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RICHARD LOVELL EDGEWORTH

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Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744-1817) was the owner of extensive property in County Longford and was, therefore, a man of considerable social eminence. As magistrate and, later, Member of Parliament, Edgeworth distinguished himself by his fairness, his progressive attitudes, his religious tolerance, and his humanitarian instincts. He was also an inventor and was possessed of a talent for engineering and surveying. Nowhere are his personal qualities more evident than in his views on education. He believed that education alone provided the vehicle by which the Irish people could control their own destiny and avoid cultural annihilation. He advocated education for all people, regardless of their social position or religion and as a member of both the Select Committee (of Parliament) on the Education of the Poor (1799) and the Commission of Inquiry on Irish Education (1806), was able to make his views widely known on such diverse topics as curriculum, teaching methods, religious instruction, and the place of work and exercise. Edgeworth was an eminently practical man and established a school in Edgeworthstown to educate children of all social classes and religions. The school was highly successful under the direction of his son Lovell Edgeworth, became a minor show-piece, and was visited by Wordsworth and Scott. Edgeworth's work for the development of education in Ireland, his contributions to educational theory, and his practical involvement in schooling clearly justify the claims made on his behalf that he was an educator of merit and foresight.

Unlike many landlord families, the Edgeworths of Edgeworthstown, County Longford, were universally liked, admired, and respected for their fairness and their generous dealings with their tenants, for their enlightened attitudes towards contemporary problems, and for the progressive stance they took on them. In no member of that family were these qualities to be more readily observed than in Richard Lovell Edgeworth who was born in 1744 in Bath in England. Edgeworth's childhood and youth were spent in England and in Ireland where he was

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educated at the Drogheda Grammar School and, inevitably, at Trinity College, Dublin before going up to Oxford in 1761 After Oxford, he lived in England where he married the first of his four wives, busied himself with a succession of mechanical inventions, and was a founder of the Lunar Society of Birmingham whose members included Erasmus Darwin, James Watt, Josiah Wedgeworth, and Joseph Priestley He also spent time in France where he directed a project to divert the Rhone at Lyons, and in Ireland where he begat both mechanical inventions and the earliest born of his 22 children From 1782 on, he resided permanently on the family estate

If the name of Edgeworth strikes any kind of response at all it is usually because of Maria Edgeworth, Richard Lovell's eldest child As the authoress of *Castle Rackrent* and other popular works, she became a minor celebrity, noteworthy enought to attract the attention of Mme de Genlis, Mme de Stael, and Lord Byron, amongst others Her father has, therefore, been largely overlooked by historians of education in particular, who have either sympathized with Byron's comment that 'old Edgewroth was a bore – the worst of bores – a boisterous bore' (5) or have associated him with only with *Practical education* and so have lumped him in with his famous daughter That is a pity, for Richard Lovell Edgeworth was a writer and practitioner of considerable insight and originality in several fields, and a man whose literary output and practical schemes are of real significance in their own right Benevolent as landlord, enlightened as politician, visionary as educator, tolerant in religion, Richard Lovell Edgeworth was a man of considerable personal significance

The enlightened position that Edgeworth took towards contemporary concerns, particularly his humane treatment of his tenants, his impartiality as a magistrate, and his tolerant attitude towards catholics, immediately mark him out from his contemporaries and peers Certainly, those qualities were responsible for the somewhat ambivalent attitudes shown towards him by his neighbours Such dedication to principle was bound to arouse suspicion, and it did There is no doubt that Edgeworth's treatment of his tenants, the improvements he made to his estates, his support for catholic emancipation, his opposition to the Act of Union, and his surveying, roadmaking, and engineering expertise clearly set him apart and illustrate the progressive thought that he was to apply to education Indeed, his decision to return to permanent residence in Ireland was prompted by

> a firm determination to dedicate the remainder of his life to the improvement of his estate and to the education of his children, and further with the sincere hope of contributing to the melioration of the inhabitants of the country from which he drew his subsistence (4, p.103).

When, in 1782, Edgeworth returned to County Longford, he faced a run-down estate and a sullen tenantry: both were the result of indifferent estate managers. In a remarkably short time, he built and assisted his tenants to build comfortable dwellings that had windows, chimneys, and good floors, he set reasonable rents and ensured that they were paid directly to himself to cut out the extortion of middlemen, he left one year's rent in the tenants' hands in case of hardship, he provided his tenants with an extended time in which to pay their rents, he removed repressive clauses from existing leases, he respected the rights of tenants to the fruits of already improved land, he abolished the odious 'duty work', he encouraged tenants by his kindness and sense of justice, and he took a pride in stimulating migration where that could be beneficial. It is not that Edgeworth was 'a soft touch'; transgressors against the law could expect to be punished impartially even though they were his own tenants, but he was fair and just. At the same time, he set out to put his grievously neglected estate into good order: Edgeworthstown House was built and a small army of labourers was put to work hedging, ditching, roofing, and mending. In all of these projects, he was encouraged by the support of such progressive and forward-looking neighbours as the Granards, and Pakenhams, and Bishop Clayton.

The same quality of fairness which was applied in his landlord/tenant relationship was also employed by Edgeworth in his attitude towards religion. Though a committed supported of the established church, Edgeworth was a courageous (at a time when that quality was rare) and outspoken supporter of religious toleration, recognizing and providing for it in his work on education. In a letter from Edgeworth to Dr William Stuart, the Lord Primate, his position is clearly established:

> It is not intended, that Protestant masters shall interfere with the religious instruction of Catholic children;
> There is but one method, that appears to me practicable in this state of things: to let Protestants appoint masters for Protestant children, and Catholics choose masters for their own schools (8, p. 463).

Edgeworth went on to list the benefits to be expected from such an

arrangement it would diminish mutual distrust and increase confidence, the best teachers would be employed regardless of their religion, and the people would benefit

> It can never be good policy, to degrade the ministers of the Catholic religion in the eyes of the people, whose consciences they are to direct, and whose morals they are to form (8, p 465)

Certainly that principle was put into effect in the school he and his son established at Edgeworthstown It is, therefore, only to be expected that Edgeworth should be a supporter of catholic emancipation, and he vigorously supported (though he did not become a member of the Irish Parliament until 1798) the move to repeal the Penal Statutes against catholics, which had been enacted during the reign of King William III, when such a move was proposed in 1782 83

The same devotion to principle is shown in Edgeworth's conduct in the controversy which led up to the Act of Union in 1800, his daughter observed

> It was late in life to begin a political career, imprudently so, had it been with the common views of family advancement, but his chief hope in going into parliament was to obtain assistance in forwarding the great object of improving the education of the people, he wished also to assist in the discussion of the union (8, p 242)

Personally, Edgeworth was in favour of the Union, seeing in it many advantages that would accrue to Ireland from such a change However, he voted against the Bill

> After stating many arguments in favor of what appeared to him to be the advantages of the union, he gave his vote against it, because he said he had been convinced by what he had heard in [the] house [that] night, that the union was at this time decidedly against the wishes of the great majority of men of sense and property in the nation (8, p 244)

There is, finally, the contribution that Edgeworth made to Irish society through his mechanical and engineering skills There are four major areas which are relevant here surveying, land reclamation, road making, and the invention of a telegraph service The first two mentioned were initially carried out on his own estate as part of the overall improvement programme

(it was this same programme, incidentally, which prompted the invention of a 'wooden movable railway' to help reclaim land at less cost) but the experience gained was later put to good use when Edgeworth undertook a statistical survey, on behalf of the Dublin Society, of the whole of County Longford and part of Meath in order to form an economic and social picture of the area, and when he drew up a scheme to drain the bogs and use the reclaimed land for crops. Both of these schemes were prompted by the worsening economic situation caused by an increasing population and unemployment. This work was completed by Edgeworth in 1810 despite his deteriorating health; the proposed scheme was to be a joint state and private business venture which expected to reap a profit and provide work. Unfortunately, the plan was thwarted at that time by the opposition of greedy (and frequently absent) landlords and had to wait another hundred and fifty years for its successful implementation.

Edgeworth had shown an intermittent but lifelong interest in improving transportation; he had invented a new carriage, improved carriage wheels and even invented a railway. It was this interest in transportation which led naturally to an interest in improving the condition of roads. Initially, in 1811, Edgeworth had been asked to assist in sorting evidence that had been collected by a Parliamentary Commission on the state of the country's roads. Edgeworth wrote a masterly report on this complex task assuming that it was to be presented to the House of Commons. When he discovered that this was not to be, he published the report himself as *An Essay on the Construction of Roads and Carriages.* What Edgeworth proposed was a system of road-making reputed to be better than that of MacAdam though the latter got most of the credit.

Edgeworth's favourite scheme, however, was the 'Tellograph'. Originally set up in 1794 between Pakenham Hall and Edgeworthstown House for use in case of invasion by the French, the system was tried between Scotland and Ireland and between Longford and Dublin, and was pronounced a success. The Lord Lieutenant, Lord Camden, failed to grasp the military significance of the invention, Edgeworth tired of trying to convince him, and the project was left in abeyance until it was encouraged by the Chief Secretary, Pelham. Edgeworth prepared a scheme for a telegraph service between Dublin and Cork involving fifteen stations at a cost of £100 each and sent his son, Lovell, to England to demonstrate it to the English government. Once again he was frustrated. Edgeworth was simply too honest in his dealings with government. This honesty, and the confusion and panic surrounding the general political situation in

Ireland in 1796 97 and, in particular, the French landing at Bantry Bay, finally put an end to this potentially fruitful scheme

EDGEWORTH'S VIEWS ON EDUCATION

Richard Lovell Edgeworth's enlightened attitudes are nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in his thoughts about the people of Ireland and their education This is of particular significance when it is put into the context of the contemporary political and social milieu For much of the time between Edgeworth's taking up permanent residence in Ireland in 1782 and the time of his departure for the unexpectedly curtailed visit to France – a period of some 20 years – Ireland was in a state of turmoil There was the frequent threat of insurrection and invasion and, finally, the bitter debate over Union

Not only was Edgeworth aware of the need to educate the Irish people, he also recognized just how important the people themselves felt it to be, above all, he realized, as did they themselves, that education alone provided a viable means by which they could avoid total cultural annihilation That such a desperate situation should exist is not at all surprising when consideration is given to the lengthy history of harrassment to which the Irish catholic population had been subjected Despite a brave start initiated by the Parish Schools Measure in 1537, (which introduced state involvement in education in Ireland years before Scotland and England), public education m Ireland had long been characterized by attempts, some more covert than others, to use education to suppress catholicism and promote protestantism Indeed, the religious motive was almost always present to mark the forays of the state into the realm of education The penal laws enacted at various times since the reign of the first Queen Elizabeth, but most noticeably during the reign of King William III and Queen Anne, clearly aimed to suppress not only the professional advancements of catholics, but also their education Such a Code was clearly too evil to last forever, and led, inevitably, to the Acts of 1778, 1782 (Gardiner's Act), and 1793 (1) These Acts gave a large measure of relief to the beleaguered catholic population, desperate for education (even to the extent of kidnapping school masters) and obliged to rely on the 'hedge' schools to provide it

EDUCATION FOR ALL

Sensitive as he was to injustice and to the legitimate desires of others,

Richard Lovell Edgeworth, who had already 'perceived, that, by kindness and attention to their wants and prejudices, it would be in our power to meliorate the condition, and to improve the disposition of the poor in our neighbourhood' (7, p. 332), now widened his horizons to include not only the poor, and not only his own neighbourhood (though that continued its claims on his attention) but all the people. In short, he developed a philosophy of education, a practical way of implementing it, a school in which it was implemented and the social and legislative awareness within which it made sense.

Unlike his ideas on the content and the method of education, the set of aims and objectives which Edgeworth had in mind for it did not vary much with the type of child to be educated. In this, Edgeworth's thought was remarkably similar to many of his contemporaries who were also interested in education. Jeremy Bentham is clearly one such person who varied the content and to some extent the method of instruction according to the social class and therefore the anticipated social role of the children concerned, but who nevertheless continued to subscribe to universal aims for all – those of augmenting 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' and of giving them, by means of education, greater control over their own lives (2, 10). Edgeworth had the same aims though he expressed them differently;* he wanted to make all people happy and he regarded education as a suitable vehicle to accomplish that task. Nowhere is that more clearly expressed than in the letter written to Archbishop Stuart and which appears as an Appendix to the Fourteenth Report of the Commissioners of the Board of Education in Ireland. Edgeworth concluded that letter by quoting

> the striking sentiment expressed by the late bishop of Elphin, in his sermon before the Incorporation Society:
> 'Education makes all the difference between wild beasts and useful animals, all the distinction between the Hottentot and the European, between the savage and the man' (8, p. 472).

Though we might now find the example exceptionable, there can be no doubt as to the meaning. For the Irish, Edgeworth had specified expecta-

* Though Edgeworth and Bentham never met which, given Bentham's mode of living, is not surprising, nor even corresponded (which is somewhat more surprising), Edgeworth was an admirer of Bentham and strongly recommended his work to students (see 8, p. 275).

tions and objectives as well The Irish had been disadvantaged because of their lack of education

> The Irish nation, he knew by experience, have as quick apprehensions, and as good hearts as any people in the world – he never met men so easily taught, so intelligent when taught, or so calculated to make virtuous, loyal subjects
> He did not wish for the people any other education, but what might afford them a knowledge of their duty, what would make them virtuous and loyal, useful to themselves and the state (8, pp 247 8)

And, he concluded,

> if the house meant to fix the foundations of private and public security, they must resort to the education of the people (8, p 248)

It was education which held out hope of improvement for the mass of the Irish people

> New industry arises with new hopes, useful luxury obliges men to look forward Fathers use their best endeavours to give their children the elements of education, the children perceive, that this education is not an evil inflicted by old age on childhood, but they are early sensible, that knowing how to read and write prepares them for situations something above that of day labourers or wretched cottagers (8, p 309)

However, the benefits of education would not be confined only to the children who were educated, rather, the whole of society would gain

> If a solid foundation be laid , time will mature what shall have been begun, and the blessings of good education will increase the security and happiness of Ireland, beyond the most sanguine hopes of that government, which instituted your Board (8, p 472)

It was largely on account of such utilitarian sentiments espoused over a period of time and his introduction into the Irish Parliament of a Bill to educate the people that the Education Commission was set up That was an innovation which Edgeworth regarded as distinctly more useful than the Union itself

Edgeworth's thoughts on the benefits of education reflect two distinct

categories: general benefits and more specific ones related to the particular class or group of individuals concerned. In the former category we may include, apart from the benefits of self-improvement already referred to, such overall benefits as an increased desire to learn* a greater ability to think and to make independent judgments, and an increased creative ability and reasoning capacity. This last benefit was set out in *Practical education* in these words:

> It is not sufficient in education to store up knowledge; it is essential to arrange facts so that they shall be ready for use, as materials for the imagination, or the judgement, to select and combine (quoted in 9, p. 211).

The parallel between Bentham and Edgeworth recurs in this context, also. Bentham believed that given a choice between pleasure and pain, between good and evil, men would choose good and the purpose of education was precisely to enable them to make that choice intelligently. In the *Memoirs,* we are informed that Edgeworth

> had believed, that, if rational creatures could be made clearly to see and understand, that virtue will render them happy, and vice will render them miserable, either in this world or in the next, they would afterwards, in consequence of this conviction, follow virtue, and avoid vice (8, p. 401).

We are led to understand that Edgeworth subsequently came to see this assumption as being in error (8, pp. 402-3). Bentham never did.

EDUCATION FOR SPECIFIC GROUPS

The specific objectives of education for Edgeworth were, as they were for Bentham, more varied. For the poor they were, not surprisingly, to teach them to read and write and otherwise provide them with useful skills with which they could improve themselves and maintain themselves in a state of independence, and thus be happy. For the middle and upper classes, however, the aims were similar (the maintenance of happiness and independence), though the forms in which they were couched differed. The kernel of Edgeworth's thought on the aims of

* According to Edgeworth in his *Essays on practical education,* 'the first object should [be] to give them the desire to learn' (quoted in 9, p. 202).

education for the middle and upper classes is to be found in his *Essays on professional education*, in which he discussed in considerable detail the nature of the appropriate education for seven professions or occupations ranging from that of cleric to prince (6)

In that work, Edgeworth argued that the objective of professional education ought to be two-fold to produce a generally educated, well-rounded individual, and to equip that person with the specific skills required for him to discharge his professional duties, whatever they might be Such means, Edgeworth believed, would result in competent and happy individuals The English country gentleman (one of the occupations discussed) is happy in his independence of mind, such fortunates

> paid their debts regularly They thanked God that they were inde pendent of all men and could speak their minds freely on every subject, private or public, without fear or reward (6, p 278)

Indeed, Edgeworth believed that the right kind of education had already brought about a transformation among this class, for

> the ignorant, hunting, drunken, obstinate, jovial, freedom loving tyrant, is no more to be seen the diffusion of knowledge, and the advantages of polite and literary [education] have silently and gradually operated this melioration (6, p 287)

Education should produce

> a true English country gentleman full of personal, civil and intellectual liberty, [possessed of] a mind that despises luxury, free from avarice, ambition and all the malevolent passions diffusing a portion of happiness on all within the sphere of his influence, conscious that every day he lives, he does not live in vain, and grateful to Providence for the felicity he enjoys (6, p 316)

Such, at least, was Edgeworth's sanguine expectation

The education of the statesman and of the prince would have different aims In the former case 'to educate a youth to be a great statesman, noble ambition must be inspired, ambition to serve, to save his country (6, p 411) The foundation would have to be laid in childhood, though

the process would be life-long, for

> No error can be more fatal to a young man, than the belief that education terminates with childhood. In fact, a wise and truly great man will continue to improve himself to the latest period of life (6, p. 420).

Edgeworth's thoughts 'On the Education of a Prince' begin with the sombre reminder that

> A more hazardous trade than that of a king can in the present times scarcely be named ... . Consequently, the rising generation of princes should be prepared for the trials, to which they may be exposed (6, p. 455).

The education of the man (or woman) born to rule ought, obviously, to aim to ensure that he or she is equipped to discharge that particular function of ruling. The prince, therefore,

> need *not* be a dancer, a fiddler, a poet, a painter, an artist an antiquary, an etymologist, a mathematician, a mechanist, or a profound scholar (6, p. 456).

but

> he must above all things be just and brave ... free from all personal prejudice or caprice, and he must disdain flattery (6, p. 465).

THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

If the aims of education were to be to render men happy through the avoidance of pain, the next question, logically, would seem to be 'what, then, are they to be taught?' Edgeworth was ready with some answers; not pat solutions but thoughtful responses based on careful observation of his own children (he had 22) and others, and reflection on that observation. In this respect, too, Edgeworth's position is almost exactly that of Bentham: all have to be educated but they do not have to be given the same education.

Excluding professional education, which was clearly intended for the middle and upper classes, the greater part of Edgeworth's contributions on the subject of what children should be taught is contained in

Appendices to the Third and Fourth Reports of the Commissioners of the Board of Education in Ireland (7) The comments on the curriculum come in the form of suggestions for the improvement of the already reformed 'protestant charter schools', and deal with academic education and employment Once again there is a strong Benthamite flavour to his comments, not only in what he selects but, more particularly, in the reasons for the choice and the anticipated results In the area of academic education,

> Writing, reading, and arithmetic, are the standing objects of attention yet of all the common acquirements, of which the young mind is capable, arithmetic is the most useful, its rules are logical the powers of the mind [are] improved, and what end can be proposed more advantageous to society in the education of the poor than to give them good sense, and reasoning minds? To make the poor tractable, you must give them sufficient powers of discernment, to discern their real interests amidst the sophistry of those, who endeavour to mislead them (8, pp 456 7)

The teaching of arithmetic was clearly very dear to Edgeworth and one which he was keen to promote He returned to the subject again in the Fourteenth Report when he took issue with Dr Bell, whose Madras system was then becoming popular Bell had given it as his opinion that arithmetic was not a necessary part of early education Edgeworth's view was that

> if it were necessary to dispense either with reading and writing, or with arithmetic, I should rather dispense with the two former, than with the latter I think it was Swift, who, when he was asked what the Irish nation needed most for its improvement, replied 'to learn that two and two are four' (8, p 462)

One of Edgeworth's proposals in the Fourteenth Report of the Comm issioners of the Board of Education was for two new types of schools for the poor preparatory and provincial, 1,300 of the former and 16 of the latter, in which

> a certain number of boys selected from time to time, [would be] draughted into the provincial schools, where they would be clothed, lodged, boarded, and instructed, for two, or perhaps three years, at the public expense
>
> Thus a considerable number of boys, of the best conduct, and of the best abilities, would be taken from the ranks of the profligate and ignorant, and would be indissolubly attached to the laws and govern-

> ment of the country (8, p. 466).

To achieve these laudable objectives and to prepare them for their future occupations, this élite cadre

> should be taught book-keeping, surveying, agricultural economy, practical mechanics, and such parts of practical chemistry, as are useful in the trades and occupations for which they are designed (8, p. 468).

Of particular historical interest (though the condescension implicit in the conclusion is hardly surprising) is the attention given by Edgeworth to the question of language. This was based on the observation – not by himself – that many of the contemporary evils arose out of perverse insistence by the lower classes to speak Irish instead of English. Edgeworth agreed that such might be the case, though not in County Longford, but that

> wherever it is the case, proper methods should be taken for remedying it; the multiplying the number of English schools seems to be one of the means most likely to succeed. It should be considered, for the honour of the docility of the Irish, that they have within these few years made a greater progress in learning English, than the Welsh have made since the time of Edward the First in acquiring that language (8, p. 469).

When he writes of 'employment', Edgeworth does not make it clear whether he anticipated that the schools would be self-supporting by the products of their industry as, for example, Bentham did in placing schools in his Houses of Industry. Employment there was certainly to be, however, and it combined the dual objectives of useful work and physical exercise. Among the suitable occupations suggested were gardening (particularly nurseries of trees), because it combined healthy outdoor exercise with the possibility of profit (to the master), weaving 'if not followed with too much assiduity', stocking weaving (but not knitting), netting and weaving sack-cord, making 'fringe furniture', basket-weaving, and shoe making, though already taught, 'may be more generally introduced, for shoes are becoming every day more common in Ireland'.

Work was not to dominate the day – it was to occupy no more than three hours and adequate time should be left for play which Edgeworth considered to be insufficiently attended to; he recommended that 'ball-

playing, gough, and cricket, and all manly sports should be encouraged' The overall objective of this part of the scheme was

> to breed boys to different occupations, servants, shoemakers, cabinet makers, clerks, merchants, surveyors, schoolmasters, parish clerks and choristers, and soldiers (8, p 459)

and to render a profit in which the master and boy would share, which seems to strengthen the argument that the scheme was expected to be at least partly self supporting

Since it was not anticipated that the sons of the middle and upper ranks of society were to be servants, shoemakers, or even schoolmasters, their education would have to have a different content Edgeworth believed that practice in contemporary public schools contained many defects, not the least of which was that every boy pursued a uniform course of instruction regardless of the profession for which he was destined This was wasteful of time, since students acquired a lot of information which would be of little use to them 'whilst they have no means of obtaining knowledge that would prepare them for their different situations in society, and which must be essential to success in their various professions (6, p 26) Above all, education should be useful Bentham would have approved Children ought to be able to speak and read English properly, particularly if they lived in 'Scotland, Ireland and those parts of England where there is a vicious pronunciation (6, p 42) They ought to be able to read and write and do arithmetic, obviously, but beyond that what they learned depended on the profession for which they were destined The future cleric would need Greek and Latin The English country gentleman ought to know about the law since he would be a magistrate, Edgeworth recommended that he should consult Blackstone's *Commentary on the laws of England* He would accompany his father and watch him perform his duties, from this he would learn the benefit of setting a good example and that helping his tenants to help themselves is better than providing charity Edgeworth recommended Smith's *Wealth of nations* 'as the best book to open his views, and to give him clear ideas' * A gentleman ought to be knowledgeable about architecture, land improvement, the sciences (particularly astronomy, mineralogy, and chemistry) and current affairs (therefore, he should read the *Edinburgh Review*)

* In the copy which I used, an antique hand had written in pencil in the margin J B Say s Political Economy is better I suppose it is a matter of opinion

The man intended for public life, on the other hand, had no need of such accomplishments. Certainly, he did not need the classical languages which the cleric had, for

> it must again be lamented that so much more time than is necessary is devoted to Latin and Greek (6, p. 416).

He would, however, need to learn about geography (if taught from a practical point of view), reason, and philosophy. He should, in addition, travel to broaden his mind and experience and to provide substance for his oratory. Oratory should not, however, be taught until later on in his education since Edgeworth recommended that he 'refrain from attempting to become an orator till he has collected materials' (6, p. 439). The education of a ruler was even less academic in the formal sense than that of the public servant. Reference has already been made to the subjects he need not know; his accomplishments ought to include physical fitness although

> mental superiority is more important ... [and] ... he must above all things be just and brave ... free from all personal prejudice or caprice ... disdain flattery ... [and yet have] a generous and elevated soul to inspire enthusiastic devotion (6, pp. 416-8).

EDGEWORTH AS AN EDUCATIONAL REFORMER

Edgeworth's view that education should be useful and that the classical languages should not be its cornerstones put him in the vanguard of educational reform and in the same category as Pestalozzi and Bentham. Equally, his ideas about teaching methods underpin that claim, for in an age in which formal education was characterized by cruelty, barbarism, ignorance, and indifference, Edgeworth's ideas have a welcome and humane touch to them.

Edgeworth had started out as an admirer of Rousseau and he was determined to implement the latter's ideas; this he did in the education of his own first son, Lovell. He ultimately came to the conclusion that Rousseau's ideas were wrong since that particular educational experiment went seriously and obviously awry. Initially, Edgeworth acknowledged

> His Emile had made a great impression upon my young mind, ... and when I compared the many plausible ideas it contains, with the obvious deficiencies and absurdities, that I saw in the treatment of children

I determined to make a fair trial of Rousseau's system (7, pp 177 8)

The result was a boy who was 'remarkably handy', 'fearless of danger', 'bold, free, fearless, generous' Unfortunately, the boy was also obstinate and self-willed and these qualities cancelled out the virtues so that his father was reluctantly obliged to 'acknowledge, with deep regret the error of a theory which I had adopted at a very early age (7, p 274)

The father next turned to the Jesuits, being at the time resident in France, despite his misgivings on the score of the boy's possible conversion to catholicism This time he was more satisfied The results of his experiences, refined and synthesized, were published principally in *Practical education,* and in *Essays on professional education* and represent his thought on the problem of how to go about the business of educating young people Much of it is now known to us through our familiarity with Rousseau, Froebel, and Pestalozzi, what is not so widely known is that Rousseau and Edgeworth were contemporaries and that Edgeworth was writing upwards of forty years before Froebel and a full twenty before Pestalozzi Not surprisingly, since both Edgeworth and Bentham were humane and progressive thinkers, several of Edgeworth's suggestions bear remarkable similarity to those in Bentham's *Chrestomathia* the absolute ban on corporal punishments, the emphasis on the efficacy of just reward and punishment, the appreciation of the value of visual aids (particularly, good clear pictures), and the need to keep lessons short if the interest level of young children was to be maintained

The major difference between the two men was that Edgeworth was a parent many times over and Bentham was not at all From this experience and the opportunities thus provided for sustained observation, came many of the unique contributions made by Edgeworth Such contributions include the realization of full and satisfactory explanations, the significance of play and discovery in the child's learning process, the desirability of reading to children, the importance of the adult setting a good example, including the child in as many of his own activities as possible, and the timely caution against the natural parental instinct to over-protect children It was, undoubtedly, Edgeworth's own experience as a family man which led him to conclude that the implementation of such ideas would result in a 'good' school, one in which children would be happy in learning just as they would be a family, indeed, that was his objective 'A good initiatory school should, as much as possible, resemble a well regulated private family' (6, p 40)

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

So far, I have not referred to religion and its place in Edgeworth's scheme of things, an omission all the more surprising in view of its obvious significance in Ireland. Edgeworth was himself criticized for omitting a consideration of religion from his *Practical education* and felt it necessary to address that omission. First of all, we may ask why was religious education not included in *Practical education*? From what Edgeworth had to say about religious (specifically Jesuit) schools in *Essays on professional education* (6, p. 27) and the complimentary remarks in his *Memoirs* (7, pp. 276-9), coupled with what we know of Edgeworth as landlord, magistrate, and Member of Parliament, there can be no basis for ever accusing him of being a religious bigot and wanting to exclude it for that reason. No, the reason is, quite simply, that though Edgeworth was convinced of the desirability of religious instruction, he had serious reservations about imposing it on young minds. Furthermore, since he could not find any particular system that would meet with general approval, he omitted it altogether. However, the subject is dealt with, satisfactorily and at length, in other ways. His view that religious education was not only desirable but essential is made only too clear in a letter written by Edgeworth to the Editor of Rees' *Cyclopedia* in which he wrote

> we are convinced, that religious obligation is indispensably necessary in the education of all descriptions of people, in every part of the world. We dread fanaticism and intolerance, ... [however] to introduce the awful ideas of God's superintendence upon puerile occasions, we decline ...
> You have turned back our thoughts to this most important subject (education), upon which *next to a universal reverence for religion,* we believe the happiness of mankind to depend (8, p. 405).*

Having said that, Edgeworth did state it as his opinion that the children attending the protestant charter schools should know why they were protestants.

* Edgeworth wrote to the Editor after reading an article on 'Intellectual education' in the encyclopedia. The article dealt with Edgeworth's work *Practical education* and noted the omission from it of provision for religious education. Although the article was most complimentary, Edgeworth seized the opportunity to clarify his position. The letter is quoted in the Memoirs (8, pp. 404-406).

> The doctrines of our church should most certainly be early impressed on their memories, and they should be made acquainted with the nature and tendency of those errors, against which we protest (8, p 456)

However, he was against any kind of proselytizing The school proposed for Edgeworthstown (of which, more later) was to admit both catholic and protestant children and both were to have suitable religious instruction provided

> The ministers of their respective religions should have entire facility afforded them for inculcating their catechism and their religious precepts
> The children should be sent regularly to attend the places of worship, which their parents point out (8, p 452)

This point is reiterated in the important Appendix to the Fourteenth Report of the Commissioners of the Board of Education and in his sub missions to the Select Committee on the Education of the Poor established in 1799, whose Report stated its aim to be

> to give the Roman Catholics of Ireland such an education as shall give them early habits of virtue and leave the way open by which they may attain to any higher acquirements or advance in any profession (quoted in 4, p 169)

THE SOCIAL LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION

I have already made reference to the social legislative framework for education which Edgeworth helped to establish and to the practical mode of implementing it I would like to turn to the first of those things now by examining Edgeworth's contributions to the Select Committee on the Education of the Poor and the Commission of Inquiry on Irish Education of 1806

The Select Committee was set up in 1799 Despite the troubled times, the Irish Parliament did little for education in the 1790s except pass the Catholic Relief Act in 1793 (which did some little good in relieving some of the Catholics' educational disabilities) and found Maynooth Seminary Events in 1798, the year of insurrection, had sounded a particularly telling note for the established families of Ireland Even those who, like the

Edgeworths, were widely known for their fairness and humanity, were troubled by the new terror which seemed to threaten their well-being. It was perhaps fortuitous that a man who held such a strong belief in the ability of education to inform and persuade should have been elected to the Irish Parliament in that most awesome of years, for the House of Commons provided him with an ideal forum in which to air his views to the only audience which had the power to put them into effect. In February 1799, Edgeworth informed members present of his belief that

> It was impossible ... when moral principles are instilled into the human mind, when people are regularly taught their duty to God and Man, that abominable tenets can prevail in the subversion of subordination and society (8, p. 247).

and concluded

> though the power of the sword was great, that the force of education was greater (8, p. 247).

Edgeworth's theme was that the widespread ignorance of the people served only to increase their vulnerability to subversive ideas. The solution was obvious: educate the poor people and you at once diminish their vulnerability to such ideas. The education of the people was, said Edgeworth, of far greater significance to the people of Ireland than the proposed Union which they were debating. It was, therefore, Edgeworth's influence which led directly to the Select Committee being set up, and the fact that the Committee was established in proof of the success he had in convincing those members of the House whose enthusiasm for popular education was somewhat less than fervent. Edgeworth introduced the Committee's report in February, 1799. It contained, after a preamble which outlined its objectives and its belief in the efficacy of education, six proposals: that the state of public education was so poor that state intervention was required; that at least one school should be established in every parish in the country; that the teachers for such schools should be examined and be licensed annually; that the teachers be paid a salary and merit pay; that textbooks should be chosen by specially appointed persons; and that Visitors be appointed to carry out an annual inspection of each school (3).

On concluding the presentation of the report, Edgeworth sought permission to introduce a Bill to give effect to its proposals. The Bill was given the customary first reading and just as suddenly dropped, partly

because of the cost that its implementation would have entailed (3) and probably also because of the general politicking that was taking place as a necessary back drop to the Union proposal (1) After the Union was established in 1800, Edgeworth's ability to intervene directly was severely curtailed since he was no longer a member of Parliament His public standing remained high, however, and he continued, as a result of his conduct in the debate on the Union, to be regarded as a man of high principle Irish education was afterwards never given the same seriousness of treatment and the educational malaise continued undisturbed until 1806 when the Commission of Inquiry was established Edgeworth's prominence and his established reputation in the area made it inevitable that he be invited to participate as a member of the Commission

The Commission was set up in 1806 after the appointment of the Duke of Bedford as Lord Lieutenant Bedford, encouraged by Newport (the Chancellor of the Exchequer for Ireland) and Dr Stuart (Protestant Arch bishop of Armagh), was a member of an aristocratic family long renowned for its liberal opinions (Bertrand Russell was one of its sons) He was appalled at the state of Education as he saw it, such instruction as was available too frequently was under the control of protestant clergy and was used as a basis for proselytization His appointment as one of the six commissioners once again provided Edgeworth with the opportunity to place his ideas before government and to renew his calls for reform and innovation which had ended abruptly in 1799 with the death of his Bill Edgeworth was well aware of the high expectations that the public had of the Board and of their responsibility not to disappoint them even though some of the expectations might have appeared to be unrealistic However, Edgeworth recalled the vast improvements that had already taken place in the condition of the people and concluded that

> If this has been the case, under the present modes of Instruction, which are obviously defective, is there not just reason to suppose, that a more rapid and extended benefit may be obtained by a better system (8, p 461)

The Commission addressed issues as the desirability of educating the poor, religious education and how to implement it, what should be in the curriculum, teaching methods, the diet of the children, the textbooks to be used, and who should teach and under what conditions All of these had, before, been thought of as secondary matters unworthy of attention The Commissioners made sweeping recommendations for reform of the

actual system of instruction and the implementation of a new one including preparatory and provincial schools. Edgeworth's contributions to the work of the Commission were constant but two of the reports, the third and fourteenth, were his work almost entirely. The latter document has been described as 'an outstanding example of liberal thought in the early nineteenth century' (4, p. 203), with its advocacy of universal education for the poor and the consequent benefits of it to them and to society. It greatly influenced Irish educational practice during the century following its appearance by its recommendations for the establishment of a permanent board of commissioners to administer parliamentary grants for education, for the establishment of training colleges for teachers, and its strictures against disturbing the religious beliefs of any christian group (1). Such recommendations amounted to nothing less than a call to massive intervention by the state in the education of the people, even though their immediate effect was different from that expected.

THE EDGEWORTHSTOWN SCHOOL

By the time he came towards the end of his life, Edgeworth had written extensively on the theory, practice, and aims of education. He had also contributed greatly to the development of a popular system of education in Ireland and had invented a type of phonetic alphabet to help to teach children to read.* The one thing lacking was his own school in which to implement at least some of these ideas. Such a school was finally established at Edgeworthstown in 1816, the year before Edgeworth's death. By that time, Edgeworth was in his seventy-third year, and, although still strong and physically active, he was beginning to fail. The school, therefore, was run by Lovell Edgeworth and continued until 1833. It was a remarkable venture and would have continued to be thought so even if it had not succeeded, for all religions and social classes were welcome and would be educated together and would operate on principles which Edgeworth senior laid down (see 8, p. 451-3). Only healthy children were to be admitted; care was to be exercised to teach all to read, write, and understand what they had read; they were to be taught grammar, obedience, truth, cleanliness, and sobriety ('particularly in this country, where in some places the earliest ambition of a boy is to drink'); religious instruction was to be provided by the children's own priest or minister; exercise was to be encouraged; children intended for business

* The system was intended to convey sounds in a regular phonetic way. For example, 'o' as in 'throne', 'ȯ' as in 'on', 'ọ' as in 'love', 'ɵ' as in move, 'ȯ' as in 'book'.

would remain longer at school to learn subjects of use to them specifically (the other children, having begun school at seven years of age, would leave off at nine), the children were to wear smocks in order to diminish obvious social class differences, and, there was payment for tuition Edgeworth insisted that even the poorest child should pay a nominal sum (one penny per week) in order to avoid the stigma of its being a charity school, to stimulate the child's sense of independence, and to increase the value put on the instruction received

The school was a great success due mainly to the natural talent that Lovell Edgeworth had as a teacher Maria Edgeworth recorded with obvious pride

> In the school established at Edgeworths Town, in 1816, by my brother Lovell there are now (March, 1820), above 170 boys of the lower, middle, and higher classes, Protestants and Catholics The seminary flourishes, has succeeded beyond our utmost hopes, and is approved of by both Protestant and Catholic ministers (8, p 453)

The school became a minor show piece for distinguished visitors, including Sir Walter Scott and William Wordsworth It failed ultimately only because Lovell Edgeworth, though a born teacher and *bon viveur,* was not a born accountant, and his sister, Maria, stepped in, sent him away, and closed the school down The building is now a small museum

CONCLUSION

Richard Lovell Edgeworth was clearly a very talented, courageous, and many sided figure of considerable significance as a contributor of original ideas on education, and Ireland was a major beneficiary of his talent in a number of ways On the broader scene he may, with justification, be viewed as a significant figure in the British educational revival which took place in the early nineteenth century after the initial impact of European ideas had been felt The publication of *Practical education,* at a time when the theory and practice of education were at a low point, brought to public notice theories that were

> revolutionary but nonetheless practical, and had been, for the most part, incorporated in our educational system and credited to other educationists (4, p 163)

Indeed,

> Those who are familiar with the customary paeans sung in honour of Pestalozzi, and of his contemporaries in Switzerland and Germany, may possibly, when they first stumble on the Edgeworths and come to appreciate their grasp of 'child nature' wonder why English people at any rate have given all the honour for the discovery of the child to any and everyone save their own countrymen (4, p. 167).

It is surprising, in view of the volume of his work and the extent of his public involvement, that Edgeworth is not a more familiar name than it is. Perhaps this is because he was to a certain extent pre-empted from notice by the ideas of both Pestalozzi and Bentham and the fact that he wrote, principally, for a limited circle of wealthy people. As a consequence, his ideas failed to make any wider appeal despite the fashionable interest that was then being shown in the state of the child. What Edgeworth did that ought to ensure his greater prominence and reputation as an educator was to supply the empirical evidence about education to substantiate the assertions and theories that abounded; for the first time, the art of education became an empirical science and, though he travelled and lived for periods of time in France and England, he was able to do this from the comparative isolation of County Longford. Though equally at home in France, England, and Ireland, Edgeworth was primarily a great Irishman; one very much in advance of his times. His approach as a landlord, his advocacy of catholic emancipation, his contributions as an inventor, his political activities, and his thinking on education all add up to 'the story of a great genius who was also a great Irishman' (5, p. viii).

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