

THE CHANGING SCHOOL

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PREFACE

THOUGH schools are always changing they are not always changing at the same rate, nor always in the same direction, nor always with the same significance. Sometimes the alterations mean no more than do the caprices of fashion; at other times they point to a profound change of heart or of creed in the great mass of the teaching profession. And nobody who has kept his finger on the pulse of education for the last few decades can fail to have noticed the peculiar restlessness of the period. The profession has been astir with movements: movements that really move, and move nearly, if not exactly, towards the same goal—the goal of freedom for the scholars. A great wave of fervour for freedom rose in the infant school, passed with diminishing force through the schools for higher learning, and broke unheeded on the walls of the university. Another great wave of enthusiasm for individual work followed the same course and stopped at the same point. Everywhere, except in the most conservative seats of learning, there has been a transfer of emphasis from teaching to learning,

everywhere a shifting of responsibility from the shoulders of the staff to the shoulders of the scholars. And the many minor changes that have concomitantly taken place have but served to swell the common current that has been heading steadily towards freedom and individualism.

The psychology of the Victorian age can make no great boast of having illumined the path of learning. But within the present century light has broken through at two distinct points. Mental tests have given us a calculus by which research may be rendered more exact and scientific; and the new psychology of the unconscious has cast some measure of light on the deeper wells of feeling and the subtler springs of conduct.

Mental tests I have already dealt with in other books, and I refer to them here merely to remove a misunderstanding. The mental tester is supposed to be a withering materialist who ignores spiritual values and teaches that the most important things in schooling are the most measurable. Nothing could be farther from the truth. He holds, in fact, that the relative importance of factors in education is often in inverse proportion to their measurability. He does not, as his opponents do, say that the higher things in education are immeasurable and forthwith proceed to measure them. He either measures them as accurately as he can, taking good care to discover

the probability of his estimate being true, or else he leaves them alone. He does not claim to be on the side of the angels merely on the strength of doing badly that which he says cannot be done at all. He knows that the last bird that is likely to soar is the ostrich. Thorndike has reminded us that a mother does not love her baby any the less for having weighed him. Nor, we may add, does she think any the less of his immortal soul by the fact that she finds it manifested in a ponderable body. Be that as it may, the reader will find little in this book about weighing the baby, though he will find a great deal about loving him, and understanding him; and incidentally about feeding him (mentally), and even about smacking him.

It will be observed that I call the baby "him." And the reader, if he reads far enough, will discover that I also call the teacher "him" and the child "him." All masculine. Madam, I crave your indulgence. It is not through lack of respect for you that I do this. It is through a love of simplicity. Suppose I wish to say: If a teacher finds that he readily loses his temper he should take himself seriously in hand. I put it like that, not because I think the man alone has the privilege of losing his temper, but because I wish to avoid saying: If a teacher finds that he or she readily loses his or her temper, he or she

should take himself or herself seriously in hand. This, you will admit, madam, is intolerable. It is true that I can sometimes, though not always, take refuge in the plural; and it is also true that I may call the child "it." I have also on occasion heard the teacher called "it." But I do not care to call the child "it," and I will not dare to call the teacher "it." So until the day arrives, as it has already arrived in America, when the noun "teacher" becomes feminine, I beg leave to treat it as an all-embracing masculine.

After this digression from mental tests and babies into the briar-patch of English grammar, I will return to the second point at which light has recently broken through from the realm of pure psychology. The new theory of the unconscious has given us fresh clues to the interpretation of human conduct; it has enabled us to know a little more about the non-rational part of man, and it has brought home to us again the fact that if we wish to improve the mind we must pay great heed to the things that move the mind—emotions, passions, and motivating ideals. And that is why so much space is devoted in this book to problems of discipline; for the school is here regarded not merely as a place where lessons are given—and forgotten; but rather as a place where little human beings with warm blood

coursing through their veins act and react on one another and on the teacher, and shape, for good or ill, each other's characters. Happiness is made there, and misery; as well as bookishness and a love of learning.

A few brief excursions have been made into the distant past to point a contrast with the present; but most of the changes of which I treat have taken place within my own memory. And they are still going on as fast as ever. And they will continue. They will perhaps slow down; they will certainly veer and vacillate; but they will not stop till the last teacher has given his last lesson and the last learner learns no more. It follows that the word "finality" finds no place in this book. To believe that we have reached a fixed and final system of education, or indeed of anything else, betrays a curiously weak sense of historical perspective. We are prone to picture ourselves as living towards the end of things. We look back and see a long line of human evolution beginning far away in the mists and ending in "these latter days." But the oldest school in the land, University College, Oxford, goes no farther back, even in tradition, than a thousand years—a small fraction of the time that has elapsed since man first appeared upon the planet. Educationally we are but babes. We are at the beginning of things. The

historian of a hundred thousand years hence will refer to us as children of the dawn ; and he will be at great pains to explain to his readers (if reading will have survived as a mode of disseminating thought) the meaning of our little systems and sects, and the significance of names that had almost passed out of the memory of man.

Changes are inevitable. New ideas, large and small, will press upon us from all quarters. How are we to receive them ? The obvious answer is : With an open mind. Certainly not with a closed mind. Nor with the mind that is open at both ends, so that when a new idea gets in at one end it pushes out an old idea at the other. The ideal mind is biassed neither towards the old, nor towards the new ; it is biassed only towards the true. It will hospitably receive new ideas even though they quarrel with the old—as they almost certainly will. It will somehow or other make peace ; and this means a constant readjustment of opinions and convictions. When in any man's mind this readjustment no longer takes place he has ceased to learn by experience. He has become in his own eyes a pundit ; in the eyes of others an old fogey. From this fate may a kind Heaven preserve both the reader and the author.

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