

A HISTORY OF WESTERN EDUCATION

James Bowen

VOLUME II

Civilization of Europe:
Sixth to Sixteenth Century

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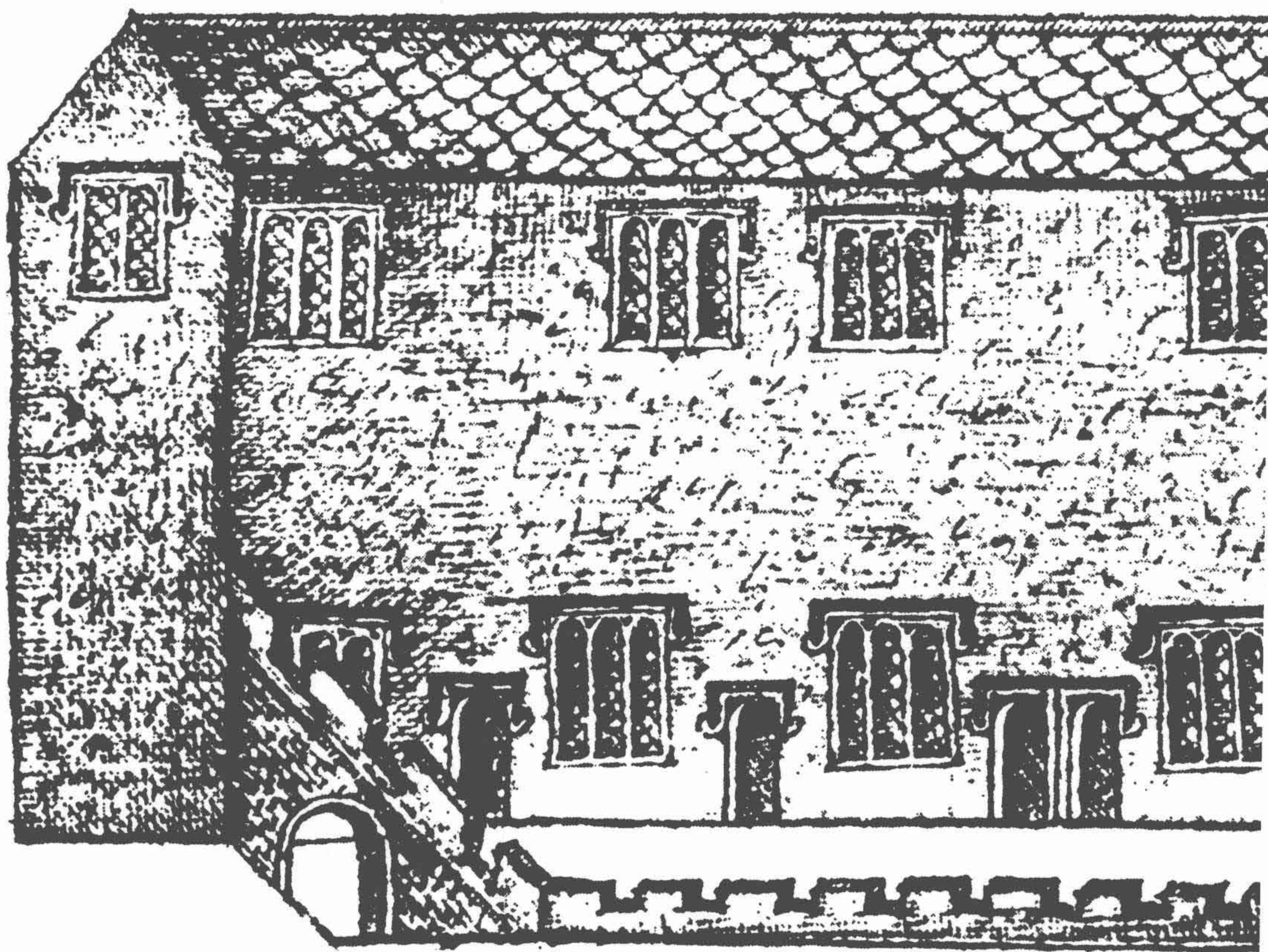
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James Bowen

A History of

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Western Education

Volume Two

CIVILIZATION OF EUROPE
SIXTH TO SIXTEENTH CENTURY



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Preface

The study of education has always been important in Western thought, attracting the interest of the greatest intellects in every age. Yet after several thousand years of close attention a precise definition, particularly of the more normative and ideational aspects of education, still eludes us. We do have the very strong implicit feeling that education is concerned with the maintenance of a social and cultural consciousness, with the transmission of an informed tradition that sustains civilization. Today, however, more than ever before, the study of education is of crucial significance since we expect not only the sustaining of our cultural traditions but also their critical revision and development. We demand of education that it provide a means to ever greater cultural vitality. And this, moreover, is often made without any clear realization that the demand itself is the result of historical processes.

One characteristic of education is outstanding: perhaps more than any other cultural process it carries almost all of its past with it into the present, even if this past rests in rather covert assumptions, practices, attitudes and beliefs. If we are to understand education in the fullest sense, as distinct from the more behaviouristic and prescriptive demands of particular learning and teaching situations, then we must study its history for the clarification and explanation which can be so secured. Not, of course,

that this is the relatively passive reading of a chronologically organized, already existent narrative of past educational thought and practice. On the contrary, genuine history, in the tradition derived from its Greek beginnings as *ἱστορία*, is properly an activity of inquiry, investigation and scientific scrutiny. The historian is involved in making decisions on just what needs clarification and explanation, and in doing this his task, in part, is one of making the present intelligible. There are, of course, other tasks which historians perform; their inquiries and resulting narratives themselves help to build the collective social mind and so sustain the very traditions on which civilization rests and by which such studies are made possible.

At the present time there are many issues in education which confuse our thought and hinder our action and of these the most prominent remains the conflict between the two conceptions of education as a conservative and as a creative activity. There is no real theoretical conflict here at all since both aspects are part of the same process of the transmission and critical reconstruction of culture, yet in practice this conflict has engendered the fiercest debates and led to some of the most fundamental breaches within societies. For instance there is the rivalry between liberal and technical education with their respective antagonists considering the former a meaningless and decadent social ideal, the latter an illiberal and mindless kind of vocational training. The interesting fact remains, however, that the former conception, the *studia humanitatis*, for more than two millennia was dominant in the West and it was within such a conceptual framework that all educational issues arose and solutions or compromises were reached. In the course of that time the Christian church came to claim title over education and attempted to maintain this for more than a thousand years. In the process it had to come to terms with pagan education which already was possessed of a millennium of tradition. Paradoxically, the church not only came to terms with this tradition, it assimilated it even to the point in the thirteenth century of making the materialistic and non-theistic philosophy of Aristotle the basis of its own philosophy and educational thought and practice. This accommodation was forced upon the church by circumstances which also stimulated the growth of new forms of political and social theory, and the development of the modern political state. In recent times, particularly in the past two hundred years, the state has become increasingly concerned with the provision of education to the stage where it has not only surpassed the church – or churches as these have been considered since the Reformation

– but has made church influence subordinate or, in cases, even legislated it completely out of any educational role. The two influences of church and state remain as subjects for continued examination.

It is of the highest significance that since the entry of the state into education the controversies and conflicts on the nature, purpose and practices of education have become much greater. This is not to be taken to imply causation; rather the conditions which allowed the emergence of the organized political state have also promoted those changes which make it very difficult to make both theoretical and practical decisions in respect to education. The only really acceptable generalization we can make about the modern period is that there is a widely held implicit and nowadays explicit belief that education can and must be extended as widely as possible, even though there is no great clarity in the public mind as to why and how this extension should and can be made. There has been, however, a substantial effort on the part of numerous individuals and organizations to work at solutions to this general problem and we are now able to discern the main characteristics of educational thought in the modern period. Of these there are three which are pre-eminent: the search for an adequate rationale – or what is loosely termed a philosophy; the search for an adequate support system of institutions and processes; and the search for an adequate pedagogy, that is, for a workable method of teaching and learning.

These, then, have been the issues which have guided the selection of problems and their treatment in these volumes. In the presentation of the historical narrative it is not imagined in any way that our educational problems will be solved. On the contrary, the recognition of difficulties, their study and analysis, exhaust the historian's tasks and competencies. It remains true, however, that the identification and explication of problems – the process, that is, whereby they are raised from a position of tacit awareness to explicit formulation – is the first, necessary step towards any kind of intelligent action. History provides us with a context within which decisions can be made and further activities pursued.

In making this present investigation, certain practical considerations had to be taken into account, one of the most important being the scale within which the narrative should be constructed. Individual authorship has both its advantages and its limitations; the former include the development of a single synoptic viewpoint and the greater consistency with which problems can be investigated. Yet it is important for this to remain within the competency of a single mind. Accordingly the narrative must

reflect this unity and the multitude of data and variety of interpretations must be kept subordinate. After a great deal of deliberation the present three-volume format has emerged as the most practicable, particularly since it is possible to conceive of the history of Western education occupying three phases: the ancient period of Greco-Roman civilization, the medieval millennium from the fall of Rome to the Enlightenment, and the ensuing modern period which includes not only the West in Europe but its extension to most of the world outside. Periodization, of course, is a notoriously difficult activity for any historian and it is not claimed that the present ones have any completeness. They do, however, have the advantage of allowing a reasonable space for the development of the narrative and each of the three periods has certain internal organizing concepts. Throughout the task has been conceived to be one of critical revision of standard opinion in the history of education and to do this effectively I have been guided by the one cardinal ideal of working wherever possible from the sources. In general it has been necessary to use translations although these have been checked against the original texts in what have seemed crucial instances. Modifications of translations, and those by myself, have been recorded, usually in the footnotes. This movement *ad fontes*, which if it has a Renaissance flavour is still relevant and even more pressing today, has been supported by extensive field work. I have made it a particular feature of this writing to visit as many of the original locations as possible during several years spent in the Mediterranean, northern Europe, England and America. Field investigations have been supported by the study of remains and archives in many museums and libraries and in this way I have attempted to exercise some control on the printed sources which otherwise inevitably have a sense of remoteness. Most of the locations, remains and documents mentioned in the text have been verified in the original.

Here I would like to make a few observations on the scope of the present volume and the considerations underlying its organization. Volume I deals with education in the ancient world of the Orient and Mediterranean, the essential character of which came from the dominance of Greek thought and practice. I have taken that narrative, with respect to the Greek East, up to the mutual excommunication of patriarch and pope in A.D. 1054, when Byzantine education reached a stage of exhaustion and decline. With regard to the Latin West, however, the narrative concludes earlier, with the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, for by then Greek influence had become minimal, the Roman education based

upon it was moribund, and the congruence of a number of political, economic and social factors brought that period to an end. The present volume considers the emergence of the civilization of Europe with its own distinctive process of education, which gained impetus during the Carolingian revival of the eighth century and continued to develop through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Reformation. While it has been a relatively simple task to begin with Charlemagne's great *renovatio*, it has been much more difficult to determine the point at which to end this volume, for, indeed, the civilization of Europe is a continuing process. For a number of cogent reasons, the sixteenth century has been chosen as the most appropriate, although there has not been a sharp break. Europe from the sixth to the sixteenth century had a large number of unifying features: it was a self-consciously Christian civilization, dominated by a strong church and with still undeveloped national states. Education, moreover, was a single process: it had an unquestioned Christian ideology; an agreed curriculum in Latin based upon the study of classical literature, both pagan and Christian; a single pedagogy, that of the master instructing *ex cathedra*; and one pervasive support system, involving progression from elementary through grammar school, to university, all under the aegis of Holy Church. This present volume is concerned with the development of that civilization and the way in which education, always considered to be the handmaiden of the church, came to assume a measure of independence and autonomy of its own. Until the late sixteenth century all of accepted educational practice, and much of Western thought, was related to advancing the cause of a Christian civilization, and for this reason the ideas of Erasmus and Luther, along with various minor figures, since they were all devoted to promoting education as *pietas litterata*, belong to the present narrative. So too does the account of the early Jesuit schools, and the work of textbook writers and educational grammarians. At the same time, however, ideas were being circulated in the sixteenth century that make distinct breaks with traditional thought and in effect mark the beginning of the modern period. Examples of this more radical literature appear in the writings in Italy of Ortensio Lando and Giambattista Gelli, and in France of François Rabelais, Michel de Montaigne and Pierre de la Ramée. Their arguments for the acceptance of the vernacular as the medium of instruction, the deposing of classical literary studies in favour of a curriculum drawn from a wider range of everyday activities and vocational needs, and their demands for the reform of the school generally, became widely discussed and in the seventeenth century were made the basis of a

number of efforts at serious educational reform. Late in the sixteenth century the modern period, then, has its beginning. These writers, the voices of dissent, and the more general historical circumstances prompting their criticisms, are thus considered as the starting-point for the third and final volume on education in the modern West, both Europe and the new world.

In the preparation of this present volume I have continued to be in debt to many colleagues and institutions, and the acknowledgements given in the Preface to Volume I are equally relevant here. I would like, however, to express particular gratitude to my own University of New England for its continued support of my research activities; to my publishers for providing invaluable assistance from their scholarly readers, for the high level of editorial guidance and for the meticulous care with which the volumes have been produced. As always, I have relied very heavily upon the assistance and guidance of my wife and have increasingly made use of her own scholarly researches in the history and philosophy of science, much of which has been influential in the development of the narrative that follows. To her this work remains dedicated.

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May 1974

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