

EDUCATION AND RESPONSIBILITY.

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PART II.

I propose now to give a more detailed illustration of the type of democratic discipline which Förster has in mind. I borrow the illustration from the appendix to Prof. Förster's book on "School and Character," where a certain Mr. Hepp gives the following instructive account of his own experience. I may premise that Hepp is—or was, the date is 1908—a secondary teacher in the city of Zurich in Switzerland.

Mr. Hepp opens with an appeal to his Swiss colleagues to follow on the lines opened out by the sister republic of the United States. Politically, he says, Switzerland is the freest country in the world;—but educationally, he adds, we still leave discipline entirely in the teacher's hands. It is time we took up the challenging call from over the water: "Make your discipline more democratic, exert it through the pupils and so train them to govern themselves."

Mr. Hepp came to Zurich from the country, and with great expectations took charge of his class. It was a particularly difficult class to handle, and was therefore handed over to him as a new comer. The first quarter of a year in the new position was the most troublesome he had ever had. The disorder, indifference, even insolence of the boys was terrible, and every day he found himself becoming less of a teacher and more of a policeman. He did his utmost to help the children; but the more he devoted himself, the less success he had with them. Something was evidently wrong, and in his desperation he tried severity and a free use of the cane. But the more severe he became the more he felt the growing alienation and resentment of the class. He resolved at last to try the new-fangled remedy from America with the outlines of which he was already familiar. But the idea of pupils sharing in the discipline appeared so paradoxical to him that he confesses he would never have turned to the idea had he not been driven to it by sheer desperation. And before taking it up he tried another method which within narrow limits had good results. He took the trouble to make himself acquainted with the homes of all his young charges, visiting several of these regularly every week, and
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thereby learning much about the peculiar dispositions of the children, and the environment in which they each and all grew up. In many cases these visits, revealing, as they occasionally did, an utter lack of perception and understanding on the part of the parents, and in other cases showing how degrading were the surroundings the child had to contend against, made him feel much more sympathetically towards certain refractory pupils; and with this increased sympathy he won the trust and good feeling of some of the boys.

But there was no radical improvement until he resorted definitely to the system of the school-city, and aimed deliberately at turning his scholars into co-workers, thereby creating a public opinion—in this case a school class-feeling—in his favour.

He began the reform on a very small scale in connection with such well-defined offices as cleaning the black-board, distributing and collecting the exercise books and maps. These offices were already in existence, but had so far been filled by the teacher on his own initiative. Now, the class, under the teacher's direction, drew up a code of duties in connection with these special offices, and the offices were then filled up by the pupils themselves according to the decision of the majority. An interesting feature in these first elections was this, that not one of the children whom the teacher had so far depended on most was chosen for any one of these

offices. They were indeed proposed, but quite definitely rejected. It was decided that the offices should be held for four weeks. At the end of the month teacher and scholars met together not only to elect new officers but to discuss the record of the resigning officials. The scholars themselves were the critics, and, on the whole, says Mr. Hepp, their estimates fell in with mine. The child's personal equation, however, was shown in this that as a rule his judgment was more strict than that of the teacher.

The elections to these various offices were matters that had a vital bearing on the reform of the discipline. Thus, in connection with the office of window-opener there was a big hulking lad who seemed made for the work and was formally proposed. But the boys—who in isolation would have been afraid to stand in his way—were resolute enough in combination. They at once protested that the boy in question would be too rough, and when his object was to clear the room would be sure to hurry up stragglers with his fists. He was therefore not elected. The rebuff did not precisely turn this youth into an angel, we

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read, but he knew now that public opinion was against him, and he became markedly quieter ever after.

On another occasion, half out of thoughtlessness, half for the joke of the thing, a boy renowned for his untidiness was proposed as officer of Cleanliness and Order, and to the joy of all was duly elected. The next morning the boy came to school punctually—a thing he rarely did—and shorn of the straggling mop of hair which was one of the main elements in his previously uncouth appearance. He was seen, a few days later, to have in his possession a tiny piece of soap. At the end of his term of office the whole class agreed that he had made tremendous improvement and had faithfully carried out all the duties of his office.

It was one of Mr. Hepps's [sic] customs to refer on the Saturday morning to any important points which affected the discipline and welfare of the class. Now it happened that in the first week of term he was called out on school business and had to leave his class to take care of itself for minutes together. The result, if the truth must be told, was a general row. On the Saturday following, Mr. Hepp brought the matter up. "What would you yourselves do," he asked, under circumstances similar to these? [sic] Three proposals were put forward:—

Pupil A:—I should keep the class in for an hour.

Pupil B:—(more keen on prevention than cure), I should have left a monitor who would have noted down the names of the culprits.

Pupil C:—The defaulters should have tasks set them to do.

Mr. Hepp wrote down these three proposals on the blackboard, and asked for criticisms.

A's suggestion, the suggestion that the class should be kept in for an hour, met with the following objections:—

The detention would mean that the innocent would suffer with the guilty.

Our parents would soon know of it, and protest.

The innocents, unjustly punished, would revenge themselves by joining next time in the uproar and so making it worse than before for the teacher.

Moreover, they would do this with the express motive of attracting outside attention,

and compelling passers by to say: "Mr. Hepp must be a bad teacher: he can keep no order in his class."

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Again, the innocents would meet after detention and unani-ously [sic] censure the teacher, and there would be a breach created between him and the scholars.

Against the idea of an overseer or monitor—this was B's suggestion—there were the following protests:—

- i. He would spare his own friends and not give their names in.
- ii. Those punished through his means would waylay him after school and give him a good drubbing.
- iii. He would seize the chance which his monitorship gave him of revenging himself on his enemies.
- iv. Some of the meaner boys would wheedle him into crossing their names off so that the teacher would not be correctly informed.
- v. The monitor's friends would become his foes if he dared to send their names in to the teacher.

The only thing said in favour of the monitor was that fewer innocent persons would suffer than on the basis of A's suggestion.

C's proposal—the proposal that the delinquents should have tasks set them to do—made no headway at all, as the discussion had clearly shown how impossible it was to find out the precise offenders.

Mr. Hepp then spoke:—What then are we to say, since all these proposals have fallen flat? [sic] A pupil calls out, "The best thing would be for us to keep still." "Why do you think, boys," says Mr. Hepp, "that that last proposal is the best of all, and the only satisfactory one?" Here are some of the answers: and if we were Mr. Hepp we should not doubt their sincerity:—

"When we keep quiet, we make fewer mistakes in our exercise books and so get fewer punishments."

"Passers-by will say: 'Ah! but that's a model class.'"

"It gives us all pleasure when the teacher, on coming in, finds us quietly going on with our work."

But smile as we may, Mr. Hepp assures us that after this talk he could leave his class without qualms. Whenever he returned to it he found the boys quiet at their work, and was able to give a word of praise, and "a milligramme of praise,"

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he remarks, "is more effective than many hectolitres of blame."

The last term in Mr. Hepp's account of the reform of discipline in his class concerns the question of corporal punishment.

He was brought to reflect on the matter by observing that certain pupils of his who had an over-dose of caning in their own homes were quite callous in the matter of corporal punishment and were indeed almost beyond the reach of any educational influence whatsoever. They had not only lost through familiarity the fear of the cane but, what was much worse, they had lost their own self-respect.

Mr. Hepp determined to try and dispense with corporal punishment. He seized a favourable moment and then said to the boys:—"As 12-year old boys you are now at an age when it should no longer be necessary to compel obedience with the stick. I make a proposal to you. I shall try during the next fortnight to dispense with every form of bodily punishment. But you on your side must give me your word that you will do your best to avoid all occasion of punishment. If this experience fails, however, I shall return to the old ways again." The boys greeted the announcement with glee, the trial was entirely successful and was continued for a further fortnight. At the end of the month Mr. Hepp announced that for the present and until further notice he would leave the cane standing in the corner. He writes that he intends never to use the cane again. Teaching without caning is, he says, immensely less wearing and irritating, and what is more important, the disappearance of the cane makes place for mutual trust and a far friendlier feeling between pupils and teacher.

Förster deals with this same problem under the heading of "Self-Respect." Americans, he says, have taught us to respect the child's own self-respect, and to revere it as the root out of which purity and sincerity grow. Now the tendency of the cane is to destroy self-respect. For ages the blow upon the back has been associated in man's mind with being treated like a brute or a slave. The blow has become the sign and symbol of insult and dishonour. It is therefore for no sentimental objection against the infliction of pain that Förster objects to corporal punishment. Not at all! he says: the pain is too superficial, and what goes deep is the brutalizing and dishonouring influence, blunting the sense of shame and the lad's self-respect.

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In sympathy with this sentiment we find that in the largest and most successful reformatories in Belgium, France and the United States, corporal punishment is abolished on the ground that self-respect is essential to moral regeneration. Yet it is still extensively recognised as essential to effective school-discipline. No one indeed can deny the momentary success of the cane in producing order. But the defect of its use is precisely that the order, like the pain, is skin deep. It does not spring from any deep bond of union between pupils and teacher.

Let me conclude on this whole matter of pupil self-government by referring back once more to the main idea that the co-operation of the pupils is essential to all true discipline. So long as the teacher has the discipline entirely in his own hands, the idea of *order* is accepted as a synonym for repression instead of as a synonym for freedom. It stands in no inward relation to the joy which the pupils have in personal initiative, in being a cause. Moreover, the system of self-government has this essential recommendation, that it tends to isolate the offender, whilst on the autocratic system the class shows its *esprit-de-corps* by sticking to the culprits. And this is logical enough, for if the teacher is the only representative of *order*, the pupils cannot be expected to stand up for it or show themselves solicitous for its maintenance. Thus the great importance of self-government in the school-system consists in this, that thereby the powerful force of public opinion becomes as it were civilised and enters as an integral factor into the

development of education.

We have laid stress so far on the necessity for a moral ground work in education based on respect for character, as this, as we have seen, implies an inner reconciliation of the claims of authority and freedom. And the type of education we have considered has been that of school education with its fundamental relationship between teacher and scholar. And this type, which dominates the formation of character at an age when youth is most plastic and impressionable, may be taken as determining the main character of our social and political intercourse. Aristotle is not the only authority who has held that the first interest of statesmanship as [sic] the education of the young.

But there is an immensely influential form of education, which though strictly subordinate to the main requirements of civil life, presents so pronounced a character of its own as to call for special treatment. I refer to military training. Förster devotes a section to this subject, and it will be worth our while
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to consider what he says. We shall see that the effectiveness of military, no less than of civil training, depends on its preserving an ethical character and enshrining at its heart a basic respect for personality and human worth.

Military training has no doubt many aspects, but its fundamental aspect is that of DISCIPLINE. Indeed this aspect is so prominent and at first sight so forbidding in its rigour, that the upholder of autocratic order might seem in this field at least to have come to his own. Let us follow Förster along this line also and see how the matter stands.

He starts with a reference to an article dealing with discipline in the French army, published in 1907 in a German military weekly. The writer drew attention to two main points: (1) That the French system of discipline was lax, *intentionally* lax. When the roll was called soldiers would appear in time for their turn and slip away individually when their attendance had been recorded. Regiments in marching along the streets never troubled to keep step. The officers in barracks never adopted the tone of command, soldiers discussed orders with those who gave them, and there was altogether far greater freedom than under similar conditions in the German army. And yet—and this was the further point that was emphasised—the troops on parade and at the manoeuvres went through their evolutions with perfect order and precision. The article attracted a great deal of attention and led certain important military authorities in Germany to ask themselves whether the German military system with its rigid severity of discipline was really so ideal after all.

Förster treats the question in a broad, impartial spirit. In so far as the discussion hinges on the option between lax and rigid discipline, he is wholly on the side of the more vigorous method. Only strict discipline can ensure that strict training in instant obedience which the requirements of war demand. And this training in obedience means that the soldier must recognize his absolute subordination as a military unit to those who in the military system are his superiors in command, it means punctilious exactitude in carrying out the details of his service, it means strict correctness and alertness in bodily bearing. Where such training is not inculcated the superior officer cannot effectively control the movements of the forces under him. Moreover, through such training as this, self-sacrifice is immensely facilitated. It has often been noticed that old soldiers will show a control of subjective feeling and a contempt for bodily comfort

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clearly traceable to the conditions of their long discipline in military obedience.

Wherein then are we to look for the defect which minimizes the value of this tradition of strict discipline in the German Army? We must look for it, says Förster, in the small respect shown for personality by the military disciplinarian, and in saying this he attaches the main blame to the corporals and other subordinate officers in that army who stand nearest to the men themselves. It is mainly owing to the soulless brutality so often shown by these subordinate officers, and to the disgust engendered through it, that the lesson of military obedience tends to lose all its personal stimulus and efficacy. Briefly, it is not the strictness that is bad, but the lack of respect for the human worth and character of the individual soldier. And the root of the trouble is a fundamental misconception as to what a true order means and what its interests require. To inculcate the order that can maintain itself only under the pressure of terror, an order that is hated and despised at heart and never receives the inward support of its victims, is not only to commit a fatal psychological blunder but to court disaster when the crisis comes, and the whole man must safeguard the discipline or the field be lost.

Without the inner co-operation and consent of the subject of discipline, argues Förster, there is no true order, but only the appearance of it, and such co-operation and consent can be won only by a constant and varied appeal to the sources of self-respect in the soldier himself. The officer who overlooks this, who forgets that the soldier's self-respect and sense of personal honour, the valour that is rooted in personal motives, is the greatest of all the forces which secure victory in battle, is the veriest tyro in his profession, [sic] however far he may have climbed up the professional ladder. What counts in the last instance is not mechanical discipline but initiative, loyalty and self-sacrifice, and whose values these must value as primarily sacred the spiritual personality in which these great forces are rooted.

Thus in matters military as well as in matters civil, the problem of discipline is at root a spiritual problem. It is the problem of re-connecting the two great requirements of Authority and of Freedom; of instilling into the severity of command motives and inspirations for obedience which touch a man's personality to the quick; and of eliminating from its tone the element of brutality which brutalizes no one more than the one

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who gives the order. Nothing can be more dangerous, says Förster, than that the opinion should become current among men that training and freedom, discipline and self-respect are in irreconcilable opposition. Indeed we can readily believe that in that case discipline would cease to be a problem and become a public menace. In place of a progressive reconciliation of authority and freedom on a spiritual basis, there would be a nerve-shattering and character-shattering oscillation between such submission on the one hand, and self-disintegrating licence on the other. But grant the problem, and a live interest in solving it, a new era is inaugurated. The democratic ideal finds a lodgment in the military life, and the military lesson in its turn braces and makes steadfast a heart prepared to receive it from the long lesson in self-government and self-submission learnt on the school benches. There a single spirit may permeate both systems of education, the civil and the military, and so far as system can unify character and elicit personality these great gains become the priceless heritage of the whole nation. And I think we may add that when the lesson of respect for human worth and for man as man has sunk deep enough into our slow lethargic mind, the day will not be far distant when

a consistent application of the lesson in international politics will eliminate the slaughter of one man by his brother from among the legitimate means open to the self-respecting citizen, and will substitute for this savagery some moral equivalent.

Where the three threads of respect for self, for country, and for international solidarity have become knit into one through a fundamental education which, in its operation, reverences at once the soul's individual depths, its practical relationships and its infinite horizons, we may hope to see emerging in concrete and convincing shape that federation of the world for which we all so ardently yearn.

Here then lies the basis, task and aim of education, and to content ourselves with anything less deep, less practical and less inclusive must be sooner or later to lose our harvest and to reap the whirlwind.

[With profound respect for Professor Förster who is, by the way, to be congratulated on having found a singularly able exponent, we would venture to hint that there is a more excellent way. Like that other faultily faultless scheme which has come out of Munich it is too complete, and too easy at that. Since

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Dr. Arnold's time at any rate we have known in England that boys govern each other very well, but Headmasters know the danger accruing from rash judgement to which so capital a working scheme as the Prefect system is liable. It is, as we know, being tried on young offenders against the law with good effect; an idea which we owe to America. It seems to us, however, that there is danger in accepting school discipline as maintained by the boys themselves for a larger part of education than it really stands for; in the same way as we may make too much of the vocational training which appeals so strongly to our educational authorities. We must press the point that such a training turns out men of narrow and limited personality, the fit agents of militarism. If the schoolboy is taught to play his part as N.C.O., his fellows may obey him, but he and they are so engrossed by the situation that the real object of school life ceases to be interesting. So, with the boy who is practically learning and working at his trade in school hours; that is very interesting and he cares for nothing else. The moment has come for us in England to decide whether we are to educate children on the principle of Militarism, solely for the uses of the State, or whether we shall recognise that the State itself is the servant of the individual. Making the individual scholar our first consideration, we shall realise that the function of the schools is to lead the scholar out of the darkness of ignorance into the glorious light of knowledge. His mind must be sustained on fit and abundant knowledge in his schooldays, and the rest will follow. The interest and delight of knowledge is a powerful factor in maintaining the discipline of a school; and the increase of power which comes with knowledge makes it possible for the school-work to be done in short hours, and so leaves a large margin to be employed in vocational work. We may not forget in the specious, convincing and practical character of modern German educational schemes that it is to them we owe the present distress. Humane learning has been definitely cut out of the schools, and the people as a consequence are at the mercy of a government which feeds them with vain imaginations. Let us take it to heart that there is no substitute for that knowledge of literature and history which alone enables people to arrive at full intellectual development, and which therefore makes good citizens, fit for any demand upon them, in peace or in war.—Ed.]