

A HISTORICAL STUDY  
OF ENGLISH ADULT EDUCATION

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Master of Education

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## CHAPTER I

### FROM IMPULSE TOWARDS CONSCIOUS VENTURE

The idea of adult learning has deep roots in the past. Since the beginning of history, man has shown a persistent, impulsive interest in educating himself. Until the end of the eighteenth century, adult education was rarely a conscious undertaking. Instead, forces operating at large in society, shaped the minds of mature people. As adult education is concerned with minds which are already mature, it must be interpreted in the light of interests and pre-occupations which form the background to the intellectual activities of each generation.

Adults were responsible for inventions and innovations. These had to be accepted before they became embodied in the culture that was to be passed on to their children. When small agricultural villages developed, life changed from the nomadic to the sedentary. Then, carpentry, pottery making, and the production of textiles made their appearance. Lore gathered around agriculture and the crafts, was accumulated, and transmitted from generation to generation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In Greek society "what the craftsmen had to know to do their work was not regarded as true education. This point of view, not unheard of today, makes it completely understandable why vocational education, or the teaching of the mechanic arts, was largely left to an oral tradition peculiar to the craftsmen themselves." C. Hartley Grattan, In Quest of Knowledge (New York: Association Press, 1955), p. 33.

After commerce developed, culture contacts between the villages were possible. Thus the adult has always occupied a vital role in cultural change.

The adult mind has been moulded in all ages by traditions, lore, and facts. The only way that knowledge could be transmitted to preliterate man was by word of mouth. Even after a literate elite developed, the method of oral transmission of knowledge continued to be used. Many adult minds considered talk the most significantly educative. Oral modes of communication have continued to play roles of considerable consequence in adult education.

The first recorded adult educators were the missionaries who came from Ireland or the Continent to convert the heathen to Christianity. For many centuries the Church was the greatest educational force in the country. The duty of teaching was laid upon the clergy from the beginning.<sup>2</sup> From a historical standpoint, therefore, religious instruction, and religiously motivated instruction have been extremely important.

Converts to Christianity were prepared for baptism in the catechumenal school. It reached its peak of strength in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. As infant baptism became common, it faded away and was not

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Kelly, A History of Adult Education in Great Britain (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1962), p.1.



replaced by any other school of doctrine. Literacy declined, and by the fifth century, people were signing their names by an X, meaning "I cannot read and write, but I am a Christian."<sup>3</sup>

Alfred the Great was himself a religious adult educator. With the help of learned clergy from England and abroad, Alfred produced English renderings of a number of key works "most needful for all men to know,"<sup>4</sup> for the instruction of the clergy and people. If his ealdormen, reeves, or officers were deficient in their judgments, they had to give up their office or apply themselves to study.

The Middle Ages have transmitted to us vast masses of written material -- statutes, charters, deeds, wills, indentures, account-books, letters, chronicles, poems, and devotional works. These provide an impressive body of evidence to suggest that even the early medieval period was more literate than has often been supposed. The evidence contradicts the notion that this was a time of widespread ignorance and illiteracy.<sup>5</sup>

The clergy received education in schools attached

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<sup>3</sup>Gilbert Highet, The Classical Tradition (New York: 1949), p. 538, cited by C. Hartley Grattan, In Quest of Knowledge (New York: Association Press, 1955), p. 55.

<sup>4</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 2.    <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

to monasteries, churches, and other ecclesiastical establishments. When universities came into existence, some of them went there. The clergy formed the main core of the educated populace. Along with the ecclesiastical hierarchy proper, there were domestic chaplains, secretaries, physicians, lawyers, stewards, and civil servants needed for the conduct of public and private business. Some great scholars emerged, such as Henry de Bracton, the great jurist, and Robert Grosseteste, the Bishop of Lincoln. At the other end of the scale were monks and priests who had scarce enough Latin to read their mass-books.<sup>6</sup>

Robert Grosseteste, in the thirteenth century, instructed his clergy in the diocese of Lincoln to teach adults who were ignorant of such matters, "the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Hail Mary, and how to make the sign of the cross."<sup>7</sup> This instruction was given in association with the confessional, since at this time, preaching sermons was not regarded as a normal part of the priest's duties. A little later, in 1281, the Council held at Lambeth declared that priests had to preach at least once every three months.

Among the lower orders, the apprenticeship system

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 3.    <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

provided the framework for handing on the skills of the crafts after they had become specialized. Monks instructed the lower orders in the crafts and provided an example of superior skill in agriculture. The clerical influence was also great in the higher skills directly useful to the church -- like masonry and glass-working. Oral traditions played an extremely important role, since the common man, at this time, felt no particular need to be literate.

The medieval need, in doctrinal instruction, was for a simplification of the symbolism which had become the essence of church services. The resort was to audio-visual devices such as drama, sculpture, wall paintings, and stained-glass windows in the churches. Styles of preaching, especially designed to reach the masses, were developed.

Many stories were told in the sculptures and stained-glass windows. Lewis Mumford describes the cathedral as "more than the stone Bible of mankind, as Victor Hugo was finally to call it; for it was likewise the Grand Encyclopedia: the sum of medieval knowledge as well as medieval faith."<sup>8</sup> These visual aids conveyed instruction to the illiterate.

The Franciscans and Dominicans made an important

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<sup>8</sup>C. Hartley Grattan, In Quest of Knowledge (New York: Association Press, 1955), p. 57.

contribution to adult education. They "were skilfully trained as preachers -- to go to hear a friar preach was a recognized holiday attraction; their racy stories, direct moral appeal, and emotional style gave them great power to move their hearers."<sup>9</sup> They reached the height of their influence in the thirteenth century.

The friars spoke in the vernacular and preached to all who would listen. They drew on secular as well as religious sources for illustrative material in their sermons. G. R. Owst considers the medieval popular sermon, for which the friars set the pattern and pace, as "almost" a forerunner of the "modern University Extension Lecture."<sup>10</sup> Yet their primary purpose, the extension work of the Church, always remained.

In the closing period of the Middle Ages, the friars fell into disrepute, but the sermon maintained its popularity, and played, as time went on, an increasingly significant part in the Church's teaching work. The schools which the friars established for the training of their own members were often open to the secular clergy as well.

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<sup>9</sup>A. R. Myers, England in the Late Middle Ages (A Pelican Book), p. 62, cited by C. Hartley Grattan, In Quest of Knowledge (New York: Association Press, 1955), pp. 57-58.

<sup>10</sup>G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Mediaeval England (Cambridge, England, 1933), cited by C. Hartley Grattan, In Quest of Knowledge (New York: Association Press, 1955), p. 58.

Thus they increased the facilities for the education of the priesthood.

Drama was also used as a pedagogical aid. The medieval dramas called mysteries dealt with Bible stories. The miracles were chiefly concerned with the lives of saints. The moralitys presented the Christian virtues in allegorical form. At first these dramas were given in Latin, but later the miracles and moralitys developed into cycles of plays lasting several days. They were now given in the vernacular and communicated to all. Their popularity did not wane until the middle of the fifteenth century.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries many preachers' aids appeared. Handbooks of sermon outlines were known as "sleepwells" since they enabled the parson to sleep in peace without having to worry about his next sermon. This is the advice given on methods of delivery:

Speak slowly and distinctly, the preacher is told: vary the pitch of your voice, but do not shout one minute and whisper the next. Be sure to make clear the division of your sermon and to emphasise the principal links of your argument. Do not try to crowd in too much, or make your sermon too long, for 'excessive prolixity induces sleep'. Let your gestures be natural: do not stand like a statue, nor on the other hand indulge in exaggerated movements. Dress soberly, avoiding outrageous garments. If you are a beginner, practise in some place apart where there is nobody to laugh at you.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 7.

The faint beginnings of nonconformity in religious adult education appeared in the teaching of John Wycliffe and the Lollards. Wycliffe insisted on the supreme importance of Bible reading -- not only by the clergy, but also by the laity. He declared that the New Testament was "open to the understanding of simple men in the points that be most needful for salvation and no man was so rude a scholar, but that he might learn from the words of the Gospel according to his simplicity."<sup>12</sup>

This idea was to have a most potent effect on adult education, for the desire to read the words of Holy Scripture became one of the greatest incentives to literacy among humble people. In 1380, Wycliffe and his helpers embarked on the tremendous task of providing an English version of the Bible as a basis for their teaching. The Lollards found many converts among the artisan classes of the towns. The movement was driven underground in the middle of the fifteenth century.

Lollard "schools" are recorded in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. These were secret adult schools for the instruction of converts and for mutual improvement among the faithful. The records show that quite a few humble people -- tailors, turners, and servants, both men and women -- were able to read.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 9.    <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

In late medieval times literacy continued to spread. "In the fifteenth century, most men and women of the upper and middle classes could read and write, although their spelling was sometimes marvellous to behold."<sup>14</sup> The rapid growth of commerce and industry, and the development of town life, made a fairly widespread measure of literacy essential.

By 1498 there were so many literate laymen, that Henry VII had to redefine "benefit of clergy" for literacy no longer sufficiently differentiated the two. The new literacy which was stimulated and sustained by economic, religious, and political factors, was associated historically with a rich pamphlet literature. The pamphlet, after the Bible, became the chosen vehicle for propaganda and education. Literacy became indispensable to success in life. Henceforth, illiteracy was definitely a handicap.

By the middle of the fifteenth century, London had begun to develop scriptoria, employing a staff of scribes for the reproduction of manuscripts on a commercial scale. It was not uncommon for a middle-class merchant to possess ten or a dozen books. A fifteenth-century parson bequeathed no fewer than ninety-three books to the Common

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<sup>14</sup>Eileen Power, Medieval People (Penguin Book: 1954), p. 128.

Library at Cambridge.<sup>15</sup>

There were libraries in private collections, in the universities, in the cathedrals, in the collegiate churches, and in the monasteries. These were freely accessible to visiting scholars and the occasional scholarly layman. In the fifteenth century, it became common for parish churches to possess a few books which were available to the clergy and others who could profit by them.

Forerunners of the public library system appeared at this time. In 1425, the executors of Richard Whittington and William Bury established at the Guildhall, a library for the City of London. In 1464 John Alcock, Bishop of Worcester, established a library at Bristol in the house of Gild of Kalendaries -- an ancient fraternity of clergy and laymen. Neither of these was a lending library, for in both, the books were chained.<sup>16</sup>

Thus even before the invention of printing there was a growing reading public. The introduction of printing into England by William Claxton in 1476, was a major landmark in adult education history. It both stimulated and sustained the art of reading. By increasing the production of relatively cheap copies of books it led to a great and immediate extension of the habit of reading among the educated classes. It also provided the basic tools with

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<sup>15</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 12.      <sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-13.



which the art of reading would ultimately be spread throughout all classes of society.

The first English printed Bible, produced in 1535, was received with such enthusiasm that the King and many of the Bishops became alarmed. By 1539, Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, complained to Thomas Cromwell, Vicar-General to Henry VIII, that divine service was being hindered by the crowds of people gathering for the reading of the Bible. In 1543, therefore, Parliament limited the reading of the Bible by laymen. The lower orders were absolutely forbidden to read it. Noblemen, gentlemen, ladies, and merchants might read it only in private. Under Edward VI and again under Elizabeth, free access to the Bible was restored.<sup>17</sup>

Although many of the early books were religious, it was the books on practical arts and science which started the developments that made the modern world. There was early recognition that the printed word was a potent educator. Therefore, systems of licensing, censorship, and prohibition to control the new communications medium were devised by church and state. This precipitated the never-ending struggle for the freedom of the press. Before the middle of the seventeenth century, this struggle was to inspire John Milton's Areopagitica.

Literacy was spread chiefly to the rising middle

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 15 - 16.

class. This came about for several reasons. The long working days of the wage earners often isolated them from the traditional educational opportunities. Then too, there was a decline in the ancient Catholic schools because of religious changes. Some of the Protestant reformers were anti-intellectual, emphasizing faith and disparaging reason. Although the English Puritans placed great emphasis on preaching as a means of teaching, Queen Elizabeth's government discouraged preaching for fear it would lead to sedition.

Sir Thomas Gresham, the wealthiest merchant of his day, made the first attempt to establish a centre of adult education in London by endowing a College in 1581. However, the seven professors did not lecture daily as Gresham's will provided. Their lectures were suspended during the Fire of London 1666, and their salaries were stopped in 1669. Petitioners demanded the resumption of public lectures. Their request was granted and the lectures were resumed. They continued until 1768.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, coffee houses spread scientific knowledge and propagated the ideas of political and religious tolerance. They became the centres of discussion of current religious and political controversies. In 1664-5 a Greek, Constantine, had a coffee house at Threadneedle Street where the Fellows of

the Royal Society used to meet as a committee on their return from Gresham College. Many known Puritans, Sir William Petty, for instance, were members of a Coffee House Club which met at Turk's Head, Westminster. There, formal methods of parliamentary procedure were used. A pamphlet, Character of a Coffee House, 1670, thus describes a typical coffee house:

A numerous company is present and each group is occupied with its subject. One is quoting Classics, another admires Euclid, a third for a lecture, a fourth a conjecture, a fifth for a penny in the pound. Theology is introduced, Masques, Balls and Plays are condemned. One cries up philosophy and whether Harrington's Rota or Boyle's Virtuosa be the nobler design they determine. The company is mixed and apprentice boys call for their coffee in Latin.<sup>18</sup>

Early in the eighteenth century, the two Universities, Oxford and Cambridge, also started public lectures on scientific subjects. Dr. John Keill, later Professor of Astronomy, lectured at Hart Hall, Oxford, on experimental philosophy from 1700 to 1710. His lectures were read and published in Latin. Dr. J. T. Desaguliers succeeded Dr. Keill in 1710 - 1712. These lectures at Oxford were not really public as they were attended mostly by University members.

Dr. Desaguliers became the pioneer of adult edu-

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<sup>18</sup>Nicholas Hans, New Trends in Education in the Eighteenth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 168.

cation through his public lectures. He began his first course in London in 1712, and in 1717, at the request of his students, he had his lectures published. They were divided into four parts: mechanics, hydrostatics, pneumatics, and optics. His course on experimental philosophy served as a model for all lecturers. He read his lectures in English, French, and Latin. His audiences consisted of men who could pay fees, although one of his students, Paul Dawson, was quite poor. His public lectures were evidently attended by merchants, craftsmen, and clerks. The charge was two guineas and a half. His private audiences consisted of gentlemen and courtiers, and included ladies as well.<sup>19</sup> A group of French refugees attended a separate course. The charge for private and French lectures was three guineas. Possibly foreigners who knew neither English nor French attended his Latin lectures. There were many other lecturers, but not all of them left published works.

Scientific knowledge was disseminated by public lectures, periodical publications, and pamphlets. One of these periodicals, The Lady's Diary, which was published from 1704 - 1818, catered for all shades of public opinion except the Catholics, who were under the

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 137 - 141.

official ban. It included elementary data on astronomy and geography and often added a chronological table of historical events and the list of English sovereigns. The Gentleman's Diary, first published in 1741, was its counterpart designed for men. These periodicals were important to adult education because they contained mathematical and scientific problems. Hundreds of men and women competed in solutions in order to win prizes.

Weavers often became interested in mathematics and experimental science. The nature of their work permitted them time for reflection. Their interest in mathematics was probably due to the fact that they worked with mathematical patterns. In 1717, the Spitalfields Mathematical Society was formed. This was a mutual improvement society of weavers and other manual workers. The Lancashire weavers, too, were interested in mathematics, especially geometry. Many of them worked at their looms with geometrical problems suspended in front of them.<sup>20</sup>

A direct reference to adult education appears in the minutes of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. In an entry for March 8, 1700, John Pierson and John Reynolds were praised for teaching

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<sup>20</sup>Thomas Kelly, George Birkbeck (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1957), p. 66.

poor children during the day, and poor adults at night, to read and understand the Church of England catechism.<sup>21</sup>

There had been lectures for adults, schools for adult literacy, and mutual improvement societies throughout the eighteenth century and earlier. In the eighteenth century, scientists and philosophers changed the contents of education. The popular lecturers, the radical reformers, and the political agitators prepared the soil for the general diffusion of knowledge and the education of the masses. They were the precursors of the adult education of today.

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<sup>21</sup>Grattan, op. cit., p. 67.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ADULT SCHOOL MOVEMENT

In the 1790s, the English adult education movement in its recognizable modern form, appeared as one of the functions of the new industrial society. Most people in England and the rest of the world were illiterate at this time. It was mankind's normal condition. Most people were poor. Smoky new towns rapidly degenerated into slums. The mine and factory claimed the labour of women and children for long hours. There was great opportunity for those who thought their prayers could serve the Spirit of the Universe.

The Baptist Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, and the Church Missionary Society were established between 1792 and 1799 to bring the Bible to people in foreign lands. Illiterate people had to be taught to read. It was in such a time of religious revival that the Adult School movement was born.<sup>1</sup>

The first recorded Adult School, for Bible-reading and instruction in writing and arithmetic, was opened at Nottingham in 1798 by William Singleton, a Methodist, and Samuel Fox, a Quaker. The latter combined courage, integrity, and deep religious conviction with a touch of eccentricity. "If you mean to thrive, you must rise at

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest Champness, Adult Schools (Wallington: Religious Education Press, 1941), p. 12.

five!"<sup>2</sup> was one of his guiding principles. He held his school at seven o'clock on Sunday mornings for two hours. Then "he entertained the teachers to breakfast."<sup>3</sup> These were mainly drawn from the women assistants employed at his grocer's shop. Although this work didn't spread, the school was later especially helpful in training "Sabbath School" teachers.

In 1810, the British and Foreign Bible Society distributed over four thousand Bibles and New Testaments in the Bristol area. It was reported in 1812 to the second anniversary meeting of the Society's local branch, that many people could not benefit because they could not read. William Smith, a Wesleyan, took this to heart, and began an experimental reading school in one of the poorer parts of the city. His first two pupils were "William Wood, aged sixty-three, and Jane Burrace, aged forty."<sup>4</sup> Smith, who earned eighteen shillings a week, was a doorkeeper at a Methodist Church. So that he might have more time to devote to his self-imposed task of bringing the light of

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<sup>2</sup>G. Currie Martin, The Adult School Movement (National Adult School Union, 1924), p. 13, cited by H. C. Dent, Part-Time Education in Britain (London: Turnstile Press, 1949), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>S. J. Curtis, History of Education in Great Britain (London: University Tutorial Press, 1961), p. 469.



knowledge to his less-favoured friends, Smith paid a substitute three shillings a week to take over some of his duties at the church.

This Bristol effort was so successful that, before long, a society was formed called "An Institution for Instructing Adult Persons to Read the Holy Scriptures" - a title which exactly describes the purpose of the early Adult Schools.<sup>5</sup> By 1816, in the Bristol area, there were twenty-four schools for men and thirty-one for women with a total of 1,581 scholars. The movement soon spread to other parts of the country.

Thomas Pole, a Philadelphia-born Quaker, and a member of the society, helped the cause by writing a book on adult education in 1816. It "was a most effective combination of fact, argumentation, and propaganda."<sup>6</sup> His first edition sold two thousand copies. To meet the objections of those who were against making the poor literate, Pole noted that he had observed well-educated poor in Scotland. They submitted cheerfully to their lot and did not aspire to equality with their masters and mistresses. He found that literacy increased their

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<sup>5</sup>H. C. Dent, Part-Time Education in Britain (London: Turnstile Press, 1949), p. 8.

<sup>6</sup>C. Hartley Grattan, In Quest of Knowledge (New York: Association Press, 1955), p. 75.

labour output, strengthened their morals, reduced crime, and reinforced their religious principles.

Pole thought that if he could teach adults, they would teach their children, and thus in time cut down the need of schools for children; and he envisaged the day when schools for adults would no longer be needed either, for every adult would know how to read!<sup>7</sup>

An interesting controversy was whether instruction was to be limited to reading, or whether it was proper to teach writing on Sundays. Reading meant the ability to read the Bible -- a religious act well justified as a Sabbath occupation. Whether writing fell into this category was considered questionable. It was thought that the teaching of writing would increase the number of forgers. As time went on, Adult School folk felt that "all that makes for the uplift of man is sacred and is a fit occupation for the holy day."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, writing could be taught on Sunday.

By the 1830s the number of schools and scholars declined sharply. This was due partly to unsettled social, political, and economic conditions. There was also a shortage of competent teachers. The decline, however, was more likely due to the fact that the original aim of the movement had largely been fulfilled. This aim, based on the rules of the original society at Bristol, read, "That

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>8</sup>Champness, op. cit., p. 12.

the learners be considered as having obtained the object of this society when they can read distinctly and readily in the Bible; and shall then be dismissed."<sup>9</sup>

The movement was not revitalized until 1845 when Joseph Sturge and William White started a school at Severn Street, Birmingham. It was not until 1852, however, that the men were separated from the boys, and a true Adult School was established. Classes were of two hours' duration. One hour was devoted to writing, the other to reading, with question periods interspersed. Sometimes, "calculations based on the number of sheep owned by the shepherd-kings of Israel, or the number of generations between Adam and Abraham provided exercises for the arithmetic class."<sup>10</sup> The motivation was both evangelical and pedagogical.

The Quakers supported the movement both spiritually and materially. The Friends' First-Day School Association dropped its preoccupation with children in 1847, and from then on gave its support to the Adult Schools by taking over the endless task of fund-raising. Fortunately, too, men like William White provided strong teaching leadership over a number of years. For these reasons, Sturge's

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<sup>9</sup>Martin, op. cit., p. 403, cited by Dent, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>J. F. C. Harrison, Learning and Living 1790-1960 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 195.

school became the basis of a widespread and enduring system.

The earlier Adult School work was based on a distinction between teachers and scholars. As time went on, such a distinction became lost, and its place was taken by the ideal of sharing in fellowship. All were considered teachers and all scholars, for in some respect or other of life, every member had some knowledge which he or she could pass on, and in doing so, achieve a sense of dignity as an active member of the group.

Most of the students in the Adult Schools were manual workers. Probably the most powerful appeal was to get a grounding in the three Rs. Gradually, the schools established savings funds, small libraries, and sick-benefit funds. Temperance societies, social teas, and athletic contests were sponsored. In spite of this, the curriculum stayed within elementary limits and students were not expected or encouraged to climb the educational ladder. "As a matter of fact, none existed, though there was something R. H. Tawney was later to call 'the greasy pole' up which the ambitious shinnied as far as they could."<sup>11</sup>

Because the number of illiterate adults was decreas-

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<sup>11</sup>Grattan, op. cit., p. 95.

ing, other forms of instruction of a wider nature were introduced in the 1890s. Some of the main characteristics of the earlier work were retained. The centre of the Adult School work was still the Sunday morning class, held usually at 8:30 or 9:00 a.m. However, the movement slowly dropped its reading and writing classes as the need for them was met by the state schools.<sup>12</sup> Instead, after an opening hymn or prayer, the "First Half-Hour" talks, non-religious in character, were started. The main feature of the meeting was the Bible lesson, usually conducted in the form of a reading. A short talk by the class leader and discussion followed. After another hymn and prayer, the morning's session was concluded.

At the turn of the century, the Adult School movement expressed Quaker idealism by its interest in prison reform, in peace, and in efforts for social betterment. Since the Spirit of God dwelt in every man, there was a belief in the value of the so-called ordinary man and woman. There was a belief in equality of the sexes, long before such a belief became general. In an era of strict Sunday observance, the Adult Schools introduced the idea that it was legitimate to conduct adult education work on Sundays, and to hold business meetings connected with it on that day.<sup>13</sup> "The secret of the success of the Adult

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 96.    <sup>13</sup>Champness, op. cit., p. 21.

School was that it was not just a school, but a community, based on the method of Socrates and the message of Christ, a rare combination."<sup>14</sup>

By the 1890s many Adult Schools had been founded by Non-Friends. There were two groups of Adult Schools -- Quaker and Non-Quaker. In 1899 a new grouping was successfully launched. A National Council of Adult Schools met at Leicester. By 1907 there was a fusion of the Quaker and the nondenominational Adult Schools of England within the National Council.

As the Adult Schools grew wider and more varied in character, and less dogmatic in the interpretation of Scriptures, it was necessary to provide some guidance for the weekly studies. In 1903, a Lesson Handbook Committee was appointed, from which came the publication of Lesson Sheets. Later, the Handbook itself was published in 1911. The book continued to be published annually in late autumn. In fifty years, it developed from a single lesson sheet to an impressive little volume of 240 pages. Although it was compiled to meet the need of Adult School members, many ministers of religion used it.

The Fellowship Hymn Book was published in 1909. The early part of the twentieth century was rich in hymn writers, and a Supplement to the Fellowship Hymn Book was

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<sup>14</sup>Harrison, op. cit., p. 201.

published in 1920. Some of the most popular hymns were written by Adult School members. In 1933 a revised edition was published. There was also a Fellowship Song Book published in 1915 and a revised edition in 1931. This has been used not only by the Secondary Schools, but also by the British Broadcasting Corporation. Many people have been served by publications of the Adult Schools.

The following nine aims for Adult Schools were drawn up and widely used, but they were never given official status by the movement:

1. To make and develop men and women and to teach them the art of life.
2. To study the Bible frankly, freely, reverently, and without prejudice.
3. To establish an unsectarian basis for Christian effort and unity.
4. To bring together in helpful comradeship and active service the different classes of society.
5. To stimulate and educate public spirit and public morality.
6. To teach the responsibility of citizenship.
7. To encourage whatever makes for International Brotherhood.
8. To advance as far as may be the equality of opportunity.
9. To help men and women to understand and to live the life of Jesus Christ, and to encourage them in their personal allegiance to Him.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of these aims, the Adult Schools have sought to bring into their fellowship not only people from all Christian denominations, but also people from Non-Christian religions, and even atheists. At various

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<sup>15</sup>Champness, op. cit., p. 32.

times throughout its history, attempts have been made to link the Adult Schools with Socialism, Pacifism, and Total Abstinence. The good spirit of the movement has resisted the charges.

Four kinds of Adult Schools were organized: (1) Men's Schools, (2) Women's Schools, (3) Mixed Schools, and (4) Young People's Schools. Discussion groups, correspondence courses, summer schools, and sessions at residential guest houses were provided.

The Adult School movement was a growth, not a carefully planned scheme. Each school became a self-governing unity standing in a federal relationship to the following larger groupings:

1. The Association of several Adult Schools generally in one building.
2. The Sub-Union of a number of Adult Schools in a large town or some definite area.
3. The County Union.
4. The National Union.<sup>16</sup>

A small number of paid officials whose office was in London, carried out the organization of the movement. It was financed by a levy made by the National Union on the County Unions based on their membership. There were also donations and profits from publishing. In 1955, its National Union decided to approach the Ministry of Education for recognition and financial support for the work of

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 37.



the movement.<sup>17</sup> This request evidently did not meet with success, since the 1962 Year Book of the National Institute of Adult Education says that "the Movement is entirely self-supporting, though a number of charitable trusts make possible particular kinds of service from the Union to the Schools."<sup>18</sup>

The character of recent Adult School work was illustrated effectively by the Handbook for 1956, with its general theme, "Achievement and Responsibility." The year's study was designed to introduce the student to a variety of modern achievements in medicine, physics, chemistry, engineering, and so on. Biblical subjects, such as "New Light on Joseph and the Exodus" were not forgotten. In forty, or at the most fifty short meetings in the course of one year, a range of study was attempted which would occupy students in other adult classes for many winter sessions. Since the leader of the discussion was usually untrained in the academic sense, this was, indeed, an ambitious undertaking.<sup>19</sup>

Harrison explained why the Adult School movement

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<sup>17</sup>S. G. Raybould (ed.) Trends in English Adult Education (London: Heinemann, 1959), p. 139.

<sup>18</sup>National Institute of Adult Education, Adult Education in 1962 (London: National Institute of Adult Education, 1962), p. 45.

<sup>19</sup>Raybould, loc. cit.

did not expand as much as it had once seemed likely. It was, first of all, adult education by amateurs. Fellowship was no substitute for pedagogic expertise and sound scholarship. No Quaker merchant or manufacturer would have expected his business to prosper without trained experts to run it; yet somehow in the difficult art of teaching adults, he hoped that by sincerity, prayer, and hints on preparation, he would be able to do the job. "The glory of the Adult Schools is that in such circumstances they often did a magnificent job."<sup>20</sup>

In the beginning, the Adult Schools spread basic literacy. The emphasis now falls upon the pursuit of learning among compatible friends dedicated to social service and inspired by religious ideals. The peak membership of nearly one hundred thousand was reached in 1910. By 1955 it had dropped to nine thousand, in spite of the strenuous efforts at recruitment since 1954.<sup>21</sup> Adult Schools have ceased to occupy a central place in the adult education movement. However, those who appreciate what they have done in one hundred and fifty years "must hope that a further phase of useful activity will develop."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Harrison, op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>21</sup>Raybould, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MECHANICS' INSTITUTES

The history of English adult education shows parallel movements stemming from different motives. The Adult Schools sprang from a religious-philanthropic motive -- a desire to supply religious instruction which might prop the established social order. The Mechanics' Institutes sprang from the new scientific discoveries by which that order was being undermined. The industrial revolution, in creating both a new kind of industry, and a new type of industrial population, had also created a new demand for scientific teaching.<sup>1</sup>

Hudson selected the Birmingham Brotherly Society, established in 1796 as the earliest example of a Mechanics' Institute, for the Society aimed to teach mechanics reading, writing, arithmetic, drawing, geography, history, and morals.<sup>2</sup> However, if Dr. John Anderson of Glasgow is given credit for establishing the first Mechanics' Institute, then the London Mechanics' Institution with Dr. George Birkbeck playing a leading role, is the first English one.

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon Hawkins (ed.), A Design for Democracy (London: Max Parrish, 1956), p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>J. W. Hudson, The History of Adult Education (London: Longmans, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1851) cited by C. Hartley Grattan, In Quest of Knowledge (New York: Association Press, 1955), p. 83.

When Francis Place was given the task of drafting the rules for the venture, he first made a study of the rules of the London literary and scientific societies. In some respects, therefore, the Mechanics' Institutes merely provided a local dwelling and a name for activities that had previously been carried on under other auspices.

The idea of an institute in London originated with Joseph Clinton Robertson, a journalist and patent agent of Fleet Street. His most valuable achievement was the Mechanics' Magazine, which was intended to provide the mechanic with instruction in the specific principles of his work, and information as to the latest discoveries and inventions. The first weekly number, price 3d., appeared on Saturday, 30 August, 1823, bearing Bacon's words, "Knowledge is Power" as its motto on the title page. Robertson was proprietor, editor, and to a considerable extent author, from its foundation until his death in 1852. He had read in the Glasgow Free Press an account of the establishment of the Glasgow Mechanics' Institute, and at once conceived the idea of a similar institution for London.<sup>3</sup>

Robertson mentioned his idea to Thomas Hodgskin, his associate editor and English forerunner of Marx.

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas Kelly, George Birkbeck (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1957), p. 78.

Hodgskin sought the assistance of Francis Place, an organizer of working-class movements. Place immediately envisaged a lecture room for a thousand persons, a laboratory, a museum, a workshop, books, and apparatus. This would take a lot of money. Membership fees at 20s. a year wouldn't be sufficient. The wealthy would have to supply the capital. Hodgskin and Robertson, however, thought that the institution, no matter how humble, should be the creation of the mechanics themselves.

A manifesto published in the Mechanics' Magazine in October 1823, proposed that the institution be self-supporting, the method of instruction be by lectures to large audiences, and the subjects of instruction include not only the principles of natural science, but also the elements of economics. This manifesto attracted the attention of Dr. George Birkbeck, who offered his assistance.

By the summer of 1824 a permanent home for the institution was found in the Southampton Buildings in Chancery Lane. Meetings were held twice weekly on Wednesday and Saturday. Courses on mechanics, chemistry, electricity, pneumatics and hydrostatics, heat, astronomy, botany, and the human mind were offered. Lectures on such varied topics as stenography, acoustics, and the steam engine were given. The lectures were free for the first

eighteen months, but in the latter part of 1825 fees were charged at the rate of three or four pounds per lecture. In 1825 Hodgskin offered twelve lectures on political economy. The opportunity to deliver them was not granted to him until much later.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to lectures, the Institution from an early stage organized classes or schools, as they were called. The first regular school was in arithmetic, in December 1824. This was followed by schools in algebra and trigonometry, drawing, geography, and French. French was surprisingly popular. In 1827 shorthand was introduced, and in 1828, after much hesitation, Latin. This last was added, no doubt, to meet the needs of the lawyers' clerks from the surrounding Inns of Court.

The classes were taught either by paid instructors, or by paid volunteers emanating principally from the classes themselves. Quite a number of classes were organized as "mutual instruction classes" in which the students with the help of textbooks, and perhaps occasional assistance from some knowledgeable member of the institution, acted as their own instructors. This method became popular in many of the Mechanics' Institutes. The fruits of this tradition of mutual help among the working classes,

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 98 - 99.

especially in the North of England, were observable in several forms. Engels wrote in 1844, "I have often heard working men whose fustian jackets scarcely held together, speak upon geological, astronomical and other subjects, with more knowledge than the most cultivated bourgeois in Germany possesses."<sup>5</sup> A demand for discussion, a feature which characterizes English working-class adult education, was made in the very early stages of development.

The physical conditions of the classrooms often left much to be desired. Some of the floors were made of stone. Although the main rooms of the institution were lit by gas, candles were still used in the classrooms. Frequently there were complaints due to overcrowding and a total lack of ventilation. These people must have had a great determination and zeal for knowledge in order to endure such discomforts at the end of a twelve-hour working day.<sup>6</sup>

A reading room was opened in December, 1824. A circulating library was functioning by September of the following year. Gradually, a collection of scientific apparatus, minerals, and botanical specimens was acquired.

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<sup>5</sup>Friedrich Engels, State of the Working Classes, p. 240, cited by Hawkins, op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>6</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 132.



Birkbeck's lectures at their best were excellent, clear, reasonably simple, and well illustrated by diagrams, models, and experiments. In 1826 he gave a lecture on weaving and the power loom. He brought with him the inventor of the loom, M. de Bergue, and he had a loom and weaver with him on the platform. He described and demonstrated the operation of the machine and concluded by trying to show that its use would be beneficial to the workers in the long run.

Some of Birkbeck's lectures had a propagandist as well as an educational purpose. In 1828 he gave an address on the construction of chimneys and mechanical methods of cleaning them. In the absence of legislation, it was necessary to create a public opinion which would demand that the new mechanical methods be used. Birkbeck was interested in alleviating the wretched fate of the climbing boys for cleaning chimneys.<sup>7</sup>

There was a propagandist element also in Birkbeck's course in 1827 on the structure and functions of the human body. The importance of dissection was now generally recognized. A supply of eight hundred bodies a year was needed for the London dissecting rooms alone. Under existing laws, only the bodies of murderers were available. The anatomy schools, therefore, had to resort to

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 114.



the illicit purchase of bodies stolen from the cemeteries by the body-snatchers or "resurrection men." To obviate this evil, it was suggested that all unclaimed bodies should be made available for medical purposes. To drive home his point, Birkbeck produced on the platform, a corpse covered with a green cloth. He removed the cloth as necessary to reveal the various muscles. His course helped to dispel the prejudice against dissection and the Anatomy Act was passed in 1832.<sup>8</sup>

Hill has preserved an interesting account by George Thurnell, a working-class member, of how he came to join the institution. Thurnell was an apprentice jeweller. One day as he was walking through Saint Paul's Churchyard, he paused to watch the workmen replacing the cross on the dome. He began to speculate on how it would be possible to determine the height of the workmen. After much thought, he eventually devised a crude quadrant. The realization came to him that he did not possess sufficient mathematical knowledge. The Mechanics' Magazine, launched about this time, introduced him to a whole new world. He learned of the Mechanics' Institution, and became a member.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 114 - 115.

<sup>9</sup>F. Hill, National Education II, App. IV (London: 1836), pp. 214 - 218, cited by Kelly, op. cit., p. 103.

Working-class students like Thurnell were driven on by a desire for knowledge of which they felt themselves to have been unjustly deprived. To these men knowledge was the key to all good things -- to skill in their work, to personal advancement, to intellectual enjoyment, and to an understanding of the world in which they lived. To many also, especially in the larger centres such as London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Leeds, it was a key to political power. The political complexion of the movement in the provinces as in London, was predominantly Whig.

The Nonconformist clergy--the Unitarians, Baptists, and Congregationalists, were often active helpers. Generally speaking, the Church of England, and Catholics were hostile. A Catholic gentleman was quoted as saying:

I had rather see my servants dead drunk, than I would see them going to the Mechanics' Institution; you are all a set of radicals in disguise; you want to upset the King and the Constitution, and to overthrow our Holy Mother Church.<sup>10</sup>

Birkbeck's friend, Henry Brougham, after Whitbread's death in 1815, became the acknowledged public champion of adult education. Brougham's greatest service to the cause was a pamphlet he published in 1825. It was a powerful plea for the extension of working-class education. He

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<sup>10</sup>New London Mechanics' Register (London: 1827), p. 106, cited by Kelly, op. cit., p. 217.

appealed to the upper classes to come forward in a generous spirit to endow the new institutions. He did not fail to point out that such institutions should be both self-supporting and self-managing. This six-penny pamphlet had undoubtedly a tremendous influence in encouraging the establishment of Mechanics' Institutes.

That the institute must rely in part for its membership on persons outside the working class was soon realized. It had also been recognized that even the workingman's appetite for science was not insatiable, and that provision must be made for more general cultural subjects and for some measure of social relaxation.

As early as May, 1829, the first tentative beginnings of social activities appeared when a concert of sacred music was given. Later, there were lectures on elocution, Shakespearean characters, and dramatic poetry. These may have been thin disguises for the dramatic readings which became so popular in Mechanics' Institutes. Another milestone, not without its social significance, was the decision in 1830 to admit female relations and friends of members to the lectures.

The then fashionable, but now despised science of phrenology made its appearance. Even George Eliot had her head shaved in order that her bumps might be studied more conveniently. To radicals and secularists phrenology

appeared to offer an alternative to the usual theological explanation of human behaviour. It was a democratic science, since particular bumps were not the monopoly of any one section of society. To social reformers, it offered the possibility of forming a more rational society.<sup>11</sup> Phrenology was permissible in Mechanics' Institutes, but the cause of universal suffrage was not.

In order to minimize criticism from the right, most of the institutes were scrupulously careful to avoid any kind of political or sectarian activity. Many workers that the movement attracted, were radicals seeking education as a means to the reconstruction of society. When they found that discussion of all controversial issues of politics, economics, and religion was excluded, they often left in disgust. They suspected that the Mechanics' Institutes were "a put-up job, designed to teach the worker obedience to constituted authority and to increase his skill for the benefit of the employer."<sup>12</sup>

Many felt that the institutes were not as successful as they might have been because the real wants of the working men were not met. Workmen whose education had scarcely advanced beyond the three Rs, if indeed it had

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<sup>11</sup>J. F. C. Harrison, Learning and Living 1790-1960 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 116.

<sup>12</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 226.

reached that level, might be interested and amused by demonstrations, but could hardly hope to gain much understanding of the scientific principles involved. A Report of the Yorkshire Union 1844, sums up the situation with the quotation "We have endeavoured to form colleges before we have had schools."<sup>13</sup>

The founders of the Mechanics' Institutes were not always agreed as to the exact aims of the institutions they were so busily establishing. Often there was an over-estimation of the educational background of those artisans who were to form the classes. By 1840 about three-quarters of the adult population had some knowledge of reading, and about three-fifths had some knowledge of writing, but only a much smaller proportion had any competence in either. Less than half had any competence in arithmetic.<sup>14</sup> The chances of another Watt or another Arkwright blossoming amongst them were very remote. However, the pipe dream persisted for quite some time.

By the forties the emphasis in most of the institutes had shifted to literary or fashionable topics, both in the lectures, and choice of books for the library. Science, however, was not completely abandoned. Sometimes, as in Leeds, the Literary Institution and the Mechanics'

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 227.    <sup>14</sup>Ibid., Appendix X, p. 338.

Institute merged.

The adult education movement for most middle-class liberals, was considered to be a social policeman. It was remarked on several occasions that the Mechanics' Institutes had exercised a restraining influence during the Plug Plot (unemployed) riots of August 1842. The Yorkshire Union was credited with keeping the peace during the monetary crisis of 1858. The institutes were also used to spread propaganda on birth control and temperance. They were a means for diffusing middle-class standards and values.<sup>15</sup>

Conservative opposition to the institutes had not disappeared altogether. As late as 1853, James Hole of Leeds wrote that the institutes in some quarters were still dreaded as nests of revolution and nurseries for schism and infidelity. They were regarded as places where poor people learned to be discontented with their position.<sup>16</sup>

Hole realized that adult education was not only remedial and social, but a definite stage in the educational process. Education was not an affair of childhood and youth, but the business of the whole life. It was a right not a privilege to be graciously bestowed on the lower classes by their betters. He thought that the Mechanics' Institutes more than any other institution

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<sup>15</sup>Harrison, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>16</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 267.

helped to form a sound public opinion as to the necessity and duty of popular education.<sup>17</sup>

In 1850 Hudson "estimated that there were 610 Literary and Mechanics' Institutes in England, having a membership of 102,500, and possessing 691,500 books in their libraries."<sup>18</sup> They varied greatly in character and achievement, and particularly in their educational importance. They had ceased to be regarded as a medium for the instruction of the masses and had become select rather than popular institutions. It was now widely accepted that the development of recreational features had not persuaded more artisans to join. Because the institutes had opened their cultural and social activities to a wide public, their influence was much greater than membership figures alone would imply.<sup>19</sup>

Even though it wasn't always the elusive mechanic who benefited, the work done for persons in a slightly different grade of society was of educational importance. The Mechanics' Institutes, for example, enabled clerks to rise in their profession. In Manchester, improvement in

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<sup>17</sup>Harrison, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>18</sup>Hudson, op. cit., cited by S. J. Curtis, History of Education in Great Britain (London: University Tutorial Press, 1961), p. 473.

<sup>19</sup>Mabel Tylecote, The Mechanics' Institutes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957), p. 258.



writing, could command an extra fifty pounds a year in salary, and "proficiency in French or German enabled students to become almost indispensable to their employers."<sup>20</sup> The institutes also gave teachers the opportunity to improve their qualifications.<sup>21</sup>

Some of the Mechanics' Institutes did train manual workers and thus fitted them for more respectable posts with higher wages. The Keighley Institute even claimed two inventors. One member invented a lightning conductor for chimneys and another made an improvement in the mariner's compass.<sup>22</sup>

The institutes were a means of drawing attention to the neglect of the education of women. In the development of vocal music classes, women were important. When dancing was introduced, they were needed. They were often admitted to classes and lectures, and the Yorkshire Union had female classes. They could even use the libraries at a cheap rate.

The teaching in a number of the institutes was superior to that generally offered at the time. Lively and effective teaching often took place because there was a determination to arouse the interest and not merely to exercise the memory. In order to increase the efficiency of teaching and lecturing, Unions of institutes were formed so that lecturers could circulate regularly among the

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 262.    <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 269.    <sup>22</sup>Ibid.



associated institutions, developing systematic courses. The Lancashire and Cheshire Union in 1847 had full-time itinerant organizing masters supervising the work of part-time local assistants. A paid secretary, Mr. Thomas Hogg, was appointed to conduct the business of the Union and to deliver lectures. In order to encourage regular attendance at the classes, a scheme of examinations was organized. On the results of the examinations, certificates and prizes were awarded. The Union still continues its work as an examining body.<sup>23</sup>

By 1841 the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge declared that whatever the original design might have been, Mechanics' Institutes now had a twofold object, instruction and rational recreation. Even Hole and Birkbeck defended this.<sup>24</sup> The social significance of the institutes was just as important as the instructional work. They were highly regarded as meeting places, centres of information, and sources of relaxation and recreation.

The service rendered by the libraries of the Mechanics' Institutes was generally recognized. The purchased books were carefully selected. They covered a wide range of subjects. Many people benefited, not only members.

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<sup>23</sup>H. J. Edwards, The Evening Institute (London: National Institute of Adult Education, 1961), pp. 22 - 23.

<sup>24</sup>Tylecote, op. cit., pp. 270 - 271.

The newsrooms, although at first disputed, became objects of pride. The effect of lectures was to stimulate the request for books on the subject under discussion. Reading had come to play such an important part in the lives of so many people that the provision of facilities had become a matter for public action. The Mechanics' Institutes, "by demonstrating the need to set up public libraries, contributed to their own decline."<sup>25</sup>

The institutes prepared the way for the development of other public services. By their pioneer work in the organization of public exhibitions, they made an eloquent plea for the provision of public museums and art galleries. Their excursions to places of interest were conducted with such decorum and success, that they helped to establish the case for the provision of public parks and botanical gardens.

The concerts provided by a number of the institutes gave evidence of a popular demand not only for entertainment, but also for excellent music. The Northern Mechanics' Institution in Liverpool drew audiences of between one and two thousand for popular Saturday evening concerts. In Leeds, the Mechanics' Institution formed a Philharmonic Society and gave five concerts of classical music in 1849 - 50 for members only. At Wakefield twelve highly successful concerts

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

were given each winter season from 1846 to 1850. The works of Beethoven, Handel, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Mozart, and Rossini were heard. The performers were nearly all residents in the towns, and were members of their respective institutions.<sup>26</sup>

Even the directors were surprised by the success of the concerts. Admission charges varied from threepence to a shilling, and at some institutions, members were admitted free to certain seats. Thus the working classes could enjoy good music cheaply.

The drawing classes of the Mechanics' Institutes were widely used. Casts and drawing books were loaned, rules and regulations were drawn up, and inspectors reviewed the work done and reported to headquarters at Somerset House. The institutes concentrated on mechanical and architectural drawing. Art instruction was a hotly debated subject at this time. In maintaining these independent classes, the Mechanics' Institutes played a part in keeping wide open the opportunity to experiment in methods.<sup>27</sup>

The national educational policy was a long time in coming. Therefore, the institutes that had class departments continued to have wide scope for their activities by providing elementary instruction for young people.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 273.    <sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 285 - 287.

They suffered, however, from antagonism from two opposing quarters, "from the fears and prejudices of the privileged and from the suspicion and resentment of the poor."<sup>28</sup> If the institutes elsewhere had been as highly efficient as those of Yorkshire, "the slowly developing educational system of the country might have been more closely associated with them than was to be the case."<sup>29</sup>

From 1850 to 1875 the movement was still vigorous. Although many institutes had disappeared, others were still being founded. Some had just faded out, and some had become mere social clubs. A substantial proportion, however, had developed educational work of considerable importance and as they gradually melted away, they left behind them "a moraine of useful institutions -- technical schools, art schools, day schools, public libraries, or at the very least a scholarship fund founded from the assets at the time of dissolution."<sup>30</sup>

By 1900 it was clear that they had had their day. With the development of public responsibility they handed over their functions to other responsible bodies. A surprising number, however, survived into the twentieth century, and of those founded by 1851, thirty-five survive

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 292.      <sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 276.

to this day. Most of them are clubs, with a library, reading room, and recreational facilities. Some are literary institutions, and quite a few still provide a home, on occasion, for some kind of educational activity.<sup>31</sup>

The best remembered pioneer of the Mechanics' Institutes is Dr. Birkbeck. In 1866 the name of the London Mechanics' Institution was changed to the Birkbeck Literary and Scientific Institution. An important part of its work became the preparation of its pupils for the external examinations of the University of London. In 1907 the institution was renamed the Birkbeck College and in 1920 it was recognized as a school of the University of London for evening and part-time students.<sup>32</sup>

Whether we consider their achievements in their own time, or the achievements they made possible for future generations, it is clear that the Mechanics' Institutes "must be reckoned one of the major educational movements of the nineteenth century."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 276 - 277.

<sup>32</sup>Curtis, op. cit., p. 477.

<sup>33</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 277.

## CHAPTER IV

### SOCIAL AND CIVIC EDUCATION

If technical education in England springs ultimately from the Mechanics' Institutes, social and civic education, though its history runs for long periods underground, can be traced to the educational idealism which was one side of most working class movements up to 1850 -- of Co-operation, of Chartism, and of early Trade Unionism.<sup>1</sup>

This kind of educational effort emerged from two sources -- the French Revolution, and the new industrial system which transformed all traditional relationships. In 1792 the London Corresponding Society and the Societies for Constitutional Information promoted groups to study the works of Thomas Paine. Many working men who had attended the Lancashire Sunday Schools had learned to read, write, and speak sufficiently well to become agitators for parliamentary reform.<sup>2</sup>

By the 1820s working-class circles eagerly debated political issues and discussed practical grievances. At Hull, for example, in 1818, the members of the Union of Political Protestants were divided into classes of twenty, each meeting weekly to read the works of Cobbett and Sherwin, Wooler's Black Dwarf, and other works calculated to diffuse political knowledge. Because of the govern-

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon Hawkins (ed.), A Design for Democracy (London: Max Parrish, 1956), Appendix I, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.



ment's alarm at such proceedings, one of the Six Acts of 1819 repeated the prohibition of 1799 on unauthorized lectures, debates, and reading rooms open to the public.<sup>3</sup>

The various working-class radical movements developed educational activities which were almost in actual opposition to the Mechanics' Institutes. This happened even though some of the working-class leaders such as Francis Place, William Lovett, Henry Hetherington, and George Jacob Holyoake participated actively in the work of the institutes. Since the Mechanics' Institutes were so anxious to avoid the stigma of Radicalism, they excluded all issues of politics and political economy. Therefore many workers sought that kind of knowledge elsewhere.

Because the early attempts to secure parliamentary reform proved fruitless, Co-operation was one of the movements in which the people sought a remedy for their evils. The first Co-operative Society was established in London in 1824 and by 1832, there were between four and five hundred societies. They were established under the "utopian socialist ideals"<sup>4</sup> of Robert Owen. The ultimate

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas Kelly, A History of Adult Education in Great Britain (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1962), p. 136.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

objective was the formation of independent co-operative communities settled on the land with provision of education both for children and for adults. Only one such community actually came into existence in Britain. This was at Orbiston, near Motherwell, in 1825.<sup>5</sup>

In Brighton, Dr. William King, a local physician published a monthly periodical, the Co-operator, from 1828 to 1830. To enlighten the working classes on the principles of Co-operation he wrote in one of his later issues:

But, above all things, . . . let Co-operators compete with each other in the improvement of their minds; let them form classes for this purpose; let them have common reading-rooms and libraries; let them learn how to keep common accounts, the principles of book-keeping, and the dealings of trade. These are the first steps in learning, and which are most useful to themselves. When they have accomplished this, then let them extend their reading to other subjects, and never cease till they have dissipated those mists of ignorance in which they are at present enveloped.<sup>6</sup>

The formation of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in 1844 was the starting point of modern Co-operation. In 1848 an Educational Department was established. The Co-operators, in 1853, decided to devote two and one-half per cent of their profits to educational purposes. Their example was widely followed. Libraries, classes, and lectures were established by a

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.



considerable number of the early Co-operative Societies. The publicists and theorists of the Co-operative movement were untiring in their reiteration of the need for a co-operative education. To George Jacob Holyoake, a library was "the soul of the store."<sup>7</sup> Popular sentiment, however, was not always in accord. A voice from the back of a crowded meeting of the Leeds Co-operative Society in 1872 said, "We want no eddication, give us a bonus."<sup>8</sup> Despite strong opposition, a modest educational fund was established even in Leeds.

Following the repeal of the Combination Acts in 1824, Trade Unions came into existence. They were primarily concerned with specific economic grievances. At this time, Trade Unionism, Co-operation, and political Radicalism were all facets of the movement inspired by Owen. His belief was in the infinite power of education to perfect the character of man and his moral and material well-being. The Grand National Consolidated Trades Union was created in 1834. This movement met with defeat since it was not strong enough to combat hostility of government

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<sup>7</sup>G. J. Holyoake, Jubilee History of the Leeds Industrial Cooperative Society, Ltd. (Manchester, 1897), p. 89, cited by J. F. C. Harrison, Learning and Living 1790 - 1960 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 105.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

and employers.<sup>9</sup>

After the trade union fiasco of 1834, the National Union was reborn in 1836 as the London Working Men's Association with Lovett as secretary and Hetherington as treasurer. Lovett was a cabinet-maker and Hetherington a printer. They were typical of working-class leadership at this period. They were Radicals and Owenites. Both had been largely self-educated, and both had taken full advantage of the facilities offered by the London Mechanics' Institution. They were both dedicated men prepared to suffer hardships and imprisonment in the great cause of uplifting the condition of the working masses. Hetherington was the great champion of a free press and Lovett was the champion of education.

In 1838 Lovett and Francis Place drew up the People's Charter as the political programme of their society. It called for universal male suffrage; equal electoral districts; removal of the property qualification for members of Parliament; payment of members of Parliament; secret ballot; and annual general elections. The first five of these six points have now become so much a part of the English parliamentary system that it is difficult to appreciate how radical they were in 1838. The radical spirit

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<sup>9</sup>Kelly, op. cit., pp. 137 - 138.

came out in the sixth point. A House of Commons subject to annual elections would have been an instrument of direct democracy. Nineteenth-century men expected that the growth of democracy would mean eventually the abolition of the Monarchy and the House of Lords.<sup>10</sup>

The most comprehensive plans for education came from Lovett. His views were expressed in a tract National Education published in 1837. "He outlined an educational programme more than two generations in advance of his time."<sup>11</sup> Later his views were more fully set forth in a work entitled Chartism which he and John Collins prepared in 1840 while they were serving a term of imprisonment in Warwick gaol for Chartist activities in Birmingham.<sup>12</sup> He asked:

Is it consistent with justice that the knowledge required to make a man acquainted with his rights and duties should be purposely withheld from him, and that then he should be upbraided and deprived of his rights on the plea of ignorance?<sup>13</sup>

Lovett thought that education should be provided free at public cost and be administered by locally elected

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<sup>10</sup>David Thomson, England in the Nineteenth Century (1815 - 1914) (London: Penguin, 1953), pp. 83 - 84.

<sup>11</sup>S. J. Curtis, History of Education in Great Britain (London: University Tutorial Press, 1961), pp. 477 - 478.

<sup>12</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 141.

<sup>13</sup>Hawkins, op. cit., Appendix I, p. 178.

bodies. It should begin with infancy and continue in adult life. His scheme provided for the creation throughout the kingdom of Public Halls or Schools for the People. In the daytime they were to be used for infant, primary, and secondary education, and in the evening they were to be used by adults for public lectures on physical, moral, and political science. They would also be used for readings, discussions, musical entertainments, dancing, and other forms of recreation. Each hall was to include baths, a small museum, and a laboratory or workshop. He also envisaged the establishment of small district circulating libraries containing the most useful works on politics, morals, the sciences, and history. The books were to be sent in rotation to the various towns and villages.<sup>14</sup>

When Lovett formulated his plan only seven years had elapsed since the first government grant of twenty thousand pounds to education. State aid to adult education was still in the distant future. Lovett was convinced from past experience that working people alone were too poor to be effective. Therefore, in 1841, he founded a new body, the National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People. This

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<sup>14</sup>Kelly, loc. cit.

didn't capture the popular imagination as the Working Men's Associations had done. Only one National Hall was opened at Holborn. This was a disused chapel which served for fifteen years as a centre for public meetings, lectures, classes, and concerts. By 1848 a Sunday School and a day school had also been established.

Under the auspices of Christian Chartism the most widespread and effective educational work was established. The Chartist Churches everywhere were associated with educational work. The Church at Birmingham consisted of a political association which studied democratic thought as laid down in the works of Cobbett, Hunt, Paine, and Cartwright, and a Church whose purpose was to further temperance, morality, and knowledge. It had schools for children and for young men, and a sick club. "At Deptford there was a 'Working-men's Church' whose members were said to study the New Testament in Greek."<sup>15</sup>

The work of Thomas Cooper in Leicester, is outstanding in the story of Chartist adult education. Thanks to a self-sacrificing mother he was able to stay at school until he was fifteen. After that, he became a shoemaker. His is one of the heroic narratives in the history of working-class self-improvement. In four years, Cooper

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<sup>15</sup>Hawkins, op. cit., Appendix I, p. 179.

"taught himself the elements of Latin, Greek, French, Mathematics, Music and English Literature."<sup>16</sup> His studies and shoemaking were ended in 1827 when he had a physical breakdown.

Later Cooper became a schoolmaster, a Methodist preacher, and a journalist. During his journalistic period, he became acquainted with the Leicester Chartists and threw himself heart and soul into the movement. The cause of education particularly claimed his attention. In 1842 he established the Shakespearean Association of Leicester Chartists. There he lectured in literature and history to starving stocking-makers.<sup>17</sup> Two weaver-poets composed hymns which were collected in the Shakespearean Chartist Hymn Book. One of them, to the tune "New Crucifixion" began:

Britannia's sons, though slaves ye be,  
God, your creator, made you free; . . . <sup>18</sup>

In 1843 Cooper was sentenced to two years' imprisonment for seditious conspiracy. On his release, he settled in London. Like his friends, William Lovett and Francis Place, he was one of the workmen of whom it may be said that amid heartbreaking discouragements, poverty, failing health, and political persecution, "the hunger for

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.    <sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 144.



knowledge haunted them like a passion."<sup>19</sup>

During the late thirties and early forties Socialism often worked in close alliance with Chartism, for many Chartists were also Socialists. Since the local authorities did not wish to lend public rooms for Socialist meetings, the Owenites built their own halls, usually called Social Institutions or Halls of Science. Such halls were erected in London, Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, and many other cities. Even though there were fewer members in the Socialist institutions in London than in the Mechanics' Institutes, their attendance was much greater. This situation could also have existed elsewhere. In 1841 Thomas Coates reported that the Chartists and Socialists had borrowed some of the most useful and attractive objects of the Mechanics' Institutes and as an added attraction freely discussed politics and economics.<sup>20</sup>

Lectures and discussions were used as a means of propaganda by most Chartist groups. There were also reading rooms for Chartist newspapers and other literature. From 1839 onwards, classes were organized.<sup>21</sup> The degree of educational experience obtained in the class meetings

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<sup>19</sup>Hawkins, op. cit., Appendix I, p. 177.

<sup>20</sup>Kelly, loc. cit.    <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

of the Chartists varied a great deal. It has been suggested, however, that in these classes "many Chartists learnt to read, discuss, speak, debate, instruct; they grew wise and skilled in promulgating truth."<sup>22</sup> The classes also served the purpose of enriching the political understanding of the people.

Although Chartism itself was routed in 1848, it left a deep and permanent mark on English history. It was the first widespread and sustained effort of working-class self-help. It was directed to the cause of parliamentary democracy and constitutional reform. The impetus it gave to eventual political reform and to trade union organization was never wasted. Because of these facts it is of lasting importance.<sup>23</sup>

The educational ideals which Chartism advanced became a tradition which has coloured the thought of all subsequent working-class movements. These ideals led certain Trade Unions to provide educational facilities for their members. In 1850, for example, the Flint Glassmaker's Magazine urged:

the education of every man in our trade, beginning at the oldest and coming down to the youngest. If

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<sup>22</sup>Mabel Tylecote, The Mechanics' Institutes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957), p. 126.

<sup>23</sup>Thomson, op. cit., p. 87.



you do not wish to stand as you are and suffer more oppressions, we say to you, 'get knowledge, and in getting knowledge you get power. . . . Get intelligence instead of alcohol; it is sweeter and more lasting.'<sup>24</sup>

A sense of common purpose bound together the groups of Chartists, Co-operators, Trade Unionists, and the spontaneous groups formed for mutual benefit. They did not want to improve themselves with technical or vocational education. Instead, they wanted an education that would give them the power to read, to speak, to debate, and to enjoy the contact with the great minds of history and literature. Their efforts were characterized by a fierce independence in their search for knowledge. They would have nothing to do with philanthropy. Therefore, Mechanics' Institutes to them, were places founded by "benevolent manufacturers to encourage subservient work-people."<sup>25</sup>

Since the Mechanics' Institutes had failed to meet the needs of the working classes, new colleges sprang up from the Chartist movement and owed much to the educational ideas of William Lovett. The new colleges provided education for men and women at work during the day. Besides including the elementary curriculum, they laid great stress

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<sup>24</sup>Hawkins, op. cit., Appendix I, p. 180.

<sup>25</sup>H. J. Edwards, The Evening Institute (London: National Institute of Adult Education, 1961), p. 27.

on the humane studies -- literature and composition, history, logic, Greek, Latin, and modern languages.

The People's College in Sheffield was opened in 1842 by an Independent Minister, Rev. R. S. Bayley. The subjects that were taught were not new, but they had never been given a dominant place. Bayley had a great faith that "among the toiling masses of the town there might be a latent perception of the beautiful, an ardent love of the true."<sup>26</sup> After Bayley's death, the humane studies languished, and the College was absorbed into the growing body of technical education.

The Sheffield experiment was important because it inspired the founding of the London Working Men's College in 1854 by the Christian Socialists. Chartist agitation had aroused the emotions of a group of university and professional people under the leadership of Frederick Denison Maurice. They realized that a deep gulf separated the middle and working classes, and that there was need to establish a new relationship. They were convinced that the social problem was at root one of education.

In 1848 the Christian Socialists were active in the pursuit of their new ideal. They organized various kinds of social work: house-to-house visiting, infant and evening schools, Bible classes and even Co-operative

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<sup>26</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 182.

Societies. They also spread their ideas through the press. Charles Kingsley's two Christian Socialist novels were highly successful. Yeast exposed the miseries of the agricultural labourer, while the hero of Alton Locke was a working tailor, based on the life of Thomas Cooper.

The Christian Socialist influence was very strong in the founding of the London Working Men's College. The name "College" was deliberately chosen. Maurice explained that it implied a society in which men might meet not as belonging to a class or caste, "but as having a common life which God has given them."<sup>27</sup> The education offered was to be humane, not technical, because a workman "is a person, not a thing, a citizen and not a slave or even a wage-earning animal."<sup>28</sup> The instruction was to be by class teaching in which teachers and taught could meet as human beings. Organized courses were to be presented, not simply unrelated miscellaneous classes. The education was to be based on the previous interests of the students, particularly upon their interest in social and political questions.<sup>29</sup>

The London Working Men's College was intended for

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>28</sup>Hawkins, op. cit., Appendix I, p.187.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

manual workers. It was open to all men and youths over sixteen who were competent in the three Rs. Although the example was followed in other parts of the country, only one other college has survived to the present day and retained its original name and purpose - the Vaughan College at Leicester, which was founded by Canon Vaughan in 1862.<sup>30</sup> The Working Men's College movement was of fundamental importance, nevertheless, because it drew attention to the distinction between technical and liberal studies. The contribution of Maurice and his friends is measured not by the numbers of institutions they founded, but by the intellectual and spiritual stimulus they transmitted to later generations.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Co-operation, Chartism, and Trade Unionism each paid a tribute to liberal education as a social ideal, however imperfectly they may have contributed to realizing that ideal in practice. The Working Men's Colleges, which were, in a sense, by-products of Chartism, pursued the new ideal -- enrichment of personality. The same current of thought and feeling which inspired the founders, appeared in subsequent adult education movements.

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<sup>30</sup>The Vaughan Memorial College is now associated with University College, Leicester. Curtis, op. cit., p. 480.

## CHAPTER V

### THE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION MOVEMENT

The Adult Schools, the Mechanics' Institutes, and the educational efforts described in the previous chapter were all originally aimed at the working classes, while the University Extension movement was an endeavour of the university to influence the great middle class of England. The idea of some form of University Extension goes back to 1850, when M. E. A. Freeman, then tutor at Oxford, wrote:

Surely the university hardly fulfills its mission as a great national institution, a corporation charged with the guidance and nurture of the national intellect, unless it at least attempts to extend its benefits to these most important classes.<sup>1</sup>

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the two ancient universities had become a social and intellectual backwater in the life of the nation. They still provided the education of a gentleman for the sons of the aristocracy destined for a career in politics, the Church, or the law, but the great new stream of life which flowed from the industrial revolution passed them by. They had little or nothing to offer to the merchants, the manufacturers, the engineers, and the increasing body of the middle-class professional people.

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<sup>1</sup>J. W. Adamson, English Education 1789-1902 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), p. 192, cited by H. C. Dent, Part-Time Education in Great Britain (London: Turnstile Press 1949), p. 34.

Between 1850 and 1880, prodded by a series of Royal Commissions, and by internal critics, the old universities did, in fact, carry out a series of reforms. The religious tests which had excluded all Nonconformists, were modified in 1854 and abolished in 1871. The Oxford and Cambridge Local Examinations were inaugurated in 1857-8. New honours schools were established, colleges were founded for women, and facilities were provided for non-collegiate students.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of extension, therefore, appeared as part of a general ferment of ideas connected with the problems of reform of the ancient universities. In 1850, William Sewell, Fellow and Senior Tutor of Exeter College, suggested a system of peripatetic lectures along the lines subsequently adopted. From Cambridge came a suggestion in 1855 that travelling lecturers should be provided by the universities for the Mechanics' Institutes.<sup>3</sup> Although there were a number of individuals in the university responsive to the idea of taking the university out to the people, the initiative in doing anything practical came from the outside.

Miss A. J. Clough, honorary secretary of the North

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Kelly, A History of Adult Education in Great Britain (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1962), p.217.

<sup>3</sup>J. F. C. Harrison, Learning and Living 1790-1960 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), pp. 220-221.



of England Council for Promoting the Higher Education of Women, sent a memorandum to the Schools Inquiry Commission in 1866. The association of schoolmistresses, was in its own way, an effective pressure group, working to secure academic qualifications for the female sex. "Their demand was itself an answer to a growing social problem: that of the surplus women in society who desired a professional career."<sup>4</sup>

In her memorandum, Miss Clough formulated a scheme for University Extension lectures. She proposed a series of about twenty to twenty-five lectures to be given by one professor in large towns, to a number of schools collected in groups, according to situation. This was to be limited to a period of three months in the year, by way of experiment. The lectures were to bring together teachers and older pupils under the influence of superior men. She hoped to interest these men in female education.

Not improbably, as years go on, many new paths of useful occupation may be opened to women; even now there are some who have cause to lament their want of training, and find it a hindrance in what they undertake.<sup>5</sup>

In 1866, a young Scotsman, James Stuart, then a

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<sup>4</sup>W. H. G. Armytage, Civic Universities (London: Benn, 1955), p.225.

<sup>5</sup>B. A. Clough, Memoir of Anne Jemima Clough (1903), pp. 114-5, cited by Harrison, op. cit., p. 229.

Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, got to know Miss Clough. He was invited to give a series of lectures on the art of teaching, to the schoolmistresses at Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, and Leeds. He offered them, instead, the history of science, in which he felt more competent. They agreed to this, and Stuart got an unexpected opportunity of starting a peripatetic university. The subject was a difficult one for women who had no knowledge of algebra and geometry, and only a smattering of arithmetic. Their hunger for knowledge was such that the lectures were enthusiastically received. Each week about three hundred women -- over half the total attending -- gave in written answers to questions set by the lecturer.

Many such courses were arranged. A parallel demand came from the working men. In 1867-8 Stuart was lecturing to railwaymen at Crewe under the auspices of the Mechanics' Institute. This was followed by a course at Rochdale at the invitation of the Equitable Pioneers' Co-operative Society. It was during this period of missionary endeavour that Stuart was led to develop, almost accidentally, three features, which later became characteristic of University Extension teaching -- the printed syllabus, the discussion period, and the written work.

The syllabus began as a series of notes distributed



at the end of the first lecture to assist the women students in making notes. Afterwards, Stuart found it more useful to distribute it in advance as an aid to the understanding of the lecture. In later University Extension practice, the syllabus grew into a very elaborate document, for example, "a syllabus for a course of eleven lectures on Elizabethan literature by R. G. Moulton extends to forty pages, followed by a sixteen-page syllabus for an extra class, and seven pages of instructions for students' reading and written work."<sup>6</sup>

The idea of discussion following a lecture was not new. It had long been common practice in mutual improvement societies, Mechanics' Institutes, and similar bodies. The origin of discussion as part of University Extension work is famous:

After a lecture to the Equitable Pioneers' Cooperative Society at Rochdale one night he was anxious to get away quickly, and so left hanging on the walls of the lecture-room the drawings and diagrams he had been using to illustrate his lecture. When he arrived the following week for the next lecture he found a score of men and women waiting for him. It was the best thing he could have done, they said; they had had time to examine the charts at leisure and now they had a host of questions to put to him. Thus began the class discussion, perhaps the most characteristic feature of a university extension session.<sup>7</sup>

The story of the origin of the periodical essay is

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<sup>6</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 220.

<sup>7</sup>Dent, op. cit., p. 35.

perhaps less well known. After Stuart had presented his students with a synopsis of the matter with which he proposed to deal, he commenced his lecture. Wishing to avoid a long, uninterrupted lecture to a passive audience, he proposed to ask questions based on the synopsis, for his class to answer. He was told that it would be improper for a lecturer to ask questions of women, and equally improper for them to reply to him in public. So he developed the practice of circulating written questions and reading written answers. Ideas of propriety <sup>have</sup> changed since those days, but the University Extension written answer remains in the form of the essays students are required to write.<sup>8</sup>

For five years Stuart lectured, but the university was in no way responsible for the lectures. His audiences were large. At Rochdale he lectured to an audience of nearly a thousand people. In 1871 he decided the time had come to approach the University of Cambridge to take the work in hand. Four memorials were presented to the university. These came from the North of England Council, the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers' Society, the Crewe Mechanics' Institute, and the Mayor and other inhabitants of Leeds.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

Stuart's scheme was really similar to the one Sewell had presented to Oxford twenty years before. Now, however, with the new spirit of reform abroad, the reception of the scheme was more favourable. A special syndicate was nominated with Stuart as secretary. In the autumn of 1873, just two years after the memorials had been presented, Extension courses of lectures were delivered in Nottingham, Derby, Leicester, Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, and Keighley. In 1875 a permanent Syndicate for Local Lectures was established.<sup>9</sup>

London University could not take up the challenge which was met in 1876 by the formation of the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching. It operated under the supervision of a joint board, representative of the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and London. This arrangement, somewhat humiliating to London, lasted until 1898. In 1878 Oxford organized a Delegacy for Extension Lectures. The Victoria University of Manchester made permanent provision for Extension lectures in 1887. The universities were on their way to serve the people.

Many English universities owed their birth to the early days of University Extension. The University College of Nottingham founded in 1881 became Nottingham University.

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<sup>9</sup>Harrison, op. cit., pp. 222-223.

It sprang directly from the Extension courses held at the Mechanics' Institute in that city. Reading University grew out of the University Extension College, founded in 1892. Sheffield University was greatly helped on its way by University Extension. The Royal Albert Memorial College of Exeter, which originated in the Extension work of the University of Cambridge, was first known as the Technical and University Extension College. Once founded, these institutions were principally concerned with regular university work. However, they touched the problem of adult education in so far as they in their turn organized Extension work.<sup>10</sup>

The pattern of Extension work elaborated by Stuart and the early lecturers survived virtually unchanged throughout the history of the movement. It consisted of the lectures with detailed syllabuses, classes, examinations, local centres, and from the late 1880s, the Summer Meetings at Oxford and Cambridge.

J. A. R. Marriott, an Extension lecturer, estimated that between 1886 and 1939 he gave ten thousand lectures throughout the country. The lecturer's first task, wrote Marriott,

was to prepare a syllabus, containing a detailed synopsis of each lecture, a list of appropriate books,

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<sup>10</sup>Gordon Hawkins (ed.), A Design for Democracy (London: Max Parrish, 1956), pp. 191-192.

hints for reading, and in some cases alternative subjects for essays. The Free Library movement, with which University Extension has since worked in close conjunction, was then in its infancy; books were often difficult to come by, especially in the poorer centres, so a 'travelling library' was supplied from Oxford, wherever possible, for preparatory reading, and always remained at the different centres for the duration of the course. The lecture, given at weekly or fortnightly intervals, lasted about an hour, and was followed by a class at which questions were asked and, if possible, answered, the corrected essays were returned to the writers, and subjects announced for the next week. The class, lasting generally from thirty to fifty minutes, might be prolonged to a late hour if a keen discussion, as sometimes happened, arose. It might be attended by a select body of students only, or by the greater part of the audience, who sometimes looked upon it as the most stimulating and perhaps the most amusing part of the evening's 'entertainment'. The essays were criticised in public but always in general terms and in scrupulous anonymity; lecturers were strictly enjoined to avoid 'scoring' off hecklers, and never to quench the smoking flax.<sup>11</sup>

Marriott confessed that he often had to correct most of his essays, and prepare some of his lectures in railway carriages. H. D. Acland described Extension lecturers as "literary and scientific bagmen." However, to enthusiasts of the movement, like H. J. Mackinder and M. E. Sadler, the Extension lecturers were paragons. They were a kind of missionary. Their purpose was not only to supply teaching to those who desired it, but also to stimulate the demand for education.

Amidst the great national reforms in the worlds

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<sup>11</sup>Maude Royden, A Threefold Cord (1948), pp. 96-97, cited by Harrison, op. cit., p. 225.

of politics, elementary education, and Trade Unionism, it was natural to consider the role of the universities in this changing society. The underlying reason for University Extension stemmed from this new awareness of the widening of the area of democracy. The idea of Extension was simple enough -- to take the university out to the people, since they could not all come to the university. In operation, there were many practical difficulties which were never solved. The pure stream of university idealism became muddied with the aspirations of middle-class social movements.

The aims of University Extension were nowhere very exactly defined. Mackinder and Sadler had a vision of Extension as a great People's University extending over the whole land. R. G. Moulton, one of the first Cambridge Extension lecturers, saw it as "a sort of stream that runs from the mountain tops of the University. . . ; the stream flows from this height over the whole land, and everybody helps himself as he wishes, or as he can."<sup>12</sup> The University Extension movement was not a carefully planned scheme, but the product of a simple purpose. Each modification was suggested by

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<sup>12</sup>The American Society for the Extension of University Teaching, Address on the University Extension Movement (Philadelphia: 1890), p. 7, cited by Harrison, op. cit., p. 227.

circumstances and tested by experience.

University Extension, like the Mechanics' Institutes earlier, appealed as a promoter of social peace. Moulton claimed that he wanted his audience to include all kinds of people -- all ages, and all degrees of previous education. Although he knew that Extension audiences were seldom like this, he thought it worthwhile to give detailed advice to local Extension Committees on how to ensure broad social representation of the area and avoid any apparent religious or political bias.<sup>13</sup>

Here was an unsolved dilemma. On the one hand there was a sincere desire that Extension students should be a heterogeneous body, a cross-section of the whole community. On the other hand there was the very practical consideration that the most pressing and reliable demands came from certain specific groups. To cater for the one, was likely to exclude the others. Stuart's original lectures in Leeds had been to women teachers. Their presence at the courses was a characteristic feature of the Extension movement from the beginning. They attended in such numbers as to dominate the proceedings. The Extension movement filled the gap for young student-teachers from fourteen to eighteen for whom no adequate opportunities for liberal studies existed. Their interest

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<sup>13</sup>Harrison, op. cit., p. 234.



was, therefore, directly vocational.

Stuart, Sadler, and Canon Barnett had intended that University Extension should be a continuation of the Oxbridge tradition of liberal education, cultural rather than vocational, and humanistic rather than technical. The interests of the contemporary lower middle and upper working-class students tended to be utilitarian. Thus from the beginning, the Extension movement was faced with one of the tensions present in all middle-class adult education movements.

Carpenter, a full-time Extension lecturer in Yorkshire, left the work in 1881 because instead of the manual workers he had hoped to get, most of his pupils were young ladies. In 1888-9 Sadler estimated that two-thirds of the students in the Oxford Extension courses were women.<sup>14</sup>

Other lecturers were more successful, of fortunate. For nine successive years between 1888 and 1896, Hudson Shaw attracted working-class audiences averaging 650 and in the last year over one thousand. In Hebden Bridge, a town with a population of some five thousand, six hundred working people attended his lectures in 1888-9. Not all lecturers were successful in such a spectacular way.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 231.      <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

From 1882 to 1895 the two universities of Durham and Cambridge combined their efforts to expand the work in the north-east. As a result, Extension centres were established in twenty-nine towns. The majority of these were working class in character.

The main success with the Co-operative Societies in Yorkshire and Lancashire was with Sadler and the Oxford Delegacy. Many of these working-class centres organized courses for only one or two sessions. Out of a total of twenty-five Oxford Extension centres in Yorkshire, in the period of 1885-1902, six had a majority of working-class students in their courses. The overall picture showed that between one-fifth and one-quarter of all Extension students came from the working classes.

The experience of the local Extension Committees was the same as that of the Mechanics' Institutes a generation earlier. There was the same sincere desire to get the working men to attend, the same hope that this could be effected by working-class representation on the controlling committee, and the same hurt sense of bafflement at the failure of any but a tiny minority of working men to respond. The ineffectiveness of University Extension in this field was similar to that of other middle-class organizations which sought to provide workers' education in the nineteenth century, and sprang from the

same root, namely, "a totally inadequate realization of the extent and depth of the sense of alienation among the working class."<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the difficulties of finance widened the rift. The Extension movement from the beginning, intended to be self-supporting. The local centres had to meet the whole cost of the lectures they arranged. This worked out to about seventy pounds for a twelve-lecture course. This was far beyond the income of the working man. In Leeds, the fee for a twelve-lecture course during the session of 1874-5 was two shillings for the evening lecture and six shillings for the lecture and class. Yet Hudson Shaw observed that when you added the cost of books and travel by tram or train to get to the class, even this was prohibitive to the man who earned not more than eighteen or nineteen shillings a week.<sup>17</sup>

In order to make University Extension cheaper, Oxford introduced a six-lecture course instead of the standard twelve-lecture course. The rapid expansion of the Oxford Extension movement from 1885 was mainly in six-lecture courses. The Gilchrist lectures at a penny a lecture were used by the Extension movement for pioneer

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 240.    <sup>17</sup>Ibid.

purposes.

From the first three courses arranged by the Cambridge Syndicate in 1873, the volume of work increased rapidly to over a hundred courses with seven thousand students in thirty-seven different centres by the session of 1875-6. After a decline, the peak year was 1891-2 when Oxford and Cambridge together provided 722 courses attended by nearly forty-seven thousand people. Some centres were continuously active, while others did not provide courses every year.

This activity was expressed in a distinctive adult education pattern. The basis of it was the hour's lecture, usually according to a printed syllabus, followed or preceded by a class, also lasting for about an hour. Only about one-third of the students stayed for the class. Those who did, wrote essays, discussed the subject matter of the lectures with the lecturer, and if they wished, sat for an examination at the end of the course. Certificates were awarded by the university on the results of the examination. Those who took a series of courses that lasted three years, obtained the title of "Affiliated Student". This entitled the holder to go to the university and take a degree after two years' residence instead of the usual three. Between the Terminal and Affiliation Certificates was the Vice-Chancellor's Certificate

awarded to students who obtained six Terminal Certificates in specified groups of subjects. Less than ten per cent of the lecture audience took examinations. The Extension examinations did not develop towards a full system of external degrees or University credits, as in America.<sup>18</sup>

Each centre dealt directly with the Secretary of the Cambridge Syndicate or the Oxford Delegacy. The circuit lecturer provided the link between the centres. To encourage continuity in the work, Student Associations were formed. In 1898 the Oxford Delegacy introduced a system of Home Reading Circles for mutual improvement. The highlight of the Extension movement to many students proved to be the Summer Meetings at Oxford and Cambridge. The ten days in the midst of the ancient colleges gave the students a sense of belonging to the university.

For the universities, the significance of the Extension movement was immense. In 1850 the universities were little known and little understood. There was little communication between them and important sections of the population. The result was that they were often viewed with envy. Extension lecturing brought missionaries from the universities into contact with men and women of all social classes in every corner of the country. The

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 243-244.

Extension Summer Meetings annually brought hundreds of ordinary people face to face with leading figures in the internal life of the universities. This personal contact brought mutual respect and understanding.

At a time when even the Working Men's Colleges were finding it difficult to resist the general trend to technical and vocational studies, the universities clearly restated the concept of liberal study. They insisted that even studies directed to vocational ends should be undertaken in a broad, humane spirit and that the fundamental values and purposes of human life should be kept steadily in view. "Thereby the universities established a tradition of liberal study which has ever since been the distinctive mark and special pride of English adult education."<sup>19</sup>

The Extension movement had sprung from the middle-class reform of Oxbridge and the unsatisfied educational demands of the provincial cities. The middle-class conquest was made. Yet another movement would attempt to ensnare the working classes.

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<sup>19</sup>Kelly, op. cit., p. 237.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE WORKERS' EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION

The Workers' Educational Association was directly descended from the University Extension movement. More than any other movement for adult education in England, it was the brain child of one man -- Albert Mansbridge. He intended it to be a means of promoting University Extension among the working classes.

Mansbridge, born at Gloucester in 1876, was the son of a carpenter. Working-class children of his day left school at the age of ten. By an accident of circumstances he was able to continue to the fourteenth year and the "grammar school" level. He turned to self-education to satisfy his craving for knowledge. Mansbridge was deeply religious and part of his self-education consisted of listening to the sermons of famous preachers. The religious-philanthropic motive was behind his educational schemes.<sup>1</sup>

Before he was twenty-one, Mansbridge became a clerk in the Co-operative Wholesale Society's warehouse in Whitechapel. In 1898 he attended the Annual Co-operative Congress at Peterborough. There he made a speech on working-class education. It attracted so much attention that he was invited to read a paper on the same

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<sup>1</sup>C. Hartley Grattan, In Quest of Knowledge (New York: Association Press, 1955), p. 110.



theme before a conference of Co-operators at the Oxford University Extension Summer Meeting in 1899.

"That paper must be regarded as one of the great landmarks in the history of adult education."<sup>2</sup> Mansbridge advocated that the Co-operative Societies and the University Extension movement should join forces to promote the education of the citizen. Although his proposal was greeted with hostility, something was gained. It was agreed that members of the Co-operative Societies should be admitted to the University Extension Summer Meetings, and that the university would recognize and register qualified class teachers in the Co-operative movement.<sup>3</sup>

In 1902 Mansbridge proposed a triple alliance of the Co-operative Societies, the Trade Unions, and the University Extension movements. Then he wrote his three articles for the University Extension Journal in January, March, and May of 1903. The idea of the Workers' Educational Association was beginning to take shape.

On May 16, 1903, at a meeting over a cup of tea, in a cafe near the British Museum, The Association to Promote the Higher Education of Working Men was founded. Albert Mansbridge was appointed its honorary secretary

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<sup>2</sup>H. C. Dent, Part-Time Education in Great Britain (London: Turnstile Press, 1949), p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

by his wife, Frances Mansfield, its first member.<sup>4</sup> The people present were sympathetic Trade Unionists, Co-operators, and Extension lecturers. "This was the first national movement for adult education which worked in partnership with the universities and the national system of education."<sup>5</sup>

The association ended its first year with 135 individual members and eleven affiliated Co-operative Societies. In October 1904 the first branch was formed at Reading. In November the Rochdale branch was founded amid a wave of educational enthusiasm such as Rochdale had never seen before.

The Rochdale program included Extension lectures which drew audiences of five hundred, and a course of six lectures on "The Care of the Horse" arranged at the request of the Carters' Union and attended by over one hundred carters. There were also classes provided by the Local Education Authority in English, Citizenship, and economics. Classes for adults in arithmetic and composition were held at the evening schools. Talks at the museum and art gallery on botany, geology, music, and art were provided. To top it all there was the publication

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>5</sup>S. J. Curtis, History of Education in Great Britain (London: University Tutorial Press, 1961), p. 484.

of an Educational Calendar.<sup>6</sup>

In 1905 the association changed its name to the Workers' Educational Association. The movement began to spread through the establishment of branches in various parts of the country. Because of Mansbridge's university friendships, the list of its early supporters "reads like the roll-call of a whole generation of progressive, socially-minded Oxford scholars."<sup>7</sup> They gave the movement academic prestige, and access to influential social and political circles.

The full potentialities of the new movement did not appear until 1907. A joint committee of seven representatives of the university and seven nominated by the Workers' Educational Association was set up to recommend appropriate action and its report was published in 1908 as Oxford and Working-class Education. This contained a blueprint for a new type of adult education organization -- the tutorial class and the Joint Committee. It was in the tutorial class movement that Mansbridge's ideal of the partnership of labour and learning found its most complete expression.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Dent, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>7</sup>Harrison, Learning and Living 1790-1960 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1961), p. 264.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 265.

The tutorial classes at Longton and Rochdale have become legendary. As early as 1906 the Rochdale Education Guild had felt that the Extension lectures were not quite meeting their needs. If they were stiff enough for the intellectual elite, that meant small attendances, and consequently heavy financial outlay for the student. If the lectures were popular, the size of the gathering limited questions and precluded serious discussion.

Rochdale sought the help of Mansbridge who had been made secretary of the Workers' Educational Association. He promised that if the Guild would get thirty people willing to undertake a course of serious study extending over two years, he would get them the best tutor available. He secured R. H. Tawney, a Balliol scholar, who was then assistant lecturer in economics at the University of Glasgow.<sup>9</sup>

A similar request had come from Longton. Tawney agreed to take both classes. Longton had theirs on Friday evenings, and Rochdale had theirs on Saturdays. Longton, though not the originator of the idea, holds the honour of having the first tutorial class meeting on January 24, 1908.

Those early tutorial class gatherings represented

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<sup>9</sup>Dent, op. cit., p. 39.

every shade of political opinion and religious belief. The discussion "hour" was an "hour" in name only. Discussion went on until the caretaker became restless, and then it was continued in the street. At Rochdale Mr. Tawney would frequently arrange to have tea and spend the evening at the home of one of the students. On these occasions, other members of the class would crowd into the house to the limits of the accomodation. Discussion often went on until the early hours of the morning.<sup>10</sup>

The Workers' Educational Association made very little impact upon organized labour before the First World War. This was probably due to the fact that Mansbridge's roots were in the Co-operative movement and not in Trade Unionism. His definition of worker included clerks as well as artisans. Militant Trade Unionists turned to the Marxist Plebs League and Central Labour College.

Mansbridge's Oxford friends gave a distinctive colouring to the public image of the Workers' Educational Association. While sympathetic to the Labour movement, they felt compelled to urge upon it certain convictions of their own. The first of these was that the real root of social problems was spiritual. The second was the

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

need for education, because Knowledge would always win over Ignorance. Thirdly, there was the belief in the traditional mission of Oxford to train men for the service of Church and State or to "educate the governing classes."<sup>11</sup> The implications of this were stated in Oxford and Working-class Education. "The Trade Union secretary and the 'Labour member' need an Oxford education as much, and will use it to as good ends, as the civil servant or the barrister."<sup>12</sup> Workers' education, in this context, meant education for political and economic power, not training in the techniques of Trade Unionism.

The tutorial class movement was originally intended to facilitate entry of students into the university. For the vast majority of students it marked, instead, the limit of their educational advance. Many descriptions of the tutorial class exist. The Leeds branch of the Workers' Educational Association described it as a body of eighteen to thirty-two men and women, who meet together for two hours each week during three successive winters, to study seriously a non-vocational subject of mutual interest, under the guidance of a qualified tutor appointed by the University Joint Committee.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Harrison, op. cit., p. 266.    <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 267.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 269.

The classes represented an idea of equal partnership between the university and the working-class movement. There was emphasis on the scholarship of the tutor coupled with the necessity of teaching subjects from the angle of the students' needs. The conception of the social purpose behind all studies, gave a distinctive slant to the typical tutorial class. The class was a self-governing unit. Tutor and students pooled knowledge and experience. In addition, there was the discipline of regular home reading and essay writing. The ideas behind tutorial classes were not new, but their combination into a complete scheme of higher popular education was novel.

Reports are unanimous as to the exceptionally high quality of the work in the early tutorial classes. A. L. Smith, later Master of Balliol, reported in 1912 that twenty-five per cent of the essays examined by him after the second year's work in two classes, and the first year's work in six classes were equal to the work done by students who gained first classes in the final schools of modern history.<sup>14</sup>

The high standard of work in the early tutorial classes was possible largely because this was a "first creaming of the milk."<sup>15</sup> A generation later, these men

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 270.    <sup>15</sup>Ibid.



would have been "caught in the educational net"<sup>16</sup> and passed on to full-time higher education. They were an elite selected from the whole neighbourhood. Later when the movement began to grow, something of this high quality was lost.

Once the tutorial class was established, there was a tendency to concentrate attention upon it to the exclusion of other types of work. As the Workers' Educational Association began to grow, however, there was a demand for shorter and less exacting courses, and also an interest in subjects other than social sciences. In the tutorial classes, literature and biology took their place by the side of economics and government.

Until 1924 all students were normally members of the Workers' Educational Association, that is, they paid a subscription to the branch or District. After that date, there appeared a new type of clientele -- people who attended classes, but who did not become members of the Association. The gap between the number of students in classes and the number of members of the Association widened steadily, until by 1939 only forty-three per cent of all students in classes were members.

Once the Association admitted non-members to classes, it found itself under pressure to provide all

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 270.

sorts of popular classes. Literature, psychology, music, local history, elocution, folk dancing, gardening, and French classes were started. The Association made itself organizer and supplier of the demand for a wide variety of popular culture. In this way it made itself vulnerable to competition from other bodies, such as the Local Education Authorities and universities.

In Leeds, as in other centres, the Workers' Educational Association filled a gap. The Local Education Authority provided a certain amount of further vocational training, but it did nothing for those who wanted continuous non-vocational liberal studies. The university provided short lecture-courses in various subjects, but they were ill-suited to the needs of working people with only an elementary schooling. None of the voluntary adult education bodies had the means of providing high academic standards of work. "To combine the experience while remedying the deficiencies of these various bodies was the historic role of the Workers' Educational Association."<sup>17</sup>

At first the Association did not envisage the provision of classes directly by itself. Instead, it gave itself the job of co-ordinating existing agencies and devising means by which working people could raise

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

themselves educationally until they were able to take advantage of the facilities which the universities provided. It encouraged working people to take full advantage of the facilities available. There was no jealousy, and no competing for students.

Within the first five years, the Leeds branch tried something new, in the way of study or reading circles. A group of six to twenty persons met weekly under the leadership of a tutor who was often an unpaid student from a tutorial class. This was a bit of pioneer work intended to stimulate interest and perhaps lead on to a tutorial class. These groups were easy to organize, but their numbers fluctuated considerably. They often provided nothing more than an hour's diversion. The study circles declined and were replaced by the one-year and terminal classes.

In 1924 the Adult Education Regulations provided a grant that enabled the one-year and terminal classes to be launched. In 1925 eight terminal and one-year classes were started. This was the annual provision for some time. Since 1950 classes <sup>have been</sup> are provided through Further Education Grant Regulations. These classes <sup>have given</sup> gave the citizens the opportunity of studying economics, history, international affairs, literature, and biology in courses of six to twenty-four lectures, under qualified

spare-time tutors.<sup>18</sup>

In Leeds, the first tutorial class was started in 1911 when the Local Education Authority assumed financial responsibility for it. However, it was the new tutorial class of 1912, organized under the Oxford Joint Committee, that had Henry Clay for its tutor. He was one of the most outstanding early tutorial class tutors. The subjects were history and economics. Of the thirty-four original students, there were nineteen manual workers, five teachers, three housewives, and seven white-collared employees. The class ran for four years under Clay. A continuous succession of tutorial classes followed. The important thing about them is that they provided a rich recruiting ground for Workers' Educational Association branch workers for nearly forty years.

George H. Thompson, an ex-carpenter and first District Secretary of Yorkshire, interpreted workers' education in terms of Yorkshire puritanism. He insisted that the Workers' Educational Association was a workers' movement and not a general adult education body. It had entered a field in which neither the Local Education Authorities nor the universities had any notion that anything required to be done. Therefore, it had provided education specially

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

designed to help activists in their service to the working-class movement and public bodies. It had also made available to the workers as citizens, the kind of knowledge and understanding of the social and political order necessary in a progressive democracy. It had given workers the opportunities to pursue general culture. Finally, it had provided special methods of study peculiarly suited to working-class needs. The tutorial class with its emphasis on three years' duration, discussion, and individual aid to students, was its special triumph.

These ideas were not new. Some of them had come from the Christian Socialists. What was distinctive, was Thompson's insistence on putting them into practice. By 1939 Yorkshire had established "a tradition of working-class education and tutorial classes which was very different from what the W. E. A. had become in some other parts of the country."<sup>19</sup>

The ideology of the workers' education movement, as symbolized by George Thompson in Yorkshire, was compounded of several diverse elements. Basic to all the various schools of thought, was the conviction that the aim of workers' education should be "to enable the student to raise, not rise out of, his class."<sup>20</sup> The education he received was not intended for personal advancement,

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 292.    <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

but as a trust for the good of others. The workers' education was not to declass the student but rather to deepen his understanding of class solidarity.

Thompson did not believe in Haldane's view that education was a bridge from one class to another. He said, "We don't want our children to remove from one class to another. We want them to stay where they are."<sup>21</sup> He rejected the view of education as "a kind of fire escape from the working classes"<sup>22</sup> and the hopes of Mansbridge that adult education was a means of class reconciliation.

He believed that the theory of the educational ladder was "no more than the seduction of the ablest members of the working class into the ruling class."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, workers' education was not to be used to increase social mobility between classes, but to help in the struggle for the establishment of a society in which there would be no classes. Economics, social theory, and related subjects were considered to be of prime importance to this type of education.

The prestige position of the Workers' Educational Association in adult learning was threatened by the creation of Departments of Extra-Mural Studies at the universities. The existing Joint Committee was felt

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 297.    <sup>22</sup>Ibid.    <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 298.

to be too narrow and too rigid to allow the university to make its full contribution to adult education. The possible revival of Extension work was feared as a threat to the Association's one-year and terminal classes. Everything possible was done, however, to make the new arrangements acceptable to the Association.

At Leeds, in 1946, the old Joint Committee was reformed as a standing committee of the new Board of Extra-mural Studies and the Association District Secretary was made sole secretary of the new Joint Tutorial Classes Committee. This Committee was responsible for all work undertaken jointly by the University of Leeds and the Association. The new Director of Extra-Mural Studies was S. G. Raybould, an Association man.

This would have been fine if the university had not developed Extension work independently of the Association. By 1959, at Leeds, there were over seventy Extension courses with some twelve hundred students as compared with forty-seven Joint Committee classes with six hundred students. The truth was that once in the field, there was little practical difference in methods and techniques of organizing and teaching classes between the Association and the Extra-Mural Department.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 352.



In 1954, the Ashby Report paid sincere tribute to the work of the Workers' Educational Association. The Committee said that for over fifty years the Association had stood for two precious ingredients of education in a free society -- objective discussion free from propaganda or indoctrination, of social and economic problems, and the full participation of the student in organizing and conducting classes. Even though some of the fire had gone out of the Association, it should be remembered that its classes had equipped thousands of workers of all kinds to approach contemporary social and economic problems with the critical objectivity of the student rather than the impassioned prejudice of the agitator.<sup>25</sup> The Association had been a powerful agent in the growth of a wider democracy.

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<sup>25</sup>Ministry of Education, The Organisation and Finance of Adult Education in England and Wales (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1954), p. 35.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE EDUCATIONAL CENTRES MOVEMENT

Beside the Workers' Educational Association, one of the three other voluntary bodies recognized for grant in the field of liberal adult education was the Educational Centres Association. Over the years, Educational Centres have given opportunities to thousands of men and women to increase their knowledge, to improve and add to their practical skills, and to widen their sympathies. The Educational Centres Association has at no time made headline news or been a power in the land. Nevertheless, it has worked with quiet persistence to propagate an idea.<sup>1</sup>

The line of descent of the Educational Centre starts with the London Working Men's College in 1854. From there the line passes through the University Settlements, of which Toynbee Hall, founded by Samuel Barnett in 1884, was the outstanding example. Then came two Quaker Settlements -- St. Mary's at York and Swarthmore at Leeds. However, it was Horace Fleming's Beechcroft, founded at Birkenhead in 1914, that was the immediate forerunner of the Educational Centre as we know it today.<sup>2</sup>

One of the main objects of the London Working Men's

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<sup>1</sup>A. J. Allaway, The Educational Centres Movement (London: National Institute of Adult Education, 1961), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

College was to gather together adult classes under a single roof and to unite their members in a fraternity through membership of a common room and participation in the day to day management of the premises. In actual fact, during Maurice's principalship which lasted until 1872, only a select few enjoyed any share in the control and direction of the College. They were those who by examination and devoted service to the College, had achieved Fellowships.

University Settlements such as Toynbee Hall had the same objects as the Working Men's Colleges. The name "settlement" was intended to convey the idea that it housed settlers. These were university men and women who came to spend part of their time living in working-class districts, with the idea of understanding at first hand the conditions of life amongst the workers, and sharing their knowledge and experience with them. For several decades the Warden and the Residents, as the settlers were called, had control. It wasn't until 1911 that the students were allowed to take part in the organization of the classes, and were ensured consideration of their wishes.<sup>3</sup>

The two Quaker Settlements -- St. Mary's at York and Swarthmore at Leeds were founded to provide leadership and teachers for the Adult Schools. They were financed

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 8 - 9.

largely by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. Roomy old houses were acquired for adaptation as Settlements. Each had a Warden and a Sub-Warden, and provided accommodation for lecturers coming from a great distance. In part, St. Mary's and Swarthmore were designed as short-term residential colleges, but to a larger extent, they were also non-residential centres where continuous classes and courses could be provided for men and women of the neighbourhood, and especially for members of local Adult Schools.

The programme during the first two years was weighted with religious studies. From the beginning, however, University Joint Committee and Workers' Educational Association classes were given a home in the two Settlements. As the work expanded, handicrafts, orchestra, languages, and expression were added to the traditional liberal studies. Dramatics soon came to play an important role. The Settlements became, as the 1919 Final Report expressed it "colleges of a new type, under whose roof a variety of educational work is gathered to form an institution with a corporate life."<sup>4</sup>

By 1914 when Beechcroft was founded, Swarthmore and St. Mary's had become non-residential centres providing a broadly liberal education for every member of the general

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<sup>4</sup>J. F. C. Harrison, Learning and Living 1790-1960 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 312.

public who cared to take advantage of it. Beechcroft was influenced by them and the Danish Folk High Schools. It differed from all of them because of its founder and earliest membership.

Unlike Arnold Rowntree who had wealth, and Samuel Barnett of Toynbee Hall who had university background connections, Horace Fleming was a small-scale businessman with little more than average schooling. The earliest members were men and women of his own kind -- small traders and weekly wage-earners, keenly interested in political, social, and religious questions. They had a great faith in education as a means for equipping themselves with a power to make the world a better place in which to live. These differences enabled the ordinary members to shape the Settlement's destinies. Beechcroft was, therefore, a democracy from the beginning.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, it was Arnold Rowntree's interest in the venture that made possible the purchase, adaptation, and equipment of the house. It wasn't really a Settlement, since the only resident was Horace Fleming, its first (Honorary) Warden. At first it was merely a home for working-class educational bodies. Before long, however, the members of the Adult Schools and the students in the

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<sup>5</sup>Allaway, op. cit., p. 11.

various classes organized by the Workers' Educational Association and the National Council of Labour Colleges, developed a sense of belonging to the Settlement, rather than to the organization whose school or class they attended. "This centripetal tendency is found at work in all viable Educational Centres."<sup>6</sup>

Even though women had been admitted from the beginning to Swarthmore and to St. Mary's on an equality with men, it was Beechcroft that made special provision for them. Mrs. Fleming formed study circles which were supported by members of the local Women's Co-operative Guilds and the wives of the men students in the Settlement. Since many of the women students were interested in practical arts, Beechcroft opened the way for the introduction of Local Education Authority craft and recreational classes into the curricula of the Settlements.

Because the form of government worked out at Beechcroft was adopted with few modifications by most Educational Centres, it deserves special mention. Horace Fleming probably got the idea of the two-tier system from his University of Liverpool friends. The upper tier was a Settlement Council and the lower tier was the Students' Association. On the Council sat representatives of the University of

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

Liverpool, the Local Education Authority, the Trades and Labour Council, the local Adult School Union, the local branch of the Workers' Educational Association, several individuals, and three representatives of the lower tier. The Council was responsible for the policy and finance, and the Students' Association for the educational programme and day to day activities.<sup>7</sup>

Horace Fleming thus incorporated the best elements of the earlier movements and added a feature which he felt was essential to adult education -- a permanent centre which to its members would be both university and club. This feature had several aspects:

The centre should house a vigorous common life; its educational method should find expression in a flexible curriculum wide enough to cover a variety of interests and meet the needs of many types of people whatever the level of their intellectual attainment. Its policy should include self-government and so help to train its members for active and responsible citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

During the decade that Horace Fleming spent as Warden of Beechcroft, he largely realized his aim and in doing so inspired the founding of similar ventures and provided a model for them to follow. Beechcroft no longer exists. Its influence lives on in the different Educational Centres affiliated to the Educational Centres Association.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 13.      <sup>8</sup>Ibid.



Within twelve months of the end of the First World War there were probably eight or nine of the new type of Settlements in being. They all had Quaker and Adult School connections and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust had helped to establish them. They remained isolated ventures. Sometimes their Wardens and others closely associated with their work met from time to time, usually in York, as Arnold Rowntree's guests. A Northern Settlements Association was created late in 1919, but it lasted only one year.

At a conference arranged at Cober Hill Guest House near Scarborough, a wider organization to be known as the Educational Settlements Association was founded in 1920. It had a miscellaneous membership of seven Educational Centres, three University Settlements, one Non-university Settlement of the Toynbee Hall type, and three Residential Colleges.<sup>9</sup> The main source of the Association's funds was the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The largest single item of expenditure of the Association was grants to Settlements and Residential Colleges.

The Educational Centres did not multiply as quickly as the founders of the Association expected. This was due partly to lack of funds. The Warden of Beechcroft was exceptional. Not only was he an energetic organizer, but

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

also, although he was part-time and unpaid, he gave almost as much time to the Settlement's work as could be expected of a full-time Warden. He also had a capable and hard-working wife. As a result, things got done at the Settlement at little cost. Since such husband and wife teams were extremely rare, it is not surprising that the number of Settlements did not increase.

In 1924 when the first Adult Education Regulations were issued, a new educational category was created. This was the Responsible Body, which was given authority to provide classes and courses of certain kinds. Responsible Bodies were promised grant aid to the extent of seventy-five per cent of their teaching costs on approved provision which satisfied the requirements of the new regulations. The Educational Settlements Association was given the status of a Responsible Body.<sup>10</sup>

At a meeting of the Council held on July 13, 1946, it was resolved that "the name of the Educational Settlements Association shall be changed to the Educational Centres Association."<sup>11</sup> It recognized the increasing diversity of Centre work, particularly since some Local Education Authorities, inspired by the work of Henry Morris in Cambridgeshire, were sponsoring Centres and Residential

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 28.      <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

Colleges. The Universities had also entered the field of Centre work.<sup>12</sup> A Policy Sub-Committee was set up to draft a new Statement of Policy and a new Constitution for the Association.

These two documents were presented and agreed to at a meeting of Council in 1947. They contained nothing new. However, they recognized the existence of Centres established and maintained by Local Education Authorities and Universities and provided for the admission of such Centres to membership of the Association. In addition, they provided for a fuller participation than hitherto, by member-centres in the government of the Educational Centres Association.<sup>13</sup>

In December 1961, there were twenty-five Centres in England belonging to the Association. Of these, thirteen are independent, that is, maintained wholly or in part by voluntary bodies. Ten are maintained by the Local Education Authorities, and two are maintained by the University of Leicester and the University of Nottingham.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>National Institute of Adult Education, Adult Education in 1962 (London: National Institute of Adult Education, 1962), p. 40.

<sup>13</sup>Allaway, loc. cit.

<sup>14</sup>K. T. Elsdon, Centres for Adult Education (London: The Educational Centres Association and The National Institute of Adult Education, 1962), p. 40.

The enrolment is given as eighteen thousand.<sup>15</sup>

In the ideal Centre there should be balanced class and course provision ranging from the practical to the academic. In 1958-59 nearly one-half of the classes were provided by the Local Education Authorities. More than one-half of these were in languages. The remainder were in crafts, drawing, singing, orchestral music, painting, and sculpture.

Since the days of the earliest Centres, there has been a great change in the subjects studied, especially in the University and Workers' Educational Association-provided classes. Economics then held first place. Second to economics was industrial history. Classes and courses in international relations were also greatly to the fore. The classes and courses that were promoted were directed toward "social purpose." Tutors now present subjects such as economics, philosophy, and literature as subjects worthy of study in and for themselves rather than for some external purpose.

In the year 1958-59, Konrad Elsdon, editor of the Annual Report of the Educational Centres Association for that year, lists the more academic types of class and course provided in the Association's member-centres in

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<sup>15</sup>Allaway, op. cit., p. 70.

the following order of popularity:

1. Archaeology
2. Physics and Astronomy; Politics and Economics;  
Art Appreciation
3. Biological Sciences; Literature
4. Musical Appreciation; Architecture; Art
5. Sociology
6. Local History<sup>16</sup>

One year earlier the order was quite different. This illustrates the recent tendency towards greater variation from year to year in the specific student interests of which Centre class and course programmes have to take account.

Some of the small centres are uneconomic enterprises. The optimum size of a Centre suggests a figure lying between fifteen hundred and two thousand. At present there are seven Centres with memberships over one thousand. It must on the one hand be sufficiently large to ensure that an adequate academic, administrative, clerical, care-taking, and cleaning staff can be employed at wages and salaries comparable to those paid in similar occupations, and yet at the same time keep the cost of facilities provided to each student member down to a reasonable sum.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the two independent Centres, only Centres maintained by the Local Education Authorities and the University are adequately staffed to carry out their proper function and pay their clerical and administrative, care-

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 73.    <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

taking and cleaning staffs at full Trade Union and professional rates. Sometimes the Wardens act as caretakers, or part-time caretakers. Only one Centre, Vaughan College, has the services of a full-time clerk to assist the Warden.

Most Educational Centres are housed in buildings designed for other purposes -- mansions, schools, and places of worship. Some have been well adapted, but others are makeshift. It is hoped that the plans for the new Vaughan College building will serve as a model for others and be an encouragement to other Centres to provide themselves with a brand new home.<sup>18</sup>

The founders would have been disappointed at the relatively few manual-worker members. Most of the members are middle-class people aged twenty to forty. They have white collar jobs and at least a grammar school education behind them. Only twenty per cent really care about the Centre and what it stands for to the extent of giving generously to it of their time and their personal and financial resources. Those who give the most into it, get the most out of it in terms of educational benefit and personal satisfaction. But even the less active members appear to get more out of the Centre than out of an Evening Institute.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 84.      <sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 79-80.

It is sometimes alleged that the Educational Centre is a magnet which attracts to itself the lonely, the disappointed, and the maladjusted members of our society. There is some truth in this allegation, but this is to the Centre's credit. If Centres did nothing more than take social misfits and give them a chance to function as normal human beings, that itself would be of useful social service. Most of the members are ordinary men and women who through Centre membership have learned to tolerate differences and even to value them, and to be compassionate towards those less well favoured by society or nature than themselves. "The best Educational Centre is a school of charity as well as a school of citizenship and a school for teaching specific disciplines."<sup>20</sup>

The Centre's interest and activities, like other forms of adult education, are bound to attract the more educated sections of the community. The Centre tries to earn at least the awareness and reasoned respect of the educationally under-privileged majority. Statistics show that Centres attract a considerably higher proportion of their local adult population than provision which is not corporately organized. Wherever there are Centres, the total proportion of the adult population drawn into any

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 80.



form of adult education is very much higher than where they do not exist.<sup>21</sup>

Local Education Authorities have been influenced by the programmes of Educational Centres, but their Institutes, as yet, have not been encouraged to develop any measure of self-government, nor have they been given any "free" money to enable them to purchase amenities of their own choosing. In a Centre, the members' committee looks after all social and sporting activities. Democracy takes on a highly practical meaning. "It is this real responsibility which, more than anything else, distinguishes an adult education centre from an evening institute, however well conducted."<sup>22</sup>

Most Centres benefit from their members' professional and amateur skills. They have their own honorary typographers, designers, architects, and auditors. They rely on expert electricians, bricklayers, engineers, decorators, plumbers, and carpenters among their members. Because they are communities, Centres are able to attract the voluntary service of their members in a way which the isolated class can rarely achieve. Because of this variety of service the educational and social life of the Centre becomes still richer and more varied, and, in turn, attracts still more service. The Centre's influence on its members is

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<sup>21</sup>Elsdon, op. cit., p. 28.      <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

thus much wider than the academic training which any adult education class can provide.

The Educational Centres Association, despite financial difficulty, is now on a firm footing.<sup>23</sup> Its member Centres have helped to broaden the conception of adult education and to enrich its practice. They now have the satisfaction of seeing the idea they have stood for being taken up by the Extra-Mural Departments of Universities, the Workers' Educational Association, and the Local Education Authorities.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>National Institute of Adult Education, loc. cit.

<sup>24</sup>Allaway, op. cit., p. 86.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TOWARDS THE FUTURE

English adult education activity cannot be classified by function, institutions, subject-content or clientele. Any attempt at classification serves to emphasize the overlapping, interlocking, and confused nature of the various parts of the field. It was not a carefully planned scheme, but an organic growth. For the outsider "it is in fact not so much a field as a jungle."<sup>1</sup> Until the First World War it was possible, though not easy, to think of adult learning in terms of a series of parallel institutions catering for different needs and groups. After the Second World War this was no longer possible because of all the tangled "undergrowth in the jungle."<sup>2</sup>

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries increasing numbers of people have participated in new political, cultural, and social opportunities. Adult education has helped to make this possible. At the beginning of the period, England was a pre-industrial, aristocratic state; at the end she is striding forward in

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<sup>1</sup>J. F. C. Harrison, Learning and Living 1790-1960 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), p. 313.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

the new age of mass democracy. Some aspects of the movement that has brought this about stand out in relief. Voluntary bodies have played a very important role in it. It was a movement for freedom and personal and social liberation. It has been a serious affair. There has been little of the "learning for leisure" approach, and a great deal of emphasis on striving and struggle by people who had very little leisure. Lastly, adult education has reached out to a minority of people only. It has been, therefore, an elite movement.<sup>3</sup>

The class structure remained in essentials, unaltered, despite the changes in living conditions. The probability that a working-class boy would reach a grammar school was not notably greater in 1953 than it had been before 1945. There had been expansion of educational opportunities, but inequalities of educational opportunities remained as reflections of wider social inequalities.

The middle class had tried from early times to stamp its image on the working man. It was, as ever, a source of bewilderment and some indignation to the middle classes that when the workers had economic security they did not behave like middle-class people.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. xiv.

For Yorkshire miners, even when earning fifteen pounds a week regularly, spent their money on beer and gambling rather than on mortgage payments for new semis, new furniture, and modern wallpapers. Middle-class values and attitudes were limited to a wide screen television, a second-hand small car, and a shiny enamelled washing machine. "There was nothing remotely resembling a middle-class status revolution on American lines."<sup>4</sup>

Even extending the range of influence beyond the boundaries of traditional liberal adult education, Trenaman estimated in 1957 that the total number of adults who had ever undertaken further education courses, was about twenty-six per cent. Three-quarters of the adult population were thus in no way affected by organizations for adult learning or by any of the processes of democratic social activity. At the same time, sound broadcasting reached into ninety-seven per cent and television into seventy per cent of the homes of the population. The mass media of radio, television, press, and advertising, succeeded in communicating with the majority of the nation. Trenaman concluded that participation in adult education was directly linked with early education, social class, and intelligence. Therefore,

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 339.

the whole provision of education for adults, both formal, and informal, was a "reinforcing" rather than a "remedial" process.<sup>5</sup>

By 1960 the crucial issue for adult education was clear. It was whether the movement could (or should) seek to transcend its elite traditions and become a very much wider movement. The idea of extending the boundaries of adult learning was not new. It had been the dream of almost every leader in the movement for the previous eighty years.

In 1960 the Workers' Educational Association published an excellent report entitled Aspects of Adult Education. The report emphasizes that although the "map of adult education is changing as society itself changes,"<sup>6</sup> there are many unrealized opportunities for adult education within the existing framework. A wide range of activities is included. There are such aspects of adult education as professional and management studies, day-release for industry, and youth work. This may represent a turning point in the history of the Association. At present, however, it is an inspiration, rather than an achievement. If Aspects of Adult Education is translated into action, the adult education movement may find

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 354-355.    <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

again a truly relevant function in society. Much of the work to be done will not be of university standard, nor reconcilable with internal academic views of the nature and function of a university. It will, therefore, be necessary to move beyond the universities and the Association.

Some of the voluntary bodies possess the imagination and vigour necessary for a great widening of the bounds of adult learning. The work of the Educational Centres in this regard has already been described. The Women's Institutes and the Townswomen's Guilds also show great promise.

From a few rural Institutes started during the First World War, the Women's Institutes movement grew into a National Federation of (in 1953) over eight thousand Institutes with nearly half a million members. Their original wartime aims were limited to encouraging country women to produce and preserve more food. The tradition which evolved was not academic, despite the encouragement of lectures on serious topics. The great and justifiable pride of the Institutes was in the high quality of their handicrafts. They also formed drama, choir, and folk-dance groups. Although the movement has always been non-political and included all classes of women, the leadership has come from the wives of local



squires, substantial farmers, and professional men living in the country. The Institutes have enriched the lives of many thousands of ordinary women.

In the towns, the place of the Women's Institutes was taken by the Townswomen's Guilds, which superficially closely resembled the Institutes. There was the same emphasis on the educational value of properly conducted meetings, the same organization for handicrafts, drama, and music, and a somewhat greater interest in civics or, as it was called later, social studies. The Townswomen's Guilds inherited a more radical tradition than the Institutes. The aim of the Guilds was "the education of women to enable them as citizens to make their best contributions towards the common good."<sup>7</sup> These Guilds have the potential for extending the bounds of common learning.

The great unknown quantity in the future development of liberal adult education, is the Local Education Authorities. They possess all the advantages which the other bodies lack. They were granted far-reaching powers under the 1944 Education Act, and had all the financial resources of local government behind them. So far, their contribution to adult learning has not been at all

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 321.

commensurate with their resources.

With the exception of the crafts, the potentialities of the Local Education Authorities in liberal education remained greater than their achievements. The great prestige conferred on the voluntary bodies by the 1919 Final Report and the corresponding writing-down of the Local Authorities probably inhibited initiative. Then, too, they had emerged slowly from the atmosphere of the restrictive evening school Codes of the later nineteenth century. Subsequently they tangled with the complexities of technical and commercial education which hampered them still further. Local Authority adult education lacked intellectual glamour or status.

The reports on Local Authority Evening Institutes were disappointing. In Leeds, for instance, the number of enrolments in Evening Institutes in October 1957 was about four thousand five hundred, virtually the same as in 1944 and 1929. Of these enrolments in 1957, a third were in vocational institutes -- ninety per cent of the students were under seventeen years of age and engaged on pre-technical or pre-commercial courses. The remaining two-thirds, in recreational institutes, were mostly over twenty-one and predominantly women.

The most exciting of all Local Authority ventures was the establishment of Residential Adult Colleges.

These colleges tackle problems, rather than conventional subjects. Residential education is of special value to adults for whom the experiences of living together are often more valuable than the acquisition of knowledge. They have been successful in reaching people who are already leaders in some field of the community. The Colleges have been one of the few agencies likely, and able, to bridge the gap between the traditional humanities and vocational education.

The Local Authorities also provide financial aid to other providing bodies. The partnership between voluntary associations and the Local Authorities became a marked feature in the adult education pattern between the wars. This pattern was strengthened by the 1944 Education Act and co-operation by Local Authorities was extended in the following years to many more voluntary organizations. The question for the 1960s is how far they should seek to provide facilities directly, and how far they should extend their present policy of aiding voluntary organizations.

There is great need for closer co-operation between the various providing and organizing bodies. Because of institutional rivalries and personal strivings, the amount of genuine co-operation possible becomes very limited. However, it is to be hoped that the tradition of collabo-

1. The first step in the process is to identify the problem or issue that needs to be addressed. This involves gathering information and understanding the context of the problem.

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