Florian Znaniecki

EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL LIFE IN EUROPE AND AMERICA.

 While the social culture of the whole Western world has common origins and in most respects remains one, yet there are important variations at different times and places. Among these we find certain interesting divergent currents which originated in the educational domain before or during the nineteenth century.

 As some survivals in European folkways and a few historical data seem to indicate, in the prehistorical past of the Celtic, Teutonic and Slavic peoples, the main educational influences to which the young were subjected were probably two: the family on the one hand, the age group uniting all the individuals of the tribe within certain age limits on the other hand. During the historic period the age groups disappeared, while the Roman tradition, combined with Christianity, strengthened the family. Thus, in mediaeval and modern times until quite recently the latter remained the main educational agency and its function was with the assistance of other agencies to prepare and introduce the individual into adult society.

 The young boy or girl thus faced the older generation alone; its social values were imposed upon him and he was pledged to keep intact the structure of the group which he was privileged to join at maturity. At an early age he began to share gradually in the interests of his elders: in the farming classes he participated actively in the economic activities of the family; in the artisan, merchant, and professional classes he was apprenticed in some older specialist's home; whereas in the upper clases he was prepared for life vicariously by governors and governesses. Schools were few and even those who went to school, with the exception of the clerics, spent very little time there. The youth had little, if any, social life of their own, apart from their elders, and that little under supervision. The spontaneous formation of young people's groups was distinctly discouraged, since these were considered conducive to mischief and dangerous to adult authority.

 Among the educational methods used, coercion, though not exclusive played a considerable part, Now, coercion breeds revolt. But the young individual's revolt found no backing anywhere and had to be inhibited, no matter what the detriment to personal development. Naturally, there - fore, the normel individual after a period of hidden opposition finally conformed, and with the help of other, more efficient methods, was made induced to become a conservative within his environment, a continuation of the traditions of his predecessors in every group to which he belonged. However, some revolted openly; but most of these ran away and became outcasts. A very few exceptions with rare genius and power became isolated social inventors, prophets, or reformers.

 In Europe the older generation preserved, with slight variations , the same fundamental educational attitudes throughout the nineteenth century. But meanwhile under the influence of new intellectual currents industrialization and later urbanization, the system of family control began to break down; at the same time the growth of schools and of large productive groups gave the young a greater opportunity of coming together independently of their elders. The young rovolte could find moral support and backing in the company of others of his own age. All over Europe groups of revolting youth, for a long time mostly secret, were formed wherever the young came together. Many were play or dissipation groups; but some had a much greater importance. Each young individual's interests in his contacts with his elders were still colored by mature society and its problems; the youthful group still remained chiefly interested in mature society, although their attitude towards it was negative. The revolt was not so much to escape adult control as to abolish adult institutions: individual revolt was turned into group revolutionism. All the revolutionary movements in Europe were assisted, if not initiated and fomented, by such groups of revolted youth. And up to now, active participation of such groups (particularly university students). in revolutionary movements - political, moral, religious, etc. - is a characteristic feature of European life. The conservative part of the older generation has frequently tried to oppose such movements by organizing the more obedient youth into equally active counter-associations.

 In America the evolution seems to have been different, chiefly perhaps because of the influence of continuous colonization of the West, though some English school traditions must probably be taken into account also. I believe that the American pioneer village or small town, as contrasted with the farm on the one hand, the industrial center on the other hand, has been a prominent factor in partially liberating the social life of the young from its early and ceaseless contact with adult interests. Play groups, freely formed, and rather protected than controlled by the older generation, seem to have soon become a characteristic feature of American town life.

 The play group may degenerate into a gang, if left unprotected or protected and encouraged by lawbreaking elements of the older society; or, if overprotected by law-abiding elders, may change into a youthful section of some adult organization and be made to pursue (along with some sport) religious or moral purposes. But its spontaneous tendency is to remain a separate and exclusive group of youth with a social life of its own and with no active participation in the serious lifebusiness of adults.

 The American school recognizes the claims of youthful groups and gives them unprecedented opportunities to satisfy these claims - always, of course, under protection. The American college is a striking combination of two distinct social systems: the teaching system headed by the faculty, within which the young are supposed to prepare for the future by merely imbibing predigested knowledge; and the youthful society a combination of groups with independent interests of their own, where the young live in their separate sphere without reference to the future. In both systems the young generation is collectively isolated from society: though influences from the outside penetrate into both systems, no active influence of the youthful college society is expected to affect the adult world. Other schools follow the lead, and the famous saying: "School is not preparation for life: it is life" gives a pregnant expression to this development.

 Of course, this contrast between social education in America and continental Europe is merely relative and concerns only one aspect of the problem: moreover, there has been recently an interpenetration of educational tendencies, particularly a marked influence of American industrial ideals in many European countries. In so far, however, as the two types of relationship between the social life of the older and that of the younger generation are distinct and real, we may ask ourselves what are their educational consequences.

 The most important result of the still predominant European tendency - the tendency to educate the youth for social life by teaching every individual separately and gradually how to participate in adult society - seems to be that the social problems as each generation sees them are essentially determined by the past. The young individual may accept and continue the traditions of his elders, or he may revolt against them, but in either case his attitude toward life is condition by them. New problems thrust upon each generation with an ever increasing speed modern cultural changes are defined in terms of the past: they are not seen as new until it is too late to solve them.

 When the young are free to prepare themselves for adult life by living a distinct social life of their own, this dependence on the past is avoided. The individual learns to meet each new social problem as it comes and to solve it from the point of view of present needs, unhampered by tradition. Each generation as it steps into the domain of its predecessors is neither attached to their traditions nor hostile to them; it is mostly indifferent. It preserves only those parts of its cultural heritage which it can actually utilize and drops the rest with out regret.

 Neither type of social education gives the young adequate preparation to face and control the future. Neither teaches them how to invent and realize a wide and distant ideal, how to utilize their entire cultural heritage for this purpose, or how to define every present situation with regard to its future possibilities. And since this is the only method by which the rushing stream of our civilization can be directed, both types of social education will have to be reorganized. The American type seems to be much more promising in this respect.