

## EDUCATION AND PERSONALITY.<sup>1</sup>

BY DR. R. BRYCE GIBSON, M.A., D.Sc.\*

### PART I.

I WAS running through the June Conference number of the PARENTS' REVIEW a week or two ago, when I was attracted by a reference to Prof. Eucken in Miss Charlotte Mason's article on "Trop de Zèle." Miss Mason had been pointing out that the eager haste to ally oneself with this or that educational novelty was apt to defeat its own ends. "Instead of pouring our tributaries into the main stream, we are apt," she writes, "to run after any trickle of water destined to lose itself in a bog." Yes, if we wish to flow with the great river to the ocean, we must seize the main current of life at its deepest and commit ourselves to it: we must follow a spiritual philosophy of education, a philosophy of life as a whole. Such in effect was the argument. And then came the reference to Prof. Eucken. Miss Mason had seen in the *Spectator* a notice of Meyrich Booth's recent work on "Rudolph Eucken, his Philosophy and Influence," and had been struck by the fact that the principles of the German thinker's philosophy were in essential agreement with those upon which the P.N.E.U. has been based and developed. "My joy was very great," she writes, "to discover that for many years I had been working out a philosophy identical with his in many points, perhaps because we have both ploughed with the same heifer." In fact, to quote Miss Mason once again, there are "two outstanding principles of Eucken's philosophy which are ours also," namely, "the recognition of the spiritual character of education; and the application of the principle of Activism." By the enforcement of these two principles, a momentous educational revolution is to be brought about.

I was personally much interested at finding that a philosophy for which I have a particular regard was identical in spirit with the educational philosophy of the P.N.E.U., and it struck me that here at any rate was an auspicious opening for an address. No subject could be more fundamental than the principles of education, none more likely to stimulate discussion, and none perhaps more congenial to the parental temper.

[p 93]

It is quite true—and Miss Mason draws attention to the fact—that Prof. Eucken has not dealt at any length with the problem of education, though his philosophy lends itself admirably to a vital solution of it, a fact which many educational writers in Germany have not been slow to perceive. But among the recently published "Collected Essays of Rudolf Eucken," edited and translated by Dr. Meyrich Booth, there is one that deals specifically with this problem. It is entitled "Thoughts upon the Education of the People." Let us glance at this Essay, and note what Eucken holds to be most fundamental in the matter of educational philosophy.

The essential requirement of a people's education, we gather, is that it should be truly *human*, in the deepest sense of that word. It must appeal to man as man: it must be adjusted to his spiritual necessities, and not to his weakness or his ignorance. Above all we must beware of supposing that by "Education of the people" we mean a special kind of education. "We do not refer," says Eucken, "to a condensed preparation of our spiritual and intellectual possessions, suitable for the needs and interests of the great masses; we are not thinking of a diluted concoction of the real draught of education which we are so kind and condescending as to dispense to the majority. No! a thousand times, no! Just as there is only one truth common to

us all, so there is only one education common to us all. ... An education which depends upon a particular situation in life, and is confined in its effect to this, which does not direct itself to man as man and promise to advance him, which from its very foundation, and throughout all its ramifications, is not first and foremost an education of the essence of man's being—such a system does not deserve to be honoured with the name of education."

And what is the essence of man's being? What is it that makes him a person and assigns him personal rights and obligations? The essence of man is the spiritual power which enables him to triumph over nature and subdue it to spiritual ends. It is this spiritual power which must be awakened if we are to educate the people. And it is a firm conviction with Eucken that this power cannot be awakened by an appeal that is purely intellectual. For in the first place man, as man, is much more than mere intellect, so that an intellectualist education never reaches the foundations which are laid in man's nature as a whole; and there is further grave danger of the intellectualistic

[p 94]

scheme of the teacher retaining the kernel and passing on to his pupils the outer husk. For the labour of investigation, the long conflict with difficulties, all that gave the intellectual enquiry its personal value—this is practically incommunicable. "Doubt, with its disruptive yet strengthening power, cannot be passed on to others. The results only can be communicated in popular fashion," and here too there is an almost inevitable deterioration. "Everything difficult and obscure is as far as possible concealed, the corners and edges are rounded off, and the whole matter is easily made to appear more finished than in reality it is; striking features likely to produce a strong impression are as far as possible brought to the front; the desire for comprehensibility easily outstrips the care for strict truth; and, moreover, such a representation easily splits up into isolated fragments of information, and dispenses with inward unity. A variegated jumble of mental stimuli is supplied, and men's interests are drawn now in one direction, now in another." And with what result? The net product is a semi-educated state of mind, "an illusion of education, carrying with it the supposed ability to speak, argue and pass judgment upon every possible subject," but stricken with a weakened sense of reverence for the great human problems and the mystery of life.

No, the spiritual power which is of man's very essence cannot be awakened by these processes of intellectual spoon-feeding in diluted doses, and unless that power can be rendered personally active in its own behalf, education is a mere word. Indeed it is less than this. It is a misleading misnomer, for does not education *mean* "a drawing out," an eliciting or educing of the personal response, the encouragement of initiative and self-activity? This is a familiar theme to a generation brought up on Froebel and Pestalozzi, and it was as familiar to Plutarch as it was to us. "The mind," writes Plutarch, "is not a vessel which calls for filling. It is a pile which simply requires kindling wood to start the flame of eagerness for original thought and ardour for truth."<sup>2</sup> But to feel the full force of this conviction it is necessary to realise the value of the power that is to express itself thus clearly in tongues of living flame. It is Eucken's main merit that with indefatigable earnestness, sublimely undeterred by the fear of repeating a good thing, he has written thousands of pages all eloquent with the same great theme—the

[p 95]

meaning and value of the spiritual life. And to him the spiritual life is not a thing that can be poured into full receptive vessels, only to inflate our natural inertia: it is nothing if it does not

spring spontaneously from the depth of our will, and express a vital and prompt decision of our nature. The task of a truly human and popular education is essentially this: “to arouse a man to self-active life and to base him firmly upon this; it is necessary to make clear to him the sharp *either—or* which is contained in human existence, to call him, through a great reversal of direction, to inner independence, to firmness and joyfulness in his own being; it is essential, further, to let him recognise the greatness and dignity of man in his spiritual nature, and at the same time his limits and the great gulf that separates him from the goal, to give him a conception of the inward greatness and importance of even the simplest situation in life or the most modest outward sphere of duty, and to fill him with a powerful faith in life, fit to fortify him against every obstacle and reverse.” Through such inspiration, life will be rejuvenated at its source [sic], and civilisation regenerated. There will be a return to the original sources of life, and “a more energetic working out of its simple and essential elements.” For “the great spiritual renewals of mankind” have always been at bottom simplifications—movements away from artificiality and perversion towards the simplicity of true spirituality, the true self-dependence of the spiritually free life.

From this account of Eucken’s philosophy of true primary education, with its activist appeal and its spiritual motive, we can understand perhaps why the Founder of this Union should have felt so inwardly in sympathy with Eucken’s message and have considered that it was in its essentials identical with her own.

There is in Miss Mason’s paper a sympathetic allusion to another great name which glitters on the panel of educational reformers of the present day. I refer to Friedrich Wilhelm Förster. In passing from Eucken to Förster we are not conscious of any marked difference in outlook or conviction.

Förster’s name has not yet become an household word in English-speaking countries, but in Central Europe his influence is immense. His message is essentially that of Eucken. Like Eucken, he is convinced that the main problem of education is that of a return to the simplicities of the spiritual life: man can find himself only by yoking his freedom under spiritual ideals.

[p 96]

But in method and manner the two thinkers differ very widely. Eucken’s manner is prophetic, and everything he writes is writ largely. Förster is a teacher rather than a prophet, and a master of illustrative detail. Thus his work fits in admirably with Eucken’s, which it prolongs into all the practicalities of the educational world. If there is a difference in their spiritual outlook, it lies in the respective attitudes they adopt towards the two dominant confessions of the Christian Faith. Neither Eucken nor Förster is either a Protestant or a Catholic, in the accepted sense of these terms, but whereas Eucken’s temperament and bias is pronouncedly Protestant, that of Förster is as decidedly Catholic. But to both thinkers alike the solution of the great issue between authority and freedom is fundamentally spiritual, and the key to the solution lies in a respect for personality.

I pass on then to consider Förster’s philosophy of education, and shall endeavour to exhibit its principles and illustrate their application. Förster was for many years a devoted adherent of the social democratic movement in Germany. He experienced the movement from within with all its inspirations and limitations. And when he drew away from direct participation in it, it was with the firm conviction that it had not yet realised what it most needed: a spiritual

education. Since that time it has been Förster's supreme aim to develop the theory and the practice of such an education. And he has been abundantly successful. I possess a copy of his *Jugendlehre*, a large work of over 700 pages. It was purchased a few years ago, in its 50th edition. When Förster's work on "Authority and Freedom" appeared in 1910, over 10,000 copies were sold in the first few days. And this is not the work of a recluse inditing from his study but that of a professor in education immersed in all the practical duties of his profession.

In his educational theories Förster has been greatly influenced by the modern educational movement in the United States, more particularly in respect to the encouragement of personal initiative and self-control. In his work on "School and Character" he quotes the full extract from W. T. Harris, then chief director of education in the United States:—"The American school is based on the idea that moral education is more important than intellectual education, and that self-government which is the basis of our political institutions must also be the basis of our individual life. Self-government and

[p 97]

self-control, however, are not gifts of fortune—they rest on habits which are themselves the result of a long and stubborn fight with impulses and passions. ... Hence to our boys and girls the art of self-government must be the one firm purpose and aim of our education from beginning to end."

There are two main convictions revealed by this extract, the first that moral education is at the root of all education whatsoever; and the second, that the essence of moral education is to form the habit of self-government. To both these positions Förster unconditionally subscribes. But he had his own way of conceiving the relation of freedom to authority, and his conscientious earnestness and clear-sightedness and deep religious bias stamp his work with an impress which is all his own.

We are accustomed to the well-worn view, based on foundations laid by Hegel, that the child in his growth towards freedom passes through three typical stages. There is first the régime of external authority. Here the child is under tutelage. He imbibes the tradition of his family, his race and nation. His capricious likes and dislikes are organised first at home and then at school, he is told what he must do and what he must not do, and is taught in its simplest form the first lesson of obedience.

And then comes the second stage, the stage of revolt: an uncomfortable and yet it is argued a necessary transit stage, since the passage from a state of forced obedience to that of free service cannot be a direct one. The child must find himself, cut his mother's apron-strings, take the reins of his own destiny into his hands, and whether for good or for evil be his own fate. Lastly comes the third stage in which the negative antagonisms die away and a positive spirit of service takes their place. Having won his way to self-government through release from external authority, the child, now become a man, learns to limit himself deliberately in the interests of others and for the public good.

In contrast with this Hegelian view Förster's theory of moral development has this distinctive mark, that it dispenses with the negative stage of individualistic reaction. No writer is more convinced than he is, that AUTHORITY is the fundamental ethical requirement, and that moral growth presupposes it from beginning to end, but he is equally convinced that the authority under which character takes shape, moral authority, in a word, is from its first appearance in the child's life, an authority

[p 98]

which respects his freedom, and co-operates with the child in helping him to secure it. And since spiritual freedom is always at once obedience and liberation, and the more profoundly obedient the more it is free, there is no call for the pendulum to swing from external tutelage to defiant revolt: this is the less effective way, the *pis aller* to which our moral nature is driven when authority does not understand its own business but compels us by its tyranny to react violently against it. The better way is that authority from the time of its earliest responsibility should reverence the child's personality, and in co-operation with all that is sensitive and heroic in the child help its young charge to triumph over its cowardice, inertia and caprice. There will then be no reaction, for the child will not need to snatch the reins out of his guardian's hands: they will be put into his keeping when he is still reluctant to assume them, and from being his guide and special providence, the guardian will eventually become his friend.

From Förster's point of view the fundamental factor in education is personal co-operation. And by "personal" Förster means usually much more than merely individual. In his distinction between the individual and the person he follows the distinction between the natural and the spiritual self. Our individuality is just our egoistic lower nature, set on having its own way, inflated with a sense of its natural rights, and seeking its own success at all costs with no thought for the common good. Our personality is our true self, the self that can find itself only in others, the search for a common good, the self that understands freedom in the light of authority and authority in the light of freedom. Thus personal co-operation in education means a spiritual fraternity. It means in particular, so far as the relation between teacher and pupil is concerned, that the teacher sides with the pupil's personality and helps the passion for the heroic, more or less awake in every normal child, to rule the slavish elements of inertia and caprice.

The moral co-operation for which Förster stands strikes the *via media* between the old cult of repression and the more modern cult of indulgence. The old system of child-repression aimed at breaking the child's will through force and ruling him through fear. The newer system, reacting against the old, is marked rather by a tendency on the teacher's part to adapt himself to the child's pettier individuality and to follow the lines of

[p 99]

his natural caprice. Under this system the school may degenerate into a mere kindergarten and the play-spirit become the presiding genius of the whole teaching. There was an institution set up in Moscow some years ago called "The House of the Free Child." The idea of this establishment was to avoid all compulsion of every kind, the child being encouraged to follow, and to follow out its own inclinations. In a word, the free child is to be trained without any appeal to his will. Inclination is to shape itself into character, and in later life a motley herd of inclinations is to take the place of a unified personality. It needs little experience of life to show that the result will be a chaos of caprices and fads which eventually obstruct each other, and that these will eventually fall under the ruthless tyranny of those social fashions and conventionalities which it was the main purpose of the establishment to do away with.

Prof. Förster agrees with the Rousseauists that the rigid, blind obedience fostered by the repressive system of the past is a bad thing. The obedience that does not proceed from the higher life of the will is, he says, not only the death of the will but the death of the soul. It is his conviction, as we have seen, that a principle of freedom runs through the whole scheme of

obedience. Initially a certain element of compulsion is indispensable, and the “noblesse oblige” of school tradition is quite inexorable; none the less the true triumph of education is the child who obeys on his own initiative and in the spirit of a volunteer. It is all-important that the demands of a discipline which works from outside, appealing to motives of pleasure and pain, and working by rewards and penalties, should be supplemented and gradually superseded by an appeal to the self-control of the child, so that he may realise that the disciplinary requirements of home or school are but the ways and means whereby he may free himself from the tyranny of his own unsettled caprices. The art at this point is to trust the spiritual element in the child and count upon it as an ally. The child will very soon appreciate that he is being spoken to and respected as a responsible person, and the response will often be beyond all expectation. Teachers, says Förster, are as a rule little aware of the quite extraordinary sensibility of young people, and little folk as well, as to appeals made to their personality, nor do they realise as a rule how the whole problem of school discipline is eased so soon as the teacher starts working

[p 100]

*with* the pupils instead of against them. Förster once had occasion to speak before the scholars of a Swiss Secondary School on the “gymnastic of the will.” The dominant impression which he took away from this meeting was, as he puts it, “the extraordinary and the grateful astonishment and interest with which the school children greeted his proposal to utilize unattractive periods of school work as opportunities and means for the gymnastic, the training of the will.

“Speaking from my own experience,” continues Prof. Förster, “I must confess that I have been astonished again and again to see how docile and attentive children become so soon as the teacher has contrived to assign tasks and commend rules to some heroic feeling in their soul. I have marvelled at the earnestness and the passion which children show in the great art of self-conquest, once the secret of the art has been made clear to them, and how resourceful and inventive they prove. Very often,” he adds, “lazy and intractable children are the most inwardly heroic. They are refractory because they will not weight themselves with dead work which they must do in the spirit of a slave; but they develop an indefatigable zeal once they can be made to realise that their tasks have a genuine bearing on the development of their higher nature.”

Let me illustrate Förster’s method of spiritualizing the requirements of discipline, and so bringing freedom into the very heart of authority: I select the topic of punctuality.

Temptations to unpunctuality are numerous, and the effort to set the will steadfastly towards punctuality is, in Förster’s opinion, the most valuable of all preliminary exercises in self-discipline.

Children as a rule look upon the requirements of punctuality as the sign and symbol of external authority. Förster’s method is to connect these requirements, without in any way relaxing them, with the child’s own desire for emancipation and independence, so that he shall come to look upon punctuality as a service to be joyfully performed, and accepted by the will as an indispensable groundwork for the superstructure of character.

The problem of punctuality, according to Förster, has a peculiar fascination for children. In his own classes he adopted the following method for making them realise the real significance of the problem: he asked the children to mention as many excuses as they could

think of through which unpunctuality might be condoned. He then let them find out for themselves

[p 101]

the extent to which the sophistry of these excuses could be laid bare. "I have seldom," he says, "seen so lively an interest taken in any subject as precisely in these talks about punctuality." One child imagined the case of her mother being ill making it necessary for her to go to the chemist for a drug. But some other children in the class speedily came to the rescue, pointing out that if the child in question had been genuinely anxious to be punctual, she would have taken care to ask her mother half an hour beforehand whether she might not be wanting something from the chemist, adding "let me fetch it now so that I may still arrive at school in good time." Förster found these discussions particularly valuable in drawing out the resource, the inventiveness and the capacity for reasoned analysis in practical matters, matters moreover of vital interest to the health and success of the school life.

The problem of self-government is intimately connected in Förster's mind with the substitution of democratic for autocratic discipline. The children, he maintains, must co-operate with the teacher in governing and disciplining themselves. When an American teacher was asked what means of rule she depended on, she replied, "On public opinion." She ruled by the help of the public opinion of her class. She was always able to rely on the better elements in the class to keep the worse in check: she always had a majority she could depend upon. No doubt this teacher had capacity, but it is encouraging to listen to the words of a director of a school in Worcester to the following effect: "If a teacher will but let herself be led, for the space of three months, by the thought that she must teach the children to discipline themselves, instead of herself inflicting discipline upon them from a centre of control quite outside the school benches, she is certain in the end of an absolute success." Three-quarters of the class, certainly not less, will rally to her side, and the minority, conscious that they are a minority, will acquiesce and become reasonably docile.

Autocratic discipline, on the other hand, alienates the sympathy of the well-meaning members of the class: the majority become indifferent and allow the minority to lead. The wilder and more revolutionary members of the class have now their opportunity. No longer checked by public opinion, they are able to make their disturbing influence freely felt and may eventually concentrate public opinion against the teacher. And there is a further point. So long as the teacher is the one and

[p 102]

the only disciplinary authority, the children accept every breach of discipline as a matter that concerns the teacher only, and in no way resent the misdemeanour as an affront to themselves. But once the class is given a sufficient subordinate share in the making of rules and the maintaining of order, these breaches of discipline *are* resented as breaches of law they themselves have denied and sanctioned. Finally, the order that is maintained through autocratic severity is not order of the genuine living stamp. It represents the triumph of passivity, and if very successful will send forth into the larger world not citizens but mere subjects, tools ready to the hand of any and every form of tyranny, whether civil or military. The order that is rooted in the will of a self-governing school class represents, on the other hand, that true self-discipline which in after years will develop into the public spirit and proved capacity of the conscientious and independent citizen.

*(To be continued).*

---

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered before the Victorian Branch (Australia) of the P.N.E.U., Aug. 4th, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> "On the student at lectures." Quoted from Prof. Tucker's translations! "Plutarch [sic]—  
Selected Essays, p. 178.

\* Original article stated By T. Gitson, M.D., corrected in The Parents' Review Vol. 26