

ideal should not be used as a device for postponing all attempts to meet the urgent and immediate needs of Scotland herself.

We need not pause to expose the arguments which purport to prove that Scotland has neither the money nor the ability to do what is done by every nation of comparable wealth and size, and even by many which cannot be compared with her in either respect. If Scottish broadcasting could be freed from its Southern shackles, we might hope for a burst of creative energy. At the very least there would be a new centre where able young men would have some chance to develop their powers freely in their own country instead of having to seek their fortune in the South.

5. *The pattern*

The development of broadcasting in Britain displays in miniature a pattern of the treatment to which Scotland is increasingly subjected.

A new situation arises, and a new institution has to be created to meet it. The institution is at once centralised under the rigid domination of London. There is a pretence at devolution, but the powers devolved are restricted and controlled on every side, not least as regards finance. The central authority takes decisions, which may or may not be wise, about the English provinces. These decisions are unhesitatingly applied to Scotland without regard to Scottish opinion, which can do nothing but grumble and protest. When, in reply to protests, reasons are given for these decisions, they are manifestly not the real reasons: they would not deceive a child. If they were the real reasons, they would show that the authority was incompetent to take any rational decision at all. The authority remains blandly innocent of all the damage it may be doing, and the snarls of protest are put down complacently to the unreasonable nationalism for which the Scots are notorious. Yet there is no other possible means of redress.

The revealing thing in all this is that there seems to be no genuine English interest involved. If the broadcasting monopoly could be broken, this would be to the advantage of all Britain, and not least of England herself.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SCHOOLS

The children of the poor must be supported and sustained on the charge of the kirk, trial being taken whether the spirit of docility be in them found or not. If they be found apt to learning and letters, then may they not, — we mean, neither the sons of the rich, nor yet of the poor, — be permitted to reject learning, but must be charged to continue their study, so that the commonwealth may have some comfort by them.

First Book of Discipline (John Knox)

1. *Past and present*

At the beginning of the present century it could still be claimed, with some show of plausibility, that Scotland enjoyed the best system of public education in the world. All children, even those from the poorest homes, were supposed to receive a sound elementary schooling. From the Shorter Catechism they learned that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever; and with the aid of the multiplication table (which was commonly bound up with it) they were able to deal with the practical difficulties of the work-a-day world. Those of them who possessed genuine talent and worked hard were able, if not without sacrifice on their own part and on the part of their parents, to become citizens (as they were called) of the ancient Scottish Universities. In relation to her size Scotland was said to have the largest number of schools in Europe and the highest proportion of university students. The success attained in every walk of life by the products of her educational system contributed to her national pride and to the reputation she enjoyed throughout the world.

Such at least was the Scottish legend, and it certainly embodies a great ideal — cherished at least since the Reformation,

and perhaps earlier – even if this ideal, like other human ideals, was imperfectly realised in a difficult world. Hence Scotsmen may be puzzled and confused when it is dinned into their ears, that ‘we British’ have always shamefully neglected education, and especially university education. But what is really disturbing to-day – not to say shattering – is to hear so many voices proclaiming loudly that education in Scotland is far inferior to that in England and that the only way of reform is to copy English models – often the very models which the English themselves begin to find more and more unsatisfactory.

There has never been a lack of voices from the South deploring what are regarded as deviations from the English norm. What is new is that these voices become ever more blaring with the aid of modern inventions. Can it be true that the ever-increasing centralisation of government has taken the heart out of Scottish education as out of so much else?

2. *Administration of the schools*

It may be replied that as Scotland already controls her system of education any complaints about the present position are irrelevant. If the Scots have allowed their education to degenerate, this is entirely their own fault.

Such a picture does not do justice to the real situation.

In Scotland as elsewhere the control of education was originally in the hands of the Church. After the Reformation the Church of Scotland, although hampered by poverty, had a strong interest in the education of the people, and by the democratic character of her courts the opinion of laymen could be expressed at every level from the parish to the nation. Most of the Scottish schools continued to be under her control till 1872, though there were also town grammar schools and private foundations. In that year she, together with the Free Church of Scotland, generously handed over her schools and school-buildings to the State without seeking or receiving any financial recompense.

The control of these schools was assigned locally to *ad hoc* authorities – for long known as School Boards – whose members were supposed to be elected because of their special interest in

education. This method worked reasonably well, as it still does in America. Yet in 1928, as was pointed out in an earlier Chapter, the schools were suddenly transferred to the control of town and county councils elected for quite other purposes. This was done, not in the interests of education or in order to meet any Scottish need, but simply to fit in with English methods of derating agriculture and industry in what was supposed to be a temporary emergency.

Members of these local authorities are sometimes of outstanding ability, but on the whole they are ill-equipped to deal with education, which for most of them is a secondary interest. Educational policy has too often been subordinated to irrelevant political prejudice.

Whatever may be thought of this, a national system of education cannot be adequately controlled, let alone developed, by an agglomeration of local authorities. This can be done only by a national administration, and it will be remembered that in 1872 Scotland had no national administration except for the Lord Advocate. Hence the administration of Scottish schools was for a time brought directly under the tutelage of London officials as ignorant of Scottish ideals as they were complacent about their own. In spite of protests this continued even in form till the office of Secretary for Scotland was restored in 1885 – in actual practice it seems to have continued a good deal longer. The damage done cannot be calculated, but, according to one authority whom I knew and respected, ‘the true aims of instruction were forgotten, and the formative value of education was sacrificed to the informative’.

The situation may be less unsatisfactory to-day, although some educationists, even in Scotland, talk and behave, however unconsciously, as if the aim of the schools should be to impart information rather than to develop, in the interests of the individual and of society, whatever capacities for thought and action a child may possess. The local authorities in Scotland, so far as they are concerned with schools, are now under a Scottish Education Department in Edinburgh. This is officered by educated men of good will, and the system (here inevitably over-simplified) might develop satisfactorily if these officials in

turn were responsible to an elected national authority with a revenue of its own adequate for modern needs. Instead of this they are, like other civil servants in the Scottish Office, responsible only to an over-burdened Secretary of State appointed by the head of an English political party and supervised by a watchful Treasury. He in turn is responsible to a predominantly English Parliament reluctant to admit that Scotland should be treated differently from an English province. Like any other Cabinet minister he is bound to defend in public 'the policy of the Government as a whole' and so to subordinate the educational interests of Scotland to the dogmas of his own political party.

This, it may be said, is only what Scotland has to suffer in other spheres – except where she is in the still worse position of being directly controlled by government offices in London. But in the case of education the unfairness of the system is glaring since, at least so far as popular education is concerned, her traditions are so much better and older than those of England. In a matter which concerns not merely her economic, but her spiritual, life her people have no adequate power to control and develop the education of their children in accordance with their own ideals. What happens, it is not unfair to say, is that the Scottish officials have to wait and see what is done in England and then to follow suit. It is hardly surprising if Scottish education is now alleged to trail behind that of England. This is the result one would expect.

3. *The contrast with England*

Because of the fundamental differences of the two countries any attempt to base changes in Scottish schools on an English model is bound to be unsatisfactory from the start. Education is a living and growing thing, and, like other living things, it can grow healthy only if it does so in accordance with its own nature.

In Scotland education has been relatively homogeneous and democratic. Even in the village schools the children of the laird, the minister, the farmers and the ploughmen, might, at least in their earliest years, sit together on the same benches to the

advantage of them all. In the towns also famous schools, some of them founded long before the Reformation and many of them of a respectable antiquity, carried on the same tradition, although in the last hundred years their status has been to some extent lowered by the fashion of sending Scottish boys to English Public Schools – a fashion which has gradually extended from the nobility and gentry to the professional classes and well-to-do business men. In spite of their small financial resources these old Scottish schools did marvellous work and produced, as they still do, many distinguished men for the service of Church and State. The astonishing lowness of their fees and a system of small bursaries meant that they were open to able children even from families who had little of the world's wealth. To say that they catered for only one social class is nonsense.

This ideal, however imperfectly realised, was in marked contrast with the system South of the Border. There it was thought dangerous to educate children above their station, whereas, in Scotland, if I may exaggerate a little, their education *was* their station. The famous Public Schools of England – in the main independent boarding schools reserved for the well-to-do – have become sharply distinguished from all other schools. They may have suited English conditions at one time, even if it is sometimes held that they do so no longer. They have many merits and some demerits, neither of which need be discussed here; but in the modern age it is not altogether an advantage to divide a country into two classes – the Public-School boy and the non-Public-School boy, the latter of whom has been regarded, and has even regarded himself, as socially inferior. Some modern Englishmen are so hostile to this tradition that they wish to do away with the Public Schools altogether. This would not only destroy something of value, but would also be an astonishing interference with private liberty.

Whatever may be the merits and demerits of the English Public School system it would be arrogant to assume that it provides the sole model which all other countries ought to follow and by which their education ought to be judged. The educational systems of France and Germany and many other

European countries have been far too successful to be swept aside as obviously inferior. It is with these European countries that Scotland should be compared; and in the light of their achievements, as well as her own, there would seem to be many reasons – if reasons must be given – why she should be free to develop her own homogeneous system in her own democratic way.

4. *The status of teachers*

If public education in Scotland must be adjusted to an English model, the model obviously cannot be the English Public Schools, which in the past monopolised whatever dignity was credited to education in the South. The model to be adopted must be the State Schools which are beginning to be developed in England but are still – to put it mildly – lacking in prestige. This means that Scottish schools, even the most famous, must be treated as if they corresponded to the less distinguished part of the English system. If this is what is done, the traditional status of Scottish teachers – not to mention the teachers themselves – must inevitably be depressed. The educational effects can only be bad.

In the days when Scotland could still be proud of her education the village dominie, and still more the headmaster or rector of the town grammar school, were important figures in their community, but a great deal of this prestige seems to have been lost. Teachers are generally excluded from the local education committee and feel themselves dominated by men, sometimes by self-important men, whose qualifications to control education are not conspicuous. The authority of the headmaster in particular has greatly declined. Since Directors of Education were introduced after the English example, the headmaster in some places may be allowed no say in the appointment of his own staff. In extreme cases he may arrive at school one morning to find that one of his teachers has been removed and replaced by another. Directors of Education may do good work: some of them may even sanction new experiments (so long as these are inexpensive). Yet we should not forget that a good headmaster makes a good school – a great headmaster

has an almost miraculous effect – and he cannot do this unless he possesses genuine authority and considerable freedom. What is indisputable is that breaches of Scottish tradition are arbitrarily imposed from above; and arbitrary imposition from above is itself a breach of Scottish tradition.

On the financial side Scotland presumably receives her Goschen proportion of the amount assigned to the State schools in England. She is in no position to devote a larger share of her national revenue to education, however much she may wish to do so. The plans of the local authorities for expanding education can be cut down by the Secretary of State because of some Government policy determined by English conditions. As the system works out, Scottish teachers can never be paid more highly than teachers in English State schools, even when they have higher qualifications. Too often they are paid less. It has even been claimed that on the average they are paid as much as 8 per cent less. In practice they must wait for any increase in salary till after teachers in England have been awarded theirs; hence they must always lag behind and, if they are unlucky, they may be caught in a freeze. In any case their salaries are tied to the percentage increases awarded in England: if English salaries have gone up by, say, 12 per cent., Scottish salaries are not allowed to go up by more.

The supposed devolution allowed to Scotland is only a façade. This would become even more obvious if there were time to examine the complicated machinery of the Scottish Joint Council for Teachers' Salaries, the appointment of arbitrators, the final decision of the Secretary of State, and so on. Even the façade is being steadily nibbled away; there is, for example, a proposal to transfer the appointment of arbitrators from the Lord President of the Court of Session, who knows the Scottish situation, to the London Minister of Labour, who does not.

There are other ways in which the status of teachers can be lowered. At the beginning of the century in Scotland almost all male teachers were expected to be University graduates; and there still is a far higher proportion of graduates in Scottish Secondary schools than there is in English ones; but if the Government succeeds in its latest policies, men as well as

women will be admitted to the teaching profession without ever having breathed the liberal atmosphere of a university.

It is not surprising if the status of the Scottish teacher has declined; if the schools are grossly understaffed; and if the confidence of Scotsmen in their own system of education has been at least partially undermined. This in itself places obstacles in the way of progress. Nevertheless it would be false to suggest that Scottish education has declined absolutely in the last half-century. In some respects it has improved; and if it has improved less rapidly than English education during the same period, this is partly because English education (outside the Public Schools) started at a lower level.

It is generally admitted that even to-day Scottish primary schools compare favourably with those in England or America. The most serious criticisms are directed against the secondary schools, and here there is a danger of judging them by an inappropriate standard. They are continually being urged to introduce an equivalent to the English Sixth Form – that is, to keep their pupils longer at school and abandon a general education for a more specialised one. Whatever may be thought of this highly disputable proposition, it is stupid to condemn the products of Scottish schools because they are less specialised than older pupils in England. This criticism is in any case concerned with the best preparation for entrance to the Universities. The condemnation meted out to the work of secondary schools as a whole is more disquieting, especially when we are told that hard work and ability to learn are now discredited in Scotland. This attitude cannot but be encouraged by educationists who sneer at the ‘lad o’ pairts’ and seem to believe that the schools should cater only for mediocrity. Nothing could be more disastrous to Scotland or to any other country.

These questions go beyond our present scope, but all this outside criticism does not make Scotsmen more contented with a system of government under which it is impossible for them to control their own destiny even in matters where their past success has been most conspicuous.

Perhaps we may be forgiven if this gloomy section is ended

on a less serious note. There is a light-hearted radio competition, known as ‘Top of the Form’, in which schools vie with one another in displays of general knowledge. The questions devised are naturally more suited to English conditions in spite of amiable but sometimes mistaken efforts to prevent this; and they are posed in accents which Scottish children sometimes find difficult to understand. In spite of this handicap, out of the first fifteen competitions Scotland won 8, Wales 4, and England 3. This seems to be not far from the proper proportion and may suggest that Scottish education is less degenerate than is commonly supposed. Even as late as 1966 supposedly tongue-tied pupils from the Scottish schools had won this competition three times in a row.

5. *Innovations from the South*

Every system of education has to adjust itself to a changing world. The need for adjustment becomes more pressing – and also more difficult to meet – at a time when science is developing with a rapidity hitherto unknown. The necessary changes should be thought out on first principles and with due regard to existing conditions: they should not be made by blindly imitating models hurriedly devised elsewhere.

The first effort to reform the State schools of England was admittedly not a success. The panacea proffered was what came to be known as the eleven-plus examination. Educationists confidently assured us that at this tender age children could be separated, even by one examination, into those fitted for academic courses which might lead through the grammar schools to the University and those who were not so fitted. The latter were consigned to other secondary schools, which – in spite of bold denials – came to be regarded as inferior and as less likely to equip pupils for remunerative positions in the outside world. So great had been the confidence in this strangely rigid reform that little or no provision was made for transferring children at a later age from one type of school to another. After some years the theory and its practice were widely discredited.

As a result a new panacea was offered with even greater confidence – the so-called ‘comprehensive’ school. As this new

reform is still in its infancy, it is not easy to know exactly what is meant by this slogan. Sometimes it looks as if a comprehensive school must be a huge glass building in which hundreds of children can be assembled without regard to differences in ability. The analogy of a great factory with one assembly line, or even with several, is not a promising one. But if a comprehensive school is not this, the meaning of the phrase becomes vague and requires further elucidation. Both in theory and practice the new reforms are still in the stage of 'muddling through'.

In accordance with the policy of assimilation the eleven-plus examination (or something very like it) had to be imposed upon schools in Scotland. One wicked sequel to this was that for a time 80 per cent of the children in Scottish Secondary schools were unable to study any foreign language. There was fortunately a reaction later, and it became possible to study foreign languages even in the primary schools; but why should children have to suffer from such inconstancy?

When the eleven-plus examination fell into general disfavour, we were told that once more Scotland must follow the newest English model. For a time a very charming and highly intelligent English lady was even made responsible for Scottish education, although her knowledge of it was manifestly not from the inside. She informed us blithely that we must now go 'all comprehensive, and even – in a burst of egalitarian enthusiasm – that in comprehensive schools there must be no streamlining. This appeared to mean that in the modern educational factory the ablest and the stupidest children must all move at the same pace along the same assembly line. Any experienced teacher – if I may say so without disrespect – must be tempted to regard this as a lapse into the larger lunacy. One can only hope that she did not mean what she seemed to say.

It is not our business here to assess in general the merits of different types of school, nor do I wish to condemn comprehensive schools in particular: they may have their own merits, though these have yet to be proved in practice; but it is hardly possible to refrain from suggesting that some of the arguments put forward on their behalf are poverty-stricken in the

extreme. Some of their defenders seem to think that they can further their case by charging their opponents with snobbishness and dishonesty. Even a highly intelligent English Minister of Education is reported to have said that the reasons for introducing comprehensive schools were not properly understood: the reason was simply that it was wrong to assign children irrevocably to different types of school at an early age. This means, if I followed him, that because one foolish modern experiment had failed, we were justified in scrapping the traditional schools which had done so much good work – not least in Scotland – long before the eleven-plus examination was invented.

What is more, too many of the arguments put forward are not really concerned with education: they stress the need to find a cure for English social snobbery. This disease I should not myself have thought so widespread or so deadly – perhaps because I have spent most of my life in a democratic university like Oxford, where a man's brains are considered more important than the social status of his father. But it must be admitted that British Broadcasting encourages a more alarmist diagnosis. From one point of view even grammar-school boys – not to mention Public-School ones – seem to be enthroned as Brahmins into whose shadow no man of lesser caste may step. From another point of view – as when some good-looking young men in uniform were shown sitting at ease in an officers' mess 'as if they were Public-School boys' – they appear to be looked on almost as if they were monkeys dressed up. Nonsense of this kind is a poor foundation for educational reform.

The ancient schools of Scotland have been happily free from such absurdities. Most of them have always been comprehensive in a liberal sense of that word: they have catered for children of varying ability, of different social origins, and often of both sexes. It is unreasonable that they should be suddenly destroyed in order to find a cure for the alleged snobbery of the English.

This is another example of the way in which Scotland is forced to swallow what are supposed, rightly or wrongly, to be the best medicine for English ailments. It is not obvious that big schools are *always* better than small ones: the 'wee schools'

of Scotland have done excellent work and still do so even to-day, though they too seem doomed for destruction. It is not obvious that what is suitable for Croydon must be equally suitable for Strathyre. Nor is it obvious to me – though it may be to some administrators – that money is better spent on vast new buildings than on the salaries of teachers: I would rather be taught by a man of genius in a hovel than by a mediocrity in a palace. But what I am arguing here is only that Scotland should have the power to develop her own educational system in her own way without regard to a mass of irrelevant considerations intruded from the South. She might make a mess of it, but at least the mess would be her own.

CHAPTER XV

THE UNIVERSITIES

Cameron (the ghillie): *'When my father has taken his degree in Aberdeen he will return and be a crofter again.'*

Simon: *'In that case I don't see what he is getting out of it.'*

Cameron: *'He iss getting the grandest thing in the world out of it, he iss getting education.'*

Sir James Barrie

1. *The ancient universities*

Great as is the importance of the schools, it is the universities which in the last resort determine the academic reputation of a country. Of the four ancient universities of Scotland – St. Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh – the first three were founded by Papal Bulls in the Fifteenth Century; and like Oxford and Cambridge they inherited from the Middle Ages the twin ideals of a liberal education and academic independence. Edinburgh was founded soon after the Reformation and carried on the same ideals. All four were established before the Union of the Crowns in 1603; and like the Church of Scotland, with which they were so closely connected, they received guarantees under the Treaty of Union in 1707. Cynics maintain that but for this good fortune Scotland would still be waiting at the end of an English queue hoping that one day she might be allowed a university of her own.

In the beginning, and indeed later, these universities had to struggle against poverty, but the astonishing thing is how much they did with how little money. Much of the teaching was elementary, but they carried on the democratic tradition of being open to able boys from all classes. Even in the earlier centuries they produced outstanding scholars, such as George