

## SOCIAL EDUCATION.

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THE earliest and perhaps the greatest treatise in which the subject of education is discussed comes down to us from the period of the fourth century before Christ.

It is known as the *Republic* of Plato, and its subject is the formation of an ideal State. How to combine Law with Right, or Law with Justice is the problem set before us all through the book. If these two can be combined, the ideal State will exist; for the combination of Law with Right is as persuasive as it is powerful.

Again the remedy for existing social and political evils can, in the mind of Plato, be found only in the creation of "a commonwealth so perfectly adjusted that every citizen would feel in his natural place, and would act accordingly."<sup>1</sup> The problem of good government, whether in the school or in society at large, can be stated in the same terms in the twentieth century, A.D., as in the fourth century, B.C.

Law and Justice must clearly be seen to coincide, and the organization both of the school and of society must admit of a perfectly natural growth. Can the solution be found by practical experiment or by philosophy? If the Socratic doctrine be accepted that what is wrong is necessarily foolish, and that what is wise is necessarily right, philosophy and practice should be found to go hand in hand.

In *Social Education*, by Dr. Colin A. Scott, Head of Department of Psychology, Boston Normal School, published by Ginn & Co., New York, we find some striking views put forward regarding good government both in the school and in society. At the same time, the book contains practical examples of schools where the philosophy described by Dr. Scott has been actually put to the test.

Here then we have the modern experimental or scientific method inaugurated by Bacon placed side by side with the

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ancient or dialectical method employed by Plato; and as the two will be found to reach the same conclusion, it may be inferred that the doctrine of the book contains something very like truth.

The book is written primarily for educationalists, but the argument is carried on till national issues are seen to depend upon scholastic methods, and the State no less than the school is shown to be within the sphere of influence of the new doctrine. Briefly stated the argument of the book may be condensed as follows: The everyday experience of life shows that the efficiency of a man as a social animal or as the member of a community, depends less upon his individual attainments than upon his power of adapting himself to his social environment.

Now his social environment is anything but a simple affair. He is, let us suppose, a business man with an interest in charitable, municipal, and parliamentary affairs. In addition to his family circle, his friends include the members of a literary club. Here, to go no further, we have six social groups consisting of different individuals, with all of whom our friend is in touch.

The success or failure of his life, its happiness or the reverse, depends mainly upon the efficiency with which he can carry out his work as a member of each of these six groups. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," and his chief

satisfaction will arise first from a sense of efficient social service; and secondly, from the appreciation and praise of his fellow men. These two motives, the desire to perform efficient social service to his group, and the desire to receive appreciation and praise from his group, are the two great motives which guide truly efficient men in their social relations.

If firstly, the desire to do; and secondly, the honour-motive, are the two great motor-activities leading to efficiency in society at large, these two motives should also be planted and stimulated in the microcosm known as the school.

It will be noticed that the efficient or successful man in society selects his own group. He chooses his own interests; and to be a successful member of a group he must not only choose but must be chosen by the group. In a word, each group is "self-organized."

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Again, each member of the group is put to do that particular work for which he is best suited, the work of all being "co-operative." Can the principles of co-operation and self-organization, which are the marks of good social government, be applied to groups in school life as in society?

Three actual schools are sited [sic] by Dr. Scott as furnishing concrete examples of co-operation and self-organization. "Actual cases of schools" writes Dr. Scott, "which have specially manifested the social spirit must be studied in detail, and we must ask in these cases to what extent the pupils are self-organized and productive members of the embryonic society to which they belong. What social satisfaction do the pupils themselves get out of their life is a question which must be asked of every school."<sup>2</sup>

It is not easy to do justice to the methods of the three schools cited by Dr. Scott, by quotation from the chapters devoted to an examination of their several strong and weak points. Students of education are recommended to study the book itself. Suffice it to say that actual examples are here given which show that as a practical principle co-operation has been shown to be superior to competition.

The true method of preparing the social embryo for his future career in life is to awaken his faculties by co-operative work, and by encouraging the self-direction of groups. What is really needed, he thinks, as a preparation for modern democracy and the highly differentiated society of the present day is not so much self-government in its political sense, but self-control and the self-direction of groups.

"It is the latter requirement" writes Dr. Scott, "which is the most significant, and also the least understood. In adult society self-directed groups abound. Every church in America is a good example of this fact. In earlier times, a church was an affair of coercive government. Forced taxes were used for its support, and the attendance was compelled by fines.... Now, however, the church directs its internal affairs without compulsion.... Besides churches, there are committees, voluntary organizations, etc., which carry on projects and interests, and hold themselves together, and are self-directive without the need of compulsion. They are

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founded on the common purposes, and the natural social capacities and affinities of their members, and are free, voluntary, and highly social, only because, unlike a national government, they are easily capable of going to pieces. To succeed here, even as a follower, is an honour; to lead, a triumph. It is the introduction into our schools of such voluntary, self-directed purpose-groups, rather than the functions of coercive government, which may be

expected to gratify the social instinct of the children, to develop their resourcefulness and initiative, and to fit them for the complicated life of present society. It is in this direction that the school may show itself naturally and easily as an embryonic social organism, manifesting its own laws of growth, rather than as prematurely moulded after the model of a not too perfect adult community.”<sup>3</sup>

One of the schools cited by Dr. Scott, was founded by Professor Dewey, at Chicago. The following extract from Professor Dewey’s book, *The School and Society*, will give some idea of his point of view. He is discussing the employment of the manual arts in school life. “We must conceive of work in wood and metal, of weaving, sewing, and cooking, as methods of life, not as distinct studies. We must conceive of them in their social significance, as types of the processes by which society keeps itself going, as agencies for bringing home to the child some of the principal necessities of community life, and as ways in which these needs have been met by the growing insight and ingenuity of man; in short, as instrumentalities through which the school itself shall be made a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons.

“A society is a number of people held together because they are working along common lines, in a common spirit, and with reference to common aims. The common needs and aims demand a growing interchange of thought, and a growing unity of sympathetic feeling. The radical reason that the present school cannot organize itself as a natural social unit is just because this element of common and productive activity is absent. Upon the playground, in games and sport, social organization takes place spontaneously and inevitably. There [p 31]

is something to do, some activity to be carried on, requiring natural division of labour, selection of leaders and followers, mutual co-operation and emulation. In the schoolroom the motive and the cement of social organization are alike wanting. Upon the ethical side the tragic weakness of the present school is that it endeavours to prepare future members of the social order in a medium in which the conditions of the social spirit are eminently wanting.”

Stanley Hall’s great work on *Adolescence*, published in 1904, was the first work of world-wide repute, pointing in the new direction.

Dr. Scott’s *Social Education* now sets the seal on the new movement.

Not instruction but motor activity, not competition but co-operation, are the watchwords of the new doctrine, and the psychological marks of a sound educational system.

We of the Parents’ Union have long been familiar with these doctrines. Miss Mason has led the movement in the realm of primary education. Let us, therefore, rejoice that the movement is now spreading so as to include secondary education, and that *Home Education* has at last found in *Adolescence* and in *Social Education* a pair of volumes worthy to stand in the same shelf with it.

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Paul in *The Nineteenth Century* for October, 1908, p. 639.

<sup>2</sup> *Social Education*, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Social Education*, pp. 75–77.