

Educational Thought of N. W. Senior
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Introduction

On the social policy, the early 19th centuries in England were period of the laissez faire. However, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 (the ‘New Poor Law’) was included unique characters such as the laissez faire and the paternalism. For example, the New Poor Law officially guaranteed the right to relief of the poor, although this law also contributed the creation of free labour market by the restriction of relief. And, the New Poor Law was made it based on the House of Commons’ Poor Law Report of 1834 (the ‘1834 Report’). At the end of the 1834 Report, the Poor Law commissioner said that the most important duty of the legislature is to take measures to promote the religious and moral education of the labouring classes after rendered further improvement of the Poor Law.¹ Actually, since the New Poor Law, the government began to actively intervene in education. And, in 1870, the Elementary Education Act was established. This law was the first act for the preparing of educational facilities by the government in Britain.

This paper will focus on the view of educational thought of Senior (Nassau William Senior, 1790-1864). Senior was the first person selected for the Drummond professorship

¹ 1834 Report: 497.

of political economy at Oxford University (1825-1830, 1847-1852). In addition, Senior spent several years acting as an economic advisor to the Whig party. As an economic advisor, Senior became a member of several commissions such as the Poor Law Inquiry Commission in 1832-1834 and the Royal Commission on Popular Education in 1857.² And, each time Senior submitted the commission's report. The 1834 Report was written by Senior and Edwin Chadwick (1800-1890). And, Senior wrote at the end of the 1834 Report.

The aim of this paper is to reveal of educational thought of Senior. There are the preceding study about the educational thought of Senior such as West (1975, 1994) and O'Donnell (1975). These researches revealed the educational thought of classical political economists including Senior. And, these researches explained the side of practice. For this reason, in this paper, we will also explain the side of theory. And, although Senior criticized the workhouse school, this criticism was made based on the side of theory.

This paper is organized as follows. The following section reveal the historical background of the 1834 Report. The third section explains the educational thought of economists before Senior. We picked up the Adam Smith in this section. The forth section explains the importance of education for the Poor Law Commissioner. The five section

² Furthermore, Senior was a member of the Royal Commission on the Distress of the Hand-loom Weavers in 1837, and that report was published in 1841.

explains the educational thought of Senior. The sixth section explains the criticism to the workhouse school. And finally, we will conclude at the end of this paper.

Historical background of the 1834 Report

The education for children on the early 19th century had been taught by the charity organization such as a Sunday school of church. However, as developing the industrial revolution, child labour in the factory became problem. And the government had started intervention to solve this problem since the Factory Act of 1802. This law limited the hours of work for apprentices in the cotton and woolen mills to 12 a day and specified that some part of the apprentice's work day be set aside for elementary instruction. And then, the Factory Act of 1833 more strictly limited the condition for child labour. This law prohibited the employment of all children under the age of nine and for children under thirteen it restricted working hours to nine a day. And this law also required the attendance at school of all children between the ages of nine and thirteen for two hours a day, six days a week. Furthermore, to assure adequate facilities to carry out this legislation, a grant of £20,000 which will support for the erection of school for the education of poor children

was voted by Parliament. According to O'Donnell, this law "marked the beginning of state involvement in British education."³

This law was epoch-making for education of children at that time. However, Senior saw the crucial working condition of children in the factory. Senior was a member of factory act in 1837. And he wrote the letter to Horner. In this letter, he appealed the importance of education for the children.

Educational Thought of Economists before Senior

Some economists asserted the role of education before Senior. For example, Smith (Adam Smith, 1723-1790) asserted the importance of domestic education. Smith believe that even if under the most worthless parent the children would better education at their home than public school which far from their home. Smith said that "Domestic education is the institution of nature; public education, the contrivance of man. It is surely unnecessary to say which is likely to be the wisest."⁴

Smith was optimist of the education of children. Normally, the common people such as labouring class have little time to spare for education. Parents can scarce afford

³ O'Donnell 1985: 9.

⁴ Smith 2003[1904]: 222.

to maintain them even in infancy. As soon as their children can work, children must work to earn their subsistence. However, they can acquire elementary knowledge as follows:

But though the common people cannot, in any civilized society, be so well instructed as people of some rank and fortune, the most essential parts of education, however, to read, write, and account, can be acquired at so early a period of life, that the greater part even of those who are to be bred to the lowest occupations, have time to acquire them before they can be employed in those occupations. For a very small expence the public can facilitate, can encourage, and can even impose upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education. (Smith: 990)

For Smith, education was one of the means to improve of moral condition of the inferior ranks of people. Smith thought that the state can get benefit by educating them. That benefit was the public security of the state.

The state, however, derives no inconsiderable advantage from their instruction. The more they are instructed, the less liable they are to the delusions of

enthusiasm and superstition, which, among ignorant nations, frequently occasion the most dreadful disorders. An instructed and intelligent people besides, are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant and stupid one. They feel themselves, each individually more respectable, and more likely to obtain the respect of their lawful superiors, and they are therefore more disposed to respect those superiors. They are more disposed to examine, and more capable of seeing through, the interested complaints of faction and sedition, and they are, upon that account, less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of government. In free countries, where the safety of government depends very much upon the favourable judgment which the people may form of its conduct, it must surely be of the highest importance that they should not be disposed to judge rashly or capriciously concerning it. (Smith: 994)

Therefore, although Smith admitted the benefit of the public education, Smith never strongly insisted on the importance of education. Instead, Smith seemed place the importance on the education at home.

The importance of education for the New Poor Law

Before the new poor law was established, the poor law was recognized the cause of poverty. Especially, the allowance system, such as the Speenhamland system in 1795, was famous. This system which is one form of outdoor relief was guaranteed a minimum weekly income of paupers. And the level of which was determined by the price of bread and the size of his family.⁵ Because of this system, the poor became increasingly un-working, and furthermore, the poor rate also increased year by year. That is, the outdoor relief had an incentive to lose the industry and moral improvement of the poor. To solve this problem, the New Poor Law was established. And, one of the character to be worked the poor was “the principle of less eligibility”. This principle is “that his situation on the whole shall not be made really or apparently so eligible as the situation of the independent labourer of the lowest class”.⁶ Furthermore, under this principle, the pauper had to enter the well-regulated workhouse. The workhouse was excepted the improvement of molarity of the poor. However, although the pauper has to take the less eligibility, the education for children was excluded from this law. Poor Law Unions were required to provide at least three hours a day of schooling for workhouse children who were to be taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and the principles of the Christian Religion, and such other instruction as may fit them for service, and train them to habits of

⁵ Boyer 1990: 10.

⁶ 1834 Report; 335.

usefulness, industry and virtue.⁷ On the other hand, in 1836, the guardians of the Bedford Union suggested a compromise by teaching workhouse children to read but not to write. However, Poor Law committee rejected to this suggestion. They admitted the importance of this argument which the children of labourers should not be enticed into the workhouse by the prospect of a better education within its walls than they could obtain elsewhere. And, the education for children should be accepted by following reasons. (1) they think that this inducement would be counteracted by a distaste for the necessary restraints of workhouse discipline, and the mere fact its being pauper education. (2) the commissioners do not doubt that in all cases there will be schools accessible to the children of independent labourers of such a character as to be more attractive than any schools can be which are accessible only by becoming an inmate of a workhouse. (3) the commissioners think it of the greatest importance that the workhouse children should be so taught as to give them the greatest attainable chance of earning an honest and independent maintenance of for the remainder of their lives, and they cannot conceal from themselves that the acquisition of the power of writing greatly increases this chance. (4) the workhouse children should not be so treated as to fix upon them any permanent stigma which should be likely to attach to them in after life. And, all other children who learn to

⁷ Higginbotham 2012: 300.

read learn also to write; to have acquired a knowledge of reading, being at the same time altogether ignorant of the art of writing, would become the distinguishing mark of those who had received a workhouse education.⁸

This argument between the Poor Law Commissioner and the guardians of the Bedford Union was an example of that the government acknowledge the importance of the education for the children.

The Educational thought of Senior

The Purpose of Education

Senior thought that the effect of education for children is the means for poverty solution. Because the evils of poverty which a government can palliate is defective education. Senior said as follows:

Equally just is the compulsory education of his children, because it is the most effectual means of raising them from the condition of pauperism to that on industrious independence. (Senior 1861: 86)

⁸ Second Annual Report on the Poor Law Commissioner 1836: 529.

Then, who should treat the education of children? Senior thought that the government should intervene to the lives of the people from the perspective of “expediency”.⁹ In the case of education to the children, as well as the expediency, Senior acknowledged the duty of government is to give protection to children. Because the children “cannot protect themselves as well as those who can”.¹⁰ And, For Senior, the expense of school was not an expense.

The money so employed is much more than repaid by the superiority in diligence, in skill, in economy, in health – in short in all the qualities which fit men to produce and to preserve wealth, of an educated over an uneducated community.¹¹

Therefore, to solve the poverty problem, the government should intervene the education of children. Because the expense of education can produce the more beneficial

⁹ Senior, Lectures 1847-1852, First Course, Lesson 6, ‘Power of Government to Alter the Degree in which Wealth Is Desirable’ in Levy 1928 vol. 2: 302.

¹⁰ Senior 1861: 6. Furthermore continuing next sentence, Senior also describes the evils of uneducated or ill-educated children as follows. “Now, the greatest sufferers from the negligence or selfishness which occasion the non-education or the mis-education of the children, are the children themselves. Their habits and their faculties, their utility and their happiness, are ruined by an ill-treatment which they cannot prevent and scarcely know”.

¹¹ Senior, Lectures 1847-1852, First Course, Lesson 6, ‘Power of Government to Alter the Degree in which Wealth Is Desirable’ in Levy 1928 vol. 2: 329.

wealth for that country. And, Senior thought that the effect of education has relation about the wealth unlike Smith.

The Definition of Education

Senior was a strictly man about the definition of words. Senior defined the education as follows:

In the widest sense, the word *education* comprehends all the external influences by which the disposition implanted by nature in any animal is subsequently modified. In its narrower sense, it is confined to the influences which one person intentionally exercises over another by precept or by example.¹²

Furthermore, Senior more classified the education as follows:

Education is divided into teaching and training.

Teaching is divided into the giving information and the giving instruction.

Training is bodily training or mental training.

¹² *Address on Education* delivered to the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, by Nassau W. Senior, President of the Department of Education, on its Seventh Annual Meeting in October, 1863. London: 1863, in Levy 1928 vol.2: 329.

Bodily training is the training the bodily faculties, or the bodily sensations.

Mental training is the training the mental faculties, which is intellectual training, or training the mental sensations, which is moral training.¹³

Senior had outlined education as above. And, more strictly speaking, “Teaching” is the imparting knowledge, and “Training” is the creation of knowledge. And, “Information” is the statement of facts which can be ascertained only by observation or by testimony. On the other hand, “Instruction” is a kind of teaching consists of statement. It is the truth of which is ascertained not by observation but by consciousness, or by inference from the pupils’ previous knowledge. Furthermore, Senior divided the training into the bodily training and mental training. Firstly, bodily training was divided in the bodily faculties and bodily sensation. Bodily faculties will be trained by gymnastics or by the acquiring any bodily art. And the bodily sensations submit to or to resist his bodily sensations of cold, heat, fatigue, or hunger and by that resistance or submission to weaken or strengthen those sensations. Secondly, mental training was divided into the mental faculties and mental sensation. The mental faculty is such as attention, memory, or imagination which is intellectual training. And, mental sensation is such a fear, anger,

¹³ Ibid: 330.

vanity, and the other affections to which we give the name of passions, which is moral training.¹⁴

In the case of education, Training is the creation of habit. Almost people defined it as a habitual mode of acting or feeling. However, Senior pointed out the difficulty about the definition of the word of habit. The difficulty is occasioned by a confusion of “custom” and “habit”. Respectively, they denote cause and effect. The frequent repetition of any act is a custom. The state of mind or of body thereby produced is a habit. The custom forms the habit, and the habit keeps up the custom. A custom is a continuous stream of similar acts. A habit is the channel which that stream has scooped out. The test of the ripening of a custom into a habit is when the customary act is performed spontaneously, or with pleasure, or when its omission has become painful. Aristotle defines the virtues as habits. Therefore, and he holds acts of virtue to be not duties to be performed but pleasures to be enjoyed. If such an act is felt as a sacrifice, the habit has not been acquired. The man who resists the temptation to steal has not the virtue of honesty. If he had he would not feel the temptation.¹⁵

Senior thought that the training is more important than teaching. It is the more important even for the purposes of knowledge, because knowledge may be forgotten, and

¹⁴ Ibid: 329-330.

¹⁵ Ibid: 330.

requires some trouble to keep it up. Habits once thoroughly acquired cannot be discontinued without pain. Therefore, they are permanent. And even the knowledge which has been forgotten, if it be worth recovering, will generally be recovered by a man of good intellectual habits. For Senior, the most important education is moral training. Therefore, training or the formation of habits, rather than teaching, or the imparting knowledge, is the great business of education.¹⁶

When Senior judged the content of education, it was evaluated on the basis of the above.

Education target

Senior divided the children into three types. The first, the children whose parents or friends can afford to pay the whole expense of education. The second, those whose parents or friends can afford to pay a portion of that expense. The third, those whose parents or friends cannot pay any part of it. Senior intended that the third class is the target for education. The first group comprehends the higher and middle classed of a community. The second comprehends the labouring classes. The third, the paupers.

Senior thought that the interference of the state in the education of the higher and middle classes is not necessary. But, Senior did not mean to treat it as useless. Senior

¹⁶ Ibid: 330-331.

meant merely to distinguish the higher and middle classes from those who are unable to pay the whole, or any part of the expense, of a good education, and who must owe such an education wholly or partially to the care of the state, or the benevolence of individuals.¹⁷

Senior considered the educational cost for each class. The average income of an ordinary agricultural labourer is about 10s a week. The education of a labourer's child costs at the lowest estimate, 6d a week, or 26s a year. At the usual estimate, 30s a year. In a labourer's family the children are the servants. The children must work or to earn the money for their family. If they go to school that family will lose the money. A still greater sacrifice is that of the child's wages. In many manufactures a child can earn money at six or seven years old. In farm work, he begins to earn at eight or nine. From the age of nine to eleven, the most important years of education, a child may earn from 1s. 6d. to 2s. a week in the country, and from 2s. 6d. to 5s. a week in towns. If an agricultural labourer, with two children between nine and eleven, were to pay for their education 1s. per week, and lose 3s. a week more in their wages, it would take 4s. from a gross weekly income of 13s., or nearly one-third. The burden, or what is the same, the loss, in the case of the artisan, would be still greater, as in towns the earnings of children bear a much larger

¹⁷ Ibid: 332-333.

proportion to those of their parents. If there are two or three children at work, their earnings often exceed those of their fathers.¹⁸

However, Senior accused parents of violating the basic rights of their offspring when they denied their child schooling because of excessively high opportunity cost of education. Senior fostered the idea that just as a child had the right to food, he also had a right to education. parents who sent their children to work instead of school were anti-social Senior criticized. Therefore, Senior thought that the education of children could not be better managed by their own parents than by the state.

Criticism of the workhouse school and Recommendation of the distinct school

The New Poor Law was the first Act which provided for the education of pauper children. It directs the Poor Law Board to regulate the education of the children in the workhouse.

In obedience to this enactment, the Poor Law Board, by their consolidated order, Article 114, have ordered as follows:

¹⁸ Senior's comments (printed memorandum, February 1, 1860) on a "confidential" paper (printed) submitted by Mr. Goldwin Smith to the attention of the Royal Commission on Popular Education (1859-1860), of which Senior was a member, in Levy 1928 vol.2: 334-335.

The boys and girls who are inmates of the workhouse shall, for three working hours at least every day, be instructed in reading, writing, and arithmetic, and the principles of the Christian religion; and such other instruction shall be imparted to them as may fit them for service and train them to habits of usefulness, industry, and virtue.

The evils, however, of workhouse education, the badness of the masters, the contamination by the adult paupers, the absence of moral, intellectual, or industrial training, and the habit quickly induced of regarding the workhouse as a home and pauperism as an inheritance, soon forced themselves on public attention.

To solve these evils, in 1837, the committee of the House of Commons which sat on the new Poor Law, and, in 1841, the Poor Law Commissioners published a volume on the training of pauper children. These Committee decided the establishment of district schools. These district school only established six in England and Wales until 1859. Senior acknowledged the establishment of district schools had been practically inoperative. However, those school had not failed. In the few instances in which they have been established their success has been striking such as North Surrey District School. Senior picked up the three reasons that the real obstacles to their establishment. First, the

clause of the 11 & 12 Vict. C. 82, which requires the consent in writing of the majority of guardians of each union to its combination in a school district any part of which shall be more than fifteen miles from any other part of such district, and to the expenditure for building purposes of more than a fifth of the annual poor rate.¹⁹ Secondly, the clause of the 7 & 8 Vict. C. 101, which empowers the guardians to send to the district school only orphans, deserted children, and children whose parents or surviving parent or guardian consent to their being so sent. Thirdly, the absence of any department expressly and imperatively charged with the duty of endeavoring to effect the objects of the Acts.²⁰

Senior had hope the effect of district school or separate school. At that time, many workhouses were established under one roof which including adults and children. When Senior visited the workhouse school at Southampton, Senior saw the actual condition of the workhouse school. The building appropriated to the children is district, but is separated from that containing the adults only by the street. The master and mistress admitted that the children frequently turned out ill, that the girls especially lost their places,

¹⁹ On the 31st of August, 1848, the 11 & 12 Vict. C. 82 was passed, which after reciting that the restrictions contained in the previous Act had rendered it inoperative, repeals the prohibition of including in a district a parish any part of which should be more than fifteen miles from any other part of the district, and also the limitation of the expenditure in buildings to one-fifth of the annual poor-law expenditure, in cases where the major part of the guardians of the unions or parishes proposed to be combined shall previously thereto consent in writing to such combination.

²⁰ Senior 1861: 74-82.

returned to the workhouse, and were immediately ruined by the adults. The principle causes of corruption were the degraded state in which they arrived, the meetings, however rare, with the adults, and the visits from relations. The paupers are a tribe. Their relations can see them once a week. The visit generally undoes all the moral good that has been done during the previous week.

The separate school, therefore, ought to be at a distance, and Senior has no doubt that the great success of those which have been established by the metropolitan and the northern unions arises in a great measure from their distance from the workhouse and from the friends and relations of the children.²¹

Moreover, the effect of district schools had contributed to diminish the pauperism of London. The good education given in these district schools absolutely stops this hereditary pauperism, and diminishes crime, by educating children out of their vicious propensities.

Conclusion

After the death of Senior, the elementary education act of 1870 was established. Although Senior had never said about the compulsory education by the government, Senior was a strong supporter of the intervention to the education by the government.

²¹ Ibid: 88-90.

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