

POLITICS AND EDUCATION IN ENGLAND*

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I ONCE asked an old Oxford friend, many years ago, for advice on the choice of a lecture subject. "Choose one," he said, "in which you can get lost. It will be more amusing for them, and safer for you." My subject tonight is certainly vast enough for me to be safe, and vast enough, I hope, for you to be amused.

Mais par ou commencer?

With the past, perhaps, the two old Universities, the Public Schools, the Classical tradition? It would be a tempting field, roomy enough in itself to get lost in. The bearing of these influences on the leadership of the nation is a matter of history, and noteworthy above most. And let no one ignore the cumulative effect of this leadership in schooling the political instinct of the masses in a nation that responds well to leadership.

Or shall I begin with the multifarious elements of the present system, which is no system at all? English civilization grows not by replacements but by agglomeration. England is a land of antinomies: thesis calls forth antithesis. That is often the method of English reform. The new good thing takes its stand alongside the old bad thing,—if it was bad—not as executioner, but as younger brother. Thus in the capacious English basket all is gathered up, and nothing is lost. And this is very philosophical: for the English doubt whether the new good thing can be quite so good as to blot out wholly the goodness in the old. To the English, who dislike logic, opposites are acceptable.

Yet a system there is, in formidable and expanding proportions—the national scheme organized or rather served by the Board of Education. That too is a tempting field. I am happy in this opportunity of vindicating system, or the rudiments at least of system, in English education, and I shall try to do so before I sit down.

Or shall I begin as it were psychologically, by distinguishing the factors at work? Some stand out in the foreground, *au premier plan*, obvious means to obvious ends. Others, less demonstrable, vivify the background by the instinctive sum-

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mations of diverse energies. It is astonishing how much of the strength and wisdom of the English is stored away in instinct, to emerge at need with curious freshness and force. The more instinct, the more soul: and the more soul, the more culture. It is certain that the more a people has stored away in instinct, the stronger and clearer is the continuity of its action.

Or shall I, an Englishman in France, try for once to be logical by defining the terms?

Try, I said. The English describe better than they define: and their definitions often throw more light on themselves than on the matter. Politics for the English means democracy. What is democracy? *Question brutale!* A democracy, they will say, is what they trust theirs is, or is becoming—a nation of friends. This friendship is both an emotion and an art: it is in part a sentiment, but also no less a method. It is something to be felt, and something to be worked out in detail. The English lay hold by intuition of the character of the Great Fellowship, the life of the nation: and in the groping creativeness of the nation's soul conscience works, and sheer resourcefulness, and Nature's gift of kindness.

Democracy, of course, is a sort of government and a sort of citizenship: and of the two, it is citizenship first and foremost. To make too much of government is easy. But how could one make too much of citizenship free and friendly? If, in our theorising, government is made the *point de depart*, then government becomes, almost inevitably, an end in itself, and from an end an idol, and the inevitable result is that the quality of citizenship and the well-being of citizens must suffer heavily. Apart from the sophistications and the exaggerations of theory, the very practice of government endangers these things. They are more and more endangered in this era that has seen the work of government so much extended and so much intensified.

What, then, is the idiosyncrasy of English citizenship? For all peoples have such: it is enough to cross a frontier to realize it: enough, perhaps, but necessary. Thus no two peoples have the same scale of nerves. Beyond the Rhine, for instance, they imagine that we have their scale, and that they themselves have none at all. Even more the social sense varies from people to people. Among the English the social sense, this complex of expectancies and impulsions, is precise and emphatic, though somewhat narrow perhaps in range. It is at home in the im-

mediate and the concrete, and most at home in close personal groupings. It reaches out towards the wider relationships by no thrusting intelligence, or organizing force of principle, or masterful legalism. Instead, hesitating but hopeful, it projects the beam of light and warmth from its own intimate scene. What are the elements of this domestic beam? Good temper, good sense, helpfulness, harmlessness, mutuality, sense of self and of other, self-respect and respect for humanity. These things, to be sure, are no miracle, and no monopoly. They are nothing but the overtures, friendly and trustful, of fundamental decency in living, whether within a small group or throughout a great nation.

If English citizenship wells up thus out of primitive sentiment and instinct, there can be nothing unique in it,—unless it be the sheer mass and heat of its voluntaries, and its deadly cohesion. But I am not sure. Straight from sentiment and instinct it comes; not from these, however, in their purity and simplicity, but tinged with a sort of conscientiousness: a sudden intrusive rectitude wells up too. What the Englishman feels in his depths takes on the quality of conscience. The stronger these fundamental promptings are, the surer he is that it is conscience that speaks, and commands. Such is the *for intérieur* of the Englishman: he is likely to seem to some observers self-righteous, or censorious, and to some a hypocrite. Will and conscience are in strange alliance in him. It is an alliance easy for the satirist, or the cynic, and in general for the men of temperament, to make fun of. But it is formidable, and it is sincere.

Let me look closer at the ingredients of our English democratic citizenship. The first, I think, is aristocracy. By this I mean not rank, nor wealth, nor privilege, but leadership, from whatever calling or class it comes. Leadership on the one hand, and on the other the habit of looking up for a lead, with a good eye for one, and an instinct for picking out a leader,—these are the requisites. The feeling for leadership is linked with the feeling for the past. The English, who have little exact knowledge of history, are historically minded above most by virtue of the diffused instinct for continuity. In the examination-room their history mark would be low, but in their action history lives again.

The second ingredient is democracy, in its two aspects of liberation and reconciliation, the one spectacular and intoxicating, the other no such thing. In the high moments of liberation, mankind thinks but little on the long labour of reconciliation

to follow; and new liberty often rekindles old hate. And yet the patient, variegated slow-maturing effort after reconciliation is the true salt of citizenship. If there is an art of politics, a touchstone of citizenship, it is reconciliation.

I turn now to education. Let me suggest what is distinctive in English education, and let me illustrate from Latin Grammar. The verbs of teaching govern two accusatives, the person taught and the thing. The English emulate these verbs. They instruct and they educate, having a double technique for a boy, as a pupil and as a person. Teach him the one way, and you help him to get on, and to live. Teach him the other, and you make him good to live with. Make a scholar, or a scientist, or an artist of him, if you can, and if Nature permits. But make a citizen of him you must. And this is not unfair. All education is the evoking of imagination: and of all forms of imagination the social imagination is the best distributed. Schools, if they are to turn out citizens, must be real communities, with a friendly atmosphere and a concrete life in common. Within this framework social habits and sympathies can be established that will last through life, and will pervade the whole country, and even its politics. It is all a question of the social consciousness. Education ought to train the young to share in the Great Fellowship, the life of the land. It must disseminate a spirit, not by class-lessons in patriotism, or by pointing to any far-away model, or by teaching civics, or by any other sort of propaganda, but by the practice of ordered unity and amity here and now, on the spot, in the school itself as itself, a focus of community. It must work, in short, not by talking and hearing of things, but by living them.

The English have had for many generations an effectual system of manly and citizenly education and culture in the Public Schools and the two old Universities. In any other country this education would inspire an army of theorists and expositors. But all this the English have hardly yet begun to describe or philosophise. There is an old rhyme:

I count him wise and right well taught
Who can bear a horn and blow it not.

The English blow not this horn: perhaps from modesty, or a little from lack of skill. They are a little helpless in self-expression, and others must come to their aid. So I, a Scot, blow the English horn.

Picture a Public School to yourselves. A rural setting or some small country town, old buildings and new, chapel and

laboratories, the green playing fields, the houses where the boys live by forties and fifties. The ensemble is an impressive scene enriched by history. The long tradition of ordered ways and famous names tells on the inmates. The boy is but one in this company of the living and the dead: among them he may find his hero and exemplar, and among his fellows he will always find his match, or more. The School humbles the perceptive boy, but stimulates him too, and steadies him.

Inside the framework of school rules and customs there is safety and happiness: outside there is neither. The system, if transgressed, reacts disconcertingly in various ways and by various agents. The headmaster is the nearest thing to an autocrat that England can show, and he is very near indeed. The scheme of equilibria requires in a boy a two-edged sense, and, if he has it, trains it to good purpose: a sense of self and of other, a sense of rights and of duties, of social pattern and cohesion. The school stages the playlife of patriotism and citizenship.

The chief cue, perhaps, of Public School life is the cue to belong. The root lies deep. All men at first belong: they were their mothers', long before they became their own: and this emancipation does not come to all of them. The instinct of attachment works in a school with spontaneous force, but not without crudity and narrowness. The lesson of belonging, of membership, reaches forward to deeper matters. The more intimate, the more disciplined, the more forceful an organization is, the more it needs a corrective, lest it conceive of itself as an ultimate end, to its own harm and the general harm. In the interest of a group to which they belong, men and women will do, alas, how often! things that they would shrink from as individuals. Good hard belonging can silence conscience, and hallow selfishness. It is no accident that the Public Schools have been and still are religious foundations, and it is no luxury. No schools teach a boy more clearly that neither his school nor himself is an end or a sufficiency, but only servant and disciple and means, as in the eye of God, and in no schools is this more vital.

I turn to the schools of the new national system, the schools of the million. The distinction between the few and the many, the "insiders" and the "outsiders", is normal in organized nations: and the wall of division between them engenders naturally, many complexes. For all these, education is a strong solvent. In 1870 a Liberal Government decreed primary education for all children. In the two generations since then,

England has carried out a programme of national education that no other old nation can match. True, she came late into the field, and she had arrears to make good. The programme has covered the land with primary schools, and secondary schools, and territorial universities. No able boy or girl need miss promotion, at the public expense, from primary school to secondary, or from secondary school to university: so plentiful and generous are the scholarships and grants of the State, of the Local Authorities, of the teaching institutions themselves, and of private trusts and persons.

In this vast new multiform growth a uniform excellence is not to be looked for, though excellence is not lacking. The oldest of the new universities is about a century old, the youngest a dozen years. But I shall tell neither ages nor names, lest these institutions lose the respect in which I trust you hold them. The new primary schools are often well housed and oftener well taught, and the cost is prodigious. The new secondary schools, the youngest and perhaps the most interesting of the three groups, already perform well, and promise still better. I shall tell you their age: they date at earliest from the Education Act of 1902, and some are still abuilding. This Act, let me add, was the work of the Conservatives. For an old nation, England can be astonishingly young. These new schools work and grow with their eyes on the older tradition, and they too show the bias of the blood. The dominating motive of community has laid hold on them. It bodies itself forth in them experimentally and unequally, but forcefully. The new pay homage to the old in the old old way: they criticize, and imitate.

Let me return again to the Classical tradition. England has been well served by a long succession of outstanding men whose education was Classical. The scope of it is easily indicated: a superb outburst of imaginative literature portraying a diverse life, a political record of the utmost variety and suggestiveness, and a brilliant philosophising of it. In all this, of course, I have chiefly in mind Greek literature as an unique epitome of human nature, of social forces, of political forms. The habit of Classical reading imparts certain qualities,—patience, thoroughness, exactitude, sincerity, flexibility, tenderness, humour and alertness. It concentrates the faculties, and toughens the will. This hard training made men of countless English boys: and these influences, impressed uniformly on generation after generation of the educated, gave English life and politics a certain unity. The Classics did what any common culture would

have done: they made for cohesion: but they did more. It was a cohesion of enlightenment and inspiration for those who shared in an incomparable inheritance. Without being a propagandist, one can realize the value of a common body of doctrine and a characteristic outlook for national life: and for long England assured this value by the curiously indirect and trustful method of making the governing classes learn Greek, or at least learn from the Greeks. For political work, a sense of people is essential: and a thorough steeping in the humanities would seem to be the right preparation. Pope's dictum, "the proper study of mankind is man", applies peculiarly to poets and politicians. I linger on this aspect of Classical education and particularly of Greek literature. It comprises imaginative and historical and philosophical works, and of the highest quality: and they have an almost unique unity as phases of one national life that blossomed in a brief period. They make together one comprehensive and fruitful study.

The School curriculum is now diverse and wide, and the Classics have many rivals. But by thoroughly indulging the diversity of individual tastes the present age may be cutting itself off from the hope of a common culture. No study or group of studies appears to have the chance to develop the humane interests with the prestige of the old Classical tradition. The schools are less able now than they were to assure a humane outlook, or a sufficiency of knowledge in common, or a uniform drift of sentiment. The ingredients of the Classical tradition—language, literature, history, philosophy—make nowadays so many specialities: and no specialism knoweth another. The rivals of the old tradition have not divined its secret. It was strong because it was organic. Now individualism, or shall I say separatism? has won. But look closer at the humane studies themselves. They are all there still—there are more of them than ever—but in disbandment. They are a sort of guerilla. Their bond of union, the service of a common end of culture, being gone, they become ends for themselves. Separatism means specialism. Moreover, a subtle change sets in. Specialism drifts into a sort of science. If there is anything worse than art for art's sake, it is science for science's sake.

Such is the life cycle of many humane studies. Some find it as natural as others distressing. The private discipline of enquiry and judgment that is incumbent on the humane scholar has usurped upon the culture which his scholarship should serve. The means to an end has usurped upon the end. It is the commonest form of usurpation in human affairs: in that sense

at least, it is natural. In a sense it is democratic. I doubt gravely whether it is good for democracy. The diversity of individual tastes has triumphed in all this, and that is democratic. But democracy itself is thereby left at a loss. The separatism which I have described robs democracy, I fear, of directives and compact impulsion. The present age exhausts itself in diatribes against specialisation, and in the promotion of it. Specialisation is democratical, of course, in the abstract. *Soit!* But need the freedom and the variety that befit the adult citizen have a full counterpart in education? Divergence and dispersion of interest from early years is more likely to produce an uneasy and unsteady agglomeration than a community. The choice seems clear: to be democratic at school, or to be better democrats later on.

Let me sum up these misgivings. The spirit of democracy can thrive only on humane doctrine. This sustenance England drew for long from the Classical humanities. But the democratic fallacy has invaded and infected these very studies. Science has now claimed a vast field in education, and in this crisis science offers little help. For the analytic eye of science is bent chiefly and characteristically on the non-human. The biological sciences, the nearest-of-kin to the humanities, come but slowly into their own: and biology itself is only incidental to the humanities. The discipline of science centres on the objective infinity of parts, stages and aspects. Its intuition of wholeness is abstract and intellectual. The discipline for citizenship, by contrast, must lay hold of the whole man, and make a complete citizen of him, citizenship being a moral relationship based on reconciliation in freedom. It is possible that the scientific view suffices in certain forms of polity; suffices, that is, for the governing classes. It may even be their distinguishing mark. But it can hardly suffice for democracy.

Enough of misgivings! I return to the reconciling side of democracy. Whenever a school awakens the social intuitions in a boy and builds him up, unwitting, perhaps, into citizenliness, wherever it is felt to minister to social justice under the motto of *la carrière ouverte aux talents*, reconciliation is at work. In the broader sense the education of the nation proceeds solidly, and even quickly. It proceeds from various points and along various lines, which it would be impossible to exhaust in a lecture. I venture to offer you a date in last century. Not 1832, the year of the Great Reform Act, a milestone of progress that gave the vote to a few more Englishmen, though it was an implicit promise of it to all of them in due time. During the

last hundred years, since Sir Robert Peel instituted the police, the mass of the people have unlearned their old obstinate hostility to Authority. The new police were unwelcome, to say the least of it. They had a foreign flavour, and were thought to derive from Napoleon. The sturdy individualism of the English has changed in the interval. It is a change to make the Spirit of History laugh and weep and wonder. The English now welcome interference, control, dictation by the State, and they have never done paying rates and taxes. It is wholly unnatural, and it has become second nature. The thanks are due largely to the police. For the police have reinterpreted Authority—those incalculable tyrannous cruel things, the initiative and the force of the State—to the people in their homes, in the streets, at work and at play. They have taught the people to look on Authority as a friend.

Not the least of the agencies of reconciliation is the great body of innovations in the sphere of industry. In some the State led the way, and in others the private reformer. I have long admired the system of *Allocations Familiales* which the French employers have built up, a system which neither the State nor the employers have as yet copied in England. Most effectual of all is the system of social insurances. Thirty years ago the first beginnings of it were vehemently opposed. It is already an invaluable element of the national tradition. To insure a working population against the major risks of life and work is to fortify and compose its spirit, and to add a new security to the State as well.

I add a word on education in the very widest sense of all. The English have never done educating and edifying each other. You must have observed the English taste for preaching. It struck M. de Voltaire more than two centuries ago. The sermon flourishes not only in the pulpit, but in the press, by the microphone, in institutions of learning, at Rotary lunches, and indeed everywhere. It flourishes and reverberates in complete democratic freedom. The love of preaching spares no class or profession. Has *M. un tel* become a member of parliament? Then let him expect invitations from every church and chapel in his constituency. Not only the politicians but the business leaders as well are encouraged and expected to preach. Exhortation is of the very atmosphere of England, and all men may alternate the rôles of preacher and hearer, as in ancient Athens the citizen alternated the rôles of ruler and ruled.

In closing, I ask your forgiveness. I have got lost I fear, both in my subject and outside it.