

CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER BOOKS

EDUCATION
AND
SOCIAL CHANGE

AN ENGLISH INTERPRETATION

F. CLARKE

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BY

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PREFACE

THIS little book has been prepared and published at the request of a number of friends who felt strongly, even before the outbreak of war, that England, no more than any other country, could withdraw from the impact of the great forces which, long gathering head, have now deployed in strength upon mankind. They realized that if a much changed order of life had to come, it would be necessary both to think out the criteria by which the elements and phases of change should be tested, and to form some picture of the concrete results of applying these criteria in the various departments of the common life.

We do not need to be told to-day that not all of our destiny is under our control. But in so far as we may be able to direct the course of events we can do so only on condition that we submit ourselves and the working presuppositions of our English society to a rigorous and radical process of self-examination. Then the negative task of clearing away irrelevancies, obsolete survivals, and pseudo-principles that are no more than the disguise of material interest, will make all the easier the positive task of formulating more relevant and defensible standards of action.

Such an effort may well run against the grain of much that is deeply ingrown in English life and habit. But there is no justification (and much risk) in any mode of thought that makes the tension between old and new

more severe than it need be. The English tradition is far from being exhausted and is of such a nature as to be indefinitely adaptable without ceasing to be itself. The form of the task is to re-think and re-interpret what we have, rather than to think out something entirely new. For the course taken by English development over long centuries makes the paradox profoundly true that if we are conservative enough we can afford to be thoroughly radical, not only without loss, but with much gain.

Honest and sustained intellectual effort along these lines is a vital part of Home Defence, unless, indeed, we are prepared to see much that we claim to be fighting for dissipated before our eyes.

This little book, in draft before the outbreak of war, has been revised in the light of this necessity. It makes no claim to originality, being rather the outcome of much discussion and criticism among friends, some of whom have had long and responsible experience in the working of education in England. If it should prove to have any relevancy or value in the present situation that merit is due, very largely, to them. But they are in no sense responsible for the book as it stands. With all its errors and indiscretions the author alone must assume personal responsibility for it, and must in particular not be taken as speaking for any institution or organization with which he may be associated.

F. CLARKE.

London,

January 1, 1940.

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INTRODUCTION

ONE of the profoundest and most acute of contemporary students of modern society has given expression to the view that "no educational activity or research is adequate in the present stage of consciousness unless it is conceived in terms of a sociology of education".

Such a mode of approach to the study of education and the formulation of educational policy is, in England, much more consistently adopted in practice than it is explicitly avowed in theory. In actual fact, both thought and practice are much more closely conditioned by social realities which are themselves the result of historical and economic forces, than by the highly generalized principles which figure so prominently in the text-books. Such conditioning factors are none the less potent in not being explicitly recognized.

It is the purpose of this book to suggest that the time has come when they should be brought into full consciousness and be looked at squarely for what they are. In other words, we propose to accept unreservedly what may be called the sociological standpoint and to exhibit as well as we can its concrete application to the field of English education. That is, we are to attempt an interpretation, conscious and deliberate, in terms of a social economic history, and then, in the light of that interpretation, to estimate the capacity of the English educational tradition to adapt itself without undue friction or shattering to the demands of a changed order.

The argument of the book is generated in a profound belief:—

(1) That the demand will come: that it is even now upon us.

(2) That the English tradition is still capable of indefinite adaptation sufficient to meet it; that, like the wise householder in the Gospel, it can yet bring out of its treasure things new and old, and remain itself while putting forth new powers and transforming old organs to meet new situations.

The second, at least, of these two articles of belief is by no means self-evident, and may well be challenged by apostles of one or other of the New Dispensations that now compete for acceptance. It may be argued that we too shall be met in our turn by catastrophe so sweeping, or by pressure so intolerable, that the comforting self-assurance of "It Never Can Happen Here" will no longer hold, and that after the inevitable spell of destructive action we shall settle down on totalitarian lines to translate some unitary social *credo* into thorough-going practice. Even so, would the tradition cease to be operative? And would it not return with renewed vigour as it did in 1660 and absorb Reform as it did after 1832? Communism itself might come to wear a strangely familiar dress. However that may be, the present argument assumes that the tradition is capable of the necessary degree of adaptation, granted a sufficient occasion, and an adequate measure both of intelligence to recognize and of will to execute the new applications of ancient principles that will be called for.

As for the demand itself, it comes upon us now from two main directions: from home and from abroad.

The demand from within has indeed its strongly marked English character, but is itself akin to those more imperious necessities which have brought about such vast revolutionary movements in European countries. The forces to which these countries have been driven to respond with such violence and swiftness of transition are at work here too. We may make the wrong response and bring disaster, but to make no response is not possible. To make it with less awareness than we might achieve by taking timely thought is to invite confusion and accentuated conflict. For the problems that loom before us and the forces that work among us are not just Russian or German, Communist or Fascist; they are, in the ultimate resort, *historical*, the impact of history itself upon our generation, and therefore inescapable.

Even the dullest of us realizes now that this particular war is something more than a conflict of vast military forces across embattled frontiers. It is a conflict, if you like a confusion, of motives and ideas appearing in many forms within the social structure of every civilized people, and reproduced in its measure in the personal life of all except the most insensitive clods among us. The problems are the problems of Everyman.

Within the educational field, then, we have, for two main reasons, to face the task of thinking out new possibilities of a long-growing tradition. On the one side we have to work out our own response for our own people to the necessities which the movement of history has brought upon us as upon others. On the other side, we have to recognize an increasing disposition in many lands to look to England for some understanding of the rôle of education in times of sweeping intellectual and social transition, a disposition likely to be much intensified if some existing totalitarian régimes break down

and the supremely difficult effort has to be made of restoring the life of their peoples to the main currents of Western liberal tradition. In such an undertaking we could not, if we would, repudiate our share of responsibility, little as we might feel disposed to pursue it in any pedagoguish spirit. But we should need to have clear consciences about the state of our own educational pastures, and from this point of view the two sides of the demand appear as one.

The estimate we have now to attempt appears to fall into three divisions: historical determinants, the present situation, and possibilities of adaptation. Or, more fully stated, the book is governed by three main objectives:—

(1) To provide some insight into the nature of the social influences by which the forms of English educational institutions have been determined and their practical objectives defined.

(2) To formulate some analysis of the present situation in England, including: the different types of institution, the social forces they express and the kind of social aim they are designed to serve, their relationship both to one another and to “non-school” forms of educating institutions, and generally the extent to which they may be regarded at the moment as expressing certain common characteristics of the English mind now face to face with the demand for change.

(3) To estimate the degree to which the existing order is capable of adaptation to the demands that have to be faced, the demands of a régime consciously planned and directed towards the guaranteeing of freedom for diversity of personality in a social order much more thoroughly collectivist in its working than any of which we have yet had experience.

It will be clear from the above that the main concern of the book is the adaptation of institutions. Questions of teaching method will arise, therefore, only incidentally, questions of curriculum rather more directly, and questions of educational philosophy still more so. There is no reason to think, at any rate not yet, that the English habit of leaving details of method, and very largely the determination of curriculum, in the hands of the teachers themselves, will seriously weaken. There is no real indication yet of any move towards bureaucratic dictation in these matters, and the public mind is not seriously concerned about them. What it is increasingly concerned about is the distribution of education, the maladjustment of the various elements of the system both among themselves and towards the needs and possibilities of the common life, the undeveloped capacities of this element, the exclusiveness of that, and the introverted formalism of this other. The problems now under debate thus raise issues of institutional form and function. They are sociological rather than pedagogic, and therefore fall properly within the field of public discussion and action.

This book, attempting as it does some very general survey of such problems, may therefore properly be addressed to the ordinary citizen rather than more exclusively to professionals. Its interest is centred in national policy rather than in classroom technique.

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORICAL DETERMINANTS OF ENGLISH EDUCATION

BOTH in form and spirit English educational institutions offer a striking vindication of the principle from which we set out. They reveal sociological determination which is all the more convincing and real by reason of its being taken so completely for granted. No writer on education, however much he may strive after universality of thought, can wholly shake himself free from the influences of time and place. It is characteristic of most English writers that they do not even make the conscious effort. Often in the most ingenuous way they give vigorous expression to quite English politico-social ideals while believing themselves to be discussing pure educational theory.

If the word "ideology" had not already been ruined for any precise use (having been employed so much recently as equivalent to "creed" or "doctrine"), we might cite English writers upon education as illuminating examples of it. For strictly, it would seem, the word applies to exactly this phenomenon—the undetected influence upon what is supposed to be generalized thought of the interests and attitudes of national, class and other groups by which the writer or thinker has been formed.

Sometimes, of course, in English writers, especially in revolutionary times, the political intent is conscious and avowed, as it was with Milton in the 17th and Tom

Paine in the 18th century. And the Arnolds, father and son, with prescient eye for things to come, thought and wrote in the 19th century in the light of an explicitly held social philosophy. But usually, unless they are consciously writing as political pamphleteers, our English authors show little explicit awareness of the social pre-suppositions of their thought.

Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* nowhere indicates that what he is here concerned with is the making of a Whig gentleman, and Herbert Spencer does not tell us that in his *Education* he is sketching for us his idea of a cultivated, somewhat radical, and perhaps lopsided member of the industrial middle class of Victorian England.

Even more striking examples might be given of the same trait in books—some of them systematic and scholarly studies of education—that have been written and published in England during the last thirty years or so.

It cannot be denied that there is strength in such a disposition as is here illustrated—strength issuing from the sublime confidence that is induced by an unconscious universalizing of the distinctively English. Yet to-day we cannot help feeling that that kind of strength is real and to be trusted only in the days of an unchallenged British Navy, a world-wide stable economic system, an Empire whose destinies are more or less directed from London, pre-aviation insularity for Great Britain, and no wireless anywhere. When these conditions no longer hold, as is the case now, the weakness of the disposition becomes only too apparent. It is the weakness of a lack of critical self-awareness, opposing as it does a formidable obstacle both to intelligent readjustment at home and to sympathetic understanding abroad. Continuance of

such a weakness in the conditions amid which we now have to maintain ourselves might well prove fatal. For enemies may come to a clear awareness of the "ideological" background of our thought and policy earlier than we do, and that would place in their hands a most effective weapon for the sap and mine of our position. Is it enough merely to shrink with amazed horror from the crude vigour with which the National Socialist renders his own "ideology" explicit and imposes it forcibly upon all forms of thought among his own people? We have done something like it ourselves for centuries in our educational thinking, though until now we have been under no pressure to tell ourselves so. Now we have to be quite clear about it, and make ourselves fully aware of social and historical "ideology" at every point of our thinking. Otherwise we shall have to say that it is propaganda when you are thus explicitly aware and education when you are not; propaganda when you know what you are about, education when you don't.¹

As Dr. Löwe² has conclusively shown, the cult of "Freedom" which has been so fashionable in self-consciously "advanced" circles in English education shows the same unlimited capacity for swallowing whole the great mass of the facts of social determination. Seen

¹ The plea that we must make ourselves aware of the conditioning of our thoughts by historical and sociological factors—by our "interests", in short—must not be taken as involving acceptance of any thorough-going doctrine of relativism, such as is now becoming fashionable. Pressed to the limit, such doctrines make science an illusion, and the idea of a common humanity a disastrous absurdity. But it does mean that in any theory of knowledge sociological factors have to be taken into account; that there is, in fact, a "sociology of knowledge". Those interested in pursuing the subject further are referred to Karl Mannheim's *Ideology and Utopia* (Routledge, 1936).

² In his valuable and penetrating little essay *The Price of Liberty* (Hogarth Press, 1937).

in the light of Löwe's perfectly just insistence upon the all-importance of social discipline and a large measure of social conformity in the English order of things, the prophets of "Freedom" appear like so many stage Ariels, conveying to the spectator the illusion of freely moving spirits only because the wires of social determination by which they are manipulated are undetected. Only here and there does an advocate of such freedom really challenge the accepted social discipline in his actual practice. In such cases he is either dismissed as a "freak"—fair game for satirists even less Philistine than those of *Punch*—or he is forgiven and tolerated on the ground that he is a person whose social position justifies the belief that he cannot really be serious and must be permitted scope for a little of that freakish eccentricity which so endears the English ruling class to the populace.

Signs of an awakening self-awareness are now manifesting themselves, and self-criticism takes on a much more serious and even alarmed air than that which has hitherto characterized the polite self-depreciation whereby the Englishman has been wont to give expression to his sense of "good form". The new note is neither markedly polite nor comfortably equable.

But it is still true that the really important facts of English education remain for the mass in the region of the "taken for granted". As a particularly striking example of this the Spens Report may be quoted. There is all too much truth in the Irishism that the most significant things in the Report are the things it does not say. Yet so deep-rooted is social habit, so completely lacking is any popular philosophy of education, that the profound issues of social destiny which are implied by the Report, though never explicitly raised in it, seem to have escaped general notice. Discussion is concerned

rather with the internals of school-organization, with relatively minor steps of liberalization, and with details of adjustment of school-types. Though the Report is directly concerned with secondary education throughout its whole range, the leading secondary schools of the country—those which claim to be in a special and peculiar sense representatively *national*—are nowhere discussed within its pages and no attempt is made to relate them organically to the system of schools, largely State-provided, but somehow less “national”, in which the mass of the population is educated.

So little attention has been given to this omission, startling enough in any other country, so generally has it been accepted as natural and proper, that one may doubt whether it was even intentional. How vain it is to look for the explanation of such phenomena in some formal and abstract statement of educational principle! The explanation is, of course, not educational at all in that sense, but sociological. The sources of such an attitude are to be found in the social history of England since the Reformation.

It is the purpose of this chapter to point out some of these historical determinants. But here, at the risk of labouring the obvious, it may be said in general terms that if there *is* a master-key for the interpretation of English educational phenomena, it is given in the word *Security*.¹ The habit of thinking in terms of concrete precedent rather than in terms of abstract principle (with

¹ “Security” here may be taken in a twofold sense. There is the physical security, only recently impaired, of the island position. (How different are the social effects of national defence by a distant and rarely visible navy from those of defence by a near and often only too visible standing army!) There is also the economic security guaranteed by a world-wide Empire, world-wide capital investment and the other familiar features of 19th-century economy.

all that this means for the preservation of continuity); the cohesion of the social class-order, with its divisions clearly marked yet connected by flexible ties, and with the steps of the social scale well fenced and guarded; the intensity and variety of group-life sustaining and bracing rather than disintegrating the national unity of the whole; the strong preference for a concrete though limited liberty over an abstract but chilly equality—all such characteristics owe their origin and persistence—in part at least—to long centuries of internal peace and external security. It is, indeed, precisely the threatened change in these historic conditions which gives point to all our re-thinking so far as England is concerned.¹

It will be easier to disentangle the threads of the educational tradition which has grown up in England under these conditions if we follow some broad classification of types of educational objective. Any classification is arbitrary and imposed on the facts: none is wholly satisfactory so as exactly to fit the facts. If we have to choose one and adapt it as best we can, we may take

¹ Some of the studies that will have to be undertaken can be deduced from the discussion as it has proceeded so far. For example:

(1) "The Abstract in English Thought" (or "The Ideology of English Abstraction"). Its purpose would be to enquire into the experiential bases upon which thought proceeded in formulating general principles of politics, economics, education, etc. Thus a colleague at Cape Town once suggested that had the "classical" economics been worked out in South Africa instead of in England, the three agents of production would have been given as *water* (not land), labour and capital.

(2) "The Politics of Education." A study going back as far as the Reformation and interpreting English educational thought and practice in the light of social and economic forces. The 17th century would prove particularly interesting.

(3) A whole series of monographs exhibiting the educational "ideologies" of different groups: e.g., Methodists, Chartists, Country Gentry, etc. The absence of a clearly defined, distinctive and generally accepted *working-class* ideology would probably be conspicuous.

that of Max Weber as quoted by Mannheim. This distinguishes:—

- (1) Charismatic education.¹
- (2) Education for culture.
- (3) Specialized education.

This is not unilluminating in its application to English conditions. The charismatic, though never wholly absent, is never dominant. But there is a side of the English character, mystic and poetical, which is open to the charismatic appeal. Adapting a Mendelian term, we may say that the charismatic is *recessive* in English education. One would not expect to find it, at any rate not officially, in an institution so alive to actuality and so ready to preserve a common-sense balance by judicious compromise as is the Anglican Church. Nor would one look for it in the ruling class, except in an occasional “sport” like Shelley. It belongs most essentially to Dissent. The Methodists, especially in their early stages, expressed it strongly, but lost it with the access of respectability and worldly success, and an interest in practical politics. The Non-Jurors were strongly touched by it, and in modern times the Salvation Army gave it new and characteristic expression in terms of the psychology of the depressed classes. Its golden age was undoubtedly the 17th century, when spiritual perception and the intensity of spiritual experience reached unwonted heights in England. Great Anglican divines and Cambridge Platonists, as well as Quakers, Independents and the

¹ We must keep the unfamiliar term, as no other word quite so clearly conveys the idea. “Conversional” is too clumsy, and “inspirational” has been spoilt for any precise use. “Education by infusion of grace” perhaps best conveys the idea to those reared in a Christian tradition.