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# A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS

# Kilquhanity and Risinghill



# Risinghill and Kilquhanity



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**About Risinghill****MARTIN SMALL**

IT IS IN THE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL—in the contrast and disparity between its theory and its practice—that the democratic nature of the culture which we inhabit in England today is tried, tested and found wanting. This is the conflict Leila Berg has endeavoured to describe in her *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School* (Penguin Books, 6s.), but which she has unfortunately mixed up with an attack upon the officials of the Inner London Education Authority and an unnecessarily melodramatic picture of Michael Duane as a prince of light against a legion of darkness. Darkness and light are not in two separate and easily distinguishable sets of men, but all around us—our whole culture displays the conflict between the principles of mutual aid and of hostility which is the conflict within all of us, perhaps more clearly than any previous culture: to identify this conflict within ourselves and others, and to endeavour to transcend it and to help others to do so, is the task before him who would reform society—not to identify the conflict as between ourselves and others: for that there is such a conflict is the myth which enslaves human society. "A story of a courageous headmaster, Michael Duane, and the story of the closure of his school, it is a blistering indictment of educational bureaucracy and bureaucrats, of intolerance and stupidity." (Ronald Deadman in *The New Statesman*, 26th April, 1968.) By giving a licence to this sort of trite comment which ignores the real tragedy of Risinghill, Leila Berg has failed to take adequate precautions to prevent the subsequent controversy over her book from obscuring the issues which the story of Risinghill should bring into prominence and debate. Leila Berg's horror stories of her encounters with the officials of the ILEA do not add to our understanding of officials and officialdom: her patronising division of the teachers on the staff at Risinghill—"Some were very good, generous and imaginative. . . . [Others] had long ago surrendered their personality, the wishes and beliefs of their own personal life. . . . A third section had first been bewildered, and then, under the influence of Michael Duane's personality, decided of their own accord to do what *he* wanted . . ."—does not enable us to understand better the particular neuroses of the teaching profession. But they have encouraged the subsequent controversy around her book to concentrate on the rudeness and inconsiderateness (or the absence of it) in Duane's attitude to the ILEA or to his staff or on the obviously unresolvable dispute about whether Duane was or was not ordered to use corporal punishment by

the ILEA. And the wider social context of what Duane tried to do—of what he did achieve—and of wherein he failed—has become lost in a trivial desert of mutual personal denigration.

The problem of understanding presented by Risinghill is two-edged. It is necessary to understand what Duane was setting out to do, and next what were the methods he used: and these separate but overlapping studies must be related to an appreciation of both what ought to have been done and what could be done. Perhaps the conclusion will be that it was necessary and desirable to do more or less what Duane does in fact seem to have done: honestly tried to implement what he thought was the official policy of the ILEA (the education department of the LCC it was, throughout most of the history of Risinghill) in its most logical and completest form—simply in order to demonstrate that such an uncompromising logicity could not succeed while the political system was what it was—and as it still remains. Whatever else he did—and however arrogant and hamfisted he may have been—there seems no doubt that the progress of Risinghill under Duane's headmastership exposed a very real gulf between the theory and practice, not merely of the local education authorities of London, but even more fundamentally, of the democracy of a whole society.

The object of education is order. Order is conceived and striven for in very different ways. There are two different main lines of approach. Order may be sought, as an already received truth or system, to be imposed upon a situation to the exclusion of all its irrelevant or inadmissible details: this is the object of the rigid school—the rigid teacher—the rigid child. (Vid. Penelope Leach, "The Rigid Child" in *ANARCHY* 64, June 1966.) This is the function and nature of authoritarianism. Alternatively, order may be sought as an organisation of the environment and co-ordination of one's reactions to it, which is continually changing even while using earlier observations and experiences: this is the mode of the flexible school—the flexible teacher—the flexible child. This is the function and nature of anarchism. This schematic division of attitudes does not of course—at least not usually—ever describe a real situation, which usually has a balance of the two components: as each individual is in a state of conflict and competition between the two tendencies in his attitudes. It is a question of which tendency predominates—both on a given occasion and over a longer period of time—and this will be determined by the individual's underlying world picture: whether he sees the world as, although strange and even dangerous, not actively hostile to his personal identity—or whether he sees it and himself as in a perpetual state of war in which each seeks domination and mastery, in which one must either destroy or be destroyed. It is again the adult stage of the conflict which Erikson describes as originating in childhood: the conflict between the desperate search for the false autonomy of an impossible "Independence", and the mature acceptance of the real autonomy of mutual regulation. The rigid, authoritarian school is the work camp which allows the adventure playground, if it does allow it at all, merely as a diversion or a distraction—perhaps even a useful,

recreative distraction—from the main business of school: the flexible, anarchic school is both adventure playground and work camp—but in which the economic necessity of the work camp is clearly recognised as a function of the existential reality that life and learning are in themselves an adventure.

That the child may learn that order must be continually recreated—that he may be able to find rest in the assurance that order will be recreated, and that it will be recreated not simply by the repetition of old reactions but by experimenting in freedom in himself and with others, not discarding old formulas but critically re-examining and refashioning them: this is the comprehensive education our children need. Towards the end of Risinghill's short career Michael Duane was once asked, "What are you really aiming at here?" and he replied: "To remove fear from children in schools". And on the evidence assembled in Leila Berg's book—which, although highly partisan, has not been disputed in its main showings—it seems clear that he was beginning to do it. "One thing Risinghill has done for these children, even those who have been there a short time. It has made it possible for them to think about what they are doing and what they are feeling, and what other people think and feel. This is no small piece of education. Risinghill children can express themselves." The very publicity the school received formed for the children an important part of the education they received. "If we really wanted schoolchildren to understand about history we would set them to find out the truth behind some contemporary event. I think by the time the school was closed, Risinghill children understood history more than any other children. I do not think for them history can ever be again an arbitrary string of events like a string of beads, or something inhuman and unchangeable like the seasons. They may be cynical—and some of them are—but they know that history has something to do with the planning of people, people with problems and power. That is why history is not normally taught in this way, in State schools."

In order to understand what Duane was trying to do—and the conflict which ensued between him and the authority which superficially shared his aims and intentions—it is perhaps useful to go back to consider the conflicting and divided purposes of the early reformers who first conceived the idea of "the education of the people". (Vid. the review of Harold Silver's *The Concept of Popular Education* in *ANARCHY* 73, March 1967.) The education of the people is not necessarily a democratic idea, either in concept or in execution. The great humanitarian educationalist Pestalozzi conceived of the education of the lower classes as an initiation into a fixed and inferior social role: and initiation to be achieved, without cynicism, by emphasising the parity of esteem of all social roles before God. "The child of the soil and the whole class of landless agricultural labourers must learn in their language lessons to express themselves accurately about everything that has to do with their calling. . . . But laborious toil is their lot in life, and their language lessons must not set up interests

which would undermine the bases of their happiness and well being. . . . Education should enable men to follow their particular calling with godliness and honour." At the same time, the method of the education which Pestalozzi recommended—if not so obviously the end—was in a truly revolutionary way child-centred: "Every philosophical investigator of human nature is compelled to admit that the sole aim of education is the harmonious development of faculties and dispositions which, under God's grace, make up a personality. It is not possible to think of making a human child what he ought to be by any other means than solicitude for the development in him of love and all round intellectual activity, and finally bringing the two into harmony. He is constitutionally perfectly adapted to the achievement of his lofty destiny and to the performance of his duty, because his manhood disposes him towards these high aims, coming as they do from love, based as they are on activity, and allied as they are with freedom." (J. H. Pestalozzi, *Swansong*.) And by the middle of the nineteenth century even the staid *Quarterly Review* was able to welcome without a qualm the prospect of a more enlightened lower class: "The clergy have, God be praised, preached down effectively that heresy of which I remember the prevalence, according to which even good men were induced to suppose that the all-wise God had given to men immortal minds, capable of great things, without the intention, with respect to a large portion of the human race, that it should be exercised. The ungodly selfishness is now exploded by which the upper classes of society were induced to suppose that mental pleasures were a luxury reserved for their exclusive enjoyment." (September 1846.)

It is only in our own day that we are beginning to understand that the education of the people is not necessarily the same thing as the democratic and comprehensive education of the people. I use the words "democratic" and "comprehensive" here and elsewhere in this critical and even mildly polemical way in order to suggest that there is a standard of education—democratic and comprehensive—which, although I do not expect to define completely, will I hope become progressively clearer as I suggest ways in which other theories and practice of education either approach to or are distant from it. The modern age seems to be increasingly one in which on the one hand norms of conformist behaviour become increasingly rigid and even paranoiac: and at the same time the sanctions and pressures which are devised to enforce these norms become ever more subtle, whilst on the other the attempts to escape and find ways out of this nonsolution of the human condition become ever more self-conscious, self-critical but above all hopeful as though such a determined absurdity—an innocence which is aware of its own innocence, conventional ineffectiveness—were the essential preliminary if not main element of a real solution. Do not confuse the escape of the prisoner with the flight of the deserter. The antimony of human existence speaks increasingly loud and bold: we must experiment—we must be free—or die. The story of education in America as well as in England is largely the

story of experiments and miniature survivals. The work of such men as Homer Lane (vid. *ANARCHY* 39, April 1964) and David Wills (vid. *ANARCHY* 15, May 1962) and their helpers, followers and friends, has demonstrated the creative use and exploitation of humanity in the midst of a society obsessed by the need to dispose efficiently of its waste matter: where the system has seen only unusable material to be disposed with the minimum of fuss and as far as possible out of sight (vid. for example the article on "Sink Schools" in *ANARCHY* 53, July 1965)—such men have believed in and have discovered the ineluctable value and joy of the merely human: the value and joy which simply to believe in seems to be to discover. In our own day their work is continued by men like Neill at Summerhill and by Aitkenhead at Kilquhanity: and even within the state system there have been individuals who have done something—who have tried—Alex Bloom at St. George's-in-the-East, R. F. Mackenzie at Braehead (vid. *ANARCHY* 82, December 1967), and Duane at Risinghill. "Tom Paine's Commentary" (*Antiphon* volume 1 number 3, Winter 1964-1965) sums up a way of looking at such experiments which is superficially enlightened and sympathetic: but fundamentally defeatist if not exactly contemptuous. "For those of us who have taught at Summerhill it was always apparent that the theories of A. S. Neill would never work inside the present state system, and to convince any doubters on that score, we have before us the disastrous precedent of St. George's-in-the-East, where for a brief period the LCC did permit some experiment on the lines of Summerhill to occur in a day school. . . . Duane must engage the sympathies of all of us who are genuinely interested in producing a wholesome system, but he was a bit of a donkey to expect that he could embark on the therapeutic work, in which lies his bent, within a competitive society in which educational competence is judged solely on the number of university entrants gained yearly."

To which Duane, and those who endorse his enthusiasm and energy and determination, even while retaining the right to be critical of his particular methods and of the reality or otherwise of his expectations—might reply: If not here, where? and if not now, when?

The school as an experimental and continually reorganised order of relationships is possible, even within the system which demands results in the shape of measurable academic achievement. In Holland the Children's Workshop Community at Bilthoven, which began with four small girls being taught by their father in one small room in January 1926, at least in 1954 had survived eight years of State patronage and inspection. "So you are going to Kees Boeke's?" said a friend to Wyatt Rawson when Rawson was about to visit the school and its famous headmaster on the eve of his retirement in 1954. "Do you know the sort of man he is? If you were walking with him in a desert, he'd make you see flowers growing on every side." (Rawson: *The Werkplaats Adventure*.) "The institution Kees and his wife built up together—for she was always at his side, supporting and encouraging him—demonstrated one often forgotten fact, that just as children love the direct and spontaneous, so they love order

and method; and indeed that, without the latter, spontaneity breeds only disagreement and strife, leading in the end to a rejection of freedom. Thus the problem of school life was how to preserve the spontaneity that gives rise to strong personalities without losing the order and friendly co-operation that are essential to a harmonious community. Order can be preserved, for a time at least, by the imposition or threat of force. But the fears and tensions due to such methods put an end to all naturalness and spontaneity. Some way must therefore be discovered of securing order with as little compulsion as possible, so that children may grow naturally, without their character being warped by fears or frustrations." The Werkplaats deliberately thrusts upon children the experience of freedom: it is strange that such a way of describing what is done at the school should seem appropriate—the growing experience of freedom, of the need himself to organise and be responsible for his relations with the world, is what every child naturally meets: until the school begins to manipulate, dilute and specialise that experience—and to cheat him into being an accomplice of his own enslavement under various pleas which however amount to only one: the dangerousness of freedom—i.e. the unmanageability of that which makes him distinctively human. There is distinctly something of the attitude of Froebel: the idea that the education we give our children is largely a matter, not of giving things to them, but of removing obstacles to their pursuit and attainment of their own goals: in Boeke's understanding of his own work. When Rawson asked him whether he thought the spirit of the Werkplaats would be diminished or altered when he retired Kees replied: "The spirit is not something in me. I am just like a catalyst, taking no part in the process but helping to make the right development possible. It is only that I try not to meddle with the children, not to hinder what is in them from growing. The spirit is not in any one kind of person: it is in all sorts of persons. And the spirit is contagious. We drink it in from wherever it is by direct assimilation, just as the plant draws water from wherever it finds it, not from any particular place. I remember, for instance, one child who was not long with us and died young. There was something in her that was beyond our limited life. She did not talk and yet her influence was felt by us all. It inspired a kind of reverence—a reverence that is in so many children already, so that they lead a pure, natural, and truly human life with all its spontaneous reactions. I would rather not call this spirit a divine spark; it is the real self that is in each of us, not in a single person or a special leader, but in every human being. Once it is not held back by moralising, once it is freed from false constraints, it will grow. There is no fear of that." At the centre of the Werkplaats' practice of collective and individual responsibility is the Bespreking (Talkover), a weekly forum at which all the members of the school—teachers and all pupils, both senior and junior—can discuss their particular grievances and problems as well as the general affairs of the school. According to Rawson, the only sanction against misbehaviour is the

expression of disapproval of the community: and that this leads to the development of a healthy and mature sense of mutual responsibility between individuals and the school as a whole: all offices in the school are held in rotation. "For the great majority this background of a friendly group is a form of security. They are safeguarded against their own evil impulses, and, having the moral support of their school fellows, find they are able to live on a level they never thought possible. So strong is the moral pressure, however—and it must be strong if order is to be maintained—that there are from time to time children who feel it as oppressive and rebel. They would like to be in an ordinary school again, and be naughty and get punished for it. One or two have left because they didn't feel capable of the moral strength required. They wanted more external compulsion and fewer calls upon their own moral effort. But the vast majority of children are only too grateful to be helped to deal with their own moral difficulties, and to live in an atmosphere that supports their better inclinations. There seems to be at least the normal number of children with mental disturbances that really need psychological treatment, but they are carried along by the stream of the school's traditions and do not prevent its methods from achieving success. Indeed, its freedom very often enables them to work out their repressions and regain a normal balance after a term or two."

Freedom works. The Werkplaats demonstrates that children will accept responsibility for their own actions—do not need others to take on the responsibility and thus the ordering of their actions for them—do not need a precast order and community but will naturally in an environment of trust fashion their own. In such an environment co-operation and mutual aid are the natural growth of the child's understanding. Rawson says: "Self-centredness is eschewed, and instead of the stress being put, as in so many Kindergarten, on the child becoming independent as quickly as possible, it is laid on learning to help one another and getting the job done. This social training leads on naturally to the co-operative attitude so apparent in the Junior and Senior Schools." The sadness of it is that the descriptions Rawson gives of the practice of freedom and mutual aid, must strike the sophisticated understanding of even the most sensitive of us as descriptions of something which sounds slightly artificial—perhaps indeed, what is more unforgivable, as just a little ridiculous.

The story of Risinghill illustrates the awkwardness and unfamiliarity of our society's experience of freedom. "We are so flooded these days by the elaborate formulations of experts that we have lost sight of the underlying simplicity of things, such as, for instance, that school is not *primarily* the relation of teachers and students, but of adults and children, and of course children and children." (George Dennison, "The First Street School". In ANARCHY 73, March 1967.) But of course it is not only confusing conceptual formulations which obscure the simplicity of things, but the institutional superstructure

which has been imposed upon it: thus the teacher is not merely an individual human being speaking to others—both he and his pupils are conditioned to think of teaching and learning not as experiences which are part of and reach out to a whole social relationship, but as the rigidly separated functions of individuals who have been authorised to participate in them, either as victims or as executioners. Teachers no less than others suffer from the neurosis of institutionalised man. They believe—and the institution which maintains them encourages them to believe—in the perfectly rational action of an unshakeable and immovable equilibrium: they are mesmerised by the golden mirage of a synthesis of thought and feeling moving with the smooth efficiency of a computer (never mind that computers are always breaking down: the ideal computer never would: and so the ideal man would never break down or be at a loss for a thought, a word, a deed . . .). In his dream world the good, responsible teacher is an heroic explorer making a perilous journey into hostile territory (not simply an unknown country, as the Newsom report recommends). “Almost every educational dictum,” wrote Duane in his review of John Holt’s *How Children Fail* (*Peace News*, July 30th, 1965), “is gently but ruthlessly exposed for what it is—a formula devised to make mass-teaching more tolerable for harassed teachers—by his simply recounting exactly what happened between child and teacher in a variety of typical classroom situations. . . .” And of such teachers who are in love with the myth of their own objectivity and unselfishness he writes bitterly: “They see no connection between their prevailing anxieties about work, health, and career, or their obsessive concern with ‘control’, ‘conformity’ and ‘neatness’, and their widespread failure to achieve satisfying and lasting sex lives.”

Whether enthusiastic or dissenting, the criticism of Leila Berg’s book and of Duane seems to have agreed—without quite appreciating the irony of the contrast—that Duane was excellent at the job of teaching and interesting young children and adolescents, but not so good or even thoroughly incompetent as a schoolmaster. . . . “He was a progressive in certain directions, but streamed his schools, and had prize days and prefects, conventionally enough. It appears to have been his amused, informal and compassionate enjoyment of children, his rejection of corporal punishment, and his frankness, that enabled him to take to Risinghill a remarkable record both of praise and dispraise. One cannot be sure—and with such a work of partisanship one has to say this—if he had less useful qualities, since Miss Berg paints him heroically throughout.” (Edward Blishen in *The Listener*, April 25th, 1968.) But perhaps even “less useful qualities”—like intolerance, rudeness or even just simple plain refusal to accept and “understand”—may be of fundamental value when dealing with areas of behaviour heavily entrenched behind an army of received and protected prejudice. Duane was “an anti-authoritarian”, Blishen continues, “who understood that many children in districts such as Islington rejected ‘the standards accepted as fundamental by most teachers with middle-class or artisan backgrounds’, and that much of

their behaviour was an attack on those standards and a defence of others ‘set by those most dear to them, their parents’. The words are Michael Duane’s own; they come from a memorandum distributed to his staff, and they suggest, with much else Miss Berg quotes, that he brought an unusual and coherent imagination to the task of schooling in such a district. He acted, as Risinghill’s head, boldly on the basis of his beliefs; he abandoned corporal punishment and drew in the parents, countering their fear of formality by making himself cheerfully accessible. He was certain that if there was ‘no anger, no contempt, no moral pressure’, then the school would move away—however difficult this might prove—from its old burden of hatreds, resentments, violent reluctance to be involved in the educational process. But many of his staff were against him. They were lost without their normal authoritarian resources. . . . From my own experience of teaching in the district, I am certain that nothing can be faulted in what she says about the predicament of the children and the desperate need that they be taught by people who delight in them and are on their side. Her analysis of the deep cancer of authoritarianism with the teaching profession is utterly accurate. It was time indeed that someone drew attention as passionately as this to the limits on educational experiment that may be set by authorities fearful of scandal. The case against corporal punishment could not be better put. . . .”

The argument against Duane seems to have mixed up two levels of a feeling of repugnance, if not of active resentment, what may be called, distinguishing rather crudely, the personal and the more general level. The two arguments which are apt to get confused are—that he was uncompromising to the point of stupidity in his attitude towards the system, and—that he was rude and intolerant so much as to be irritatingly self-righteous in his relations with individuals. But is it possible to be too uncompromising—possible that, as Keith Pople seems to be arguing in his oddly sententious review of *Risinghill* in *Peace News* (17th May, 1968), Duane was “too steadfast—almost to the point of fanaticism”: but what are the criteria of fanaticism (his fanaticism is my firmness, so to speak), and is it a bad thing anyway, or is it just disturbing—and surely what we need is the sort of disturbance which Duane and Risinghill created: not a “chaos” which had not been there before, but the exposure of a chaos which has become the unconfessed normality of our social and not least of our educational life. . . . As Arthur Uloth comments (*FREEDOM*, July 27th, 1968): “It has become fashionable now to blame Duane for being intolerant of his reactionary staff, but this is equivalent to asking a man to be a saint. Where ideas about what life means are in total opposition all that can be managed is agreement to differ, and this is impossible where the people involved are engaged in a joint enterprise, which requires the utmost co-operation. The only solution is separation.” Revolution and its reconciling of men to one another and to themselves only becomes possible when the disguised conflict in this way—by separation, by taking up distinct positions—is brought out

into the open. Distinct positions are not opposed positions—not at least positions opposed in such a way that only the total destruction of one can solve the conflict: however radical the differences are between authoritarians and libertarians, revolutionaries and conservatives (and Paul Goodman has pointed out that in one very important way the revolutionary is the true conservative who wants to conserve, use and maintain, light and laughter and green grass . . .), they are at last only differences of interpretation of a common human need—the need to be at one, at home, in the world.

Was Duane saint-like?—or have things got so bad that it is possible to be as offensive as the most unperturbed saint merely by trying to do one's best and by expecting others to try as well? From what Keith Pople says about Michael Duane's "folly" it would appear that it is. "What in the name of Humanity does Mr. Duane—and Leila Berg who writes about these things—expect the reaction of a teacher to be when 'shown up to be a liar' in front of children? I know of few mature personalities outside the world of education, who can stand up to this sort of thing. To do this to almost any person is tantamount to driving him mad. . . . Carried to extremes, 'contempt for the System' can be made an excuse for anything and everything—for we all live within some sort of System and every System has its faults. This is the irony of actuality: that people who want to transform almost any System (but especially in education) rather than withdraw from it or destroy it, must operate practically and live humanely within it. What we have to do when difficulties arise is *not* crucify each other for the sake of some principle or other but act *intelligently*." But perhaps it may be acting intelligently to act stupidly and inconsiderately: to take people at their word: to show them up publicly as liars and hypocrites (publicly, for a lie is not simply an insult in a relationship between two human beings, but a sin against the goodwill which is necessary to society as a whole): for how else are the liars to learn the obnoxiousness of their lying and their obligation to tell the truth? Not to attempt to conceal from an individual your knowledge that he is a liar—not to attempt to conceal it either from the people with whom he or she associates—is to treat that individual as someone whose lack of honesty both should and can be reformed: but to make allowances for his or her not being a mature personality who can stand up to this sort of thing—well this is part of the mess we are in already.

The problem of our schools is that to the teacher ordinariness has become an embarrassing unfamiliarity: and that further (what is perhaps part of the same syndrome of the disintegration of our concept of our humanity) saintliness is equally embarrassing, a superfluous and irrelevant gesture. But saintliness—as any orthodox theologian or common sense revolutionary knows—is neither irrelevant nor superfluous, but the natural and necessary development of our ordinary humanity. Saintliness in teaching perhaps more than in almost any other occupation is the standard of ordinary humane behaviour which must be striven for: to try to achieve it and to fail, is more

useful and enlightening both to the teacher and to his pupils and to whatever larger public happens to notice, than any miserable substitute of expert technique helped out by the artificial limb of the "special responsibility allowance" which—as Duane himself recently argued in *The Times Educational Supplement* ("Good Relationships", July 19th, 1968)—encourages an evasion of the total reality of teaching, producing "an inevitable erosion of the feeling of all pervasive responsibility towards the child". The trouble with the controversy that has surrounded Duane and Risinghill, particularly since the publication of Leila Berg's book—is that it has tended to ignore the most important fact which is that Michael Duane was merely trying to do his job: indignation at his outrageous subversive literalness and obstinacy has been matched by a tendency to make of it a heroic and inimitable superpower: and one myth has fed the other. What we must try and see in Duane is not a saviour whom we have lost: as Brecht said, "no man is indispensable, and if he is he's up to no good"—our society suffers from the myth of the indispensable individual as much as from that of the useless one: but a man who was self-consciously and deliberately not a teacher, much less a Head, a man helping children to develop their powers to the best of his ability and as far as—and if possible further than—the total social environment allowed. To think of him as a hero in the traditional sense: Brecht again—"Unhappy the land that has no heroes"—"Unhappy the land that needs a hero!": is as stultifying as to think of him as the villain who is rocking the boat of social adjustment and compromise. What we can do—and what his failure as much as his success can help us to do perhaps more than any other single public experience Britain has had for many years—is to see and learn from his actions and reactions: perhaps we might even call them his good and bad vibrations: where we as a society are falling down and what we must do to set ourselves right.

"The Headmaster", ran a highly confidential report upon a visit to Risinghill early in 1962 by twenty of Her Majesty's Inspectors, "has pursued a policy eschewing corporal punishment. . . . [He] esteems cordiality among the major virtues. . . . His approach to staff and pupils is informal. . . . It is difficult to say that he carries the aura of the Headmaster around with him and though he inspires some liking, he fails to inculcate respect. Indeed, he may well regard this respect as basically unnecessary in human relations. . . . The children do not hold authority in any awe. . . . There is an atmosphere of indiscipline which is difficult to describe. . . . Its effect in the Art Department is almost catastrophic. As far as can be seen it appears that only some of the children work at all and then for only some of the time. The loss of productive hours of work because the children are so uninterested and to put it simply, quite unruly, is enormous. Added to this is of course the frustration of the teaching staff who have so much to give, and also the tiredness of the staff which is very evident. . . . There have been too many signs of strain among staff, among good staff, too great a feeling that there is neither unity of

purpose nor strength of leadership. Even in the matter of discipline, on which the Headmaster holds lofty and inflexible views, there is no uniformity from house to house. The only thing of which children can be sure is that punishment will normally be benign and the staff hesitate to take upon themselves responsibilities which properly lie elsewhere. It may well be that friendliness too frequently degenerates into undignified informality; the regular clutter of children outside the Headmaster's door is perhaps not the symbol of comradeship but the revelation of confusion. . . . In spite of the heroic efforts of some senior staff, the school's personality remains amorphous, fugitive and ambiguous." When we have the full text of this document (I have quoted extracts from among the longer but still incomplete text which Leila Berg prints) we will have an extraordinary self-revelation of the fearful unimaginativeness and incompetence of the authoritarian mentality: Duane's crime was not that he created chaos but that he made no effort to suppress it—he was a man who, perhaps not always successfully but at least honestly, started "from the ground up" with the individual children as they actually were in that time and place: and in so doing he "disorganized everything". . . . "The school had children of nineteen nationalities, more than most of the children, or even some of the teachers, had realized existed. Since the school had many Greek, Turkish and African children, Mr. Duane took on Greek, Turkish and African teachers. Having teachers of their own nationality, speaking their own language, meant that the non-English children knew they were granted as much respect as the English children. Their teachers were their prestige symbols. Messages were sent to their parents in their own language, and they too could be drawn into the life of the school; now they no longer need face the conflict of feeling the school as an enemy who drew their children away from them and yet an enemy to whom they had to submit both for their children's sake and their own. It meant that the particular extra problems of these children could be explained and understood. It meant that these children if they got into trouble could be helped to give a statement in court and would therefore have some possibility of justice. It meant that ideas and conventions could be examined, re-examined, compared, and pondered over. It meant many more things; but these few are enough to show that the authoritarian idea of conforming never builds on the possibilities within a situation, does not even solve the problems of a situation, but merely gets by, by pretending no problems are there. This is why the authoritarians said—which puzzled me when I first heard it—'Mr. Duane disorganizes everything'."

All men are aware of the depth of the unknown which is in themselves—in their fellow men—and in the world in which they live: but for some this experience remains fixed in fear, whilst in others by some mysterious alchemy this fear has become transmuted into wonder: they do not endeavour to build an existence upon a miserable pretence of its completeness and compact invulnerable boundaries—they accept the boundless ocean and ride out onto it, not with their eyes closed,

nor unprepared, but knowing that whatever knowledge they may have, whatever techniques of management they may learn, are but as tangents which describe the area of their insatiable ignorance. Of course these two distinct forms of experience are not divided between two distinct groups of men, but are varying quantities and conflicting tendencies in every human experience: perhaps indeed there can be no wonder without an element of fear, nor any fear which is without the touch of wonder: it is again a question of the balance of things and of the prevailing tendency: it is a question of whether we really believe in the rightness of wonder, or are obsessed by the inevitability of fear. *Risinghill* should help us to see where we stand. Leila Berg has made it clear where she stands: she believes in the natural order of symmetry, balance and harmony which Duane was seeking to discover and recreate in the shattered or at least disordered lives of his kids (and the inspectors were worried that the personality of the *school* was "amorphous, fugitive and ambiguous"!)—not in the conventional order of his situation and profession which he was expected to maintain. The best case for such maintenance of order that I have seen was made by Terence Constable, once head of the French department at *Risinghill*, in his article "The *Risinghill* Myth" (*New Society*, 13th June, 1968). "In rejecting the concept of external authority and by alienating many of his teachers in other ways, Duane, I consider, deprived himself of most of the normal mechanisms of communication and control." (A similar but less unselfish and thus perhaps more truthful objection was made by another ex-*Risinghill* teacher, Patricia Tuckman, in a letter to *The Times Educational Supplement*: "Had one-tenth of the time and energy spent to gain the co-operation and understanding of the staff and welding them together, so very much more could have been done."—May 17th, 1968.) "A headmaster of a state school is not captain of his ship to the extent that he can pick and choose his entire crew. He must make do, like every other state head [and surely also, like every captain of every ship that has ever been], with a cross-section of ordinary people, the old with the young, the narrow-minded with the broad-minded, the altruistic with the selfish, the clever with the semi-competent. The essence of his job is to weld these people into a cohesive group dedicated to common purposes. If he fails in this, then he surely fails in everything. . . . In dealing with individual children he certainly possessed unusual insight. In this, as in other respects, he was not unlike Homer Lane, the non-authoritarian educator active in the early years of this century. But Duane was not chosen as a clinical psychologist or as an assistant probation officer: he was appointed the professional and administrative head of a school of some 1,400 places.

"Although an instinct for handling children is a necessary qualification for a headmaster, it is far from being a sufficient one. Of equal importance are a capacity to get the best out of such teachers as he can recruit, and an ability to represent effectively the interests and needs of his school to the local authority." Constable goes on to question whether even Duane's handling of children was as much

beyond criticism as Leila Berg suggests. "Duane's humanitarian concern for the minority distracted him from the rest of the school. Some of his children had terrible lives, it is true. But, rough-and-ready as life might be at the back of King's Cross, not all the children suffered the acute emotional and social deprivation which Mrs. Berg's book suggests. Many of the children in the school became more and more distracted, and then bored, as a result of the unproductive turmoil which prevailed in many classes." Duane went too far "in allowing children to feel that there was no place for authority at all. Without it, how could the gulf between two generations, between two classes, between half a dozen ethnic groups, ever be bridged? Certainly not by simply allowing children to do the things they *want* to do, for this would be to ignore how very transient these desires are, how they differ from child to child, and how they are influenced by powerful forces outside the school and the home. Authority does not exist to subjugate children but to give them a provisional means through people they have the chance to love or admire, of discovering the enjoyment and intrinsic value of learning. On my experience at Risinghill—except for a minority of children and teachers, and this in limited situations—no such means existed: the peer group reigned supreme." The charge of total abandonment of authority is followed up by citing particular examples of the chaos that ensued. "The intensity of the disorder reached a peak when, at about 2 p.m. on 15th January, 1965, many children were to attempt a mass 'break-out'. Duane ran white-faced from exit to exit, then tried to calm them by appeals over the public address system (Mrs. Berg's 'mind-spattering' tool of authoritarian power). This subsided; but little over a week later, the school was again at fever pitch, in spite of the brave efforts of the exhausted young senior mistress to maintain some framework of order. In the room next to mine, children set fire to heaps of litter which filled the desks in the presence of a terrified supply teacher who found himself powerless to stop them." But perhaps this is an acceptable price to pay for what Duane was trying to achieve: was it perhaps even a necessary and healthy stage through which the emergent democracy of the school must pass? "Duane tried to adopt similar techniques in his school to those Lane used in his 'Little Republic'. The aim of these was to achieve self-reliance and social responsibility, mainly through tactfully engineered peer-group processes and by demonstrating that self-reliance and consideration for others paid off in terms of personal happiness and social cordiality. Duane was also much impressed by the analysis of social character made by Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd*. At Risinghill, Duane tried to avoid, for his children, the latent danger of isolation in adult life induced by competitive striving. This he abhorred equally with the hollow pseudo-cohesion of 'togetherness' and unthinking conformity." This is an honest tribute; but, "Duane, in my belief, overlooked the technical difficulties in his way. I think he not only underestimated the tremendous power of the peer group, but also effectively disregarded the close bond between schooling and the world of work." Earlier in his article he has discounted the evidence of

Risinghill's improved academic results (the number taking GCE "O" levels rose from 18 in 1960 to 80 in 1964, and the number passing—in from one to six subjects—from five to forty-two): the reason was "not any novelty in teaching or organisation but the extremely generous staff-to-pupil ratio among children already well enough supported by their parents to be able to stop on beyond the legal minimum leaving age"; and now he argues that even this development was peripheral to the real history of the school—a breakdown of academic standards and incentives: "neither Duane nor his staff could urge children to work or to behave tolerably with the promise (or threat) of examinations and what they might lead to. The organisational 'tension' which external examinations provide was almost totally lacking in his school. Before hastening to assert that this might be a good thing, one would do well to consider the price paid by its young people in terms of social and occupational non-advancement. Although utilitarian education (for white collar or for blue overall) might not be the most desirable feature of the secondary curriculum, when a single school drops out it makes the gesture at the expense of its pupils. In this respect the children of Islington were the 'waste clay' of the experiment."

Some form of authority, discipline and order must be provided by the adult world for the child, who needs a usable environment to grow up into—an environment that he can rely upon. But the authority which does not subjugate the child (cf. Erich Fromm's distinction between "overt authority and anonymous authority" in his preface to A. S. Neill's *Summerhill*, and Dachine Rainer's comments upon it in ANARCHY 15, May 1962; also Jeremy Westall's "Reflections on Authority" in ANARCHY 21, November 1962) must be functional and not institutional: it must grow out of the perception of what is immediately required by the situation—it will naturally be assumed usually by the more experienced and the adult, but the more it is in virtue of a demonstrable superior knowledge rather than of any official institution the more helpful the child will find it: authority, the authority which reassures and encourages, resides not in the individual but in the action. Is this the kind of authority we want and are working for? If we are, what Duane was trying to do at Risinghill is a step forward and our task must not be to retreat from it but to go on and beyond it: Duane's "anarchism" abandoned the old system of authority based upon fear, and surely Terence Constable and Duane's other liberal critics would not want to return to that even if the first consequences of abandonment of such shoddy authority must unhappily result in "liberties" being taken by those who have never known any other. (cf. the description of the working of the Werkplaats principle, quoted above.) We know now too well the cost exacted by the old authority of fear, the observations of such as John Holt and Michael Duane in our own day have made more irrefutable the arguments of earlier reformers like Lane and Neill: surely it cannot be maintained that the cost in emotional inhibition is to be balanced against "the price paid in terms of social and occupational non-advancement" by those who have been deprived (!—Constable does not use this term, but he implies it) of the tradi-

tional motives of fear and failure. If academic success, and the social and occupational advancement that go with it, cannot find other motives to inspire children to seek it then surely it is time to re-examine the value—and the price—of these things. “Examinations,” said Duane himself on the school’s prizegiving day in 1962, “are necessary in a highly technical society like ours, but to measure a school by exam results is like estimating the quality of a man’s life by the number of calories he burns, or the number of footpounds of energy he expends. They bear no relation to the real purposes of living. Real life is bound up with other people, with personal relations, with love and man’s need to serve.” It is surely good that we have learnt and that our children should learn the use of intellectual and of mechanical tools: but are we so poor in spirit that we can only conceive of “social and occupational advancement” (for one person to advance it is necessary that someone else be left behind) as motives for such proficiency: what is at last the use of such tools where there is no simple joy in the use of them: if we have been educated to the slavery of position and status, is that any reason why we should resign our children to the same slavery? Examinations are necessary: in order that those who need to may test, and those who want to may prove, particular specialist abilities; but if we are to be a living and active democratic society, the obligation is equally upon the society to discover the particular ability of every man as it is upon the individual to demonstrate that ability. An elitist, hierarchical society may be able to afford to believe that not all men have value; but a democracy and a democrat must believe that, however unequal men may be in important ways, there is in every man a capacity to organise for himself an individually and socially meaningful and harmonious existence. A democracy is a statement of faith and an expression of determination: of faith in this universal capacity and of determination to find it: and it is above all in its schools, in the way it educates its children, that a society which pretends to be democratic demonstrates the truth or falsity of that pretence.

“Just occasionally something happens which pierces the fog of generalisation, and shows what’s really going on in our schools. Risinghill was one of those happenings, and Leila Berg, telling its story, has written a book which anyone who wants to understand the educational debate in this country should read.” (Virginia Makins in the *Observer*, April 28th, 1968.) “. . . The Risinghill battle stood out as a rallying cry: were comprehensives about a new deal for children, dismantling repressive forms of teacher authority in class, bringing a new sense of democracy and fulfilment to the most deprived as well as to the sons of Ministers in Holland Park, or was it just an administrative juggle?” (Richard Bourne in the *Guardian*, April 25th, 1968.) “Western civilisation,” wrote Robin Pedley in his contribution to a collection of essays published in 1955, “has pinned its faith to ‘democracy’: more exactly, to government by representatives elected by and from the whole adult community. Most of us are well aware of the deficiencies of this system—of the frequently poor calibre of the men and women so chosen, and the superficial ideas which often sway the vote of

electors. Are we then—with most head teachers today—fearfully to renounce this system within our own school community [he is writing with reference to the idea of school councils], to say that children, too, will be improperly swayed by popularity (a libel on those I have taught), or will be simply ‘too inexperienced’? And to save them (and ourselves) from unwise decisions, are we to fall back on government by staff oligarchy, or even our own benevolent despotisms? Or should we take the view that part of our job is to prepare children to become responsible citizens in a democratic community, and give them the opportunity to learn by personal experience the pitfalls and paths of democratic government?” At Risinghill, says Leila Berg, we looked at ourselves and saw that our democracy was a fraud. “One day, at a [School] Council meeting, the head boy said that some members of the staff were not turning up for their playground duty, as arranged, and the prefects were having to do it for them, in addition to their own. Mr. Duane stopped him from mentioning the actual names of the teachers, by promising to deal with it. Immediately after the meeting closed, a deputation from the staff arrived to say they strongly objected to being discussed and criticized. Mr. Duane pointed out that no names had been mentioned, but this did not mollify them; ‘the staff’, in the abstract, had been criticized. They went to Inspector Macgowan, and he made it one of the items in his report (which County Hall was later to describe as ‘the blackest report they had even seen’). Later on in 1965, the same destruction of democracy was to happen on a larger scale. The School Council affair was the pupils’ first introduction to a democracy that offers rights as long as the rights aren’t used.” And at the end: “All the deputations to the government of both children and parents, all the clauses of the Education Act hopefully intoned, all the meetings and the letters and the signatures collected in the pouring rain had been just something that filled in the time, while authority got on with what it intended to do in the first place. A headmaster at another school had said to a Risinghill mother, ‘You surely don’t think these deputations will get you anywhere? The decision has already been taken. This three months for the appeal to be considered, these kind invitations to state your case, that’s just papering over the cracks in the walls of democracy.’ No one had wanted to listen to him. Of course he was right.”

One man can do so much and no more. When society itself is mainly given over to “happy mutual robbery” (as Marat calls it in Peter Weiss’ play), it cannot be expected that the schools will be secure havens of democratic practice: when push and pull are the order of the day almost everywhere the young and thoughtless will hardly react with immediate understanding to a real attempt at democratic mutuality. At its worst the simplicity of a Duane who takes democracy as an actually working proposition (and that he was not as naive as all that would seem to be clear from the speech he made at the 1963 prize-giving, quoted by Leila Berg on page 148 of her book: but he may have thought it good tactics to behave as though he did) terrifies the teachers and sends wild with uncomprehending delight the children

who have lived with and kept their distance from each other by an entirely different set of rules hitherto. But real democracy: a real attempt to take it seriously and make it work: is bound to be an exhilarating and somewhat frightening experience at first: but to temper and channel that exuberance—to exorcise that fear—what is needed is not less but more democracy. Duane's reintroduction of basic simplicity into the scene of our public education was like a douche of cold water in the face of the English public. We can find his rudeness and his folly repugnant: at the same time there was perhaps a trace of honest artifice in the simplicity with which he accepted the logical conclusions of the LCC's statements on comprehensive schooling and of his staff's decision to abandon corporal punishment ("If the children don't know that you've decided to abolish it," he said, "then the threat of it remains—and so it is still there"): but we cannot evade the choice. It is indeed hardly a moral choice we have to make: rather is it an existential imperative we must obey or die—not tomorrow, when the bomb falls, but today when we diminish our common humanity by discriminating degrees of social usefulness. A man lives in an expanding or a contracting universe: he cannot stand still: his world and his society is moving outwards, to adapt to, to utilise and to enjoy, all men—or it is closing upon the dead centre of his fear. That is the meaning of Risinghill.

## Experiment at Kingsway

CHARLIE GILLET

MICHAEL DUANE THOUGHT that a solution to some of Risinghill's problems might have been found if there'd been "special teachers *within the school*, taking groups of children who need therapeutic treatment *within the school*, and nursing them back to the normal teaching situation". (Quoted by Leila Berg, with her italics, in *Risinghill: Death of a Comprehensive School*.)

The disarmingly simple statement includes a number of explosive concepts, any one of which is likely to arouse opposition from one or more bodies of opinion; collected together, they represent such a challenge to the present situation that it takes considerable strategic planning to establish such a course. Among the questions which will be asked are: what is a "special teacher", and how is he trained, qualified, and identified; what, in this context, is "therapeutic treatment", and who are the students who "need" it; what kind of teaching is implied by "nursing"; and what "normal teaching situation" is it that the students are to be fitted into?

At Kingsway College For Further Education, in the building vacated when Starcross School moved into the Risinghill premises, a

course has been running for some time which shares some of the characteristics of that envisaged by Michael Duane. The difficulties encountered in planning and running the course might be similar to those which would be faced by anyone trying to run such a course within a school. But there are very important differences in formal structure and informal atmosphere which distinguish the college from a school, and which might be sufficient to enable the course to work in the college in ways which it would not have worked in a school.

The fact that a college for further education is connected to the adult world, of work, is important to the formation of its character. Discipline tends to be less ritual, more practical than that in schools. The Education Authority stipulates "no smoking in classrooms", but apart from that, most of the formal and informal rules and customs of the college arise out of specific situations. People wear what they want to, smoke between classes, and eat informally in canteens where they play transistor radios.

To some extent this atmosphere attracts teachers who don't want to be in relatively rigidly-structured schools, so that some of the classes reflect the open character of the college. These non-authoritarian teachers allow their opinions to be challenged, their information to be queried; they encourage discussion, expect to be asked questions, welcome informality.

Not all of the teachers, or even most of them, are necessarily of this kind. But the non-authoritarian teachers do constitute a significant and articulate body of opinion in the college, and make it possible for the college to offer a special course for students who have found school difficult, inadequate, or intolerable. For four years, such a course has been developing; originally, it offered to take for one term three girls whose youth employment officers had been unable to find work for them. Now, more than forty students are enrolled on the course, for as many as three years.

In providing the course, the administrators have to bear in mind four distinct sources of possible opposition: the employers of the part-time day students, who have particular expectations of what happens in the college; parents of other full-time students, and of the part-time students, who similarly have preconceptions of the environment of the college; the other full-time and part-time students; and the teachers in the college.

Courses which all of these groups can recognise as being directly oriented to getting students through exams are relatively easy to justify and establish. Any course which does not have an examination tagged to the end of it requires an explanation. The more remote the connection between the course and exam success, the greater will be the criticism of it.

Kingsway College has a well-established tradition and reputation for its non-examination courses, which include various kinds of Social Studies and English Studies, Speech and Drama, and Film Studies. Because of these and other supplements to the exam classes, it was possible for the special full-time course to be started without any extra

classes provided for it. Supported by weekly tutorials with a special tutor, the students enrolled in the regular classes.

But once the course became known to various welfare agencies, an increasingly varied group of students joined it, recommended by probation officers, child care officers, youth employment officers, former teachers, etc. And as the range of temperaments and academic ability increased, the students found it harder to discover suitable courses within the existing timetable. As a result, sympathetic teachers created a special sub-section of the timetable, co-ordinated by the special course tutors, offering Psychology, Film Making, Design, Urban Studies, non-exam Biology, etc. (This curriculum has been described in *Education*, June 7, 1968.)

The special courses are designed to interest, involve, and educate the students, who are encouraged to suggest areas of interest which they would be interested in knowing more about, discussing, and finding ways to change. Various experimental teaching techniques are used, including team teaching, the use of film and tape recorders as means of expression and description by the students, and an emphasis on regularly meeting professional experts whose work relates to the field of inquiry. The overall aim of these courses is to investigate the social/economic/personal causes behind various phenomena, and to develop ways of expressing opinions, feelings, and factual discoveries about them. If possible, ways of changing undesired situations are enquired into, and even put into effect.

Many of these aims can be seen as part of the whole course's function in the lives of the students, and the role of the special courses is supported by three other main elements of the course; these are (i) the classes which the students attend in company with the part-time students, where the full-time students encounter people with different experiences of life and attitudes towards it; (ii) the weekly tutorials, which enable each student to establish a relatively stable relationship with an adult, through discussion of personal matters, college work, and cultural, political, sporting events, etc.; and (iii) the group of 40 full-time students, which provides the environment within which several students are able to make more permanent relationships than they had previously had the opportunity to do.

Each of these elements of the course produce the basis for the arguments of people who feel critical of it. The special courses are questioned on the grounds that the students become too familiar with each other, and insufficiently aware of other people in the college. Ideally, this would be avoided by having part-time students in the special classes; a school could do this more easily than the college can. The special classes meet two or three times during the week; the part-time students come only one day per week, and so could only attend part of a course.

The intimate relationships within various small groups of full-time students are seen to contrast with the relative unfamiliarity of the part-time students with each other. But, although this has been raised as a general "problem", it probably only arises because almost half of

the full-time students are immigrants, mainly from the West Indies and Africa. Some of these students formed groups with various distinctive cultural characteristics: a small group laughs easily and loudly, wears colourful clothes, and likes blue-beat music. This all contrasts with the more reserved taste of British girls and is thus conspicuous. Many of the staff and students who have no direct connection with the full-time course have identified it as being predominantly immigrant—and noisy. This misapprehension is easily corrected, and at the end of the term was, in a special staff meeting to discuss the course. But that such feelings arise points to the necessity of frequent contact between those involved in the course, and those on the edge of it and outside it.

The tutorial element of the course arouses proper critical attention from other teachers. A one-to-one staff-student ratio obviously enlarges the classes of other teachers, if the overall ratio granted to the establishment is to be maintained. There are strong arguments to support the creation of a separate status for a special tutorial course if it is to function within a school or college.

But apart from the "diplomatic" problems which arise out of the various special functions of the course, there are others which derive from the students themselves. For most of the time, most of the students behave in much the same way as any of the other students in the college. A number become important leaders of college life, feeling an identification with the institution which the part-time students, with more sporadic attendance, don't so easily feel.

But still, the full-time students are on the course because they didn't easily adjust to school life. Although very few of them are evidently "maladjusted" or seriously disturbed, many of them respond more sensitively to situations of stress than most people do. Conflicts about race or status, rivalries for boy-friends, etc., are perhaps more likely to develop into passionate argument or physical violence than they would in other situations. Students might run away from home, or from their hostel; they might steal (or, equally likely, get arrested on a dubious or unbased charge); they might not come to college on time, or refuse to go to a class. The behaviour is always similar to that expected of adolescents, and in that sense unremarkable and unimportant. But the course teachers have, perhaps foolishly, accepted responsibility for the behaviour of the students in their course. If a part-time student steals, the college principal apologises to the person who suffered loss, and does his best to discover the thief and take appropriate action. But if a student on the full-time course steals something (or is in the vicinity when something is lost, and thereby comes under suspicion), the principal can be (and has been) accused of exposing "innocent" students to the undesirable influence of the full-time students.

It would be interesting to know what Michael Duane envisaged by a special therapeutic course. It is quite possible that he was thinking of different students from those enrolled on the Kingsway course. But at Kingsway "therapy" is not a feature; the teachers have no psychiatric

training, and do not consider their job as "nursing". The students who have disliked school tend to find college a more sympathetic environment; the creation of a special course within that environment seems to meet many of their needs. We have preferred to develop an educational method to meet their interests, rather than to concentrate on their "problems". This has maintained continuity between the students enrolled on the course, and the other students in the college, and has led to a situation where some of the special courses are sought by the other students. In some ways this has justified the creation of a special course; because it is "special", it is allowed to be different. Educational innovations are tolerated or encouraged because there are no accepted criteria for providing courses for this kind of student. Thus the kind of teachers needed for the course are people interested in educational experiment, who relate to adolescents, and who have specialist skills which can be of use to the students. But these teachers would be disastrously undermined if their students were to leave their classes and go into others where "discipline" was enforced with corporal punishment or a corporal manner. A special course cannot expect, and should not try, to function independently of the environment in which it is physically and socially situated. This is what makes a college for further education so suitable.

## A visit to to Kilquhanity House School

MICHAEL BARTHOLOMEW

KILQUHANITY CONFORMS VERY CLOSELY to the popular idea of what progressive schools look like. The "kids" wear a "uniform" of jeans, pullovers and long hair; girls are, to strangers, and at a distance indistinguishable from boys and all have (including staff, but excluding John A.) a slightly scruffy, lived-in look. (I use the term "kids" because everybody at Kilquhanity—children and adults—uses the term and because "children" or "pupils" would seem out of place.) The school is housed in a mostly Georgian farmhouse and its outbuildings, and is situated in a most beautiful spot overlooking the River Urr. The school has no notice-board at its entrance but its existence is proclaimed by a twenty-foot-high log fort visible from the road.

An extremely frank and friendly atmosphere prevails, and my visit was acknowledged by the kids insofar as they had a genuine interest in me. One or two asked me what I was doing, but most just accepted me as a temporary member of the community who was as useful as

most at lighting fires and more useful than most at teaching the guitar.

Mr. Aitkenhead, or John A. as he is known, is an M.A. with two degrees; one in English and one in Education—he says that his education degree was useless "nothing practical in it". He wears the kilt all the time, is most energetic, and has been running his school for twenty-eight years. The school was started with the enthusiastic support of A. S. Neill and owes much to Summerhill.

I arrived at 8 a.m. on a January morning and after a brief introduction to John A. was free to ramble about the school at will. Community is a better word than school, since Kilquhanity goes deeper and wider into the existence of its members than ordinary schools.

I breakfasted with the kids, who took no notice of me, and after a brief chat with John A. was seconded to fire-lighting with 12-year-old Heather. Each morning, between 8.30 and 9.30, all the school, staff and kids, is engaged on the self-explanatory "useful work"—sweeping, washing, mending, etc. Apart from the Cook, there is no domestic staff. Heather took me to the junior common room where she was having difficulty with the stove. The junior common room is a log cabin in the trees near the house and was built by the kids and a teacher who had had experience of cabin-building in Russia. It is a fine affair, not skimped, with windows, properly pitched roof and pot-bellied stove. An enormous amount of gear at Kilquhanity is built by the staff and kids and is of a surprisingly high standard. The design too, is often remarkably original and effective.

The fire-lighting took longer than expected due to damp kindling. Damp kindling was a common complaint that morning, and several kids said they would bring up the whole subject of kindling at the weekly council meeting.

At about 9.30, I went to John A.'s class. This corresponded more or less with top junior—lower secondary age and was made up of 7 or 8 boys. (There were at the time no girls of this age at Kilquhanity.) There was an industrious but quiet atmosphere in the room, which was much more like a workshop than a classroom. There were a lot of books around the room, not organised in any way and definitely regarded as "tools". A specimen shelf contained musty copies of Milton's prose works, maps, a new paperback of *King Lear*, *Huckleberry Finn* and a book on archaeology. The centre of the room was given over to a line of trestles for canoe making. Apart from the canoe-making rig and the books there was an attractive accumulation of bits and pieces including two old typewriters.

Each kid was working on something different. One lad was working on the weekly news-sheet and another was ambitiously hammering out his autobiography on a typewriter; chapter one, "I can remember when I was about six we lived in Camberley". Another was writing poetry. He showed me a book of poems he had written; strange, mannered anti-bomb stuff; not really very good. One obviously very backward boy was cutting up an old calendar and pasting it into a scrapbook to make a picture story of a trip down the Bath Road. There were two older boys in the class; one a disabled armless boy

who was reading, and a sixteen-year-old boy who was doing a précis as part of a crash programme of study for Scottish A level English Literature. (Scottish A level is different from England's.) Two American boys were tanning squirrel skins.

John A. was walking about encouraging, suggesting and occasionally telling someone to mind his own business and get on with his own work. John A. told me that the kids who were making the canoe got all the maths they needed from the plans. "This is their maths textbook," he said, holding up a book on canoe building. One lad was writing up a visit to a local slaughterhouse where he had gone to enquire about buying a hide to cover a drum he planned to make.

There was a break at 11 o'clock for coffee and toast, and lessons resumed at 11.30. Some of the boys didn't bother to go for coffee but kept on with their work. After break, two boys who had been on an archaeological expedition on their bikes returned with their findings. One is writing a history of the river valley and showed me the first couple of chapters; beautifully and methodically set out and very thorough.

After lunch, eaten in the staff room, I joined a working party of four 13-14-year-old boys who were clearing a hedge so that the local farmer could plough closer to the edge of his field. They worked fairly hard but were not wildly enthusiastic about the job. I talked to them about the school. Two were enthusiastic, one quietly so and one vociferously so, and one was critical. All three thought that the weekly council meeting was very valuable. One thought that "You learn more at an ordinary school".

Tea was at 4.15, eaten with the kids and the weekly council meeting followed soon after. As the council meeting is the centre of the school's existence I shall set out more or less all that was said.

The meeting was held in the dining-room and the whole school, 40 kids and about 6 staff, attended. The kids were aged between 8 and 17. The chairman was Phil, 17, and the secretary was Lois, John's daughter, 17. The meeting was conducted with more competence and more enthusiasm than most meetings I've attended, and a determination to both get to the bottom of things and see fair-play was very real.

After apologies for absence—none—the meeting moved on to "breakages". The chairman keeps the meeting going smartly without overriding opinions. Breakages were: (1) A saw blade, broken in hedge-cutting. As this was an accident, no fine is imposed; someone says that the blade has already been replaced. (2) A plate—again no fine. (3) A broom. It turned out that this was broken as a result of horse-play on the middle landing involving a boy, two girls and a water-pistol. The matter was quickly debated and at John A.'s suggestion, a fine of 3d. apiece was imposed. I thought that perhaps John A.'s word was taken as final, but was later proved wrong.

In one corner of the room the kid who went to the slaughterhouse is burnishing a cow's horn he brought back from his visit, and in the middle of the floor the two-year-old daughter of one of the house-

mothers is playing.

The meeting moves on to "useful work". Nothing to report.

Next—the junior common room report. (1) A cracked beam is reported; John A. takes responsibility for repairing it. (2) A kid reports that a chair was left near to the fire and caught fire. The two kids who had taken it outside and thrown it into the pond (where it still lay) are rewarded with spontaneous applause.

Next—bedtimes. John A.'s word is here taken as final; bedtimes are laid down as a fundamental rule—but no one really disagrees.

Next—fighting, nobody.

Next—pinching. A kid, Jem, has lost a pound and is convinced that it has been pinched. This is not certain—he may have just lost it. John A. suggests a whip round to replace it. A fine point of order is raised here by one kid. "If we give Jem a whip-round we'll have to do the same for every kid who loses money." But one kid sticks out for the idea of each kid giving sixpence. A young kid objects: "Sixpence may be all right for you, but we (the juniors) only get one-and-six and sixpence is a lot." A compromise is reached. Jem is awarded ten shillings out of the fines fund but no precedent is set.

Next, Bill, one of the teachers, objects to his class being used as a common room.

Next, Jeremy complains about the loss of a pamphlet about the Houses of Parliament. Someone pipes up, "Who'd pinch that? No one but Jeremy's interested in politics."

Next, kindling. The lad who is in charge of chopping kindling wood complains that when it is left by the fire to dry for the morning, kids burn it at night to save themselves the bother of going to fetch coal. This incident is typical of the school: dry kindling is burnt, next morning's is damp, the fire won't light, and the common rooms are cold—a case of taking the consequences.

The baby girl runs about, screaming but nobody takes any notice.

Next, smoking. David was found smoking in the junior common room. He is not an outsider. (Outsiders are kids old and responsible enough to sleep in dormitories in the outhouses and insiders are the youngsters who sleep in the main building.) Outsiders are not allowed to smoke. Furthermore, David was smoking amongst younger kids which is again breaking the rules. Some of the younger kids were also smoking.

David looks pale and worried as deliberations continue. He is automatically fined two weeks' pocket money. Someone (Jeremy) says, "David is already a smoker, fining him isn't going to make any difference." Remarkably sane this. There is a proposal from Paul, a teacher, that David has the automatic fine of two weeks' pocket money imposed on him, but that the juniors should be just warned as it's the first week of term.

A kid says that the youngsters ought to be fined as well; "They know the rule". This proposal is carried; David, two weeks' fine, the juniors one week's.

John A. tries to find out how much money David has but he won't

tell. John claims the right to know and says that he will write to David's parents and find out. David capitulates and tells John and John advises him to bank it in the school bank.

David is one of the lads who went on the archaeological expedition in the morning. John later tells me that the boy has a background of emotional disturbance. He is much improved but is still anti-social at times. His treatment at the hands of the meeting is absolutely fair and almost impersonal, or perhaps "super-personal", since the meeting considered David's personal difficulties. However, I later found out that David tried to get hold of the minute-book and tear out the page referring to his smoking.

Next a lad proposes that the meeting should fine himself three weeks' pocket money as he saw the smokers and didn't report them. This proposal is dismissed with humour but without surprise.

Incidentally, there is a dilemma among the staff about smoking. Both staff and kids realise that if the staff and the older kids smoke they can't rightly forbid the youngsters to smoke. Yet they all realise that the young kids will harm their health if they smoke.

Next, a lad wants to know if he can use his air-gun at school. John A. says that a previous air-gunner broke the regulations imposed on him and that regulations were very difficult to frame. Morag (John's wife) says that air-guns are altogether dangerous and shouldn't be authorised. One lad proposes that if the kid is allowed to use it, he should be forbidden to fire at live animals. The meeting is divided half and half on this point.

John saves time by suggesting that if the lad writes out his own regulations, he would discuss them with him and present the result to next week's meeting. Passed. Immediately, two other kids want to bring their air-guns.

Next. Paul (teacher) complains that dirty plates are being left about by kids cooking their own food. At this point there is a fine, spirited exchange between a 14-year-old boy and John A. Both are convinced that they are right but the boy does not give way. My neighbour, a lad of 13 who has had his hand up for some time trying to attract the chairman's attention says "Oh, for fuck's sake." Nobody takes any notice.

Next, menus. Satisfactory and are to stay as they are.

Lastly, Johnny, an 11-year-old American, who expresses himself more effectively than any junior child I have ever heard says he wants to be taken off bell-ringing, a job which involves going round at key times like a town crier. Someone else volunteers and jobs are changed over.

The meeting breaks up at 6.15 after 1½ hours.

The council meeting illustrates several important points. First, children are both capable of, and keen on organising their own existence. They need adults in their meetings and accept adult wisdom and experience, but they neither need nor want adult authority exercised over them. There are certain, almost inflexible rules laid down by John A., but these affect only health and general physical well-being.

Bedtimes, smoking, guns are all instances of the curtailment of the child's freedom, but none of these subjects, nor any other, is taboo at the meeting and I do not think that any child feels that he is being forced to do something with which he disagrees, or is in fact being silently directed by a subtle and external authority—unless you call the very existence of the school a subtle and external authority—which of course it is.

Secondly, the council meeting demonstrates the kids' tolerance and sense of fair play. Tolerance depends not on age and authority, but merely on membership of the school. Older children respect younger children and small kids respect adults all in the same way. Also, a kid like David the smoker, who is suffering from some emotional upset finds a special, unsolicited understanding from the rest of the kids.

None of the meeting's judgements was either harsh or arbitrary, and occasionally they showed an understanding that would have done credit to a magistrate. Jeremy's understanding of the futility of pointlessly repeating a punishment is an example of this—and Jeremy himself was wildly neurotic.

Lastly, the council is a very real exercise in democracy and taking the consequences of one's own actions. In these respects it is worth fifty discussions in the formal atmosphere of the classroom about subjects which either have no bearing on the child's life or matters where the decision of the meeting will have no effect.

No kid at Kilquhanity can nurse grievances. Anything at all can be raised and be sure of getting a fair hearing.

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Next morning, I went with the useful work party who are responsible for the farm. The school has two cows, three calves, two sows and their litters and assorted chickens. A young member of the staff supervises the farm work and he has three kids to help him. (Incidentally, he is an ex-bank clerk who picked up farming as he went along.) The team was mucking out, feeding and milking in what seemed an efficient and workmanlike fashion. The farm just about breaks even and is operated mainly for its benefit in giving children experience, but not in any "careers" sense.

I spent a morning touring the three classes. The first corresponds with top infants/lower junior, the second (John A.'s class, described above), top junior/lower secondary, and the top class, 13 or 14 years onwards.

There were about seven or eight kids in the lower class which was housed in a small room equipped with antiquated Dickensian desks. The class teacher was a woman—the only woman on the permanent teaching staff. All the kids were writing, most of them about winter sports. This class showed much less imagination than some good state schools of equivalent age-range. Housed in the same block as the bottom class is the art-room and the pottery, both well used, with murals and paintings all over the place.

The top class was studying for Scottish GCE O-level Modern Studies which is similar to our Economics/British Constitution. Paul,

a London University graduate in physics and economics, was teaching four or five older kids.

One kid was working on his own, using a physics text-book and lenses. The class was keen and was obviously up with the syllabus. It is a principle of the school that examinations are ignored until about two terms beforehand, and then a crash programme of selected learning usually gets the kids through. Kids don't do exam courses unless they want to, so the initial resistance to learning is non-existent.

Academic studies at the school are very casually and unmethodically pursued. The scheme wouldn't stand up to a very critical analysis by a Diene's apparatus enthusiast, or a programmed learning expert, but it seems to work. All the kids can, and what is perhaps more important, do read; their self-expression is excellent, their ingenuity and independence fine, and they are happy. I talked to two girls who were leaving that summer, one of them John A.'s daughter. Both hoped to do something creative (although they didn't put it like that); one wanted to go to drama school and one didn't know, but was keen on pottery and drawing. Both were pleased with the education they had received at Kilquhanity and both exhibited what seemed to be the most outstanding characteristics of Kilquhanity kids—an enthusiasm for life, complete naturalness and great charm.

John A.'s daughter spent all but one year of her education at Kilquhanity. The odd year was spent at Monkton Wyld school. She didn't like it, saying that it wasn't as happy a place as Kilquhanity. She said that at the Monkton Wyld council meeting young kids were expected to give up their seats to older kids and all the staff sat in a row. She said, "Don't you think that's peculiar—expecting young kids to be more considerate than older ones?" This instances the maturity of thought among the older ones at Kilquhanity.

In the afternoon I went to a woodwork class. Here again I saw a typical Kilquhanity situation. A kid aged about eleven was making a chess-board. He had marked out the squares on the plywood and John A. suggested a beading round the edge. Together they worked out how much wood was needed—this is how children pick up maths at Kilquhanity. The kid then went off with his friend up to the village to buy the wood. I found out later that this kid had come to Kilquhanity as a backward boy who had been overshadowed by a younger but brighter brother at their local school. Both brothers finally came to Kilquhanity, but both co-exist quite happily, with Johnny, the backward one, making up leeway apace.

Other kids were making model boats—a perennially popular topic—and another was carving a bowl from wood (walnut) cut from Kilquhanity's own ground.

Outside, a group of seniors was driving an old van about at break-neck speed with one lad hanging on to the back.

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At 6.15 there was a special council meeting. This was called following the theft of a stop watch from one of the kids. Although I thought this meeting valuable, it got into deep water and was obviously

seriously considered by the staff, and the older kids. Without going into details, the situation was that the meeting was convinced that two of the boys were responsible for the theft, possibly for a joke. As one kid whispered to me, "It's an open and shut case". Now the two suspects stoutly maintained their innocence and the meeting could not reach a conclusion. Someone suggested that all the kids who had access to the watch should contribute towards a new watch. (I should have mentioned that John was unanimously elected chairman of the meeting.) This suggestion, the contributions, brought a passionate outburst from an eleven-year-old New York kid—"I wouldn't pinch my best friend's watch, for Chrissake!" This was extremely effective, and obviously true, and the suggestion was dropped.

The meeting adjourned inconclusively. The possible harmful effect of the meeting was that two possibly innocent boys were suspected of a crime of which nobody could prove their guilt. This is of course bad, but is it worse than the often arbitrary and unjust punishments dished out in most conventional schools from time to time? On the credit side is the openness of the whole proceedings and the intimacy of the relationship between kid and kid—it wasn't as if the accusers were remote from the accused. Anyway, the matter was soon forgotten and no grudges seemed to be borne. Significantly enough, the principle of theft was more important to all concerned than the expensive watch—in fact, the kid who lost the watch didn't say much and didn't seem too concerned.

The weekend was even more casual than the weekday with meals arranged to fit in with various expeditions. John A. is firmly convinced that kids do not need, and should not have, very much pocket money, and to this end he limits junior kids to one-and-six a week and seniors to two-and-six, with a supplementary fund for special purposes. He feels that his school should stand against the affluent society and reaffirm the value of personal resourcefulness and ingenuity. "It's easy to go out and buy an electric drill," he says, "but the kids appreciate what they have made much more if they have used rudimentary tools." This theory looks absurd if pushed to its logical conclusion, and the school evidences many inconsistencies, like John's enthusiasm for replacing rasps and planes with Surforms in the workshop, but he makes a good point, and his ideals are reflected in the often brilliant ingenuity seen about the place, whether it is an ambitious project by the seniors or the cunning shown by a newly-arrived junior in lighting fires. John took me to a nearby loch to show me his pride and joy, a dugout, outrigger canoe, built entirely by the kids.

The school spends a lot of its time camping by the loch, and John took me to their favourite camp-site. Last summer, when the kids were working on the dugout they made their home here, constructing shelters out of dry-stone foundations and bracken roofs. The dugout is a triumph of ingenuity and perseverance. It started life as a pine tree at Kilquhanity. The kids and an enthusiastic teacher (the idea came, I believe from the teacher), cut it down and hollowed it out—a job of immense labour—and then lashed an outrigger to it. The boat is faith-

ful to its type, using no glue or screws—just poles and lashing. The boat was carted down to the loch some six or seven miles away and camp was set up for its trials. As a keen dinghy sailor I know that the problems involved in making and sailing a boat of this type are formidable—rather like building a bicycle, right from scratch which performs safely and efficiently without handlebars. After much trial and error, the boat was made to sail adequately and seems to me a measure of the capabilities of kids given the environment of a place like Kilquhanity. It took immense physical labour initially and great tenacity when the scheme looked like failing. The scheme scotches any notion that free kids haven't any staying power, and who would doubt the educational value of learning geography, history, woodwork, sailing theory and plain hard graft all at first-hand? Many would, of course, as schemes like this cut right across conventional timetables. You can't expect to drag a kid away from his canoe, give him a week's unrelated timetabling and expect him to go back to it next week with the same enthusiasm. It requires an absolute faith in the value of kids' self-determination.

When I stood with John on a knoll overlooking the ruined camp-site and the still and perfect loch, he said that what kids got from situations like this couldn't be written down properly. It wasn't in or from books, it had nothing directly to do with learning to earn a living; it was perhaps more "learning just to live". He said, "It does their souls good." Finally, Kilquhanity is beyond theories. "Freedom" as defined at Kilquhanity is as limited as anywhere else, but John A. has taken Herbert Read's definition of education, "the generation of happiness", and has built a community producing happy people.

As I left, at about 7 p.m., the farm team were in the byre doing the evening milking, and as I walked past the junior common room in the log-cabin, smoke was billowing from the windows and the kids were shouting instructions and counter-instructions to each other as they tried to cope with a blocked-up chimney.

## Max Stirner on education

S. E. PARKER

"The False Principle of Our Education, or Humanism and Realism" by Max Stirner. Translated from the German by Robert H. Beebe. Edited and introduced by James J. Martin. Published by Ralph Myers, P.O. Box 1533, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80901, USA. 1967. 60 cents.

MOST PEOPLE WHO HAVE HEARD OF Max Stirner know only two things about him: that he wrote *The Ego and His Own* and that Karl Marx attempted to refute his ideas in an essay included in *The German*

*Ideology* that must be the most tedious and unreadable piece of prose ever written. But Stirner's major work did not come from nowhere. He prepared the way for it with a number of seminal essays, among which was *The False Principle of Our Education*—described by John Henry Mackay, his biographer, as "the most valuable and significant of Stirner's shorter works". *The False Principle of Our Education* was originally published in 1842. The present edition is its first appearance in the English language. In it one can detect hints of that magnificent outburst of a unique ego, *The Ego and His Own*, although its style is more formal and academic than the latter, which was published two and a half years later.

In 1842 a bitter controversy was raging in German educational circles. On one side were the champions of "humanism", who emphasized the need for continuing the traditional and exclusive education of the classical style, and whose aim was the cultivation of an aristocratic taste. On the other side were the champions of "realism" who emphasized the need for a new, practical education, open to all, and whose aim was preparation for everyday living. Although he tended to favour the "realists", Stirner asked them, as he did their rivals, do you want us to become *creators*, or merely *creatures*? He concludes that neither humanists nor realists wanted to treat their pupils as anything but creatures. But self-revelation, which is what genuine education is about, means "the liberation from all that is alien, the uttermost abstraction or release from all authority". If such men were to exist, he said, they would exist "in spite of school":

"... in the pedagogical as in certain other spheres freedom is not allowed to erupt, the power of the *opposition* is not allowed to put a word in edgewise: they want *submissiveness*. Only a formal and material training is being aimed at and only scholars come out of the menageries of the humanists, only 'useful citizens' out of those of the realists, both of whom are indeed nothing but *subservient* people."

Stirner would like to see an education which favours the development of individual will, which rejects the formal externalisms of both humanists and realists. Knowledge should not be something that exists outside the pupil:

"a knowledge which only burdens me as a belonging and a possession, instead of having gone along with me completely so that the free-moving ego, not encumbered by any dragging possession, passes through the world with a fresh spirit, such a knowledge then, which has not become *personal*, furnishes a poor preparation for life."

Knowledge, to be real, must be experiential, because

"as scholarly and profound or as wide and as comprehensive as it may be, (it) remains indeed only a possession and a belonging so long as it has not vanished into the invisible point of the ego, from there to break forth all-powerfully as will."

The theme of the conflict of egos as a source of creativity and of individual growth, which is developed in detail in *The Ego and His Own*, is touched on here in relation to the child. Stirner sees the child as neither an angel nor a devil and while he refuses to be

an authority over the child, he resolutely opposes letting the child dominate the adult:

“Childlike obstinacy and intractability have as much right as childlike curiosity. The latter is being stimulated; so one should also call forth the natural strength of the will, *opposition*. If a child does not learn self-awareness, then he plainly does not learn that which is most important. They do not suppress his pride or his frankness. If pride turns into spite, then the child approaches me with violence. I do not have to endure this since I am just as free as the child. Must I however defend myself against him by using the convenient rampart of authority? No, I oppose him with the strength of my own freedom: thus the spite of the child will break itself up. Whoever is a complete person does not need—to be an authority.”

Here Stirner tackles a problem that still troubles educational “progressives” today. The biological dependence of the child on the adult prevents the practice of complete “freedom” in education. Whatever theories may be propounded, in practice the “freedom” offered is a varying amount of permissiveness, with adults having the final say in important matters.

And it is difficult, from an anarchist point of view, to see how it could be any different. A “freedom” that is given or permitted is no real freedom at all since it can be withdrawn when the giver sees fit. The only freedoms that are worth having are those that the individual takes for himself and his ability to do this depends upon his power to take and to keep. The child, therefore, is in no position to compete with adults on these terms and, while he is often competent to achieve much, cannot hope to win freedom for himself until he has the power (the “adulthood”) to do so.

But because the adult has to use his will against that of the child and usually wins because of his greater strength, at the same time he does not need, as Stirner says, to pose as a sacrosanct authority. This opposition and conflict of wills can be as much a part of the child’s development of self-awareness as can be love and care. The view that the child is an innocent perverted by wicked adults is no more than an inversion of the view that he is an evil being to be kept in check by moralizing and punishment. Indeed, the child may be just as browbeaten by the sweetness and light of those who are *always* “on his side” as he is by cruelty and discipline.

Dr. James J. Martin, author of *Men Against The State*, contributes an excellent introduction to this edition of Stirner’s essay. He relates Stirner’s ideas to the contemporary educational scene and concludes:

“The war of wills between the individual and the collectivity will undoubtedly go on as long as the race of man persists, and the schoolroom will continue to be one of its ubiquitous battle grounds. As the school training machinery of the State grows ever more pervasive and inescapable, and no less so even in most of the privately organized institutions, it may be that, for some time to come, such as one may number among Stirner’s ‘free men’ are most likely to come into existence and endure in an autodidact underground.”

## Kilquhanity House School

It’s not a matter of giving the children total freedom to do as they like. We do have some compulsory lesson time—from 9.30 to 11 and from 1.30 to 3—but they are given a great deal of freedom, even within that time, to do what they like doing. One boy may be reading a favourite author, another writing an article for our weekly magazine, the *Broadsheet*, another may be outside measuring or observing something, all according to their own pace and abilities. But it’s not total freedom. I always talk to them of freedom in this way: “A man may be free to jump in the water or not to jump in the water. But if he jumps he’s not free to remain dry.” Here they can do French or not, but if they choose French they must abide by the requirements of the teacher and the subject. They say “free as a bird in the air”, but a bird obeys the rules of aerodynamics.

Between 11.30 and dinner-time each day they have a free choice. It can be drama or science. Some might be on “maintenance”, working with men draining the meadow or repairing the fencing. Every morning after breakfast we have “useful work”—the kids help with milking the cows, feeding the pigs and chickens, the household chores, sweeping the dorms, making the breakfast, preparing the vegetables for the mid-day and evening meals. It’s all organised at the school council, which everybody in the school attends once a week, from the teachers to the eight-year-olds. A senior boy or girl takes the chair and all the decisions are reached by democratic vote. They make a lot of the rules and decide on punishments, usually fines or taking away privileges: never a caning, never in your life. It’s like a primitive tribe: they see justice done, everyone can have a say—this is valuable. But think of the civics in this practical government. Real feelings enter into this, real lives are being affected, it’s a thousand times better than mock debates. They learn patience and tolerance and charity. It’s the same with the games. All ages together, boys and girls playing rounders on half a football field. I suppose most schools wouldn’t call it games at all; but the charity—letting the little ones get to first base, not getting them out too soon—this is what games should be. I suppose a small school like this, for all ages, can be called inefficient these days; but only in the narrow sense, only in subject learning. It’s not inefficient when it comes to the unmeasurable values that have been developed. Brains aren’t everything. Human qualities, like reliability, stickability, integrity—these qualities grow here simply out of living together.

We don’t get the grey-faced exam-passer, the boy who never gets jam today, always jam tomorrow, who can’t enjoy school because of what he has to do to get to university; who can’t enjoy university because of what he’ll have to do to get a job; in the job, what he’ll have to do to keep up. Sir Herbert Read said that education is the generation of happiness. That’s the really creative work, the work that must be done to enable happiness to grow and flower in a child. Your young crook, your maladjusted child, is just an unhappy person.

—John Aitkenhead