause, is almost certain to rouse resentment against them, leading to a love of all that they most dislike. The conscientious parent may be driven by these considerations to send his boys and girls to schools in which he sees grave defects, merely because no existing schools seem to him satisfactory—or, if any are satisfactory, they are not in his neighbourhood. Thus the cause of

educational reform is forced upon conscientious parents, not only for the good of the community, but also for the good of their own children. If the parents are well-to-do, it is not necessary to the solution of their private problem that *all* schools should be good, but only that there should be some good school geographically available. But for wage-earning parents nothing suffices except reform in the elementary schools. As one parent will object to the reforms which another parent desires, nothing will serve except an energetic educational propaganda, which is not likely to prove effective until long after the reformer's children are grown up. Thus from love for our own children we are driven, step by step, into the wider sphere of politics and philosophy.

From this wider sphere I desire, in the following pages, to remain aloof as far as possible. The greater part of what I have to say will not be dependent upon the views that I may happen to hold as regards the major controversies of our age. But *complete* independence in this regard is impossible. The education we desire for our children must depend upon our ideals of human character, and our hopes as to the part they are to play in the community. A pacifist will not desire for his children the education which seems good to a militarist; the educational outlook of a communist will not be

the same as that of an individualist. To come to a more fundamental cleavage: there can be no agreement between those who regard education as a means of instilling certain definite beliefs and those who think that it should produce the power of independent judgment. Where such issues are relevant, it would be idle to shirk them. At the same time, there is a considerable body of new knowledge in psychology and pedagogy which is independent of these ultimate questions, and has an intimate bearing on education. Already it has produced very important results, but a great deal remains to be done before its teachings have been fully assimilated. This is especially true of the first five years of life; these have been found to have an importance far greater than that formerly attributed to them, which involves a corresponding increase in the educational importance of parents. My aim and purpose, wherever possible, will be to avoid controversial issues. Polemical writing is necessary in some spheres; but in addressing parents one may assume a sincere desire for the welfare of their offspring, and this alone, in conjunction with modern knowledge, suffices to decide a very large number of educational problems. What I have to say is the outcome of perplexities in regard to my own children; it is therefore not remote or theoretical, and may, I hope, help to

clarify the thoughts of other parents faced with a like perplexity, whether in the way of agreement with my conclusions or the opposite. The opinions of parents are immensely important, because, for lack of expert knowledge, parents are too often a drag upon the best educationists. If parents desire a good education for their children, there will, I am convinced, be no lack of teachers willing and able to give it.

I propose, in what follows, to consider first the aims of education: the kind of individuals, and the kind of community, that we may reasonably hope to see produced by education applied to raw material of the present quality. I ignore the question of the improvement of the breed, whether by eugenics or by any other process, natural or artificial, since this is essentially outside the problems of education. But I attach great weight to modern psychological discoveries which tend to show that character is determined by early education to a much greater extent than was thought by the most enthusiastic educationists of former generations. I distinguish between education of character and education in knowledge, which may be called instruction in the strict sense. The distinction is useful, though not ultimate: some virtues are required in a pupil who is to become instructed, and much knowledge is required for

the successful practice of many important virtues. For purposes of discussion, however, instruction can be kept apart from education of character. I shall deal first with education of character, because it is especially important in early years; but I shall carry it through to adolescence, and deal, under this head, with the important question of sex education. Finally, I shall discuss intellectual education, its aims, its curriculum, and its possibilities, from the first lessons in reading and writing to the end of the university years. The further education which men and women derive from life and the world I shall regard as lying outside my scope; but to make men and women capable of learning from experience should be one of the aims which early education should keep most prominently in view.

PART I
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CHAPTER I

POSTULATES OF MODERN EDUCATIONAL THEORY

In reading even the best treatises on education written in former times, one becomes aware of certain changes that have come over educational theory. The two great reformers of educational theory before the nineteenth century were Locke and Rousseau. Both deserved their reputation, for both repudiated many errors which were widespread when they wrote. But neither went as far in his own direction as almost all modern educationists go. Both, for example, belong to the tendency which led to liberalism and democracy; yet both consider only the education of an aristocratic boy, to which one man's whole time is devoted. However excellent might be the results of such a system, no man with a modern outlook would give it serious consideration,

because it is arithmetically impossible for every child to absorb the whole time of an adult tutor. The system is therefore one which can only be employed by a privileged caste; in a just world, its existence would be impossible. The modern man, though he may seek special advantages for his own children in practice, does not consider the theoretical problem solved except by some method of education which could be open to all, or at least to all whose capacities render them capable of profiting by it. I do not mean that the well-to-do should, here and now, forego educational opportunities which, in the existing world, are not open to all. To do that would be to sacrifice civilization to justice. What I do mean is that the educational system we must aim at producing in the future is one which gives to every boy and girl an opportunity for the best that exists. The ideal system of education must be democratic, although that ideal is not immediately attainable. This, I think, would, nowadays, be pretty generally conceded. In this sense, I shall keep democracy in view. Whatever I shall advocate will be capable of being universal, though the individual should not meantime sacrifice his children to the badness of what is common, if he has the intelligence and the opportunity to secure something better. Even this very attentuated form of democratic principle is ab-