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Davidson's Influence on Educational Historiography

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FOR THE GROUP "firmly shaping the historical study of American education," at the turn of this century, "the seminal book, marking 'an epoch in the conception of educational history in English,' was *A History of Education* written by . . . Thomas Davidson."

Thus Bernard Bailyn in his *Education in the Forming of American Society*, an important and provocative book whose publication some six years ago caused no little fluttering in the educational dovescotes. With its general theme we are not concerned in this paper. A certain implication that history of education as a subject got off to a wrong start under the care of devoted incompetents has not gone unchallenged. (1) And some educationist has probably seized by now upon Professor Bailyn's first and subtle reference to Cubberley, "whose formative professional experience was gained as superintendent of public schools in San Francisco." (2) A Chesterton among us would point out that the actual town (San Diego) is some 500 miles to the south-east but that the State is right. He would then go on to pay tribute to Professor Bailyn for the shrewd insights into the history of American education that he acquired in studying Massachusetts shipping and New England merchants in the seventeenth century. But this is speculative and our concern is with facts.

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MONROE AND DAVIDSON

The Davidson theory that education should be considered as "the last and highest form of evolution" was the "epochal" feature of the *History of Education* published in 1900. Professor Bailyn's authority was obviously the Paul Monroe-Isaac Kandel article in the 1912 *Cyclopedia of Education*. (3) It should be noted that the complete comment includes this criticism: "But while trying to avoid the narrowness of earlier histories, Davidson's book errs somewhat in exaggerating the other side without giving a clear definition of education." This qualification betrays the careful hand of Kandel. There is conclusive evidence that Monroe accepted without reservation the main Davidson thesis and found no major flaw in the entire book. He was fairly ecstatic over it.

The most glowing notice given to the *History* was naturally the book review by Monroe. (4) Superlative was piled upon superlative. Davidson's was "the best sketch of the history of education in our language." (5) It was "so superior to all other histories of education that it could not be classed in the same group," (6) and much more to the same effect. Had he drawn upon Monroe's review, Professor Bailyn could have found at least some support for the "seminal" idea. But had he gone more deeply into available sources he would have settled for a milder term.

Let it be repeated that there can be no question about Monroe's practically venerating Davidson. In the *Text-Book in the History of Education*, one authority cited needs no identification except "Professor Davidson." Monroe defers to him in so weighty a matter as "the first actual use of the numeral seven in connection with the liberal arts." Davidson gave full credit to Rabanus Maurus in the ninth century. There were those who rather preferred Cassiodorus in the sixth. Fairly respectable cases could be made out for Alcuin and St. Augustine. But Davidson had ruled in favor of Rabanus Maurus and that apparently settled the thing for Monroe. (7)

MIXED REACTION TO DAVIDSON'S BOOK

Publication of the *History* was not widely noted in the journals of the day. One of the half-dozen reviewers who did discuss it implied that Davidson had chosen the sources that suited his case and had ignored scholars with whose writings he did not agree. (8) This anonymous

critic remarked, as Anderson (9) did, that Herbert Spencer had been dismissed in a footnote. Davidson had found nothing original in him except possibly some objectionable ethical principles.

Davidson's text was not highly rated by historians of education. Indeed, an inspection of articles and books on the history of education from shortly after the publication of his work through the 1960's indicates that his point of view had little appeal from the very first. Comment ranged from reactions in such popular periodicals as *The Independent* (10) which felt that "teachers in general [would] get more aid" from Levi Seeley's book, (11) and *The Dial*, (12) which predicted that only a "small minority of teachers [would] read it or [could] read it," (13) to severe criticisms in scholarly journals. Ernest C. Moore in a study which analyzed the state of the history of education in 1903 found that Davidson's text was weak factually and much too brief. (14) Indeed, Moore charged that it was "not a history," for history is first of all a broad statement of facts, and then an explanation of their meaning. He declared that the history of education could not "be stated briefly." (15)

Another critic, A. O. Norton, found basic weakness in the philosophical nature of Davidson's book. He said:

the subject has been given from the standpoint of the philosophy of history until the knowledge of the facts in detail has in many cases become less important than the philosophy. . . . (16)

Norton made a plea for a new conception of the field which recognized that "the history of education is genuinely and primarily history." He added that it was necessary to make constant reference to social and political history in order to obtain the true picture of the past in education. (17)

An extensive critique of the content of textbooks used in teaching educational history in 1918 pronounced the Davidson book extremely unbalanced in scope. (18) Almost one third of the content was devoted to primitive and oriental education. (19) It was difficult to justify this in the light of Davidson's statement in his preface that "to record even summarily the facts in the long history of education within the narrow limits of a textbook would have been both impossible and undesirable." (20) Even though the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons, were attempting to market the text for classroom use, it did not prove popu-

lar. (21) Although the 1912 reprint was available, the Stoutmeyer study on "Teaching of the History of Education in Normal Schools," placed the Davidson text near the bottom in the order of use. (22)

In a plea for a "better history of education," Stephen G. Rich traced the development of American texts to 1925. He chose as his samples "the better-known ones—Painter, the translation of Compayre, Monroe, Graves, Hart, and Cubberley." (23) Thirty-five years before Professor Bailyn pointed out the right approach, Rich found that there was an "increasing tendency to treat the history of education as a general history rather than as an isolated development." (24)

A critique of the history of education conducted by Philip W. Perdew (25) in 1948, examined thirty-nine articles and books to find the "values" ascribed to the study of the subject. Perdew's analysis resulted in the development of twenty-six categories of values. Under each, the educators who had mentioned that particular value were listed chronologically. (26) Davidson (1900) showed up in two categories. To him the special values of history of education were that it aided in the "development of educational and national ideals" and "enhanced the sense of dignity of the profession." In the former, he was preceded by W. T. Harris (1888), and S. S. Laurie (1900) and in the latter by W. N. Hailman (1874), and S. G. Williams (1899). (27)

In 1955 Cremin traced the development of the history of education with no mention of Davidson. (28) The 1940, 1950, and 1960 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* make no reference to him. (29) In addition, a careful examination of history of education textbooks from 1900 to the present reveals that the Davidson book appears in about half of the bibliographies and by no one except Monroe is it given special mention.

A word should be said here about Edward Eggleston's *Transit of Civilization*, which Bailyn believes should have been the "seminal" work to the educators who were writing history but who, he charges, ignored it in favor of Davidson. (30) This is a research question in itself. Cubberley's reaction to Eggleston will be mentioned in due course. A quite different one occurred in another wing of the historical household.

The eminent historian of the colonial period, Charles M. Andrews, wrote in *The Political Science Quarterly* that each chapter of Eggleston's book was made up of a "kaleidoscopic assortment of notes, lengthy,

discursive and often bewildering, treating all sorts and conditions," being little more than a series of essays. Indeed Andrews charged Eggleston with fact-collecting, lacking historical mechanics, failing to cite sources in many instances and ignoring recent scholarship. (31) A review in the *American Historical Review* was only slightly more favorable. (32)

CUBBERLEY AND DAVIDSON

It has become fashionable for those who stand upon his shoulders to look down upon E. P. Cubberley. For years we have read *ad nauseam* that he made too much of the Massachusetts laws of 1642 and 1647 and that he attributed to this or that colonial item a "public school" significance that it does not have. This dreary theme suggests a naive streak in Cubberley which should have led him to place the highest value on Davidson's elaboration of the idea that "evolution, finally attaining to consciousness, becomes education," and the corollary that "the educator's profession . . . is the highest phase of the world-process." Waiving the question of what automatic rejection of those thoughts may imply, we go straight to the record.

Cubberley was quite familiar with the Davidson book. In 1904 he listed it (33) and four others as those that would be found most useful considered as a whole, but qualified this with special commendation of James P. Munroe and R. H. Quick. "Compayre, Davidson and Kemp . . . contain chapters which are so brief and so lacking in detail as to be of little value." (34) In the "Suggestions as to Reading," found at the ends of chapters, Davidson is cited less frequently than Kemp and Compayre and nowhere is he especially recommended. A typical annotation reads, "Davidson has a brief general chapter, but lacks sufficient detail." (35)

Public Education in the United States, the Cubberley book first published in 1919, which was revised in 1934 and is currently in print, was for long years a standard text throughout the United States. Its prestige is presumptive evidence of its influence. And the fact is that it neither follows the "conscious evolution" theme nor mentions Davidson in "Selected References" or footnotes. It does recommend Eggleston's *Transit of Civilization*, pointing out that "Chapter V, on the transfer of educational traditions, is especially important." (36) Nor was that a recent discovery. In his *Syllabus*, 1904 edition, Cubberley

recommends Eggleston in connection with the topic "European Influences Acting on American Education." (37)

The Cubberley *History of Education* (1920) and the *Brief History* (1922) list Davidson among references, but accord him an asterisk, the symbol of importance, only in connection with Greek education, a tribute to his *Aristotle*, not to his *History*.

The Sears and Henderson biography is silent, significantly silent, on the question of Davidson's influence on Cubberley. The one reference to the *History* is made by Sears and there is no indication that his own judgment differed from that of his long-time colleague at Stanford. Correspondence with Sears has supported our conviction that an excerpt from the biography might just as well have come from the pen of Cubberley:

In 1900 Thomas Davidson's *History of Education* appeared. In his preface the author states that the book should have been entitled "A Brief History of Education, as Conscious Evolution"; yet it adds little to books then available in the field aside from its rather worthy attempt to recognize the concept of evolution as applying to human society as well as to the individual, and of education as a factor man might use to determine the direction evolution should take. Davidson recognized education as a social force, but the reader is kept so much in the atmosphere of speculation, metaphysics, and philosophy that he gathers little that is new about the history of schools and their management. (38)

REVIVED INTEREST IN DAVIDSON

Davidsonian literature is extensive (39) though the man himself has fallen into obscurity in recent years. Professor Bailyn has rendered notable service in helping to revive interest in him. If this is to be considered a by-product of *Education in the Forming of American Society* it is still an important one. The present writers suspect that they are only two of many whom Professor Bailyn has led to William James' absorbing "Knight-Errant of the Intellectual Life" essay on Davidson. (40)

NO COMPLACENCY EVIDENT

The sins of educational historians have been many. And with very few exceptions indeed they have written with paralyzing dullness. Professor Bailyn is hardly too severe in calling them a humorless lot. Adolphe Meyer is the rarest of rarities. On the other hand, there has been no lack

of searching self-criticism within the family. Borrowman has deplored many features of the development of history of education and most of all that "these two impulses—the professional and the scholarly—ought in theory to have complemented each other; in fact they often warred" (41)

Nash has gone on from there and freely admitted that historians of education, like historians in general, are fully subject to the danger of "monumental triviality and sublime irrelevance," (42) as well as to the temptation to "use educational history [only] as a source of inspiration and a guide to action." (43) There is, in a word, no trace of complacency over the past or the present states of history of education in the appraisals of scholars in the field. What interests us even more, in terms of the paper in hand, is that the influence of Thomas Davidson has not been acknowledged as crucial or at least detected as peripheral.

REJECTION OF "SEMINAL"

When Jowett was asked for his opinion of Gladstone's *Homer* as a scholarly work he established the all-time high in criticism. "It really says two things, neither of them new, both wrong, and mutually contradictory."

No one has suggested that anything like so sharp a judgment should be made of Professor Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society*. We do not suggest it here. The book should have a net influence for great good. Historians of education should be all the better for the Bailyn shock treatment. But they are not to be given lessons in accuracy or interpretation by some sweeping statement about a particular work being "seminal" unless that conclusion can be documented.

Notes

1. See William W. Brickman, "Revisionism and the Study of the History of Education," *History of Education Quarterly*, IV (December, 1964), 209-222. Also see Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Wonderful World of Ellwood Cubberley* (New York: Teachers College Bureau of Publications, Columbia University, 1965).
2. Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 10.
3. "History of Education," Vol. 3, p. 296.

4. In *Educational Review*, XX (December, 1900), 522-525.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 523.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 524.
7. Paul Monroe, *A Text-Book in the History of Education* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1909), p. 268.
8. Vide unsigned article in *The Athenaeum*, Dec. 22, 1900, p. 817.
9. Lewis F. Anderson, "A History of Education," *Journal of Pedagogy*, XIII (October, 1900), 154.
10. "Textbooks on History," *The Independent*, LII (August 2, 1900), 1870.
11. Levi Seeley, *History of Education* (New York: American Book Company, 1900).
12. "Briefs on New Books," *The Dial*, XXIX (September 16, 1900), 182.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Ernest C. Moore, "History of Education," *School Review*, XI (May, 1903), 357-358.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 358.
16. A. O. Norton, "Scope and Aims of the History of Education," *Educational Review*, XXVII (May, 1904), 446.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 446-447.
18. J. H. Stoutmeyer, "Teaching of the History of Education in Normal Schools," *School and Society*, VII (May 18, 1918), 577.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Thomas Davidson, *A History of Education* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), p. v.
21. Stoutmeyer, *op. cit.*, p. 576.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Stephen G. Rich, "Wanted: A Better History of Education," *Educational Administration and Supervision*, XI (April 1925), 239.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Philip W. Perdue, "History of Education and the Educational Professions," *The Educational Forum* (March 1948), pp. 311-23.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 314, 318.
28. Lawrence Cremin, "Recent Development of the History of Education as a Field of Study in the United States," *History of Education Journal*, VII (Fall 1955), pp. 1-35.
29. Edgar W. Knight, "History of Education," in Walter S. Monroe (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1940), pp. 580-84; Edgar W. Knight, "History of Education," in Walter S. Monroe (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), pp. 551-56; Merle L. Borrowman, "History of Education," in Chester W. Harris (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), pp. 661-68.
30. Bailyn, *op. cit.*

31. Charles M. Andrews, Review of Edward Eggleston, *The Transit of Civilization in Political Science Quarterly*, XVII (March 1902), 162-66.
32. See review by Barrett Wendell, *The American Historical Review*, VI (July 1901), pp. 802-5. For an elaboration of the significance of these reviews in relation to Eggleston himself see William Peirce Randel, *Edward Eggleston* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1946), pp. 225-28.
33. In his *Syllabus of Lectures on the History of Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904).
34. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 2.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
36. Ellwood P. Cubberley, *Public Education in the United States* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), p. 49.
37. Cubberley *Syllabus*, *op cit.*, pp. 342-43, 354.
38. Jesse B. Sears and Adin D. Henderson, *Cubberley of Stanford* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 108.
39. The available literature on Davidson includes: Florence Arvidson Abbot, "Thomas Davidson and His Educational Ministry" (unpublished Master's thesis, Clark University, 1948); Charles B. Lindsley, "The Educational Philosophy of Thomas Davidson" (unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1926). W. H. G. Armytage, "Thomas Davidson, Anglo-American Educator," *History of Education Journal*, II (Spring 1951), 75-79. More recently John Roemischer of Brooklyn College and Albert Lataner of New York Community College have been carrying on extensive research. See Roemischer's unpublished Doctoral dissertation, "A Synthetic Interpretation of the Technical and Educational Philosophy of Thomas Davidson, 1840-1900," New York University, 1966.
40. William James, "A Knight-Errant of the Intellectual Life," *McClure's Magazine*, XXV (May 1905), 3-11.
41. Borrowman, *op. cit.*, p. 661.
42. Paul Nash, "History of Education," *Review of Educational Research*, XXXIV (February 1964), 6.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 5.