

# THE ENGLISH TRADITION OF EDUCATION

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IN the spring of this year I was one of a number of English and Scottish headmasters who had the great privilege of visiting Canada, and travelling through it from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast. We went to learn, and we learned much, since seeing is believing. We all of us realized that it is one thing to read of a country in books, and another thing to see with the eyes and to hear with the ears. We returned completely converted to a belief in the incredibly great future awaiting the Dominion. Our immediate purpose was to find out whether British boys of a good type could easily pass from British schools to Canadian universities, and find welcome and a career which would be of service to themselves and to their new home. Our secondary purpose was to discover whether the educational ideals for which we stood would meet with approval in a country whose educational system was of necessity different, and whose social organization had from the first been based on that spirit of democracy and mutual equality to which Great Britain has come late, and as yet with imperfect attainment.

We were conscious that we represented the "Public Schools" of our home country, a wide term, incapable of exact definition, associated in the minds of most people with privilege and wealth. We realized that we might be thought to be heads of boarding-schools for the sons of the gentry and the moneyed classes. But the Public Schools of Great Britain are something much wider than that. They are simply schools which are in a large measure independent of state control, which carry the education of their pupils up to the nineteenth year, and have a definite connection with the universities of England and Scotland, by whose spirit of freedom and culture they are largely inspired. Their pupils may be wealthy or they may be poor; they may be boarders or they may be day-boys. The schools may be in the countryside or the town. But they are alike in the measure of independence which they enjoy, and in their common outlook on the work of education.

We were quite aware also that the Public Schools which we represented had been the object of many attacks, political, social, and educational. We knew that at home our schools were full to overflowing, and that their privileges stood high. But more than one novel was in circulation, written by some old disgruntled pupil, which selected the worst and most exceptional scandals, and represented these as the normal state of this educational Augean stable, while pretending that it was nobody's interest to clean it out. And there were many more reasonable and less unscrupulous attacks from critics who had more self-respect, and were more worthy of attention. Those alleged that the English Public Schools were exerting a deleterious social influence, since they were not in the stream of modern development. They led to exclusiveness, since their products came unconsciously to believe that they were in some way set apart, and superior to other men. They created a caste. They crushed individuality, and created a type: the artist, the musician, the poet, the thinker could not flourish and develop in the atmosphere which they created. They were devoted to a stupid worship of the athlete, "the flannelled fool at the wicket, and the muddied oaf in the goal," so that all their values became hopelessly wrong, and their product was of no service in the modern world of business and science. They turned out young men who were unable to think, disinclined to read, and unresponsive to new ideas, to whom "intellectual" was a term of reproach, and "aesthetic" a term of contempt. They were based upon an obsolete curriculum in which the whole stress was laid upon dead languages. They were themselves inadaptable, and they turned out men who were inadaptable, of whom the cleverer were merely humbugs, and the stupider were merely fools.

It may be worth while, therefore, to set down here something of what we attempted to say, not so much in defence as in explanation of the institutions for which we stood. That which is dominant and successful must always suffer detraction, and those who are responsible for training the best of a nation's youth must not be impatient of criticism. Critics, indeed, fasten upon the failures of any system, and represent them as the typical product; but those who are responsible for the moulding of the system should not therefore give way to more or less justifiable anger, but consider whether they are not allowing an unjustifiably large number of failures to pass from their hands. It must be admitted that exclusive, stupid, and conceited Philistines do from year to year emerge from the schools; but they are the failures who have declined to learn, or who have been incapable of learning, the lessons which

the schools exist to teach. Nor are the English schools more than any other school capable of converting sow's ears infallibly into silk purses.

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No one can begin to understand the English schools apart from the social history of the nation, and without consideration of the soil in which they have grown, and the quarry from which they have been hewn. They go right back to the middle ages, and received their first impress from a society in which the Church was as yet an unbroken unity, and the main school of service in things of both spiritual and lay administration, and in which feudalism and the ideals of knighthood had not yet become a shadow. When William of Wykeham founded Winchester, he laid down the broad lines within which the best of English education was henceforth to move. It was to be based on religion: sound learning was to be its end, but an end subordinate to its supreme purpose—the formation of honest character. It was to issue in a regular supply of trustworthy servants of Church and King. The sons of poor men who had suitable talent were to be admitted to the same education as the sons of their social superiors, and the Church was a career open to talent from whatever social stratum it might come. The pupils were to learn to rule and to help one another. So were the broad lines laid down; and though the subsequent ages which saw the self-seeking of the Reformation period, the strife and persecutions of the seventeenth and the materialism and entrenched privilege of the eighteenth centuries were a period of darkness and eclipse for education, these lines were never wholly lost, nor was the lamp which William of Wykeham had lighted ever wholly extinguished.

The early nineteenth century saw the beginning of a great educational revival, though it was as yet confined to the upper and more well-to-do classes, those who had come into political power by the passing of Reform. That revival is usually associated with the work of Arnold at Rugby. He made religion the basis of his educational work, and was the first headmaster to act as chaplain to his own school, to build his influence on his sermons, and the appeal of the school service. He invented, or adopted, the Prefect system, by which the senior boys rule the school: whatever its origin may have been, and its embryo was present in the schools centuries before, he saw its possibilities, and the great educational influence of the sharing of moral responsibility. He began in a tentative way to widen the curriculum, and to bring it into relation with the needs of the day. This ideal was to send out into the

world Christian gentlemen, and it is not a low or a narrow ideal.

For the remainder of the nineteenth century the type of school which Arnold inspired had the educational field to itself in England. The famous old schools which went back to pre-Reformation days were reinvigorated and renewed by men who worked in his spirit; many new schools were founded to work on the same lines, and to follow the same ideal by the same method. The great day-schools of London and the chief provincial cities were ruled by men of the same tradition. All these were alive and vigorous, but there was little life in the country grammar schools, and the day of state-aided and state-subsidised education was not yet. For seventy years the Public School was dominant in a field in which it was very much itself, and the England of the nineteenth century was the result. At home and abroad the work of the nation was done, or at any rate directed, by the men who had caught their inspiration from these schools, or had at any rate been unconsciously moulded by them. Doubtless the period had its faults; but it can be argued that it established a quality of purity in public life which has so far not been lost. Votes ceased to be sold, and men ceased to take open bribes. It believed that social position always carries with it a real measure of responsibility, and it erected a tradition of unpaid public service. It produced in the Civil Service of India an administration which is probably the most honest and efficient which an alien race has ever provided for its subjects. It certainly produced the ideals which have found expression in the Covenant of the League of Nations, where a mandate is conceived as a trust imposed on a superior race to develop a backward people to the stage when it can be trusted to rule itself. Moreover, it made the name of the British known all over the world, as a race the average member of which could be trusted to keep his word, to be honest according to his lights, and not to run away from responsibility or danger. It is true that there were found people, not a few, to allege that the British were arrogant, lacking in sobriety and sympathy, and inclined to think that God had made them of different clay from all other men. But no fair student can deny that the work achieved by the nation in the nineteenth century was a great work both at home and abroad: none can fail to see in it the shaping power of an ideal: and none who looks closely can avoid the conclusion that it was being steadily shaped in the schools of the country.

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The nineteenth century is over and done with, but the schools which it produced and upon which it relied show no signs of



becoming obsolete. On the contrary, since the war, several new foundations have come into being, because the old, numerous as they were, could not contain the applicants who thronged to their doors. They still seem to flow from the main stream of the national life, and they show markedly that sign of quality which consists in differentiation of type, while preserving all the marks of the genus to which they belong. The ideal is still the same, but its content is fuller, and it is sought by greater variety of method. It would be convenient here to state more precisely what it is, for those who are engaged in the practical work of conducting the schools have little leisure for speaking about their theoretic ends, and it has therefore become a not uncommon gibe to say that British schoolmasters have merely inherited a tradition which they serve unintelligently. Nothing could well be further from the truth, for it is at least true to say that the teachers in the schools were never more self-conscious, or more convinced that their work must justify itself by proving that it satisfies a national need, and is not unrelated to the national life.

It is accepted as a great principle that the basis of education is religious, but this does not mean that its first purpose is to teach the specific tenets of a particular Christian denomination, or to insist on the importance of theoretic dogma. It is rather believed that for the young the best teaching comes from example, and that the religion which bears fruit is the life that is lived rather than the theory which is taught. There are two philosophies, spiritual and material, which are at sharp issue in this generation, as they have been in all the generations past. The material teaches that the things that we can see and handle, and make our own, are the things which are really important, and the realist will therefore make no mistake about choosing acquisition as the main purpose of his life: the spiritual teaches that those things are there for use, but that they are in themselves unreal, as everything else in this physical life is impermanent and unreal. The spiritual virtues are alone lasting, and alone worthy of pursuit: to follow goodness, to seek for truth, to search after beauty, these things alone ennoble character, and give man satisfaction at the last. The chapel, where those things can most naturally and therefore most effectively be said, is therefore at the centre of the school. The worship of God and the gospel of Christ were made the foundation on which all is to be built.

Next, the Public Schools stand upon discipline, and are there at issue with a certain vigorous modern tendency towards anti-nomianism which shows itself in education as in every other depart-

ment of life. It is held by some of the new school of educational thought that human nature is good, that without repression and discipline it will unfold itself naturally into the good character, that the work of the educator is merely to suggest right objects, and to induce the taught to derive of themselves the good which they should seek. Natural interest will produce natural industry, and the desire for full self-expression will issue in moral excellence. As against this, the Public Schools believe, and have considerable authority and experience for believing, that we have each of us a higher and a lower nature, and that we must master our lower self, or be mastered by it. They hold that the quickest and surest way is to be under discipline ourselves, and that it is quite possible and natural for any healthy subject under a sound system of discipline to realize that the system is right, to re-enact it himself when he is old enough to judge, and to reach by a shorter and more certain method the state in which as a good citizen he does what he ought, and yet only obeys himself, and is conscious of no limitation to his own freedom. Duty, discipline, obedience, are therefore words that in the schools are not obsolete. Every boy is tried out, first, to see whether he can be trusted to obey with a good temper, then, to see whether he can be trusted when in control of little things, then to learn whether he is fit to direct them with fairness and justice. To learn to obey in order to be fit to command, to be a subject first before you are chosen to be a ruler, these are rules which at any rate in the Public Schools are believed to work.

Nor is character lost sight of when we pass to the actual content of the instruction given, or to the playing-fields. To deal with the curriculum first, we may admit at once that throughout the nineteenth century it was too narrow, and too subservient to the old Renaissance tradition of Latin and Greek. Yet always new subjects were establishing, first a precarious, and then a permanent, foothold, and now in all the schools every single boy devotes his time to the study of English, Scripture, History and Geography, to Latin and a modern language, usually French, and to Mathematics and Sciences, and he follows this course until he has reached a standard equivalent to matriculation in a university. When that standard has been attained, he usually "specialises"; he devotes, in other words, two-thirds of his time to the subject in which he is strong, classics, or modern languages, or history, or mathematics, or a group of sciences, and one-third to general subjects. He is expected throughout to work at the subjects which do not interest him as well as the subjects which do, and in this way he learns something of that conduct of the understanding which is of consider-

able value in later life. He is not bound down, as he used to be, inside a narrow curriculum, and in his later days he has a very full latitude of choice. There is plenty of play for individuality. As a matter of fact, at his best the English Public School boy reaches a very high intellectual standard, and I doubt whether in any country of the old or the new world a higher standard is attained than that shown by British boys of eighteen in their competitions for the open scholarships which are offered by the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

A still more remarkable development has taken place in the activities of boys out of school. There is not space to say much of the facilities for art work and handicraft, the societies for natural history, for the pursuit of hobbies by individual spirits, the dramatic and the debating enterprises. It is enough to say that they exist in greater or less degree in every school. The chief development of all, of course, has taken place in the promotion of games. Doubtless, they first entered into the life of the schools because they were an interesting and harmless way of occupying the spare time of boys, and working off their animal spirits: they were developed because they were seen to be an admirable means for the formation of character and encouraging certain fine qualities: their danger has been that they have been found so attractive that they have tended to become ends-in-themselves. The Public Schools have to admit that they have carried them at times to excess, but they can claim that they are still, in Great Britain at any rate, the chief if not the only citadel where the true ideal of games is preserved, that they are played for the sake of the game itself, and that it does not matter whether you win or lose, so long as you play hard and play fair. "To play cricket", "to play the game", are valuable elements in the ideal of conduct, and they have been given world-wide currency in the English-speaking world by the cult of games in English education in the last seventy years. It is always difficult to play games keenly, and yet to keep them in their place, but it is perhaps done as well in the Public Schools as it is done anywhere, and certainly the lesson has never been forgotten that what is of value is always the team, and not the individual, self-sacrifice and not self-advertisement. Games are played because they promote health and alertness of body, and courage, endurance, and unselfishness of spirit. They have therefore strong educational justification, but they form a side of our education which needs to be jealously watched.

The purpose of the whole education is to send out men into the body politic who are equipped and willing to serve. The ideal is

neither self-expression nor self-development; but while emphatically each boy is called upon to develop his own individual capacities to the utmost, it is that he may thereby the better serve his generation, the better use the talents entrusted to him by God. Service is a better but a more difficult ideal than self-assertion: it is an easy word for the humbug to use. If the word is disliked, the Public Schools would equally accept the statement that the ideal is to do your duty in that state of life into which it may please God to call you. At any rate, as modern life develops in all its complexity, it becomes increasingly clear that the individualists of every kind are disruptive in their effect on society, and unfavorable to its healthy development. The need of modern democracy is for large numbers of enlightened members who anxiously seek to serve the community. And so at last the Public School ideal comes back to the point from which it started, to religion, and the command of our Master that we have a duty of love towards both God and our neighbour.

Such is the ideal, briefly and inadequately stated, and it may be well to close this article with a brief reconsideration of the conditions which were quoted at an earlier stage. It was said that the Public Schools were exclusive, and there is ground for this criticism in two directions. In the first place, since the schools are largely boarding-schools, and receive no state assistance, they are in most cases expensive: this is inevitable. They therefore exclude the sons of the poorer, though they do not desire to do so. In the second place, there are those who do regard the fact that they have been able to attend such schools as a distinction which marks them off from the common herd. They have indeed failed to learn their lesson, or to absorb the real spirit of their school, and they are not the majority: but they are enough to give substance to the conclusion which is not infrequently drawn. However, with every year this matters less. During the present century there has been an immense extension of secondary education in Great Britain. The old grammar schools have been revived by financial aid from national and local sources, and a very large number of new schools have been erected. They follow a curriculum which is practically the same as that of the Public Schools, and every year they absorb more of their spirit. They too realize that "manners make the man," and more and more they refuse to be content with mere instruction, but desire to set their mark on character. By the organization of games, school societies, scouts, cadets, and "Houses" they create the atmosphere of public service, and the desire for it. The aloofness of school from school tends



steadily to grow less, and the same ideal is gradually extending through every branch of the national system. Exclusiveness is bound to be less common when the sons of all classes learn the same lessons, and respond to the same appeals.

The conclusion that the schools produce a type is shallow. Every association of human beings results in a type. We may say "he is a typical East End Jew" or "a typical art student" or "a typical American" or a typical anything, wherever human beings are joined together. The question therefore should rather be whether, granted that a type must be produced, it is a good type. The answer can only be that the nation as a whole feels it to be so, for the schools are thronged, and their lists are filled up for ten years ahead. Where they were tested as a class, in the Great War, they were not found wanting: witness the fact that their proportion of casualties was double that of the rest of the combatant forces of the nation. And the fact that they are increasingly sought for by great commercial and industrial firms, tells its own tale.

That they tend to pay too much attention to games, and to value them too highly, has been admitted. But it must be remembered that they cannot be entirely separate in their life from the nation and world to which they belong. When one reflects upon the salaries paid to professional baseball players, or to the leading boxers of the world, when one considers the adulation poured upon the champion lawn tennis players, when one thinks of the utter lack of sanity and proportion displayed by the Press in all matters of games and athletics, it is natural to be impatient when so many stones are thrown at the schools, where games are still games, where fair play comes first, and publicity is avoided.

Finally, the conclusions that the products of the schools are men who are unable and unwilling to think, men who are inadaptably, are simply not true. They are not more true than they are as generalizations about the whole British stock. It has been a common line of attack to dwell upon an Englishman's dislike of theory, and instinctive objection to being made to think: it is true that there exists a national preference for action, a national dislike for talk and abstract ratiocination. The nation is notorious for its illogical compromises which nevertheless work. The Empire itself is such a compromise. What sort of Empire is it, when every member is entirely free? And why is it that in the stress of world peril this aggregation of heterogeneous units, which pretends to be an Empire, is found to be so surprisingly coherent? The average Englishman, and Scotsman for that matter, will continue to be one who will

leave thinking to others, and who will concentrate on the practical issues of life. But the history of the nation shows that it produces enough of the other and the rarer type. Just the same is true of the Public Schools, which represent just a typical stratum of the best stock of Great Britain, and therefore cannot avoid displaying the virtues and defects which are typical of the national character.

My purpose is not to show that the Public Schools are better than other schools, or to argue that they ought to be transplanted, and made to grow where they are not national. My purpose is rather to argue that they have a sound ideal which appeals to the national genius of the English-speaking races: briefly, it is that education must be based on religion, not denominationalism, that it must aim at the production of moral character, and the intellectual results must not take the first place to the exclusion of these. This means that the teaching profession must have a high status and must be inspired by the common ideal: in other words, they must have a sense of vocation as definite and real as every minister of religion. This is as yet far away, but it is not a mere vision: if it could take general hold of the teaching professions of Great Britain, the Dominions, and the United States, it could not fail to raise the level of human life throughout the world, and to bring in its train universal peace and the ability to use it.