HARTVIG NISSEN'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE SCOTTISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

by LAWRENCE STEINHOUSE, Staff Tutor, Institute of Education, University of Durham

Hartvig Nissen (1815–74) is one of the central figures of Norwegian educational history, a man who was 'the focal centre of Norwegian educational politics, and who, more than any other, came to hold all the threads in his hands'. His visit to Scotland in 1852, which he reported in a substantial book, An Account of Scotland's General School System together with Proposals regarding Various Arrangements for the further Development of the Norwegian General School System, was made at the height of his powers. His biographer's tribute to the thoroughness of research, the scrupulous sifting of material and the theoretical weight which characterize this work is not misplaced. It is impressive even by modern standards.

Nissen himself perhaps needs some introduction to British readers. He was an advocate of encyclopaedism in education, in opposition to the narrow classical curriculum of the lærde skole (grammar school). The word, encyclopaedism, suggests a desire to include a little of everything in the curriculum, a desire which is easily reduced to absurdity. Nissen was a practical man, not a dreamer. Seen against the background of an almueskole (general elementary or vulgar school) which was often concerned with little more than religious knowledge, and a lærde skole which was exclusively classical, his notion of encyclopaedism implies something very close to our own conception of a broad, general education.

A measure, both of his effectiveness as a thinker and of his practical acumen, is provided by his remarkable role in the passage of the important landskole law of 1860 (law relating to schools in the country). In 1856, two years after publishing his book on Scotland, Nissen, who had left his post as consultant to the Church Department (responsible for education) and had become a private school headmaster in the capital, drew up a proposal for the reform of the landskole law. In

2 Nissen, Hartvig, Beskrivelse over Skolans Almueskoleveren tilliggende forslag till forskellige Foranstaltningar till en vidare Uudvikling af det norske Almueskolens, Christiania: Malling, 1854. Reprinted these numbers below refer to this book.
HARTVIG NISSEN'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE SCOTTISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

1857, three different proposals were brought forward by members of the Storting, all based on Nissen's draft; but the government proceeded by setting up an educational commission (1858), which produced its proposal in 1859. This proposal was also based on Nissen's but it seemed to him in some respects impracticable and, moreover, it went quite contrary to his ideas in that it secured control of the school system for the officials, the clergy and the substantial landholders, rather than for popularly elected representatives. Nissen, therefore, produced a draft bill of a hundred paragraphs in opposition to the official proposal. He secured a great personal triumph. The Storting set the commission's proposal on one side, and adopted his draft with only minor alterations.

Subsequently, Nissen was largely responsible for the secondary education act of 1869 and played a prominent part in the adult education movement.

Nissen's book about Scotland contains in its second part proposals for the reform of the Norwegian educational system. How far his Scottish experience influenced his educational ideas could only be assessed by a close study of his private and public writings before and after the Scottish visit. Nissen's Norwegian biographer, Dr. Einar Boysen, believes that it 'radicalised his whole attitude towards the school',¹ and seems inclined to see some Scottish influence behind Nissen's developing emphasis upon the social relevance of education, which was one of the growing points of what is known as the enhetskole (unity school, comprehensive school) principle.² Such an influence would be an important one, as this principle lies behind much subsequent Norwegian educational thinking and is effective in the new school law of 1959. Our concern here, however, is with Nissen's observations in Scotland.

His survey is a remarkably thorough one. After a brief historical introduction and an account of the religious situation, he describes the parish school system, paying particular attention to school management, school buildings and teachers' appointment, salaries and status. He explains the background of the different types of school, both inside and outside the orbit of the established church, and, in a substantial section extending to over fifty pages, discusses the subjects taught and the methods employed. Industrial schools, secular schools, various private charities and teacher training are treated at some length. Finally, he assesses the role of the state in educational development and sums up his impressions. In a short article it is impossible to do justice to all this material.

One of the main concerns of European educators at that time was the problem of securing attendance, and Nissen devotes a good deal of space to this. Much of it is taken up with a critical discussion of the

HARTVIG NISSEN’S IMPRESSIONS OF THE SCOTTISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

statistics available to him, which, for Scotland in particular, were very poor. However, he concluded that ‘With these two exceptions—individual neighbourhoods in the highlands and the large towns—Scotland takes a high position among the countries of Europe with respect to attendance’ (p. 172).

Another aspect of attendance which interested Nissen was the age of commencement of schooling. As a rule, children in Norway began school at seven; in Scotland, children often attended at five or earlier. Nissen felt that the earlier rather than the later start required explanation, and he attributed the Scottish practice to the limitations of voluntary schooling. ‘Experience also shows that, in those countries where compulsory attendance does not prevail, while children attend school evenly and regularly until the 11th or 12th year, a large number stop completely at that time, while even more attend less regularly from then onward and probably very few after they complete the 14th year. With this experience before their eyes, those responsible for the development of the Scottish school system endeavour to get the children to school as soon as possible. From this arises the strong tendency, noticeable in Scotland, to set up Infant Schools, which already in their brief school time, generally three hours daily, show that they have a purpose more concerned with intellectual development than our asylums (kindergartens)’ (p. 265). It should be noted, however, that David Stow made a strong plea for infant schools on grounds quite different from these. He urged the need to inculcate moral habits early if one were to succeed in counteracting the demoralization of life in the towns.

In Nissen’s time, the Norwegian elementary school was principally a religious school, often paying little or no attention to general education as we understand it. It is not surprising, therefore, that Nissen was interested in the religious situation in Scotland.

He describes the impetus given to school provision by the Secession of 1843, after which the Free Church built up its own school system alongside that of the Established Church. But, though in general its effects had been beneficial, this energetic expansion was sometimes misplaced. There was no substantial doctrinal difference between the churches, so that the children of Free Church parents often attended Established Church schools; but the aim of the Free Church to become the true popular church led it to struggle to set up schools, even where there was no lack of school places. Education had become a battle-field for the two churches, and they sought to overbid each other in the provision of educational opportunities. To this situation the intrusion of the state into education had added a new element. Both the church

1 A. Morgan attributes the Free Church’s building of an educational system partly to the need to find places for the large number of Free Church teachers expelled from the schools of the Established Church. (Makers of Scottish Education, London: Longmans, 1929, p. 187).
HARTVIO NISSEN'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE SCOTTISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Societies were very ready to take advantage of state aid, despite misgivings about state control. The great majority of the clergy and religious laity seemed to be agreed that religious education should be undertaken by the churches and should not be separated from other instruction as if it were something apart from education. ‘This point of view produces an alliance between the two church societies; it is this which makes them natural allies in the struggle against the fairly influential party which wishes to institute a national school system, extending throughout the country, on the American pattern’ (pp. 184–5). Support for such a national system came both from those who were unsympathetic towards religion in the schools and from those who thought that such a system would in the end benefit religion.

If there was rivalry in school provision, there was also rivalry in teaching methods. Nissen visited Scotland at the height of the battle between Wood’s ‘Intellectual System’ and Stow’s ‘Training System’.

These two systems he characterizes as follows:

‘The Intellectual System’s merit lies in its attempt to keep all the dispensing of instruction at the level of simple and natural principles. It does not, therefore, set any exaggerated value on any particular method or any external arrangements. It has, on the contrary, a progressive tendency, and demands application in different ways under differing circumstances. But for that very reason, it has exerted a strong influence on the methodological development of the Scottish school system, and is spreading steadily wider and wider. Where instruction is concerned, the other pedagogical system, the Training System, does not really depart in anything of importance from the Intellectual System. It is true that the Training System claims to introduce two new and essential elements, namely moral training and “picturing out in words”. But, so far as this picturing out in words is concerned, it is evidently embraced by the other system’s “development and explanation”, and, moreover, it is probable that some of the forms recommended by the Training System for this picturing out in words, e.g. the use of ellipsis, are of doubtful worth. On the other hand, what is characteristic and good in this system is, as has already been remarked, its eager desire for proper upbringing, for moral training. This desire shows itself even in its demands with respect to the range of instruction. Thus it sets up, besides religion, writing, reckoning, geography and history, linear drawing and “a little natural history and physics, additional theoretical and practical instruction in methods of cultivation as a subject of instruction for country lads in rural schools, as well as knitting and sewing for girls in both country and town. In addition, this system makes greater demands with respect to the planning of the school premises. Thus, a playground is a necessary

1 Based on: Wood, John, Account of the Edinburgh Sessional School and the other Parochial Institutions for Education established in that City in the Year 1812; with Strictures on Education in General, 3rd edition, with additions, Edinburgh: John Wardlaw, 1830. (First edition, 1828.)

adjunct to a Training school, as is a gallery (raised tiers of seats). Bodily exercise and movement is frequently demanded, and much emphasis is laid on song. The pupils are continually under the careful supervision of the teacher, who not only looks on, but also himself takes part in the children's rough and tumble and play in the playground, where he has the best opportunity to learn about the pupils' characters and propensities' (pp. 81–83).

He goes on to comment on the Training System's objection to the excessive use of rewards, and particularly to the custom of continuous competition for the position of dux boy.

Nissen was impressed by the spirit of the Training System, and thought that it had exerted 'a peculiarly significant influence on schools in general with its strong emphasis on the truth that the school ought to aim to develop the whole man, the body as well as the mind, the moral element as well as the intellectual, the propensities and habits as well as the working of the understanding, even though all the means which it proposes should be employed to the attainment of this end, have not been generally recognised and adopted' (p. 84). As we have seen, Nissen himself was rather dubious about some of its methods, especially those which could most easily develop into a lifeless formalism in the schools. He was also at pains to point out that many of the moral virtues of the Training System were to be found in practice in the Intellectual System as well, though there was some tendency for classroom behaviour in schools under the Intellectual System to be less consistently orderly than in Training System schools.

The Training System was at its strongest in meeting the problems of education in the towns. 'Certainly, it is more carefully worked out, both in theory and in practice, with special reference to the lower group of working people in the large towns, that numerous section of society which stands in every respect at a low level, and whose children very seldom absorb good influences at home . . .' (p. 84).

Nissen was shocked by the 'wildness and bestial roughness' of the children admitted to the Ragged School, and gives the following picture of their treatment there:

'The United School is opened at 8.30 a.m. The children, most of whom go barefoot in the summer, come punctually, regularly and contentedly. They have the certain prospect of breakfast, which could be problematical enough in their own homes. Breakfast does not, however, take place immediately they arrive. First, face and hands must be washed in the washroom, hair must be combed, and shoes, so far as these exist, polished. Thereafter, they get leave to run about the yard until nine o'clock. Then the clock gives the signal for breakfast, which consists of a bowl of oatmeal porridge and a cup of buttermilk. All meals take place in a large room where every child gets a seat. Everything proceeds with the utmost order and regularity. When breakfast is eaten, the boys are mustered by the principal, who gets them to perform a half military drill, which has been found peculiarly adapted to winning them to obedience, order, quickness and common action. These exercises are conducive to health, amuse the children and help to
make them happy and contented. While the boys have this drill, the girls are employed in cleaning the house and other similar jobs. At ten o'clock, instruction in religion begins and this lasts until eleven. Then the children are split into two sections. One goes to the schoolrooms, where two teachers with their pupil teachers, teach reading, writing and so forth; while the other section goes to the workrooms, where they pursue various industrial processes under the direction of skilled craftsmen. At twelve o'clock the two sections exchange employments. The hour from 1.0 p.m. to 2 p.m. is given up to play and lunch. From 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. all the children are occupied in book learning. From 4 p.m. to 5.30 p.m., they pursue industrial occupations. Thereafter, they get supper and leave the school at seven o'clock. (pp. 103-104).

Nissen thought that this treatment was effective. 'When one compares the recently admitted pupils' faces and their whole aspect with those of the pupils who have already attended the school for a fairly long time, one immediately becomes convinced of the school's moral influence on the children' (p. 108).

It is clear that Nissen was not an enemy to the Training System; and it is therefore of some interest that he found Stow's Normal Seminary in Glasgow handling much the same material in much the same way as the Intellectual System's normal school in Edinburgh. Indeed, in some respects, such as bible reading, on which the Training System prided itself, he found it, surprisingly, somewhat inferior.

In the schools at large, he observed a good deal of eclecticism and was of the opinion that most Scottish teachers went forward in a spirit of experiment and then chose the best of both systems. He was also attracted, one gathers, by the fact that the Intellectual System was rather a system derived from practice than a projection of theory. Certainly, he claimed that it was generally the more influential in the common practice of the schools, and his account of it, once he has summarized the arguments of Wood's book, is in fact his broad description of the schools of Scotland. We can select only a few points from this.

Nissen was greatly impressed by the quality of expression in reading and by the standard of mental arithmetic, and gives some examples of rapid calculation. He noticed that a battle was conducted against linguistic provincialisms and against the Gaelic intonation in the speaking of English. The inspectors were particularly keen in this direction, and sometimes complained that many of the teachers themselves offended with provincialisms.

In 1843, Horace Mann had had this comment to make on the atmosphere of Scottish schools:

'The highest tension of authority which I anywhere witnessed was in the Scotch schools. There, as a general rule, the criminal code seemed to include mistakes in recitation as well as delinquencies in conduct; and, where these were committed, nothing of the "law's delay" intervened between offence and punishment. If a spectator were not vigilant, there might be an erroneous answer by a pupil, and a retributive blow on his head by the
HARTVIG NISSEN'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE SCOTTISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

teacher's fist, so instantaneous, and so nearly simultaneous, as to elude observation. Still, the bonds of attachment between teacher and pupils seemed very strong. It was, however, a bond founded quite as much on awe as on simple affection. The general character of the nation was distinctly visible in the schools. Could the Scotch teacher add something more of gentleness to his prodigious energy and vivacity, and were the general influences which he imparts to his pupils modified in one or two particulars, he would become a model teacher for the world.1

Basing his judgement partly on a comparison of his own experience with that of Mann and partly on discussions with Scottish educators, Nissen considered that the Scottish schools were somewhat kindlier places than they had been twenty years earlier and that there had in that time been a freer life developing in them, especially with regard to methods. This progress was particularly exemplified in the teaching of geography, probably, he thought, because there was no subject easier to develop interestingly through illustrative material.

This use of illustration seems to have been one of the strongest impressions made on the visitor.

When one walks into a Scottish school, one almost always notices various large geographical maps hanging on the walls, and beside them, a lot of cardboard sheets, on which biblical matter is printed. Generally, one finds also coloured natural history diagrams accompanied by a text. These things, one can well say, give the Scottish school its physiognomy... One finds in places one, or more often, several blackboards, sometimes on easels, sometimes hanging on the walls and these “wallboards” are much used in teaching, especially in arithmetic and geography, but also in other subjects. There are also globes and different sorts of diagrams. Wall maps are new and then left without the names; these are aids for teaching general or physical and mathematical geography” (pp. 47–48).

Nissen remarks on the excellent equipment of the Heriot’s schools and in one of them he listed the work which was set up on the eight wallboards.

1st board with religious knowledge.
1 Introductory
2 Christology
3 Basic knowledge which all must know.
Each of the three divisions of this board contained the most important material with bible references.
2nd Chronology (Biblical and British)
3rd Chronology (General)
4th with physiological teaching aids. (Picture of a human skeleton and other things.)
5th Instead of the board, various weights, balances and other mechanical contrivances and small machines.
6th Large scale representations of pillars. (The Ionic, Doric and Corinthian), friezes and other architectural features.
7th Rules.

HARTVIG NISSEN'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE SCOTTISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

VIIth A whole lot of mathematical figures and also drawings illustrative
of vegetable physiology.
In addition to these inscribed blackboards, there were two others set on
the wall. There was also a simple barometer and thermometer, and good
maps on stands, together with natural history diagrams' (pp. 48-49).

There certainly seems to have been good provision of 'visual aids',
though this school was obviously exceptional in the generosity of its
equipment.

In one school, Nissen attended an examination in geography where
blank maps like those mentioned above were used.

'The pupils were split into four sections for this subject. The lowest of
these was examined by a pupil teacher of 15 or 16. The children's ages were
7 or 8 years. A large map of Scotland hung on the wall: it was without names.
The children were examined individually—not, as was often the case, all
at once—and it was thus possible to ascertain how far each individual had
learned the material. They enumerated all the various shires and counties . . . ;
they gave an account of the character of their landscapes, enumerated the
individual towns, even the smallest, for example, Portobello, Musselburgh
and so forth, and almost all the children gave correct and complete answers'
(pp. 35-36).

This was 'capes and bays' with a vengeance, but there was other
material in geography syllabuses, for the third section (twelve-year-
olds), which was studying Ireland, had to know something about the
'number of schools, what is done for the education of the generality
and the poor by different authorities, wage levels in the different parts
of Ireland and the reason for the differences' among other things.

Nissen was not only a shrewd observer. He enquired, and, as his
letters home to his wife testify, he read. There is in his book a great
deal of information about curricula, time tabling, teaching methods
and examinations in various subjects and under various conditions,
and a number of documents are reproduced in English.1 In this wealth
of material, two things, which can be closely related to Nissen's work
in Norway, seem worthy of particular mention: text-books and patriotic
education.

Nissen was interested in text-books in all subjects and at all levels,
but, like Horace Mann in his wider European observations, he was
most impressed with the amount of information about a wide range of
subjects, which was contained in the general reading books. He
mentions by name 'The Moral and Intellectual Series', four volumes

1 The following appendices to Nissen's book are printed in English: Act for making
better Provision for the Parochial Schoolmasters (1803); Regulations respecting the Education
of Pupil Teachers; Instructions to Inspectors of Schools; Examination papers for teachers
in Aberdeen, Banff and Moray for awards from Dick's Legat; Examinations in
mathematical subjects in the Free Church Seminary, Glasgow, 1852. An excerpt
from the third annual Report on William's Secular School and a Report on an
Examination in Political Economy in Mr. Williams's Secular School in Edinburgh
are translated into Norwegian.
of English origin, produced by the British and Foreign School Society, though he claims that two other collections, one published by the Scottish School-Book Association and the other by the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, were even more commonly used.

He also encountered a Course of Elementary Reading in Science and Literature, compiled from popular writers, to which is added a copious list of the Latin and Greek Primitives, by J. M. McCulloch. He went to some pains to catalogue the contents of such works. Here, for example, is his treatment of one of the volumes of 'The Moral and Intellectual Series' which was used in the Heriot's schools and in Mr. Williams's Secular School in Edinburgh:

'The fourth volume is composed of 324 pages and contains 16 pieces on English history, 42 pieces on general world history, 14 pieces of mixed content, 6 pieces on physical geography, 5 pieces of mechanical content, 7 referring to pneumatics and hydrostatics, 3 to hydraulics, 3 to optics, 1 to acoustics, 1 concerning magnetism, 2 concerning electricity, 9 referring to astronomy, 1 to geology, 2 to mineralogy, 8 to chemistry, 6 to animal physiology, 4 to plant physiology, and 14 to natural history. In addition there are some geographical and chronological tables, scientific definitions, geometric and astronomical definitions, and finally, as is customary in reading books, some pages which contain a catalogue of the roots of many English words of Latin and Greek derivation' (p. 51).


It has not proved possible to trace copies of the actual series described by Nissen. The Scottish Council for Research in Education, which holds a useful collection of early text-books, has other books: 'Compiled for the Scottish School-book Association. Edinburgh: William Whyte & Co.' The Association was a charitable one, the profits being devoted to the relief of widows and orphans of schoolmasters, and reports were published which give valuable statistics of sales.

Fourth [Third, etc.] Book of Lessons for the Use of Schools published by direction of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland. Edinburgh: Fraser, 1845. This series of books seems to have been extraordinarily popular. The Scottish Council for Research in Education holds a copy of an edition of 1849 sold by W. Curry, Jun. & Co., Dublin; R. Groombridge and Sons, London; George Phillips, Liverpool; Fraser & Co., Edinburgh; Armour and Ramsay and Donohue and Martin, Montreal, Canada; & Chubb & Co., Halifax, Nova Scotia.' One writer deplores the extensive use of the series: 'I wish now to call attention to the enormous preponderance which the sale of the books of the Irish Commissioners has over the sale of other books under the same heads.

Of the 904,926 reading lesson books ordered, 480,724, or more than one-half, were copies of the books of the Irish reading series. No other series reached 100,000 copies.—Return of books ordered by the managers of schools in Great Britain through Committee of Council, Sep., 1856-May, 1859.'


McCulloch also wrote a progressive course similar to those already mentioned. It was, however, the book which Nissen met which was his money spinner. Published by Oliver and Boyd, it was in its 33rd edition in 1838, 35th in 1859, 52nd in 1872.
HARTVIG NISSEN’S IMPRESSIONS OF THE SCOTTISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Our own impression may be that this is not a suitable diet for immature minds, but this is hindsight. Not only did such books appeal to the encyclopaedist in Nissen, but they also seemed to encourage reading in a useful context along lines which were intended to be of interest to the child. The alternative school reader was for him the Bible, which held sway in the schools of Norway.

Interestingly enough, the attempt to introduce such books into Norwegian schools after the act of 1860 met with a good deal of opposition. The arrangement for a reading book of this type was made in the law. Nissen held that the exclusive use of religious material for reading was favourable neither to religion nor to secular culture and that ‘history, geography, nature study . . . could not be ordinary subjects in the elementary school, but children should be familiarized with them through pieces in the reading book’.¹ The teachers were by no means all with him. No doubt, some of the material was really too difficult for children, but the real trouble was its worldly nature.

Until after 1880, ‘the reading book struggle’ was a centre of strife in Norwegian educational affairs. There was only one book (by P. A. Jensen) which met the requirements of the law, and it contained not only pieces on various secular sciences but, worse still, a number of stories and poems, as frivolous for example as ‘A Cheerful Boy’. ‘In some places they tried to make do by tearing out the worst pages or by sticking dark paper over, for example, “A Cheerful Boy”, but in other places for as long as they could, they defied the clear demands of the law and still used the New Testament as the reading book.’² The Scots were by no means irreligious, and it is interesting to find here that religious support for the serious matters of this world, which has often been noticed in Calvinism, illuminated by the contrasting attitude of the Norwegian Lutheran.

Whatever contrasts we may find in religious attitudes in Norway and Scotland, it is certain that both countries shared a patriotism which was perhaps made keener by their precarious nationality. Norway stood under the influence of Denmark and Sweden only a little less than Scotland under the influence of England. Nissen was treated to a show of Scottish patriotism, which he understood in a way which testifies to its relevance for Norway, where, indeed, the abnueskole was peculiarly national, in contrast to the higher schools.

Writing of the examination in the model school attached to the Normal School in Edinburgh, he says:

¹In English some pieces were read from the reading book. All, without exception, read well, some remarkably finely. Thus, there was a lively thirteen-year-old boy, who had to read a short rhetorical piece, whose opening was: “Liberty is commensurate with and inseparable from British soil; British law proclaims even to the stranger and the sojourner, the

¹Haigard, Einar and Puge, Herman, op. cit., p. 128.
²Ibid., p. 155.
Nissen comments that he himself, who could not share the feelings, was caught in the emotion.

And even looked at in the light of reflection, such a scene has its deep meaning. Here the common school shows its power to implant a feeling for freedom and nationality in its pupils' breasts: the love of the fatherland is strengthened and nourished by the power of sympathy, and, when the simplest working man's son in the common school is thus through the employment of the materials of instruction which are prescribed for him, in a position to strike the very heartstrings of his superiors and carry them with him in the stream of emotion, then one not only understands, but feels, that this people is one and that education, though its levels be different, yet, is similar and common for all sections of the people' (p. 145).

We are close here to the idea of a national and common enhetskole.

But, of course, the Scottish system had its faults and Nissen was not uncritical. The weaknesses in the towns and in certain parts of the highlands seemed to him an important problem. In the towns particularly, compulsory attendance seemed desirable, while both in the towns and in the highlands, provision suffered from the lack of unified control, which, resulting as it did in an absence of any comprehensive planning, seemed to an outsider the most serious defect of the Scottish system. It was, indeed, surprising under these circumstances that Scottish education was so good. The battle between the churches appeared particularly wasteful.

Nissen also felt that education began too early in Scotland. In St. Andrews, for instance, he found three-year-old children in an infant school being examined in the geography of Scotland! (pp. 149-150). He was not impressed by such precocity. Another criticism which touched on the internal conditions of the schools was his feeling that there was a conservative over-emphasis on Latin, which sometimes damaged the more elementary work of the schools. Moreover, in Nissen's opinion, the academically trained boy in Norway was in advance of his Scottish counterpart in the understanding of Latin, partly because the reading of Latin suffered from the Scottish insistence on the writing of Latin prose and verse.

Nissen's summing up of the system reflects his criticisms perhaps more strongly than the general tenor of the book might justify.

'I have sought here to give a picture of those powers working and fermenting in Scottish society, which drive the school machinery forward. The real motive power (primum motor), the people's deep consciousness of the school's significance for the development of the individual and the progress of society, is of such a nature that it works imperishably, continuously and
HARTVIG NISSEN’S IMPRESSIONS OF THE SCOTTISH EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

steadily. The other contributory powers, which accelerate the pace, are of a subordinate kind; they are to be compared to the individual person’s impulses and inclinations, which, in the leading strings of reason and under the direction of prudence, may serve to further the development of the good. They derive from the less lovable traits in the old Scottish national character, eagerness to take sides and love of battle, which are perhaps concomitants of that Celtic blood, which is blended in Scotland with the Anglo-Saxon. It was these very qualities which in older times brought one clan into a life and death struggle with another. But the struggle has now a higher object and nobler forms; in older days, the field of battle was covered with slaughtered corpses; nowadays, it is strewn with newly built churches and schools' (pp. 185-6).

If Nissen’s account has important bearings on his work in Norway, it is also a valuable first-hand picture of Scottish education in the mid-nineteenth century. As a visitor, he noticed things which a Scot would have taken for granted; as a distinguished educationist, he made judgements of some value. In view of the reputation of Scottish education in the nineteenth century, it may be that there are a number of similar accounts locked in lesser European languages which might be useful sources for the historian of Scottish education.

Short Notice


Professor Lloyd’s Inaugural Lecture at Cambridge last October ought to be very widely read, for its delightful touch in sketching the changed attitude to training schoolmasters during the last hundred years, via Charles Lamb, R. L. Edgeworth, the Mills, Kay-Suttleworth, the Cambridge Grace of 1878, and the pioneer work at Geneva under Flournoy, Claparède and Piaget. We are brought from a time when the emphasis just had to be on technique (for in 1879 there were as yet no textbooks on ‘mental science’ or on the history of education), to a time when, today, ‘we have fallen into the error in education of rating knowledge above the knower’. A first-hand account of the work in Geneva shows us Piaget’s enduring example, of spreading ‘throughout the world an understanding of (the) wonderland world of young children’. And the implications of it all, that it cannot be developed elsewhere without research directors freed from other tasks and fully equipped and endowed, and that ‘one test of a university’s value to the nation might very well be the warmth of its interest in training these teachers,’ are still not taken to heart universally in this country.