Chapter 06

Co-education of the Social Classes

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Text:

CHAPTER VI.

CO-EDUCATION OF THE SOCIAL CLASSES

There must be a co-education of the different social classes as well as of the two sexes. I might have founded a school giving lessons gratuitously; but a school for poor children only would not be a rational school, since, if they were not taught submission and credulity as in the old type of school, they would have been strongly disposed to rebel, and would instinctively cherish sentiments of hatred. There is no escape from the dilemma. There is no middle term in the school for the disinherited class alone; you have either a systematic insistence, by means of false teaching, on error and ignorance, or hatred of those who domineer and exploit. It is a delicate point, and needs stating clearly. Rebellion against oppression is merely a question of statics, of equilibrium. Between one man and another who are perfectly equal, as is said in the immortal first clause of the famous Declaration of the French Revolution ("Men are born and remain free and equal in rights") there can be no social inequality. If there is such inequality, some will tyrannize, the others protest and hate. Rebellion is a leveling tendency, and to that extent natural and rational, however much it may be discredited by justice and its evil companions, law and religion.

I venture to say quite plainly: the oppressed and the exploited have a right to rebel, because they have to reclaim their rights until they enjoy their full share in the common patrimony. The Modern School, however, has to deal with children,
whom it prepares by instruction for the state of manhood, and it must not anticipate the cravings and hatreds, the adhesions and rebellions, which may be fitting sentiments in the adult. In other words, it must not seek to gather fruit until it has been produced by cultivation, nor must it attempt to implant a sense of responsibility until it has equipped the conscience with the fundamental conditions of such responsibility. Let it teach the children to be men; when they are men, they may declare themselves rebels against injustice.

It needs very little reflection to see that a school for rich children only cannot be a rational school. From the very nature of things it will tend to insist on the maintenance of privilege and the securing of their advantages. The only sound and enlightened form of school is that which co-educates the poor and the rich, which brings the one class into touch with the other in the innocent equality of childhood, by means of the systematic equality of the rational School.

With this end in view I decided to secure pupils of every social rank and include them in a common class, adopting a system accommodated to the circumstances of the parents or guardians of the children; I would not have a fixed and invariable fee, but a kind of sliding scale, with free lessons for some and different charges for others. I later published the following article on the subject in the Bulletin (May 10, 1905):

Our friend D.R.C. gave a lecture last Sunday at the Republican Club on the Subject of "Modern Pædagogy," explaining to his audience what we mean by modern education and what advantages society may derive from it. As I think that the subject is one of very great interest and most proper to receive public attention, I offer the following reflections and considerations on it. It seems to me that the lecturer was happy in his exposition of the ideal, but not in the suggestions he made with a view to realizing it, nor in bringing forward the schools of France and Belgium as models to be imitated.

Señor C., in fact, relies upon the State, upon Parliament or municipalities, for the building, equipment, and management of scholastic institutions. This seems to me a great mistake. If modern pædagogy means an effort towards the realization of a new and more just form of Society; if it means that we propose to instruct the rising generation in the causes which have brought about and maintain the lack of social equilibrium; if it means that we are anxious to prepare the race for better days,
freeing it from religious fiction and from all idea of submission to an inevitable socioeconomic inequality; we cannot entrust it to the State nor to other official organisms which necessarily maintain existing privileges and support the laws which at present consecrate the exploitation of one man by another, the pernicious source of the by worst abuses.

Evidence of the truth of this is so abundant that any person can obtain it by visiting the factories and workshops and other centers of paid workers, by inquiring what is the manner of life of those in the higher and those in the lower social rank, by frequenting what are called courts of justice, and by asking the prisoners in our penal institutions what were the motives for their misconduct, if all this does not suffice to prove that the State favors those who are in possession of wealth and frowns on those who rebel against injustice, it may be useful to notice what has happened in Belgium. Here, according to Señor C., the government is so attentive to education and conducts it so excellently that private schools are impossible. In the official schools, he says, the children of the rich mingle with the children of the poor, and one may at times see the child of wealthy parents arm in arm with a poor and lowly companion. It is true, I admit, that children of all classes may attend the Belgian schools; but the instruction that is given in them is based on the supposed eternal necessity for a division of rich and poor, and on the principle that social harmony consists in the fulfillment of the laws.

It is natural enough that the masters should like to see this kind of education given on every side. It is a means of bringing to reason those who might one day be tempted to rebel. Not long ago, in Brussels and other Belgian towns, the sons of the rich, armed and organized in national troops, shot down the sons of the poor who were claiming universal suffrage. On the other hand, my acquaintance with the quality of Belgian education differs considerably from that of the lecturer. I have before me various issues of a Belgian journal (L'Express de Liége) which devotes an article to the subject, entitled "The Destruction of our National System of Education." The facts given are, unfortunately, very similar to the facts about education in Spain, though in this country there has been a great development of education by religious orders, which is, as everybody knows, the systematization of ignorance. In fine, it is not for nothing that a violently clerical government rules in Belgium.
As to the modern education which is given in French schools, we may say that not a single one of the books used in them serves the purpose of a really secular education. On the very day in which Señor C. was lecturing in Gracia the Parisian journal *L'Action* published an article, with the title "How Secular Morality is Taught," in regard to the book *Recueil de maximes et Pensées morales*, and quoted from it certain ridiculously anachronistic ideas which offend the most elementary common sense.

We shall be asked, what are we to do if we cannot rely on the aid of the State, of Parliament, or municipalities? We must appeal to those whose interest it is to bring about a reform; to the workers, in the first place, then to the cultivated and privileged people who cherish sentiments of justice. They may not be numerous, but there are such. I am personally acquainted with several. The lecturer complained that the civic authorities were so dilatory in granting the reforms that are needed. I feel sure that he would do better not to waste his time on them, but appeal directly to the working class.

The field has been well prepared. Let him visit the various working men's societies, the Republican Fraternities, the Centers of Instruction, the Workers' Athenæums, and all the bodies which are working for reform,1 and let him give ear to the language of truth, the exhortations to union and courage. Let him observe the attention given to the problem of rational and scientific instruction, a kind of instruction which shows the injustice of privilege and the possibility of reforms. If individuals and societies continue thus to combine their endeavors to secure the emancipation of those who suffer --- for it is not the workers only who suffer --- Señor C. may rest assured of a positive, sound, and speedy result, while whatever may be obtained of the government will be dilatory, and will tend only to stupefy, to confuse ideas, and to perpetuate the domination of one class over another.

1These societies are particularly numerous in Spain, where the government system of education is deplorable, and schools are often established in connection with them.-J.M.

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