

THE DANISH FOLK SCHOOL

To appreciate fully the value of Mrs Campbell's book,* one should have visited Denmark and made acquaintance with its urban and rural population. But even for those to whom that country is still a *terra incognita*, it is replete with informative and edifying narrative. The fact that the author comes from the new world of America with its short history and its firm outlook upon the future, gives a quality to her judgments on the life-conditions of the Danish people and their traditions that might otherwise be lacking. Mr Paul Monroe, in his excellent "Foreword," emphasizes the interest which these schools have awakened in the minds of American educationists by reason of their cultural aims and their rejection of those tendencies towards standardization which may be observed in the United States.

The avowed purpose of the book is to face the question, "How shall we keep an enlightened, progressive and contented farming population on the land?" This is indeed the crucial question which ought to lie uppermost in the thought of every statesman or patriot in every country; it is the form in which the Sphinx of Destiny presents her riddle to-day; and as of yore, the penalty with which she threatens a failure to find the answer is—destruction. It may be that the answer is not to be given in one word or formula like a Morrison's pill, but in a series of propositions—a number of things to be done, errors to be corrected, age-long habits to be changed, and a re-orientation of outlook upon the world to be effected. But it *must* be that there is a proper order in which what we may call the *clauses* of our answer should be framed, putting first things first; and it is because we know that Denmark has recognized this and is acting accordingly, that our sympathies go out to her in fullest measure.

Before conducting her readers on a series of visits to Folk Schools in different parts of the country, Mrs Campbell illumines her story with an outline of Denmark's early history from the misty ages of Odin and Thor and the romantic period of the Vikings, onwards to the close of the Napoleonic wars. Up to this point we gather that the economic condition of the peasants and rural population generally was much as in other countries, except that "Denmark never fell completely into the clutches of the feudal system, though feudalism left its traces upon her." It is just in regard to this exception that we could have welcomed some enlightenment, first, as to what led up to or conditioned that circumstance, and secondly, as to how far it goes to explain the comparative independence of the Danish peasant to-day, and the fact mentioned by the author that "Wealth is so well divided that few are very rich and almost none are really poor." As to the first question, the roots of racial mentality and the class-relationships into which primitive peoples fall, go deep into cosmic beginnings, and it may be futile to seek for their origins. But having finally evolved along lines of greater freedom in relation to the soil and natural resources (for we are told that the Nobles of Denmark were never permitted to enclose the common lands) we should like to have been shown what we believe to be true, that the upward reach of the Danish peasant towards the higher forms of educational culture followed as a natural consequence of that freedom.

It is to be feared that Mrs Campbell is imperfectly acquainted with Chapter iv of Book VII of *Progress and Poverty*, otherwise she could hardly have written: "It is impossible to trace in detail the steps by which

landownership in Denmark passed from the hands of a free and independent peasantry into that of a ruling aristocracy." As Henry George has shown, the steps have been the same in every country, and proceed from "the concentration of power in the hands of chieftains and the military class . . . the effect of conquest in reducing the conquered to predial slavery . . . and the influence of professional lawyers whose interests are served by the substitution of exclusive in place of common property in land." The point to be noted, however, with satisfaction is that towards the end of the eighteenth century there set in a slow movement towards greater freedom in the use of land, and that this seems to have been largely an expression of the collective mind of the nation.

"Fortunate it was," Mrs Campbell writes, "for the Danish farmer—twice fortunate for Denmark's future—that the nobles were never permitted to enclose the common land. The roof that sheltered the farmer, the village itself in which he dwelt, might become the property of a noble and exacting landlord, but he himself had always recourse to the common land. He was never shut out by Enclosure Acts like those in England. He was not forced by inability to support himself on his own small property, to surrender all rights to the great owner and thereby remain landless for all time." (Page 25.)

The student will note with interest the following comment on recent Danish land legislation (page 199):—

"In 1922 the Radical, Moderate Liberal, and Social Democratic parties came together and succeeded in passing a small entering wedge in the form of a law which imposed a uniform national land value tax operative in both town and country without exemption to any class of owner at the rate of one and a half kroner per thousand of capital value. On 31st March, 1926, another step was taken, this time bearing on community taxes. All Denmark was turned into a debating society over the law which, as finally passed, gives to municipal councils an opportunity to replace the old tax on land and houses as a whole with a land tax, the taxes on improvements being at the same time reduced. A greater measure of land value taxation to do away with the remaining taxes on improvements, tariffs and the earnings of industry, seems likely to follow before long."

We are not surprised, therefore, to read further on that "The Danish country people are held by many abroad to have the deepest culture of the most widely cultured nation in the world."

Taking a synoptic view of all Mrs Campbell has told us, we get the impression of a people largely endowed with that valuable quality which Professor Royce described as "loyalty to personalities," which Carlyle called "hero-worship" and Mr Middleton Murry speaks of more ponderously as "responsiveness to significant variations." The conception of the Folk School or People's College took its rise, we are told, in the mind of Nikolai Grundtvig, priest, poet, historian and reformer, who died in 1872 at the age of ninety, and whose portrait is hung in every school visited by the author. The biographical details given are deeply interesting, and convey the impression of a scholar with deep human sympathies, a mind of many facets, a character equally capable of solitary communion with the Eternal Verities, and of grappling with the hard realities of mundane life. But what most attracts a true democrat in this skilfully-drawn pen-portrait is his faith in the spontaneous tendency of all human nature towards the True, the Good and the Beautiful, under conditions of real freedom. The strange magnetism of a strong personality is shown in the number

* *The Danish Folk School*. By Olive D. Campbell (Macmillan, London and New York, price 7s. 6d. net).

and steadfastness of his disciples, and in the rapidity with which the Folk School movement has grown. The story of Kristen-Kold gives the life-history of one of the strongest of these disciples, but a complete list of them would include the Principals with their wives of all the schools that are described. Among these we gladly recognize the names of our good friends Mr Jakob Lange and Mr and Mrs Anders Vedel. Considerations of space forbid any comment upon the story of an excursion into Norway, Sweden and the Snow-country of the far North—further than to say that it is interesting and instructive historically, geographically and sociologically.

The book is enriched not only by a series of excellent photographs, but by many epigrammatic *obiter dicta* of philosophic value. For example, "The Folk School seeks to make real the spiritual significance of material things." Or again, "It sees clearly that the only safe path for any nation to internal and external peace is that which seeks the contentment, economic and spiritual, of all its people." And in telling of a young husband and his wife, struggling with the difficulties of a small farm, Mrs Campbell writes, "our appreciation of human values needed no more stimulation: the magnificent castle of Nyborg became the unreal thing, and the real things were, the dignity, the courage, and the enthusiasm born of ownership."

We just wonder here, if security and not ownership is the right term to be used. The cultivating farmer in America commenced in ownership, and as the story goes his land is rapidly leaving him. Surely the American farmer is not bereft of dignity, courage and enthusiasm and if these qualities are born of land ownership, why is it he is in such a helpless state to-day? The American farmer is so far "down and out" that President Hoover is going to his help with tens of millions of dollars. As Henry George has observed (*Progress and Poverty*, Book VIII, chapter 1):—

"It is not necessary to say to a man 'this land is yours,' in order to induce him to cultivate or improve it. It is only necessary to say to him, 'whatever your labour or capital produces on this land shall be yours.' Give a man security that he may reap, and he will sow; assure him of the possession of the house he wants to build, and he will build it. These are the natural rewards of labour. It is for the sake of reaping that men sow; it is for the sake of possessing houses that men build. The ownership of land has nothing to do with it."

"Do you suppose," the author asked Mr Lange, "that one can interest young men in small farms as long as there are great economic opportunities open to them?" "I think one can," he answered. "At least we can here, by making them feel that they are important, that their life counts in a cause" (page 212). Such fine passages could be quoted freely, and they are sufficiently numerous to make one close the book with regret.

ALEXANDER MACKENDRICK.

The text of the Bill for the Rating of Land Values in Scotland, introduced in the House of Commons on 27th November by Mr James Scott, M.P., was published on 6th December and received a wide Press notice not only in Scottish, but also in English and Welsh newspapers. The Bill is backed by Sir Robert Hamilton (Liberal), Mr Duncan Millar (Liberal), Major Mackenzie Wood (Liberal), Mr George Hardie (Labour) and Mr W. McL. Watson (Labour). The *Kincardineshire Observer* of 6th December reported fully Mr Scott's speech on the introduction of the Bill.

COL. WEDGWOOD AT BOLTON

The *Times* of 17th December reported the meeting addressed on the 16th by Rt. Hon. Josiah C. Wedgwood, M.P., in Bolton under the auspices of the Labour Party. Col. Wedgwood said that many people still believed that unemployment could be reduced, and trade improved, by spending public money on relief works; but the Labour Party realized ever more clearly that such expenditure merely changed the character of work available, and injured some as much as it benefited others. Government loans for such work had the same effect; more capital employed on roads meant less capital for industry, more expensive capital, and a higher rate of interest for the capitalist.

The growing appreciation of these truisms had led a large number of Labour and Liberal members to approach the Lord Privy Seal and to urge on him an economically sound way of dealing with the problem and of stimulating all productive work. They were to see Mr Thomas the next day. All productive work must begin by the application of labour to land; therefore if land were made cheaper, if it were made more expensive to keep land idle or underused, people would be better able to start useful work. The taxation or rating of land values would have the effect of so cheapening land. But he wished to make two points clear. Nothing of any value could be done without a valuation of land apart from the improvements now on it. Secondly, an increment tax, such as Mr Lloyd George tried in 1909, levied on subsequent increases in land value, would not make land cheaper, but rather dearer to the user.

The speech was reported at greater length in the *Bolton Evening News* and was noticed also in the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Daily Herald* and other papers. At the conclusion of the meeting a resolution was adopted declaring that land monopoly stands in the way of any solution of the problems of unemployment and housing, welcoming the promises of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to provide a tax on land values in his next budget, and urging the Government to allow local authorities to levy rates on land values, was passed unanimously. It was also resolved that copies of the resolution be sent to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the local M.P.s. Councillor J. H. Eastwood of Bolton presided and spoke on the question with great acceptance, until Col. Wedgwood arrived after having been delayed by the fog that upset train arrangements.

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Col. Wedgwood at Tonbridge on 7th December predicted that Mr Snowden would introduce in his Budget a penny in the pound tax on the market value of all land. That, he stated, would not only bring in increased revenue, but would cheapen land by putting more of it on the market. Thereby the Government would partially attain its desire to recover for the people the land which should be theirs. Colonel Wedgwood's speech was given a wide Press, reports of it appearing in nearly all the London dailies as well as in a number of provincial journals.

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