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TORSTEN RUDENSCHÖLD

(1798-1859)

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Swedish society

The Swedish educator and social reformer Torsten Rudenschöld was working in a country which, although situated on the periphery of the Continent of Europe, was well integrated into the mainstream of European civilization. During the seventeenth century, Sweden had been a great European power with extensive territorial possessions around the Baltic Sea, but had subsequently been demoted to a nation of second or third rank.

At one point during Rudenschöld's childhood—in the year 1809—Sweden was faced with two traumatic events. Firstly, after a war with Russia, the loss of Finland, which had been a part of Sweden, and secondly a political revolution, resulting in the dethronement of the king and the ending of the royal autocracy. A constitution granting greater power to the Parliament was founded. One of Napoleon's field marshals, Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, was later on elected new successor to the throne. This fact demonstrates the intimate cultural and political relations with France, as well as the hopes set on foreign policy aims that were prevalent at this time in Sweden. It is somewhat the irony of history that a king who never learned to speak Swedish was the first to proclaim a State regulation on elementary schools in this country.

At that time, Sweden was a large, sparsely populated country. In the middle of the nineteenth century there were just over three million inhabitants. About 90% of them lived in the countryside and were occupied with farming. Sweden was not, however, a static society. Agriculture was passing through a relatively rapid process of modernization, a new credit system with local banks was being established, a great canal-building enterprise ('Göta kanal') was carried out, the press, with many local newspapers and small magazines, expanded fast—from about twenty in 1800 to about 120 in 1840, and local self-government was strengthened. All of these changes meant that the circumstances were created for the holding of public debates. In ethnic, linguistic and religious respects Sweden was a remarkably homogeneous society. The Swedish church was a Lutheran State church. Swedish subjects were not yet permitted to leave the church, but small groups of dissidents had sprung up in the middle of the eighteenth century. The most serious problems in Swedish society were caused by the very rapid growth of the population. The total population increased by about 50 % during the first half of the nineteenth century. This fact led to unemployment and underemployment, and great poverty, above all among the groups without land in the countryside. In the subsequent discussions about a common elementary school, the social problems, generated by the growth of a rural proletariat, played an important role.

It was in a society like this that Torsten Rudenschöld fulfilled his life's work in the field of education. In order to understand his mission it is necessary to know something about the educational milieu and the educational problems of that time.

The school system

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Swedish school system consisted of two separate parts: a State secondary school system which had been worked out in the seventeenth century; and elementary schools of very variable quality established and managed by local authorities and private persons. Education taking place in the children's homes can also be divided into two categories: instruction of good quality by private tutors; and very elementary teaching in reading from books and the catechism under the guidance of persons with rudimentary knowledge. Although the ability to read was relatively widespread, this ability was, in most cases, probably restricted to Luther's Catechism or other well-known texts. Thanks to the examination records from parish meetings, it is possible to estimate the rate of reading ability—in the sense described above—of great parts of the Swedish population during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

During the 1820s and 1830s, a lively debate was carried on over the question of the extent to which the State should be responsible for the schooling of the general public. In accordance with the strongly established conservative ideology, the State would be responsible only for the training of the future so-called 'officials in the State service'. Other people—farmers, craftsmen and businessmen—merely served their own interests and not those of the general public. For that reason these groups would be responsible for the education of their own children. Advocates of a liberal ideology were of another opinion on this matter: the State had to take responsibility for the basic education of the whole population. 'The elementary school must be admitted as one of the most important concerns of the State,' one of the most prominent representatives of the liberal ideology—the historian and poet Erik Gustaf Geijer—declared at the end of the 1830s.

Interest in founding new elementary schools—above all in the towns—had been strongly stimulated by a new and, what seemed to be, revolutionary method of education recently introduced to Sweden, namely the method of mutual education or the monitorial system invented in England by Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster. The method implied that older and more advanced pupils (monitors) taught groups of younger classmates with the help of, for instance, boards that could be hung up. In this way the same teacher could supervise the education of hundreds of children. The endeavors to spread the British monitorial models in Sweden were given a firm foundation in *Sällskapet för Vexelundervisningens befrämjande* (The Society for the Encouragement of Monitorial Education), set up in 1822. The aim of this society was, above all, to advance the education and upbringing of the rural poor. In order to realize this mission, the society took the decision to set up a teacher-training school in Stockholm. A decisive event in Rudenschöld's life occurred in 1842, when the first regulation on the elementary school in Sweden was adopted by parliament. The decision involved general compulsory education for all children, but not compulsory school attendance, since the children could also acquire the necessary knowledge and skills through instruction at home. This meant that parishes were forced to set up schools and that the State authorities assumed responsibility for the training of teachers.

The organization of the elementary school was not specified to any great extent in regulations and the directives about the curriculum were very vague. There was some uncertainty as to whether the children should be able to read before starting school or not. The recommended teaching method was the monitorial one. This was also the method that would be taught in the teacher training colleges.

The regulation of 1842 which introduced the elementary school was certainly of great importance, but the practical problems were so numerous and so serious that it was to be a long time before the project could be realized. Sweden was a poor country and there was a widespread lack of school buildings and qualified teachers. The sparse population constituted

a special problem and led to long journeys to school for many children. It also soon became evident that the high expectations regarding the effectiveness of the Lancaster method were quite unrealistic.

These were the two main problems that engaged Rudenschöld in his work as organizer of the elementary school.

Torsten Rudenschöld's career

Rudenschöld belonged to the high nobility in Sweden. He was a count. His grandfather had been a cabinet minister and his father was a lieutenant-colonel and a chamberlain to the king. He was born in 1798 and was brought up on two separate country estates (Riseberga in Närke, and Gudhammar in Västergötland). Torsten Rudenschöld was taught in his home by a private tutor who in 1811 followed him and his elder brother to Uppsala. Since he was qualified for university entrance, he studied at the University of Uppsala for some years. His studies did not lead to an academic degree, but the years spent in Uppsala were subsequently to prove of great importance for him. He came into contact with new philosophical and literary currents that were characterized by a reaction against the rationalism and the utilitarianism of the Age of Enlightenment, and also with the national movements which were prevalent in Sweden after the foreign policy debacle of 1809. He was strongly influenced by young friends belonging to a romantic and nationalistic literature club (*Manhemsförbundet*).

Rudenschöld left Uppsala in 1816 and joined the armed forces. He became a commissioned officer in the Skaraborgs Regiment, but resigned from the service in 1824 when he inherited his father's agricultural estate. Because of financial difficulties and the need to increase his income, he gave private tuition to boys in his home. In that way he came into contact with the work which, later on, would come to dominate his life completely.

In 1830 Rudenschöld abandoned the farming enterprise for a post as managing director of an ironworks owned by some of his relatives. Unlike other idealists and social reformers from the upper classes, he witnessed firsthand the arduous conditions of the workers' lives. He saw their penury and their economic difficulties and tried to bring about improvements in various ways. This however, led to conflicts with the owners of the company and he was forced to leave this job in 1833.

With no means to support himself and his family and nowhere to live, he was invited to settle down close to his elder brother's home at Läckö Palace in Västergötland. There he started a private boarding school for his brother's children and some other children. As his school did not generate enough income, he bought, with the help of his brother and some friends, a small country estate. This affair, however, also turned into a fiasco. He left the estate and moved to Läckö Palace in 1843, where he started a new school. This school was, first and foremost, intended for the children of the permanent staff of Läckö Palace and its environs.

He also started participating in the local government of the district. Up to that time, Rudenschöld had been active in the military, industrial and agrarian fields, and had been less than successful in at least the latter two. When, in 1843, motivated chiefly by economic necessity, he took an active part in the full-time teaching at an elementary school, it occurred at a strategically suitable time for him.

According to the State regulation of 1842, it was now the duty for all parishes in the country to organize elementary school education. The regulations were so vague that a great deal of unregulated experimental work took place.

In this situation there was a need for persons who could give assistance in organizing the school system at the local level and who could also take part in the necessary debate on the central issues. Rudenschöld, as it happened, devoted the rest of his life—as an elementary school teacher, a school organizer, an author, a State inspector and as a member of the

Swedish Parliament—to the improvement of the Swedish elementary school. In 1849 he was commissioned by the government to travel around the country to supervise the development of the elementary school. Later on, he received the same commission from parliament. He played an important role in the political and educational reform of the school during the parliamentary session in 1856-58.

He died in Uppsala in 1859.

A social utopia

Alongside his work as a teacher, Rudenschöld's achievements in the educational field consisted of a new, radical theory on society, organizational work during the development of elementary schools at the local as well as the central level, and, finally, several publications on political and educational issues concerning the school. His philosophical ideas about social problems were presented in two books published in 1845 and 1846: *Tankar om ståndscirkulation* [Thoughts about the Mobility of Persons between Social Classes] and *Tankar om ståndscirkulationens verkställighet* [Thoughts about the Realization of the Mobility of Persons between Social Classes). It is difficult to find an exact English term for what he called *ståndscirkulation*, but what he means is social mobility—the movement of persons from one social class to another.

He thought that the origin of social problems lay in the deep gaps between the different estates or 'classes' in society. Rudenschöld saw these problems first of all from a religious point of view:

The form in which a true Christian brotherliness will be able to rise up and work, not only in exceptional cases but as a common spirit making all people happy, is in social mobility, which in its thorough application will abolish all un-Christian oppression between individuals, as well as rejecting un-Christian enviousness between members in different positions and in different capacities in the social structure. The health and joyful well-being of this structure, for all as well as for each individual, is ultimately due to the fact that every single member, high or low, without prejudices, unpretentiously and clearly apprehends his position and fulfils his mission in life, not under compulsion but with unselfish willingness in that position which a wise and tender Providence, through the natural gifts, has granted him (*Tankar om ståndscirkulationens verkställighet*, p. 9 ff.).

The purpose of 'social mobility' was the establishment of good relations between peoples who, due to different circumstances, were divided into separate classes in society. He did not, however, recommend leveling these differences but suggested instead that there should be better opportunities to move from one class to another, since the differences between the separate individuals are founded on nature. A talented peasant boy should, for instance, have a chance to study and be a member of a higher estate, but there should also be a movement in the opposite direction. 'The social changes in society will', he said, 'awaken and maintain a healthy motion as natural and even as necessary as the circulation of the blood in the human body' (*Tankar om ståndscirkulation*, p. 23).

What was fundamentally new—and highly controversial—in Rudenschöld's plan for more social mobility was the strong accent on the need for downward movement. He proclaimed vigorously that many children in the highest social classes had to accept jobs as workers. He was very critical of his own class and its mode of life. His book is, in reality, to be seen as a way of confronting the dominant class in society, as a kind of criticism of civilization. As the dominant class had gradually grown in size, many quite unnecessary offices had been set up in the government. In spite of this fact, many 'gentlemen' were nevertheless more or less out of work. They lived a highly agreeable, frivolous and luxurious life. Instead of fulfilling a responsible mission to society—to be 'the leaders of the general public in

enlightenment and nobleness’—they selfishly abused their possessive influence over the masses and, at the latter’s expense, guaranteed for themselves total liberty from work and indulgence in the enjoyments of life.

Society was moreover characterized by a lack of contact between different social classes. In Rudenschöld’s social utopia, human relationships were characterized by mutual understanding, love, and harmony.

Another reason for increased social mobility was that all the children of the upper classes did not possess the necessary gifts for intellectual work. Rudenschöld was of the opinion that natural intellectual aptitudes were fairly equally divided among the different social classes.

These ideas about society and human nature constituted the background of Rudenschöld’s educational program for equality. The real problem was an unwillingness by upper-class children and their parents to agree to do manual work and, particularly, to be trained for such jobs. According to Rudenschöld, this problem could only be solved through a different type of education.

In the school system, as presented by Rudenschöld, the first, basic school should be common for children from all social classes. He was the first educator or politician in Sweden to recommend what later on was to be called ‘the common basic school’—or the comprehensive school program—which to a great extent has been typical of Swedish educational politics ever since. An important element in the curriculum would be manual labor. This was necessary to prepare the children from upper-class families for a future manual job.

Another important purpose was to promote a more simple and natural life among people from this class. The need to achieve a more modest and unpretentious mode of life was so urgent for Rudenschöld that he recommended the setting up of special ‘clubs for simplicity’ and so-called ‘social mobility camps’ (*ståndscirkulationskolonier*). Boys from upper-class families would work on farms and live under modest conditions.

Another important element in Rudenschöld’s social utopia was a Christian idealism and perhaps a somewhat naive hope of better relations between the different social classes in society. These dreams of reconciliation and harmony in society were further strengthened under the impact of the February Revolution in 1848, which in Sweden—and particularly in Stockholm—led to scenes of tumultuous violence. In a publication from 1850—*Tankar om vår tids samhällsfrågor* [Thoughts about the Social Problems of Our Time]—he conveyed an affectionate prayer of entreaty to the people of Sweden to ‘take one another’s hands in mutual Christian reconciliation’.

Rudenschöld’s ideas about social mobility attracted great attention. In conservative circles many looked upon him as a popular agitator, while the people in general saw him as an unrealistic idealist and visionary, an eccentric and unpractical dreamer. Among his peers in the nobility many spoke scornfully about ‘the mad count and his mad book’. However, his practical work with the elementary school was respected and probably also resulted in a greater understanding of his ideas about social mobility. The continuing development of the community—in Sweden as well as in other countries—also contributed to this fact.

It is true that the immediate impact of Rudenschöld’s publications was not very great but, in the long run, his ideas have certainly had some effect. Enrollment into higher education and universities in Sweden has been broader and more democratic than in many other countries on the European Continent; there have been accordingly a greater number of students from farming backgrounds studying at universities. It seems probable that, in this case, his ideas about social mobility have had some effect.

After this presentation of Rudenschöld’s ideas about social mobility, it is also of interest to search for an explanation. From where did the ideas come? What influences? As a starting point, it is natural to take note of the impressions of the romantic and national

movements encountered in his younger days. In the 1820s, Rudenschöld came into contact with an innovative group of young writers and students. Much has subsequently been written about this experiment in the history of Swedish literature. In fact, a romantic group of young people left Stockholm in order to settle in a small rural village and live in a very simple way. Dreams of an idealistic rustic life based on Christian solidarity were a part of the spirit of the time. In the years around 1840, widespread rural poverty and the social problems caused by it were the subject of intense interest. These matters were examined by a committee for social welfare and were discussed in parliament. Several of the leading authors of the day dealt with the problem of poverty and social welfare, among others Carl Jonas Love Almquist, Fredrika Bremer and Erik Gustaf Geijer.

There are probably other influences from the international debate. Thus these concepts remind us of Rousseau's ideas about a simple and natural life, even if Rudenschöld did not explicitly refer to him. Similarities to the French utopian Saint-Simon have also been pointed out, but Rudenschöld defended himself against suspicions of the 'Jacobinian and Simonian development of society' by referring to what he called 'the absurdity of class leveling'. Some similarities to another French utopian, Charles Fourier, have also been mentioned. It seems more plausible, however, that these similarities were common elements in the spirit of the time shared by many European countries in the middle of nineteenth century, rather than direct influences.

One more fact ought to be mentioned: Rudenschöld's own experiences from an almost lifelong struggle against poverty. Although born and brought up in an upper-class milieu, he was nevertheless forced to provide for the welfare of himself and his family as a simple elementary school teacher, and he made great sacrifices. A modest way of life was for him a case of dire necessity.

A teacher and organizer at the local level

The State regulation on elementary schools of 1842 was extremely vague. According to its first paragraph there was to be one, preferably fixed, school in every parish. Two or three small parishes could combine, however, to set up such a school together. The recommended pedagogical method was the Bell-Lancaster monitorial system. This method would also be used in the training of teachers. When, in 1843, Rudenschöld started his work with the elementary schools in the parish where Läckö Palace was situated, he found serious defects in the school organization which were, however, acceptable according to the State regulations. For instance, it was unclear to what extent the children should be able to read from a book when they entered school for the first time. In the long debates about the elementary school in the parliament of 1840-41, strong opinions were expressed for maintaining the tradition of teaching the children the elements of reading in their homes.

The demand for 'one preferably fixed school' in most parishes implied that there should be a 'central school' bringing together as many children as possible and consequently involving a long journey to school for most of them. Thus, any homogenous grouping of pupils into classes by age was excluded.

Rudenschöld found this organization unsatisfactory. He rejected the Lancaster method. The training given by the monitors was ineffective and, as far as learning the catechism was involved, quite misleading as it only resulted in the mechanical repetition of words in a book without any understanding of its content. He declared that such work with the catechism lessons must therefore be seriously and vigorously opposed as being not only unnecessary and useless, but also deeply damaging. There was also another disadvantage: it could easily

stimulate a system of corruption, as it was not unusual for the monitors, when examining younger pupils, to receive bribes in the form of gifts of various kinds, such as money, apples or lumps of sugar.

Rudenschöld believed that it was necessary to set up schools in every hamlet in order to give the youngest children a shorter distance to go to school. (It is true that he was in favor of home education, but he also realized that it could not work in all families.) When the younger children had learned to read they would be able to travel, at a somewhat older age, a little further in order to attend the proper elementary school.

In 1850 he presented such a school system program in a publication: *Tankar om vår tids samhällsfrågor: del II, Om folkskolor* [Thoughts about the Social Problems in Our Time. Vol. 2. About Elementary Schools]. The purpose of teaching in what he called *roteskolor* (hamlet schools) was:

- to teach children the basic steps in learning to read from a book so that they could draw greater advantage from education given in their own homes;
- to give this instruction in a school near enough to the home so that no child would be prevented from going to school because of the distance;
- to use older pupils as teachers on certain days in elementary schools with qualified teachers as supervisors;
- to protect small children from the influence of older children by enrolling the latter in central schools, which should also not be too far away from their homes;
- to make it possible for some of the more advanced children to reach a sufficiently high level of competence to assist the teachers in the hamlet schools;
- to let the elementary school-teachers evaluate home education on their periodic tours of inspection to the hamlet schools;
- to introduce some instruction in arithmetic and writing.

Rudenschöld's school plan clearly reflects the major difficulties existing in establishing an elementary school system catering for all rural children in large parts of Sweden. Through his great familiarity with the practical conditions, he saw the problems in their right perspective. Later on, he came to develop the idea of these relatively primitive hamlet schools further and, in so doing, also raised the overall aspiration.

A school plan for the national level

Ideas about the organization of the elementary school which Rudenschöld presented in the book mentioned above were based on his personal experiences as a teacher and school organizer in his own parish. His work had been successful and had attracted the attention of many uninitiated people. Organizations and associations invited him to give lectures about his school. Educators from different parts of Sweden visited him and his schools in order to study them. He wrote articles in newspapers and magazines. In the two books about 'social mobility'—written on the initiative of and published by *Hushållningssällskapet i Skaraborgs län* (The Agricultural Society in the Province of Skaraborg)—school problems were basic issues. All these circumstances resulted in the school experiment at Läckö becoming widely known. The mere fact that a count worked as a simple school teacher also aroused attention and curiosity.

In 1849 Rudenschöld received some economic aid from the government to realize his educational projects, and it was only natural that, during the 1850s, he should be asked to fulfil the functions of an itinerant inspector. His commission was to follow up the work of establishing elementary schools on behalf of the government and the parliament. He gave an account of his experiences and presented a proposal for school organization in two books:

Tankar om folkskolan [Thoughts about the Elementary School] in 1854 and *Svenska folkskolans praktiska ordnande* [The Practical Arrangement of the Swedish Elementary School] in 1856. The government bought 2,500 copies of the latter book for distribution to the local school boards all over the country.

According to Rudenschöld, the main problems concerning the elementary school could be summarized in the following two questions:

1. How can the elementary school be accessible to all children 'in a vast, sparsely populated country with a harsh climate and a poor population'?
2. How can the teaching be arranged so as to be adapted to its purpose?

The two problems are interwoven one with another as the organization of the school to a great extent creates the conditions for the teaching process. Thanks to his visits to many schools all over Sweden, Rudenschöld gained wider experience, which enabled him to go on developing his ideas about the organization of the elementary school with still greater authority.

On the whole, however, he maintained his previously declared views, not least his criticism of the Lancaster method. His familiarity of how this method was practiced in certain large urban schools resulted in even harsher criticism of it. This aroused, not surprisingly, strong indignation among the advocates of this type of school and also led to some controversy. As this method was officially sanctioned in the State regulations on the elementary schools published in 1842 and also in the instructions for teacher training colleges, Rudenschöld's criticisms affected many people. His message was simple: it was impossible to obtain good results with school classes containing 100 or more pupils with a single teacher and a few monitors to assist him.

Rudenschöld's school plan meant that the system of small local schools was further developed. These were often named *småskolor*, which literally interpreted means 'small schools'. In the 1850s, the concept was unclear: it could refer to both a small school and also to a school for small children. The difference is, however, primarily of academic interest, as these schools were usually small schools for small children. The basic idea was, as mentioned above, that these *småskolor* should be set up near enough to the children's homes that the distance to the school building should not be an obstacle for regular school attendance. But there was also another motive: to bring the infants together in a special classroom. He sometimes called these schools 'home schools' and there were two reasons for this: they could be located in one of the children's homes (and not in a special school building); and it presupposed collaboration between the school and the parents.

The primary task of the *småskola* was to teach the children to read from a book, even if writing and arithmetic also formed part of the curriculum. It is worth observing that Rudenschöld had not given up the idea of instruction in the home for learning the rudiments of reading. To begin school by teaching the letters of the alphabet would only be wasting the teacher's time.

The question of the role played by the parents from a pedagogical point of view had been an important and controversial issue in the discussions in parliament and in the general debate. Rudenschöld attached great importance to the home, as well as to education by the parents. He recommended a kind of interaction between home and school, implying that the children should be at school in the mornings and do their homework at home in the afternoons, or that they go to school every second day and do their homework on the day in between.

Rudenschöld's opposition to the Lancaster method even met with general approval. Much attention had been paid to the difficulties in trying to teach children of widely different ages and levels of knowledge in one and the same classroom. His ambition to set up separate preparatory local schools (*småskolor*) became just one phase in many developments. Such developments led in 1858 to a parliamentary decision implying that school boards all over the

country had the right to set up ‘smaller schools’ (*mindre skolor*) for the initial education of beginners, independent of the distance to the school. Many people thought that experience had shown there was a missing link between parents and the school, and this was it. It should not be necessary in these schools to engage trained and qualified teachers. Rudenschöld intended that older pupils from so-called élite classes (see below) could be engaged. Furthermore, the teachers from these élite schools were to carry out regular inspections of the ‘smaller schools’ in order to supervise the work and to help the young teachers. When parliament accepted the idea of special preparatory schools it was assumed that 15- or 16-year-old girls or clever monitors from Lancaster-type schools were to be engaged as teachers.

A higher section of the elementary school

A leading idea in Rudenschöld’s educational program was to give all children without exception a chance to receive basic formal education. This implied, in a poor and sparsely populated country like Sweden, that it was necessary to accept a school with rather modest aims. Following on from this school, there would be a higher section for children between twelve and fifteen years of age in a central school. Such a school, dispensing a higher level of education, would not be compulsory but would, however, make great demands upon the pupils; it would be a school for a limited élite. He consequently called this school the ‘élite school’.

In one respect, Rudenschöld was somewhat vague and unclear. He did not say much about the ordinary elementary school. It is possible that the explanation is to be found in the fact that this school was the main object of the State regulation on elementary schools of 1842. For this reason, perhaps, he did not find it necessary say very much about it.

Rudenschöld built his political program for schools on a special psychological foundation: there were large individual differences with regard to intellectual resources. The political consequences of this for education and the school implied that the most talented—in accordance with ‘the eternal fundamental laws’—must be identified and selected, and that the elementary school was the foundation for higher learning. To the detriment of the secondary schools, in the past it was the wealth of the parents that had been the determining factor on entry. While it was true that these schools were not closed to poor children, it was nevertheless practically impossible for them to attend. For that reason, secondary schools were not true schools for the intellectual élite. ‘The old-fashioned method of selecting the élite is defective in so far as the pupils are selected exclusively from a tiny part of the population’, i.e. the economically privileged classes. A weak point in this selective process was conspicuous in that children began the secondary school at such an early age that their intellectual talents could not yet be properly evaluated. The solution to this problem, according to Rudenschöld, consisted in moving the basis of selection for higher education to the elementary school. ‘The range from which the élite was selected’ would thus be widened to the whole nation. There were also other advantages in such a system:

To choose the élites in such a manner and with such a purpose from the whole population is of importance not only for the more abundant resources that will be available, but also because the élites would then arise from the social classes where natural strength is still the soundest and the soil of the moral culture more fertile and fruitful, namely from the labouring classes in the countryside (*Tänkar om folkskolan*, p. 58).

As mentioned earlier, this suggestion corresponds to the ideas of ‘social mobility’ which Rudenschöld had proposed ten years earlier. Experience has shown, he says, that occupations such as farming, trade and handicrafts have provided children from the upper classes with prosperous jobs and independence, while such jobs had previously been regarded as

degrading. Rudenschöld criticizes the short sighted view that such jobs are degrading: only a false conception of happiness leads parents to deprive their children of the work which might be compatible with their inclinations and aptitudes.

Religious instruction

The Swedish elementary school was in many respects subordinated to the Swedish Church, a Lutheran State church. The local vicar was to officiate as chairman of the school board. As Rudenschöld himself was a firm Christian believer, he found this order quite correct. He was of the opinion that a clergyman should be the one to teach religion. The most fundamental part of religious instruction in the elementary school was, traditionally, Luther's Catechism.

This text existed in two versions: a short version and a complete book. Rudenschöld's idea was that the study of Luther's Catechism should be restricted to the Short Catechism, including Luther's explanations, since such study already led to the quite pointless rote learning of the content without comprehension. According to him, the Gospels ought to be the fundamental part of religious instruction. It was also important for the teacher to interpret the words of the Bible intelligibly to the children and to avoid such meaningless learning.

In relation to his contemporaries, Rudenschöld's view on religious instruction was remarkably modern. The methodical changes that later followed were to a great extent in accordance with his opinions.

Rudenschöld's educational principles

Torsten Rudenschöld belongs to the educators who are not well known outside the boundaries of their own country. His publications have not been translated into any foreign languages, nor has his work previously been presented to an international circle of readers. He has, however, had a very great influence on the development of the elementary school in Sweden. Working as an ordinary school teacher, organizer, and writer of educational publications gave him strategic importance when the general elementary school—lacking an established organization as well as a curriculum—was being introduced. His work can be described as showing a realistic judgement of the conditions operating in his time and of the political and pedagogical principles affecting the school. These principles are summed up below.

According to Rudenschöld, the elementary school would be a 'common basic school' for all higher education. All children, irrespective of the social position of their family, would attend that school. The elementary school teachers and the political left wing would later prove to maintain this principle. During the twentieth century, this idea gradually became a reality accepted by all, taking final form in the comprehensive school reform of 1962.

Rudenschöld's most original contribution to political and social thinking about the school consists of his theory about 'social mobility'. He attached great importance to school's role as an instrument for the transformation of society. He recommended manual labor as an important element in the schooling of all young people.

In his struggle against the Lancaster method, a principle argument was emphasis on direct contact between the teacher and the pupils. Such a relationship could not be established in a Lancaster school where there was only one teacher and several monitors dealing with a huge number of pupils.

Concerning the internal working of the school, Rudenschöld attached special importance to training in reading from a book: teaching the children to read well and with good understanding of the text. He complained of their poor ability to read—even among

older pupils; he noted that this inferior capacity was often concealed because the children had learned many texts by heart. He recommended the phonetic method in the process of learning to read.

As an important condition for success at school, teachers must always take into consideration the children's stage of development and try to adapt their teaching to it.

Among the purely methodical principles to which Rudenschöld attached great importance the following can be mentioned:

- *the principle of following the natural course*: the importance of proceeding from the simple to the complicated, and from the easy to the difficult;
- *the principle of teaching by object lessons*: the importance of making the teaching as clear and lucid as possible, in spite of the lack of facilities encountered in poorly equipped classrooms;
- *the principle of arousing interest*: the need to awaken the children's interest and counteract the function of the school as a place where homework was corrected and examinations carried out;
- *the principle of physical education*: combined with an outdoor life and manual labour, this was intended partly as a counterbalance to too much sitting still, partly to strengthen the children's physical growth and also to teach them respect for manual work.

Torsten Rudenschöld has been called 'the founder of the Swedish elementary school'. Even though he was not the unique pioneer in this work, he was arguably the most prominent one. On a memorial monument situated near Läckö Palace he is called an educator and a philanthropist. It is, indeed, an accurate description.

Note

Gunner Richardson (Sweden) Professor Emeritus at the University of Linköping. President of the Association for the History of Education in Sweden. Former member of the Swedish Parliament. Among his works on the history of education are: *Kulturkamp och klasskamp* [Cultural Struggle and Class Struggle] (1963); *Drommen om en ny skola* [The Dream of a New School] (1983); *Svensk utbildningshistoria* [Swedish History of Education! (1988); and *Tekniken, människan och samhället* [Technology, Man, and Society] (1987).

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1846. *Tankar om ståndscirkulationens verkställighet* [Thoughts about the Realization of the Mobility of Persons between Social Classes].
1848. *Tankar om vår tids samhällsfrågor: del I* [Thoughts about the Social Problems of Our Time: Volume 1].
1850. *Tankar om vår tids samhällsfrågor: del II, Om folkskolan* [Thoughts about the Social Problems of Our Time: Vol. 2. About Elementary Schools].
1854. *Tankar om folkskolan* [Thoughts about the Elementary School].
1856. *Svenska folkskolans praktiska ordnande* [The Practical Arrangement of the Swedish Elementary Schools].

All of these publications are available in a new, easily accessible edition: *Pedagogiska skrifter* [Educational Writings] (Stockholm, Sveriges allmänna folkskollärares litteratursällskap), 1920-21, nos. 89, 92, 95, 96.