

Margaret McMillan and Scotland: rebellion, resistance and recognition.

Walter Humes

University of Stirling

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines some aspects of the work of Margaret McMillan (1860-1931), who is best known for her advocacy of child welfare and nursery education in the first decades of the twentieth century, but who was also closely involved in early socialist movements and, to a lesser extent, the campaign for women's suffrage. The particular focus is on her Scottish connections, which have hitherto received limited attention. Although most of her work was carried out in Bradford and London, it is argued that her early education in Inverness was an important factor in the direction of her life and that references to Scotland in her writing suggest an interesting combination of national pride, literary romanticism and intellectual disappointment. The complex elements in her social and educational philosophy are described and their mixed reception in Scotland is examined. Possible areas for further research are suggested. Is McMillan an example of a prophet who has been insufficiently honoured, not in the country of her birth (which was the United States) but of her childhood and adolescence? Was there something about the social conservatism of much of Scotland that made it inevitable that she would seek to put her ideas into practice in a more receptive environment? These questions are set against one (negative) characterisation of the Scottish educational tradition.

INTRODUCTION

In *A Century of the Scottish People 1830-1950*, the historian T. C. Smout observes:

Perhaps . . . it is in the history of the school more than in any other aspect of recent social history that the key lies to some of the more depressing aspects of modern Scotland. If there are in this country too many people who fear what is new, believe the difficult to be impossible, draw back from responsibility, and afford established authority an exaggerated respect, we can reasonably look for an explanation in the institutions that moulded them. (Smout 1986, p. 229)

It is interesting to place this statement alongside the career of Margaret McMillan (1860-1931), who was born in the United States, but educated in Scotland, who went on to effect great changes in the nurture and early education of young children. Here was a woman who, in contrast to Smout's description, embraced new ideas, was resilient in the face of setbacks, took on a level of responsibility that damaged her own health, and was willing to challenge various forms of authority. It is true that most of her pioneering work was carried out in England, first in Bradford and then in London, but in the longer term she influenced provision in Scotland too. How is this seeming exception to Smout's generalisation to be explained? What were the factors (personal, educational, political, religious) that impelled Margaret McMillan to take the course she did? How much public awareness of her work was there in Scotland during her lifetime? What do her achievements reveal about cultural and social attitudes to the welfare of children in the period 1890-1930? These are some of the questions that will be considered in this paper.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Margaret McMillan was born in 1860 in Westchester County, New York, to parents who had emigrated from the highlands of Scotland. Her later recollection of the first few years of her life presents a picture of physical and emotional warmth, freedom and happiness (McMillan, 1927, p.10). Tragedy struck in 1865 when both her father and younger sister, Elizabeth, died within a few days of each other. Her mother, in straitened financial circumstances, was forced to return to Scotland with her two remaining daughters, Margaret and her elder sister Rachel. The girls lived with their mother and maternal grandparents in Inverness, where they received their education (see below). Mrs McMillan died in 1877, requiring the two young women to carve independent lives for themselves, albeit with some support from relatives. Margaret trained as a governess on the continent and later studied languages and taught English in Geneva and Lausanne. These foreign experiences were important in broadening her outlook and introducing her to progressive ideas in education, psychology and sociology. After several years working as a governess, she joined Rachel in London and became involved in socialist movements, meeting influential figures including William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb. For a time, she acted as a companion to the socialite Lady Meux, who sponsored her to train as an actress. Forced to choose between her political activities and Lady Meux's patronage, McMillan put principles above financial security. Her growing success as a propagandist for the socialist cause led to an invitation to settle in Bradford as an adult educator for the newly-formed Independent Labour Party. She worked there for nine years, securing election three times as a member of the Bradford School Board. This enabled her to campaign against the 'half-time' system, whereby children were exempted from full-time attendance at schools in order to work in factories (McMillan, 1896). She argued that childhood under industrial capitalism was a physical and psychological distortion of what it should be. By drawing attention to the distressing medical condition of many children, caused by sub-standard housing, poor hygiene and inadequate nutrition, she argued successfully for the installation of school baths and the provision of meals. Her

reputation as an inspiring speaker gave her a growing national profile. This was reinforced by her substantial output as a journalist, writing for socialist magazines such as *Clarion* and *The Labour Leader*.

Following a period of ill-health, and a recuperative holiday in the Hebrides (Bradburn, 1989, pp.60-63) she returned south and went to live with Rachel in Bromley, Kent. Rachel had trained as a sanitary inspector and was very familiar with the challenges (domestic, financial, educational) which faced poor parents and their children. The two sisters worked as a team, initiating projects, seeking support and putting plans into action. While Rachel influenced Margaret's political thinking and made an immense contribution to the practical aspects of their schemes, it was Margaret who advanced the intellectual case through her writing and mobilised political support.

Margaret became a lecturer for the Ethical Society and, in 1904, was appointed by the London County Council as a manager of a group of schools in Deptford, an impoverished part of south-east London. This marked the beginning of a 25-year mission to establish clinics and open-air nursery schools in deprived communities. She attracted backing from philanthropists and, despite bureaucratic obstacles and the challenges posed by the 1914-18 war (when many mothers were employed in munitions factories), developed a powerful network of supporters among officials, politicians and intellectuals. Rachel died in 1917 and the rest of Margaret's life was devoted to celebrating her sister's achievements, culminating in the founding of the Rachel McMillan Training College, opened by Queen Mary in 1930. Margaret McMillan herself was awarded a C.B.E. in 1917 and made a Companion of Honour in 1930.

(In the sections that follow, when 'McMillan' is used, it refers specifically to Margaret. Where it is necessary to distinguish the two sisters, Christian names are occasionally given.)

SOURCES

There is no shortage of material on Margaret McMillan, but relatively little that relates specifically to Scotland. The body of her own work is extensive. In addition to book-length publications (McMillan, 1900; 1904; 1907; 1911; 1917; 1919; 1927), she wrote numerous pamphlets and a great many articles in magazines and journals. Steedman (1990) in her bibliography lists some 400 articles by McMillan and suggests that there are certainly more to be discovered, particularly for the period after 1914: between 1905 and 1915 she wrote at least 100 articles on one topic, the medical inspection and treatment of children (Steedman, 1990, pp. 146-147). There is also a substantial amount of unpublished material relating to her work in Bradford and London, held in archives at the University of Greenwich, Lewisham Local History and Archives Centre, the London School of Economics and Bradford Council. More useful, with regard to the present study, are reports in Scottish newspapers of her writing and her visits to Scotland to speak at public events (accessed via the British Newspaper Archives). She published a number of articles in the *Scottish Educational Journal*, produced by the Educational Institute of Scotland, the main teachers' organisation north of the border. A particularly valuable source is a short pamphlet, *A Nursery School in Dundee*, written by one of McMillan's students, Mabel Brydie, and

published posthumously in 1923. Miss Brydie states explicitly that her work was based directly on what she had learned at the training centre started by Rachel and continued by Margaret.

The secondary source material is extensive. It includes several biographies, studies of the historical development of early education (e.g., Pound, 2011; Jarvis et al., 2017) scholarly articles in educational journals dealing with specific topics, such as the debates within the Nursery School Association in the 1920s (Jarvis & Liebovich, 2015), and McMillan's influence in the United States (Whitehead, 2014; Liebovich, 2016). The early biographies and memoirs (Mansbridge, 1932; Cresswell, 1948; Lowndes, 1960) tended to be hagiographical in character, emphasising the inspirational character of McMillan's work, her Christian and socialist convictions, and her desire to transform society. Later commentators, while celebrating her achievements and legacy, have been more analytical and critical in their approach (Bradburn, 1989; Moriarty, 1998) and have acknowledged her tough-minded response to obstacles and critics, which sometimes caused offence. The most detailed study, using original material and setting the efforts of the McMillans against the social, economic and political background of the period, is to be found in Steedman (1990). It notes the tendency among many commentators to focus rather narrowly on McMillan's educational work, without giving sufficient weight to the personal, social, religious and political motivations which helped to shape it. For this reason, in the present paper some use has been made of studies of the cultural context of the period 1890-1930, including campaigns for improved public health. Useful chronologies of McMillan's life are to be found in Mansbridge (1932), Bradburn (1976) and Moriarty (1998).

EDUCATION

Margaret McMillan attended Inverness Royal Academy Ladies' Institution (later to be incorporated into the co-educational Inverness Royal Academy) from 1873 to 1877. Some of her early experience may help to explain her preoccupations in adulthood. In her life of her sister, Rachel, she observed: 'The schools of that day, even for well-to-do children whose parents paid high fees (our mother paid them with difficulty), had a low standard in respect of hygiene. Dusty walls, greasy slates, no hot water and no care of the physical body' (McMillan, 1927, p. 17). The curriculum offered a good grounding in English literature, grammar and composition, foreign languages (French and German), history and geography. Coverage of mathematics and science was limited, but religious education, needlework and 'calisthenics' featured at all stages (Preece, 2011). Piano and singing lessons, deemed desirable social accomplishments for young ladies, could be provided at extra cost. Commenting on her schooling near the end of her life, Margaret said that 'the girls were trained to be ridiculous snobs' (Mansbridge, p. 10).

She did not recall her early education with pleasure, though she did acknowledge that it had given her 'scholarship' (McMillan, 1927, p. 19). Writing to a school contemporary, the Reverend John Mackenzie, in 1930, she recalled, 'I was a deaf child – and on the whole a very unhappy one' (ibid., p. 9). Accounts of her deafness vary, but it seems to have followed a bout of scarlet fever at the

age of three and cleared up without medical intervention at around fourteen (see Bradburn, 1989, p. 9). Given prevailing attitudes to disability in the 19th century, it is likely that she would have been treated harshly by many pupils and some teachers. In the same letter, she stated, 'I think my school life made me a rebel and also a reformer . . . Reform. That's what Scotland needs. What memories of suffering and cruelty I have of my native land' (ibid., p. 10).

It would be simplistic to claim that McMillan's subsequent career, working tirelessly for poor children in deprived communities, can be attributed directly to her memories of the harshness and social divisiveness of her Scottish schooling. As will be shown, all sorts of other influences helped to shape the direction of her life. Just as A. S. Neill's progressive attitude to education was partly a reaction against his own schooling in Forfar, but was subject to more positive forces arising from his European travels and his encounters with creative thinkers in the arts, literature, philosophy and psychology (see Humes, 2015a), so too Margaret McMillan, drawing on extensive reading in a range of intellectual fields and engaging with others in political campaigns for social change, moved beyond the narrowness and negativity of her adolescent years. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to dismiss entirely the idea that her efforts were partly motivated by the sense of injustice which she felt about the form of schooling she had received in Inverness. She wanted to create a better world, in which class divisions were challenged and all children were given the opportunity of a happy, fulfilled life.

Some of her thinking was influenced by reports from Rachel who visited cousins in Edinburgh in 1887 and was impressed by people and ideas she encountered there: 'Edinburgh was far ahead of Inverness. It was permeated already with new influences, influences that were breaking up its dour traditions' (McMillan, 1927, p. 27). Rachel attended sermons by radical preachers and meetings promoting socialist ideas. One of those she met was John Gilray, who gave her copies of journals advancing the case for social reform, such as *Commonweal* and *Justice*: he himself later produced an unpublished account of the socialist movement in Edinburgh (Gilray, 1909). The McMillan sisters came to hold the view that idealistic socialists, with their vision of a fairer world, were the true apostles of Christ.

EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Three main elements can be detected in McMillan's educational and social philosophy. First, there is a 'romantic', child-centred strand, influenced by her reading of Rousseau (1712-1778), Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Froebel (1782-1852). According to Moriarty (1998, p. 58), McMillan's ideas were 'steeped in Romantic ideology, mediated through earlier educators and philosophers'. This strand is also evident in her fictional portrayals of childhood, which not only evoke sympathy for those brought up in desperate conditions but also express belief in the potential of all children (see Steedman, 1990, pp. 68-80). Here, appeals to nature and the role of the teacher as gardener, cultivating the growth and development of the delicate organism of the child, are invoked. 'The real object of our work is Nurture – the organic and natural education which should precede all primary teaching and without which the work of the schools is largely lost' (McMillan's speech at the opening of the Rachel McMillan College, 1930, quoted

in Lowndes, 1960, p. 107). For McMillan, the garden was not merely a metaphor: the schools she established had real gardens, which not only helped to train the children's powers of observation and to develop their vocabulary, but also inspired their imagination and opened their eyes to previously unknown pleasures.

Steedman (1990) highlights the contrast between 'gardens' and 'cities' in McMillan's writing. The former represent the natural life cycle, allowing for growth and development, while the latter are seen as oppressive sites in which people are dehumanised in the drive for profit. It was her firm belief that a child's capacity to lead a fulfilled life can be stimulated or stunted from the moment of birth: in her Presidential speech to the Nursery School Association in 1923, she stated bluntly, 'The first years decide all' (quoted in Lowndes, 1960, p. 45). It can be argued that, nearly a century later, this conviction is still not fully reflected in educational and welfare provision.

A second element might be described as 'scientific'. This involved supporting her arguments for educational and social reform by the systematic study of childhood, based on careful observation and the accumulation of evidence. In an article in the *Scottish Educational Journal*, McMillan stated:

This is the day . . . of statistics, of the cool gathering and comparison of figures on birth rate, on death rates, on the distribution of disease, of crime and mental deficiency; of figures also of scientific accuracy on the distribution of intelligence, of normal and sub-normal, and of super-normal types (McMillan, 1929a, p. 74).

In Bradford, for example, working with Dr James Kerr (Medical Superintendent of Schools and later Chief Medical Officer to the London School Board), she drew on statistical information about the incidence of children's medical conditions to make her case for the installation of baths in schools. Rickets, diphtheria, scarlet fever, scabies, ringworm and respiratory disease were commonplace and in the early 1890s more than 30 percent of children in the city died before their first birthday (Steedman, 1990, p. 107). McMillan campaigned tirelessly for measures to remedy curable conditions of the eyes, ears, throats, teeth and skin, seeking at the same time to educate parents about how they could improve the life chances of their children.

It is also apparent that she read extensively in physiology, medicine, neurology and psychology. For example, her familiarity with the writings of the French psychologist, Alfred Binet (1857-1911), whose intelligence tests were widely used in the first half of the 20th century, is apparent in *The Child and the State* (McMillan, 1911). The physiological basis of her thinking is strongly evident in *Early Childhood*: 'All true education is, primarily, physiological. It is concerned, not with books, but with nervous tissue' (McMillan, 1900, p. 35). This leads her to stress the importance of early sensory impressions and the developmental value of exercising all the senses. Children should have opportunities to touch and observe, using their hands and eyes freely. For natural growth to proceed, they need to be allowed to move, explore, run and jump. Play is essential for 'the higher mental life which is to follow' (ibid, p. 22). The link between the physical and mental experiences of the child is also apparent from the attention she gives to hygiene, fresh air and nutrition.

The psychologist, Cyril Burt, observed that 'she combined with her remarkable intuitive gifts a wide knowledge of the relevant literature', adding that 'Her own name is chiefly associated with physical welfare and with the medical aspects of child development and treatment. But she was equally interested in mental welfare and in the psychological aspects' (quoted in Lowndes, 1960, pp. 97-98). Her thinking was particularly influenced by the work of Édouard Séguin (1812-80) on mental deficiency, as can be seen from the many citations of him in her own writing.

The third element, which fuelled her passionate campaigns for reform, was her Christian socialism. Her Christianity was ecumenical in character, quite unlike the narrow Presbyterianism which she experienced as a child in Inverness and was imbued with a spiritual dimension which she attributed to a vague, mystical experience during her time as a governess in Ludlow (see Bradburn, 1989, pp. 17-18). Her writing makes frequent references to the scriptures and, speaking to 'young Scots' in 1903 she urged them to study and digest their Bibles: 'There is no other book like it for the education of the higher ideals' (quoted in Mansbridge, 1932, p. 161). For both McMillan sisters, their Christianity went hand-in-hand with their socialist convictions: socialism was seen as a natural way of trying to express Christ's injunction to love thy neighbour. This belief underpinned the reforming zeal evident in Margaret's work for the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the Fabian Society and other organisations seeking to create a more democratic and egalitarian society. As part of this, she supported the campaign for women's suffrage, despite some opposition within the ILP. At the ILP Congress in Derby in 1907, she spoke in favour of a motion to send a telegram to women 'imprisoned for their fidelity to the cause of sex equality and congratulate them for their courage in suffering the rigours of our inhuman prison system' (reported in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 3 April, 1907, p. 6). Seven years later McMillan herself was a victim of police violence when she took part in a protest outside the House of Commons (Steedman, 1990, p. 136). She stopped short, however, of supporting the more extreme forms of protest, aligning herself with the moderate Women's Freedom League rather than the militant Women's Social and Political Union.

McMillan's support for the London dockers' strike in 1889 was a critical turning point in her career, leading to the invitation to work in Bradford. There are grounds for thinking that her political radicalism diminished somewhat after the death of her sister in 1917 and that in the post-war period her main energies were directed towards promoting her particular vision of nursery education. By the late 1920s, Steedman suggests, 'McMillan placed the question of child welfare above that of political allegiance' (Steedman, 1990, p. 102). Certainly, some of her early socialist associates were dismayed by her connection with the Conservative MP, Lady Astor, who was a strong supporter of the work in Deptford. It was through the financial support of Lord and Lady Astor that it was possible to establish the Rachel McMillan College for the training of nursery teachers in 1930 (prior to that date, the Deptford school served as a training centre which lacked full college status).

SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Although McMillan was most concerned with the welfare and development of very young children, she also wrote about other sectors. The Education Act of 1870 (and a similar, but not identical, 1872 Act in Scotland) had established state-controlled elementary schools under the supervision of locally-elected School Boards, but by the turn of the century (earlier in Scotland) there were demands for improved access to post-elementary establishments of various kinds. McMillan contributed to this debate, indeed arguing that the school leaving age should be 16 (McMillan, 1911, p. 187) – a target that was not reached in England and Scotland until 1972 – thus preventing the premature entry of adolescents to exploitative and unhealthy work in factories, mills and mines. At the same time, she suggested that the benefits of raising the leaving-age would be limited unless the welfare and educational needs of very young children were also addressed: for many, the damage had already been done before they reached the age of five (McMillan, 1929b, p. 858).

McMillan was very impressed by the Danish system of high schools introduced by N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872), which combined practical skills with a broader cultural outlook, and encouraged active participation in society. The education of adults, especially those who have been denied opportunities in their youth, was also a topic that featured in McMillan's writing, with references to the contribution of Mechanics' Institutes, the Workers' Educational Association and the University Extension Movement. With regard to universities, she had harsh comments to make about the way in which Oxford and Cambridge colleges had managed to transform endowments originally intended to benefit poor scholars into awards that benefitted those who were socially and financially privileged, concluding that 'the caste system rules in the English educational world' (McMillan, 1911, p. 158). By contrast, she claimed, Scottish universities were more egalitarian, enabling students from modest backgrounds to gain entry and pursue learning for its own sake. She predicted that higher education in England would soon have to cater for 'a newly emancipated class' of workers (McMillan, 1911, p. 165).

RECEPTION IN SCOTLAND

The challenges that McMillan encountered in Bradford and London, adversely affecting the health and welfare of mothers and children, were also widespread in Scotland (see Ferguson, 1958, chapter IX). Vigorous campaigning by a number of individuals and organisations, for a long time resisted by conservative political and economic interests, eventually led to modest legislative reforms in both England and Scotland, initially covering medical inspection and the provision of meals (the Scottish Acts came a year after their English equivalents). The Children Act of 1908 applied to both Scotland and England and was concerned with the protection of children from ill-treatment, cruelty and neglect. It was an important landmark in the gradual reconceptualization of working-class childhood, not simply as a precursor to employment but as a critical developmental stage requiring nurture and support, although it took a long time for the Act's provisions to be effectively implemented.

McMillan's input into these debates was very apparent in England but her name also became well-known in Scotland as a result of her work for the

Independent Labour Party and her activities on the Bradford School Board. Bradburn (1989, p. 54) reports that 'she was often in demand as a speaker in Scotland' and gives as an example a notice in *The Labour Leader* (September 21, 1900) publicising a lecture by McMillan in the Albion Halls, Glasgow: 'Those who have listened to her before will be glad of this opportunity to hear her again' (ibid, p. 54). McMillan's continuing links with Scotland were probably strengthened by her close association with Keir Hardie (1856-1915), the Lanarkshire-born socialist who, after founding the Scottish Labour Party (1888), was instrumental in the setting up of the Independent Labour Party (in 1893) and subsequently became leader of the Labour Party in Parliament (1906-08). Hardie had a high regard for McMillan (see Steedman, p. 130; Benn, 1997, p. 149). As the first editor of *The Labour Leader* (from 1888 to 1904), Hardie would have been responsible for publishing many of McMillan's early articles and her brand of Christian socialism was highly compatible with his own ideological stance.

There is evidence that McMillan's work in Bradford and Deptford began to influence thinking in Scotland on the importance of medical inspection and treatment for children in schools. A substantial report entitled *School Clinics at Home and Abroad* was produced by the National League for Physical Education and Improvement in 1913. Its principal author was Lewis D. Cruickshank, described as 'Medical Officer and Inspector of Physical Education, Scotch [sic] Education Department' and also 'Late Principal of the Dunfermline College of Hygiene and Physical Education' (a 1905 Carnegie Trust foundation). McMillan refers to the 'Dunfermline clinic' in some of her writing (e.g., McMillan, 1911, p. 32). The report by Cruickshank makes reference to provision in Bradford and goes on to state: 'The Deptford Clinic, initiated, controlled and directed by Miss Margaret McMillan, has done excellent pioneer work, and may still be regarded as a model of comprehensiveness and efficiency' (Cruickshank, 1913, p. 76). The report noted, however, that the legal framework in Scotland prevented school boards from raising funds to provide for the treatment (as distinct from the medical inspection) of children. It stated: 'As regards the provision of treatment, English local authorities have thus a clear advantage over the Scottish school boards' (Cruickshank, 1913, p. 32). The English school boards had been abolished in 1902 and replaced by local authorities. This did not happen in Scotland until 1919.

It would be a mistake, however, to claim that Scotland was invariably behind England in child welfare matters. McMillan's vigorous campaign against the half-time system, whereby children could be exempted from full-time attendance at schools in order to work and contribute to the family income, had considerable force in the north of England but did not reflect the situation in Scotland to the same extent. According to McDermid (2015), most school boards in Scotland resisted the system, insisting on full-time attendance. Glasgow was particularly energetic in this regard. One exception was Dundee, where the power of the mill owners helped to ensure that the school board there granted many more exemptions from full-time attendance than elsewhere. But, as will be shown below, Dundee can claim to have been more innovative in one respect.

With regard to McMillan's campaign for nursery schools, there is some evidence of gradual awareness in Scotland of their potential and value, but also

some evidence of resistance. This debate should be seen as part of a wider discussion of the extent to which the state should take responsibility for matters previously left to parents. In an article in the *Scotsman*, (September 7, 1908, p. 6) discussing a report by the English Board of Education regarding the age at which schooling should begin, including the possibility of provision for three to five-year-olds, the idea is seen as 'a step in the socialistic evolution destined to substitute the State for the parent'. This would amount to 'destruction, not reform' and would represent 'a headlong plunge into the yawning depths of Socialism'.

Scottish newspapers included reviews of McMillan's publications. *The Camp School* (McMillan, 1917) received a brief notice in the *Scotsman* (October 1, 1917, p. 2), while *The Nursery School* (McMillan, 1919) was given fuller treatment in the same paper (*Scotsman*, December 15, 1919, p. 2). In the latter, McMillan is described as someone who is 'well known for her educational work among poor children, and [who] holds advanced views upon most social questions'.

An article by a Mrs Worsthorne (no Christian name given) in the *Fife Free Press* (August 20, 1927, p. 8) referred positively to McMillan's publications *The Nursery School* and *What an Open-Air Nursery Is* and concluded: 'The arguments for nursery schools are overwhelming, not only for children whose parents are poor and overworked, but for all children.' It was acknowledged, however, that there was opposition to the idea, both on grounds of cost and a fear of downgrading the role of parents. A similar argument was advanced at a meeting of Lanarkshire Education Authority reported in the *Motherwell Times* (November 2, 1928), where it was again suggested that nursery schools were a 'socialistic' idea favoured by the Soviet government as a means of indoctrinating young children. Resistance in Aberdeen, a place with a reputation for canniness in financial matters, took the form of an argument that the city's own welfare scheme was sufficient to meet the needs of impoverished families (*Press and Journal*, March 26, 1926, p. 4). Perhaps the elected members had not forgiven McMillan for a talk she gave to the local Women's Educational Association in 1920, during which the slowness of the education authority in responding to the call for nurseries was criticised (*Press and Journal*, December 2, 1920).

An interesting exception to the general coolness towards nurseries in Scotland can be found in Dundee. Here the efforts of the Dundee Social Union, particularly under the leadership of Mary Walker (1863-1913), had raised civic awareness of a wide range of social ills deriving from poverty, poor housing and the damaging effects of the 'half-time system' on children's educational progress. In 1905, Part 1 of a report of an investigation into social conditions in the city, with particular reference to the medical inspection of school children, was published, containing statistical data about the many acute and chronic ailments identified by doctors (Dundee Social Union, 1905). This was reminiscent of work undertaken by Dr Kerr in Bradford during McMillan's time there. The initiative in Dundee took place against a background of national fears about physical deterioration provoked by the poor state of health found in potential military recruits to serve in the Second Boer War (1889-1902). A small number of day nurseries were established, with some financial backing from the municipality, but mainly through voluntary efforts.

Of direct relevance to the present study, was the work of Mabel Brydie in the period after the First World War. Brydie and her colleague, Jessie Porter, started

a nursery school in a wing of the old Western Poorhouse in Dundee on May 17, 1920 (Brydie, 1923, p. 5). Significantly, following attendance at the Froebel Institute, both had been trained at the centre in Deptford run by the McMillan sisters. Brydie is quite explicit about the extent to which her approach was influenced by her experience in London. In this comment she is clearly referring to Margaret McMillan as Rachel had died in 1917:

I was ten years a kindergarten teacher, and it is entirely due to Miss McMillan's inspiration that I took up this work. She first opened my eyes to the great need of efficient nursery schools in the slums of our cities, and after four years' experience of the work here and in London, I realise that the need is far greater than I knew. Our school is run on Miss McMillan's lines (Brydie, 1923, p. 6)

The description that follows is entirely consistent with the principles outlined in McMillan's own publications and the reports of visitors to the Deptford school. The importance of addressing the poor physical condition of children, most of whom are underweight, is stressed. Bathing, feeding, sleeping and exercise are all part of the routine. A weekly visit from Dr Scott Dickson of the Dundee Maternity and Child Welfare Clinic takes place (*ibid*, p. 8). Although not an 'open-air' nursery on the Deptford model, the school does have a garden, which Brydie describes as 'our greatest asset' (*ibid*, p. 10). It provides the setting for various forms of outdoor learning. Taking children beyond their own immediate environment to visit the River Tay, the railway station, local landmarks and a farm encourages them to observe a wider world than they normally experience and helps to extend their vocabulary. Although 'there is no formality' (*ibid*, p.16) in teaching, all the areas identified by McMillan as growth points for future development are mentioned: music, singing and dancing; incidental work with numbers, using the apparatus developed by Maria Montessori (1870-1952); drawing to encourage free expression; the use of pictures, poems, nursery rhymes and stories to stimulate the imagination. Brydie observes that 'The children often teach us' (*ibid*, p. 9), implying that, for teachers, the biggest challenge is to understand the reality of poor children's lives.

Most of Brydie's account is taken up with a description of the daily activities in her nursery, with some touching vignettes of individual children, but towards the end she comments directly on the wider economic and social issues that featured so prominently in McMillan's writings. She reports that nearly all of the mothers work in the mills: 'Their lives are full of struggle and difficulty, and many of them are worn-out women, physically, though still young' (*ibid*, p. 31). Overcrowded and insanitary housing conditions, in parts of the city where there is no opportunity for children to benefit from fresh air, exercise and safe play, mean that families are trapped in a pattern of unhealthy living. Brydie expresses the hope that she and her colleagues would be able to 'increase the social work among the mothers' (*ibid*, p. 32). Sadly, she did not live to fulfil this hope. Her own health was never very robust and she died the year before her book was published. The Preface states that 'in a literal sense she gave her life for the success of her school' (*ibid*, p. 3). In her account of the spread of the nursery movement, Emma Stevinson, superintendent of the Deptford school in the 1920s and later principal of the Rachel McMillan Training College, makes particular mention of Brydie's efforts in

Dundee: 'The school is notable for its wonderful success in gaining the friendship and support of the parents' (Stevinson, 1923, p. 64).

But the Dundee example was untypical of provision across Scotland. McMillan continued to be critical of what she saw as the neglect of early education in Scotland, implying that the response north of the border had been inadequate. In 1900 she had written: 'Scotland is the one of the foremost countries in matters that concern education . . . Yet there is, perhaps, no country where the works of Froebel and Pestalozzi were less studied . . . And in Scotland only a comparatively small number of very young children go to school *at all*' (McMillan, 1900, p. 107: emphasis in original). Nursery schools were slow to develop in Scotland, despite recognition by the inspectorate and some School Boards of what they could achieve. Ferguson (1958, p. 576) estimates that in 1914 there were 20-30 day nurseries in Scotland. According to Bone, as late as 1938 there were only 34 nursery schools across the whole country (Bone, 1968, p. 200). When McMillan gave an address to the EIS Annual Congress in St Andrews in 1928, Miss Muir of Edinburgh, proposing a vote of thanks, acknowledged that 'To our shame in Scotland there were very few nursery schools' (reported in the *Scottish Educational Journal*, January 4, 1929, p. 7). In her response, McMillan rather tartly replied that she wished Scotland were the pioneer of the nursery school movement as it had been the pioneer of ordinary education. And although provision in Scotland expanded rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century, as late as the 1980s there was some professional opposition to the 'nurture' view advocated by McMillan in favour of a more formal, structured approach (Paterson, 2003, p. 126).

SCOTTISH IDENTITY

Despite her criticisms of Scotland – its Calvinist repression, its intellectual narrowness and its social conservatism – McMillan retained a strong emotional attachment to the land of her upbringing. There was never any sense that she sought to repudiate her Scottishness as she acquired a public profile in England. On the contrary, several of her colleagues and supporters remarked on the importance of her Scottish roots. In his biography of her, Mansbridge states: 'The Highland tradition of piety, mysticism, scholarship and unremitting industry were ingrained in her, as also a fierce Highland pride' (Mansbridge, 1932, p. 20). One of her Bradford associates, Glyn Thomas, remarked that 'It was no doubt to her Highland heritage that she owed certain mystic powers which she seemed to possess' (quoted in Lowndes, 1960, p. 22). Another, unnamed contributor to the volume published to mark the centenary of her birth referred to 'her fiery Gaelic spirit and genius' (ibid, p. 38). Her strength of character and resilience in the face of setbacks were sometimes attributed to her Scottishness. J. J. Mallon, onetime Warden of Toynbee Hall described her as 'A Scotswoman with the genius of her race for planning and construction' (ibid, p. 14).

Her writing often contains sentimental appeals to highland landscape and occasional references to the 'authenticity' of Scottish culture compared to the 'artificiality' of English customs. Steedman refers to what she calls a persistent 'Scottishness trope' in much of McMillan's early writing (Steedman, 1990, p. 153), especially the rather romantic, sentimental tone of her moralistic fiction. There is

even an attachment to the nutritional value of the Scottish staple of porridge! *The Nursery School* informs readers that the oatmeal used to provide the children with breakfast is sourced from A. Mackenzie, King's Mills, Inverness: 'It outstrips all qualities of meal ever tried' (McMillan, 1919, p. 51). McMillan also used some Scottish material in her teaching. One former pupil said 'she enthralled us with her beloved Scottish songs' (Lowndes, 1960, p. 73), while a London County Council inspector recalled hearing a recitation by a pupil of Sir Walter Scott's poem 'Lochinvar' 'in a strong Scottish accent without a trace of Cockney' (ibid, p. 71).

McMillan's Scottish connections emerge as important in various ways. Her schooling in Inverness had provided her with a solid intellectual foundation which enabled her to engage with a wide range of challenging ideas in politics, sociology, science and education. At the same time, she found the formal climate of Scottish schooling in the 1860s and 70s harsh and oppressive: it gave her the resolve to aim for something more humane and enlightened. On the political front, there were several Scottish sources that encouraged her radicalism: her perception of the unfairness of land ownership and economic inequality in the Highlands (Steedman, 1990, p. 33); the stimulus she received from Rachel's account of her introduction to socialist ideas in Edinburgh; her own later encounters with leading Scottish figures in the Labour movement such as Keir Hardie and Ramsay McDonald. These diverse influences resulted in an unsettling mixture of pride and despair about the condition of Scotland.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

More work needs to be done in tracing the frequency and nature of McMillan's visits to Scotland during the time she was working in Bradford and London. In existing accounts of her work, there are a number of intriguing references to Scottish links which invite further investigation. For example, as part of her campaign to introduce school baths in Bradford, she went on a deputation with colleagues to inspect facilities in Glasgow, where some provision had already been made (Mansbridge, 1932, p. 45). Again, when Sir Robert Morant (1863-1920), Permanent Secretary of the English Board of Education from 1903 to 1911, who was a strong supporter of McMillan's work, despite the bureaucratic constraints of his official role, found himself under attack from teachers in England, she wrote to him in encouraging terms: 'You're not disliked as much as you think . . . In Scotland you're very much respected, and there is not any prejudice at all. I spoke in seven towns in eight days and talked freely to people who know' (quoted in Mansbridge, 1932, p. 70).

Another line of enquiry is suggested by the account of Mabel Brydie's school in Dundee. Was it an isolated case or were there other Scottish students who attended the Rachel McMillan Training Centre and who returned north to apply some of the principles and practices they encountered there? The archive material held in Lewisham, Greenwich and the LSE may make it possible to identify students from Scotland, though the task of trying to trace their subsequent careers would be challenging. What evidence exists, indicates that former students of the Centre worked not only in Britain but also in Europe, Africa and the United States (Bradburn, 1976).

There is also scope to investigate changing attitudes to McMillan's strongly-held conviction that nursery schools should, in the main, be open-air, not confined to classrooms. Her arguments in favour of open-air provision seem to have received limited support in Scotland, perhaps because of the harsher climate north of the border. Some doctors supported the idea, on health rather than educational grounds, though a member of the Edinburgh School Board, Mrs Leslie Mackenzie (whose husband was a medical member of the Local Government Board), did so too (Anderson, 1995, p. 204). In general, however, School Boards in Scotland gave priority to the erection of solid (in some cases, rather grim) school buildings as an expression of civic responsibility and pride (see Roxburgh, 1971, pp. 234-6). McMillan's hope, expressed in 1925, that 'Scotland will yet rejoice in gardens, real child gardens, instead of child classrooms' (McMillan, 1925, p. 799) was not to be fulfilled during her lifetime. But a longer-term perspective shows that her vision was not entirely rejected. A nursery school set up by the Moray House Training Centre (later Moray House College of Education) was established in 1908 and, when the original building had to be replaced, the design was influenced by the open-air layout developed by the McMillan sisters in Deptford: 'The . . . interior included glazed panels in sliding timber frames. These south and west glazed walls could be pushed back so that the indoors and outdoors merged into an "open air" environment' (www.ed.ac.uk/education/about-us/maps-estates-history/estates/nursery-school). There has recently been renewed interest in outdoor learning (see Knight 2009; Joyce, 2012; Beames et al, 2012; Higgins & Nicol, 2018) and a website describing existing outdoor nurseries, forest and nature kindergarten in Scotland lists more than 24 such establishments across the country (www.creativestarning.co.uk). Here too there is scope to see how far such ventures may have been influenced by Macmillan's thinking on the subject. Interestingly, a Care Inspectorate report in 2016 designed to show how early years services can provide play and learning wholly or partially outdoors makes explicit reference to the work of the McMillan sisters in London and includes a quotation from Margaret McMillan's book *What the Open-Air Nursery Is* (McMillan, 1923; Care Inspectorate, 2016, p. 4).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Margaret McMillan represents a striking exception to the picture of the negative effects of Scottish education expressed in the quotation from T. C. Smout at the start of this article. Far from fearing a new vision of the nature and purpose of schooling, she actively sought to promote a theory of education that involved a direct challenge to existing conceptions of childhood, a redefinition of the relationship between school and work, and an insistence on the responsibility of the state in making appropriate provision for health and welfare, not just schooling. She advanced a powerful case for explaining the capacity of children to benefit from schooling in terms of their physical, material and emotional experiences in the earliest years of life. Furthermore, she had a good understanding of the importance of legislative and official support for the reforms she wanted to see, but when this was not forthcoming, she pressed ahead and made the best provision she could. Writing from a public health perspective,

Lammin (2017, p. 76) argues that 'networking, debate and research' were key tools in Macmillan's achievements: these enabled her 'to gain credibility and position herself so as to influence public policy'. She had sufficient confidence to disregard those who opposed social reform or were sceptical of her ambition to transform the lives of impoverished children and their families. In the last year of her life, she told one of her students: 'If you're going to get on, never be afraid of criticism. If you think a thing is right, say it, and never mind what people say about you' (quoted in Mansbridge, 1932, pp. 119-20).

McMillan's sometimes combative approach was described more directly by the writer, J. B. Priestley (1894-1984), in the Foreword to a Memoir published after the Second World War:

This energetic, indomitable, hot-tempered Highland spinster. . . turned herself into one of those Terrible Nuisances who are in fact the salt of the earth. These people, whose every visit is an appalling visitation, will not let things alone, are always bringing up awkward subjects, and cannot help making decent citizens, who ask for nothing but a quiet life, feel uncomfortable (Cresswell, 1948, p. 9).

It is interesting to speculate on the likely official response in Scotland if she had employed these tactics in seeking to persuade the Scotch [sic] Education Department, which had been established in 1885, with Sir Henry Craik (1846-1927) as its Secretary until 1904, of the importance of making provision for the nurture of very young children. By all accounts Craik was a highly efficient administrator whose priorities were financial prudence and operational practicality (Humes, 2000, p. 89). He has been described as 'typical of senior civil servants of his day, punctiliously correct at all times, aloof, authoritarian and ruthless when necessary' (Bone, 1968, p. 119). Later he became a Unionist MP. It seems unlikely, therefore, that McMillan would have received a sympathetic hearing such as she found in Sir Robert Morant, Permanent Secretary of the English Board of Education. Craik's successor, Sir John Struthers (1857-1925), who was in post until 1922, maintained the formal bureaucratic style of the SED that was to characterise its approach for most of the twentieth century. Its methods were described by critics as 'arbitrary and despotic' (Anderson, 1995, p. 175). In any case, the main focus of debate before and after the First World War was the extension of secondary education, not provision for the under-fives. Add to this the growing professionalisation of the teachers in Scotland, evident in the activities of the Educational Institute of Scotland (Belford, 1946), seeking to advance the status of primary and secondary teachers, and it is not hard to see how the exhortations of a person lacking formal teaching qualifications could easily be marginalised. As one of the speakers noted at the 1928 conference of the EIS, at which Margaret McMillan gave an address, there was a tendency to become rather inward-looking and complacent among the leaders of Scottish education (*Dundee Courier*, 29 December, 1928, p. 3), a criticism that arguably remains valid today (see Humes, 1986; 2015b).

These attitudes perhaps also explain why McMillan has not received much attention in histories of Scottish education. She merits brief, passing mention in a number of texts written by Scottish authors, but no sustained analysis. In his *History of Infant Education*, written by R. R. Rusk, the first Director of the Scottish

Council for Educational Research, McMillan is not mentioned at all (Rusk, 1951). Scottish histories of education, with some honourable exceptions (Anderson, 1995; Paterson, 2003) have tended to focus rather narrowly on legislative changes and curricular reforms, with limited attention given to the economic and political drivers of such developments. These aspects are dealt with more fully in R. J. W. Selleck's *The New Education 1870-1914* and in Brian Simon's *Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920*, works which relate educational developments (mainly in England) to radical political movements during that period: consequently, McMillan receives more attention in these volumes. Another factor is that the official narrative of Scottish education - as presented in reports and policy documents by government and its professional agencies – has tended to ignore those 'radical' spirits who questioned established practices. These include A. S. Neill, R. F. Mackenzie and John Aitkenhead. Neill, for example, was awarded three honorary degrees in his lifetime but none by a Scottish university (despite being a graduate of Edinburgh). And, in Macmillan's case, the fact that she was a woman may also have counted against her. The thought that Scottish education could learn something from England – albeit from someone with strong Scottish credentials – might have been a step too far for the male-dominated teaching profession of the time. It is fitting that the work of the McMillan sisters has at last been recognised in Scotland, albeit belatedly, by an entry in the *Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women* (Ewan et al, 2006, p. 240). In 2017, the Education Building at Goldsmith's College, University of London, was renamed the Margaret McMillan Building, following a campaign by staff and students to honour her achievements as a social and educational reformer (www.gold.ac.uk/news/margaret-mcmillan-building).

Finally, the case of Margaret McMillan is significant not just because of her interesting personal narrative and the intelligence and persistence she brought to bear on important social issues. Her educational work illustrates two important principles that have continuing relevance. Firstly, she demonstrated that schooling for disadvantaged children needs to be seen not simply in terms of improved institutional provision: to be effective, it must also address the social context in which they live. Poverty, housing, health, parenting and environment are all crucial in relation to the capacity of youngsters to grow and flourish. And secondly, her experience shows that educational reform is inescapably intertwined with highly contested political, economic and ideological questions. It is never simply a technical or organisational matter. Fundamental values and beliefs about the good life and the good society are always involved. This means that education professionals should resist attempts (by some politicians and officials) to limit their contribution to policy debates by permitting them only to ask 'How?' questions, never 'Why?' questions. Margaret McMillan's courage in daring to challenge the orthodoxies of her time should be an inspiration to us all.

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