

Education and Peace: The Foundations of Modern Society

By Kurt Hahn

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On his death bed my late chief, Prince Max of Baden, wrote a letter to a leading European statesman in which he uttered a grave warning - The League of Nations was a magnificent edifice, but it would break down because it was erected on the rotten foundation of the Versailles Treaty, that is to say, on hatred and distrust. Nothing would save the League and the peace of the world but the revision of the Treaty. That was in 1929. At this perilous moment of the world's history, Western civilisation is making frantic efforts to establish the peace of nations, but the building of class peace is a task no less compelling. We follow with faith and hope those healing movements meant to help the unemployed. We look forward to an ever-improving mechanism of arbitration and conciliation in the labour disputes of the future, but what will all these plans and structures avail if they are built on the unsafe foundation of class distrust and class strangeness.

To use a simile: A gigantic dam for water works was erected in the south of Germany. The best engineers had planned and supervised the building of this dam; the structure was flawless, but it was erected on crumbling stone, and with this stone the dam gave way. Nothing but goodwill between nations and classes can save this generation from wars and revolutions. And education can help to build this bedrock of goodwill as a foundation of the society to be.

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I take liberty to mention in this context the Salem-Gordonstoun contribution. We have seventy boys in Gordonstoun, and of these, twenty percent are non-British, and among them are five different nationalities. The boy growing up in brotherhood with foreigners, cannot help but learn to care about the rights and the happiness of at least one other nation. A German boy would realise what sea power meant for your sense of security; and a British boy would taste some of the German anxiety, when the Russian bear and French cock are beginning to growl and crow in unison round our unprotected frontiers.

Patriotism does not become diluted; on the contrary, it grows up stronger and nobler by including the love of humanity. I have no respect for the tribal fervour which extols one's own virtues and blinds one to the virtues of one's neighbours. I remember one of my German professors; he was a charming Jingo. He felt disturbed by the fact that our great philosopher, Kant, had a father of Aberdeenshire origin. He said in the lecture room: "Gentlemen, the man who has given the Categorical Imperative to the world, that is the supremacy of moral duty - this man cannot possibly have had a Scottish father, at least, as I imagine Scottish people to be." Probably the only Scottish characters he knew were some wild and shaggy Shetland ponies, which were, at that time, driven about in the parks of Berlin. I have no more sympathy with that nice English boy who settled a controversy of his younger brothers about what the Lord looked like, whether he had a beard or not. He settled it by saying, "What does it matter so long as he is an Englishman?"

Such sentiments do not thrive in a community where boys of different nations share the experiences of an enthralling school life. To what extent the sense of justice can be quickened in the young I should like to illustrate by the protest of a Salem boy, which, I am afraid, was directed against me and one of my statements on international affairs. I was explaining the Versailles Treaty to a Salem class, and had related that unforgettable incident in Versailles when the outraged sense of justice of one man achieved the changing of an important article. The Saar article in its original form not only stipulated a plebiscite after 15 years and the endorsement of a favorable plebiscite by the Council of the League, but also that even then the Saar River was not to return to Germany unless Germany had previously bought back the coal mines. Then Dr. Simons, the late Lord Chief Justice of Germany, flared up, and said, "For the first time in history men are treated as chattels of coal mines." This indignant outcry was transmitted to a note, and through the note to the English delegation, who saw to it that this outrage was ejected from the Treaty.

In the next lesson I spoke of the Eastern section of the Treaty. I was justly indignant about the Corridor and the Upper Silesia settlement, but, unfortunately, tribal fervour swept me along, and I also took objection to the cession of Posen, which was inhabited by an indisputably Polish population. I objected on the strength of the fact that Berlin had lost with Posen its chief potato base. Then a boy of 15 flared up like a Lord Chief Justice, and said, "Mr Hahn, you are treating Polish men as chattels of potato fields." I am sure this healthy rebuke was only administered because there was an admixture of foreign boys exercising a salubrious influence on the spirit of equity throughout the school.

In the same way children should, during their adolescence, experience the brotherhood of classes. In Gordonstoun we are grading the fees according to the incomes of the parents. Before long we hope only to charge a nominal fee for our day boys, as we did in Salem. Distances should not deter. It takes as long to go in a motorbus from Burghead to Gordonstoun as it took me to walk in my Oxford days from my College to Worcester College, where I attended lectures.

All our boys learn a craft, not from artisans who come to us, but from artisans whom they seek out in their own workshops. They go to the boat-builder, to the smith, to the carpenter. They will go to the engineer and the sail-maker. I have the same experience as at home: your sterling artisans have a greater horror of half-finished work than the schoolmaster. Every one of our boys learns how to groom a horse; many of them learn gardening. In this way all sense the dignity of manual labour.

They try to serve this beautiful district. Our boys have built a coast-guard hut. The Board of Trade have installed a telephone and lent us a life-saving outfit. Whenever there is a summons from headquarters in Aberdeen they man the hut and watch day and night. When they come back in the morning they have an expression in their eyes such as you see in fishermen who are in the habit of looking out to the horizon.

They know they are never called out unless there is real anxiety: Life-saving requires soldierly drill, precise and brisk as any drill for martial purposes, but it is a good thought that mass discipline such as this aims at the saving, not the destruction, of lives. In the holidays the Gordonstoun duties are taken over by the Hopeman Rovers. Hopeman, indeed, has proved a good brother to us. They have lent us the beautiful voices of their boys for our Nativity Play. We hope next year to throw open our natural stadium to all the neighbourhood, so that every Morayshire boy, whether he goes to school in Gordonstoun or elsewhere, can train and be trained with us how to jump, to run, and to throw. Jumping develops decision; throwing, strength; running, the power to tap one's hidden reserves. We intend to present the Gordonstoun badge to all those who pass certain tests which are within the reach of every normal boy. We would add one condition, that during their training period, which extends over a year, they observe our rules of health. They have to take a cold shower, they have to abstain from drinking and smoking.

It is our duty to equip this growing generation, irrespective of class, with willing bodies. It is our duty also to train them in self-discipline. Freedom and discipline are not enemies, they are friends. If you throw a glance at the boys of any public or secondary school you find them up to the age of thirteen full of curiosity, courteous, animated by high and good spirits. Then they reach the awkward age. They often lose their freshness and their charm, sometimes forever. I belong to a secret society called the Anti-lout Society. The Salem system tries to preserve a child's strength intact through the difficult, the loutish years, and to hand it to the man as a life-long source of strength.

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I should like to tell you of an episode which took place a few months ago. I told a Professor of a London hospital that Ernst Hofmann, the Professor of Education in, Heidelberg, once said in a lecture, "If I travel through the length and breadth of Germany and meet young people between the ages of 15 and 20, with a radiance in their eyes

reflecting the unbroken strength of childhood, I ask them, 'Are you from Salem?' And they generally are." The London Professor looked rather incredulous. Some weeks after this a young German entered his office to apply for permission to work in this London hospital. The Professor saw a certain light in his face, and asked him, "Are you from Salem?" The answer was in the affirmative.

Morayshire is a training centre district, receiving health from the district, and one day, we hope to give it out. Jean Jaures said, "Nations are treasure-houses of humanity." I believe he is right, and I add, "Counties are treasure-houses of nations."