An Essay Toward
A HISTORY OF EDUCATION
CONSIDERED CHIEFLY IN ITS DEVELOPMENT IN THE WESTERN WORLD

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PREFACE

The writer of this textbook is a Catholic priest. He is aware that in historical controversy there is a Catholic prejudice as well as an anti-Catholic prejudice. He has tried to keep that fact clearly in mind when writing this book. He has gone to sources as much as he could; when the sources were not accessible to him, or the field too large for him to cover directly, he has preferred the authority of non-Catholic scholars to that of Catholic scholars, in every instance where choice was reasonably possible.

Since the book is written as a textbook, he has tried to keep it brief, even though to do that meant to make the treatment deliberately inadequate. He believes that a textbook should be little more than a suggestive outline, not a complete treatise to take the place of the living teacher or to obviate the need of study and research on the part of the student. A textbook should be a stimulus and a guide to work, not a substitute for work. There is, apparently, no way open to mere human beings to educate a man, save by getting him to educate himself.

W. K.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTORY

I

History a piecemeal record. History, in a general sense, is the record of human experience. As that experience is enormously complex, it is necessary that we break it up in various ways in order to make an intelligible record of it. Thus we limit our consideration of past experience, say to a definite period of time, or within certain geographical limits, or to a particular phase of human activity, such as the political, the artistic, the philosophical, and the like. And we do this, not merely for the sake of clearness, but because the extremely finite human mind cannot well grasp at one time more than a few details of the complicated and multitudinous acts that make up the life story of a single individual: to say nothing of the complexity of experience in the life of a nation or of the entire race. Such a splitting-up of human experience is not in itself desirable; it is an unfortunate necessity, resulting from the limitations of our intelligence. All too frequently, it leads to distortion of the historical record, to a lack of perspective in viewing the past. But with all its faults, it is the only practicable method at our command.

But not of political facts only. Thus the greater part of history has concerned itself with the broad political facts in the experience of large groups of people, of nations. The very word ‘history’ brings instantly to the minds of most persons such a record of the political organization and activity of a nation, of millions of people, through centuries of time: with the result, generally speaking, that this
meager record comes to stand for the complete story of the life of those millions, and a man is considered well versed in history who has a ready knowledge of the political facts regarding, say, a dozen nations. Obviously, that sort of knowledge may very well leave its possessor quite ignorant of the most important truths concerning those nations. Indeed, for lack of knowing something about the daily life of the men and women who made up those nations, something of their manner of dress and housing, their food, their amusements, their ideals, their religion, the student of history generally does not understand even the bald political facts he may have read.

**Placing the history of education.** All this has long been realized by historians. Within the past few generations attempts have been made to record history more intelligently and with better balance. As part of that purpose, much more attention has been paid to the study of the principles and means by which each generation in the past has tried to train and equip the succeeding generation for the business of living. Histories of education, as well as economic histories, social histories, and the like, have been multiplied. In particular, the history of education has been recognized as important, not merely for the technical student of education, to whom it is of immediate and prime necessity, but for the general reader who aims at being a cultured man. One cannot understand a people at all without considerable knowledge of their aims and methods in education. These tell us what they wished to be and tried to be; whereas the best of general political histories tell us, at most, only what they were.

**Which is a difficult branch of history.** Yet it would be a mistake to think that the history of education is a simpler matter than general history. The field of ideas and ideals is even broader than the field of facts, and much more tangled. There is great danger that the student of it may be lost in details, not able, as the venerable tag has it, to see the wood for the trees. Any book dealing with the history of education, and more particularly a textbook, must interpret these infinite details, must stress certain of them as significant, and necessarily ignore thousands of them. This is obviously a delicate and difficult task. In carrying it out, the writer cannot but be guided by his own definite philosophy, his personal point of view. He must, of course, strive for objective truth. His aim, through all his selecting and summarizing, must be to give as exact and faithful a presentation of educational aim and procedure as the limits of his space and time will permit. But unless he be a singularly stupid man, he must realize the limitations, not merely of his ability, but of his prejudices (especially his unconscious prejudices), and of the pressure brought to bear upon his thinking by the traditions and even current opinions of his own civilization: and he must, with that intellectual humility which is the only honesty of mind, try to prevent these limitations from distorting his vision of the truth.

**And a subject of controversy.** It is because of the manifold limitations of the human mind that the history of education (of course, this holds for other histories, too) is a ground of controversy. All men, for instance, practically agree on the general meaning of education: that it is the development of a human being in all his capacities; yet they may disagree intensely, and to the point of quarreling, about the ultimate aim that should guide that development, about the relative value of man's diverse capacities, about ways and means of developing an individual, and so forth; and hence come to the widest divergence of judgment concerning any one scheme of education. Any man who ventures to write on education should at all times suspect and test his opinions, should guard himself against bias as earnestly as against falsehood; and, with all the watchful-
ness possible, he may still be morally certain of a margin of error in even his most considered judgments.

II

Education a larger affair than schooling. There are a few considerations which, from the outset, should be kept in mind by the student of the history of education. The first of these is the essential nature of education, that it is the complete development of the individual, in his body, in his mind, in his moral character. This is a most obvious truism; yet it is constantly being forgotten both in the educational process itself and in books about education. In the modern elaborate growth of schools, the training and equipment of the mind has been stressed almost exclusively; and in modern thought the school has all too often come to stand for the whole of the educational process. Most histories of education should more honestly and properly be called histories of the school. The influence of the home, the army, the daily toil and play of men, upon the shaping of individuals is generally ignored; though these exert a great force in forming even the habits and power of thought, to say nothing of their effect upon bodily development and the training of character.

Its value measured both by man's nature and by his conditions of life. The second consideration is that education, to be successful, must develop individuals to fit into the social, economic, political, and religious conditions of the actual society in which they live; and hence must be judged, in great measure, by the concrete circumstances of the particular time or period involved: though it is true that there are certain qualities and habits in men which education must at all times and under all conditions try to develop in the individual, because they are at all times and under all conditions proper to him as a human being.

Thus, education must always try to make men more reasonable, more self-controlled, more obedient to God and all lawful authority, more vigorous and well-balanced in bodily and mental activity: because these qualities are always essential to the ideal of man. But the particular forms of, say, self-control, or keenness of thought, called for by the conditions of life in Europe of the thirteenth or fourteenth century, may well be different from those needed for successful living in America of the twentieth century, or for life in central Africa today. It is a gross mistake to judge of an educational system of the past purely in the light of its usefulness for our own time: but it is not an uncommon mistake.

Each education a fresh beginning. The third consideration is the rather paradoxical one that, although education has a sort of cumulative character, in that we inherit the experiences of the past and should be able to profit by them, yet each new individual faces his problems as entirely new, comes into the world with the same limitations as hampered the child in ancient Athens or Carthage. The wealth of past experience is like wealth hidden in a mine, of service only to him who digs it out, and then only in so far as he knows or learns how to use it. We have, unquestionably, more educational tools today than, say, the Greeks had in 500 B.C. Does it at all necessarily follow that we know how to use them to better effect? Yet one of the unconscious prejudices that injure so many books on education is the assumption that an educational system, because it is later, must be better. It does not take much thinking to see that that is a dangerous and unwise assumption.

The goal of all human education includes more than the present. Finally, any study of education which excludes, as so many do exclude, all thought of the ulterior purposes of life, is a very faulty and unbalanced study. Human life
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has a value immeasurably beyond that of the daily details of living, and a purpose beyond its mere limited maintenance here on earth. It is a gift of God, who, in the very fact of giving it, implies a definite use and end for it. If it were only an accidental thing, to be held in insecure tenure for a few years, the whole business of training new generations for its use would be quite futile. All its significance comes from that at which it aims, and all its details are measured by the definitive test of their furthering an eternal achievement. Individuals forget that very often, nations profess to ignore it for long periods; but no individual of sound mind, nor any nation, can ever forget it entirely. Even the attempted negation of a destiny beyond the present violently colors the fabric of life in any man or group of men. Hence we must keep that purpose in mind, as a sort of background, for any intelligent study of the development of the individual, of education.

The aim of this book. This book, intended for use as a textbook, does not aim at covering the entire field of the history of education; and that for the simple reason that the field is too large. It will confine itself chiefly to an attempt to sketch, as clearly as its brief compass will allow, the aims and methods of education in our Western civilization. Even in that narrower field what it omits of historical detail must necessarily be enormously more than what it sets down. It has to be selective, to keep within reasonable bounds. Now, one must readily admit beforehand that in that process of selection the author will quite certainly make a great many errors: due both to limitations of knowledge and to defects of judgment. He has never yet read an entirely satisfactory textbook on the history of education, and he simply has not the conceit to imagine that this will be a satisfactory book. It will try to keep in mind, and to base itself upon, the four considerations just outlined. Each chapter will be followed by a short list of references and some suggestions for further investigation and discussion.

INTRODUCTORY

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Some particular influences exerted by one's point of view (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, rationalistic, materialistic) upon one's concept of the history of education.

2. The meaning and limitations of impartiality in studying the history of education.

3. The place of supernatural aims and agencies in the history of education.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

It may be appropriate to mention here some of the general works concerned with the history of education, such as encyclopedias, bibliographies, and periodical indexes. Of the encyclopedias, the following are the most important: K. A. Schmidt, Encyclopædie des gesammten Erziehungs- und Unterrichtswesens, 11 vols., Gotha, 1859-76, revised ed., 10 vols., 1876-87; F. Buisson, Dictionnaire de Pédagogie et d'Instruction Primaire, Paris, 1882 sqq.; D. Raymond, Dictionnaire d'Éducation Publique et Privée, Paris, 1885 (good for accounts of some Catholic schools); R. Blanco y Sanchez, Bibliografía Pedagógica, 5 vols., Madrid, 1907-12 (valuable for Spain and Latin America; gives long excerpts from Spanish works or translations); F. Monroe, Encyclopædia of Education, 5 vols., New York, 1911-14; W. Watson, Encyclopædia and Dictionary of Education, 4 vols., London, 1921-22.

Most modern governments have issued serial publications which contain educational data: e.g., the Bulletins and Reports of the United States Bureau of Education; Musée Pédagogique et Bibliothèque Centrale de l'Enseignement Primaire, begun at Paris in 1884, and running to over 100 fascicules (contains such bibliographic aids as Bonet-Maury's Catalogue des Ouvrages et Documents, 1886-89, with supplements); Special Reports on Educational Subjects, begun by the Education Department of Great Britain in 1897 (valuable not merely for statistics, but for excellent monographs in a wide range of topics); Freisprache Statistik, begun in 1890. W. T. Harris compiled Publications of the United States Bureau of Education from 1867 to 1896, with Subject Index, Washington, 1891.

Amongst the many bibliographies, the following should be particularly helpful: W. S. Monroe and O. Asher, A Bibliography of Bibliographies, University of Illinois, 1927; Monroe, Hamilton, and Smith, Locating Educational Information in Published Sources, University of Illinois, 1930; G. Stanley Hall and J. M. Mansfield, Hints toward a Select and Descriptive Bibliography of Education, Boston, 1886; Will S. Monroe, Bibliography of Education, New York, 1897.
CHAPTER II

PRIMITIVE EDUCATION

Its history based on assumptions. A desire for completeness, if no other reason, seems to demand of most histories of education some discussion of primitive education. If one kept only to known facts, that discussion might properly be as brief as the chapter on Snakes in Ireland. There is good evidence for the fact that men lived on this earth long before we have any intelligible record of how they lived. Nor have we any way of knowing accurately how long that unrecorded period of human life was. Conjectures run all the way from thousands to millions of years. The details of that life are almost absolutely unknown to us. But discussion of primitive education, in the present fashion, cheerfully ignores this paucity of facts, and tries to supply for them by a jauntily offered wealth of more or less gratuitous assumptions.

First assumption: Early men savages. Perhaps the most widely used of these assumptions is that men everywhere were first savages. We simply have no knowledge whatever of this as a fact. We have indications, it is true, of savage life in prehistoric times: such as is given by stone implements and the absence of the useful metals. From such indications we may conclude that in some instances there was development from a less civilized to a more civilized people. But we have no ground for asserting that these savage people were the first people, and that they did not degenerate from ancestors much more highly cultured than themselves.

Samuel Johnson is often quoted as saying, "One set of
savages is like another.” Granting, even, the accuracy of this as a broad generalization, what has it to do with the assumption as an historical fact that men everywhere and universally were savages before they became civilized? Yet, with Johnson's saying as a text, authors of books on education, apparently serious, present sketches of the life and customs of savage people of our own times as the reflected history of races earlier than the dawn of history. The procedure is more than unscientific: it is ridiculous. If it could be based upon anything, it would be upon a very nebulous theory of human evolution. Now, the theory of human evolution, like all unproven theories, is very interesting, and may possibly one day prove very valuable; but it is not history, nor the basis of history. Until we actually know something about the life of primitive peoples, discussion of their education is as futile as discussion of the contents of a sealed casket. Conjecture is not history.

Second assumption: Constantly ascending progress. Another assumption, closely akin to the preceding, perhaps even part of it, is that civilization has developed in a continuously ascending scale, and that therefore we may infer the history of earlier peoples by reasoning backward from later known eras. It is a very tempting assumption. No book of history, so far as I know, honestly offers this as an assumption; but many act upon it. It is, of course, a false assumption, refuted readily and abundantly by patent historical facts. One need only compare the Egyptians under Rameses II with the Egyptians, say of 1750 A.D. (some 3,000 years later); or the Irish of 548 A.D. with the Irish of 1848 A.D.; or, to take a briefer compass of time, the Greeks of 479 B.C., after the Battle of Plataea, with the Greeks at the time of the Macedonian domination, 338 B.C.; or the Romans of the Punic Wars with the Romans under Caracalla. Wars, famine, foreign invasions, endemic malaria, domestic tyrannies, the decay of public and private morality, economic disturbances, and a score of other causes, may partially destroy a civilization, may undo the development of centuries, and may so blunt the ideals of men that more centuries must pass before men even strive to regain the lost development. The history of education is always a history of new beginnings: a fact which finds plentiful illustration even in our own times. If the story of man's development, as known to us, were charted in the form of a graph, it would be represented, not by a straight line of continuous ascent, but by a very zigzag line of many ups and downs.

This assumption vigorously refuted by facts. Our researches into the hidden past of prehistory are more and more confirming the view that men in those remote times moved in much the same fashion as they have done in recent historical times, as often backward as forward. Take only a few instances. The excavations in Crete have revealed a superb culture thirty-five or forty centuries earlier than the Dorian invasion. Hogarth does not hesitate to say: “Man in Hellas was more highly civilized before history than when history begins to record his state.” At the annual meeting of British Scientists, 1925, Sir William Flinders Petrie reported the discovery, at Badar, some thirty miles south of Asyut in Egypt, of vases finer and thinner than any of later age, of glazed beads, of ivory statuettes of Asiatic type and pottery statuettes of Mediterranean type, all at a level covered by the water of the Nile since at least 10,000 B.C., and therefore five or six thousand years earlier than the first dynasty. Even Davidson, despite his emotional bias in favor of evolution, admits of the story...
The remarkable drawings and sculptures of the caves explored within the last fifty years in France and Spain have amazed the scientific world. In artistic perception and execution, these drawings, numbering thousands, often far surpass the much later work of the Egyptians and Babylonians. W. J. Sollas says of the group of bisons modeled in clay, found in the cave of the Tuc d'Audoubert, "It is probably 20,000 years old and yet quite modern."  


3 Ibid., p. 535.

library; quite exactly as the mere size of a modern university library tells us practically nothing of the intellectual processes of the undergraduates. We must go cautiously, therefore, when we single out particular instances of intellectual culture or moral comprehension as indicative of early education.

**Facts drawn from the organization of early peoples.** But the general organization of a people, the ideals shown in their social relations, their laws, their religion, these do tell us a great deal about their mental and moral status. We have enough knowledge of many early peoples to be able to grasp what that general organization was. We have got this knowledge from their memorial inscriptions, from their writings on clay and other substances, from their monuments, from their dwellings and household utensils, from their temples and burial places. The detail of it would be burdensome and out of proportion in such a book as this. But the broad outline is significant.

One of the most notable things in that organization is that it so closely resembled our own present society. It divided the people into great classes: upper, middle, and lower. The conditions which determined the particular class to which each person belonged were also, in general, the same as those which determine the present social status of the individual. They were chiefly his possession of wealth, prestige, and opportunity. The wealth may have been agricultural rather than industrial, the prestige may have been military rather than scientific or literary or purely political, the opportunity may have been won more by physical force than by cunning: but in their essence and their effects they were the same social determinants.

There is a curious kinship between, say, an Assyrian usurer and an American bootlegger, or an Egyptian priest and a modern politician.

And there was the same restless seeking for material advancement as now, the same 'divine discontent' with one's present state of affairs, the same succession of conflicts between individuals and between groups, the same shifting and uncertainty of ideals in all these conflicts, the same confusion of high and low purposes, worthy and unworthy. Men then as now puzzled over the ultimate meaning of life, and perceived by inevitable inference that it must have some purpose beyond the present, and were vague and discordant as now about the nature of that purpose and the means of attaining it. They worshiped God in various ways and measures. They appointed and accepted ministers of religion, specialists who should study these matters more profoundly and act as guides to those with lesser knowledge. They established civil governments, and quarreled about them. They changed both governments and forms of worship. They wrestled with the problem of compromise between the interests of time and of eternity, or at least of this life and a life other than the present. And all this involved purposive activity of mind and will, which is mental and moral education.

**Early schools.** Did they have schools as we know them now? The question is relatively unimportant; but we have made such a fetish of the school in education that it must be answered. There is evidence that they did have schools; though the school had not usurped the function of the family in education to the extent to which it now does.¹ But life itself was then, as it is now, as it must always be, the great school.² Each new generation of men and women faced the problems of living, as it always faces them, under

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² "No means can be found of exercising the higher faculties which can be compared with the actual relations of daily life." Quick, *Educational Reformers*, p. 313. Laurie also warns repeatedly "that we must not measure the education of a nation by its schools." *Pre-Christian Education*, p. 226.
the guidance of those who had a longer experience of living. And that longer experience sometimes was well interpreted and sometimes ill interpreted, sometimes condensed into formulas which were meant, as they always are meant, to be a short-cut to wisdom, but with very varying success in attaining their purpose. So arose literatures amongst these peoples, and with them schools of various sorts; but chiefly, as in all times, for those who had more wealth and the leisure that wealth brings.

**Early relationships vague.** Of the origins of these ideals, as of the detailed influences that carried them now to higher now to lower levels, we can say very little. There are curious parallels of thought between the Babylonians and the Egyptians and the Greeks, between the ancient Hebrews and all these peoples, which seem to point to some common origin; but that is not a sure ground of history. There is further a great, though vague, tradition, of some real historical value, which leads us back to a large mental culture as well as a great physical prowess and a high moral ideal. And there is a great deal of evidence, though not abundant enough nor well enough linked together, that generally the trend in these splendid possessions was downward: with fitful periods of reform, and more or less sporadic attempts, under special influences and the leadership of exceptional individuals, to recover some of the former excellence.

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Yet one cannot, in mere reason, escape the evidence for a Creator; nor can one write human history intelligently and leave out of it the direct action of the Creator and Conserver of humanity. Add to this that the Christian teaching of a primitive revelation, made by God to the first human beings, is inmeasurably better substantiated than the modern naturalistic assumption that man has 'evolved' in unbroken advance by his merely natural powers, and one cannot but admit that the idea of such a revelation is at least worth considering. To reject it a priori is unwarrantable and unscientific prejudice.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The hints offered toward an understanding of education in the Aurignacian and Solutrean periods by their drawings and sculptures.
2. The early domestication of animals as an indication of human education.
3. The common origin of certain scriptural and Babylonian narratives.
4. Babylonian libraries as educational indices.
5. The very early astronomical discoveries.

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