
DAVID STOW – FAITH AND LEARNING: ‘TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO’

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DAVID STOW (1793–1864)

Historically Scotland's Presbyterian Churches have shown an interest in education, but there have been times when this concern was to the fore. At the time of the Reformation in Scotland, Parliament asked the Church to formulate a confession of faith. The task was undertaken by John Knox and four other ministers, and the resulting

collection of documents includes the *Scots Confession, the Book of Order*, and the *First Book of Discipline*. What is evident, particularly in Chapters 7 and 8 of the *Book of Discipline*, is the importance those ministers placed on the compulsory education of the nation's youth. Given the absence of any modern welfare state they placed the responsibility for financing schools on the church. This Presbyterian emphasis on the need to educate all children created the phenomenon of the 'lad o' pairs' [a clever boy from a humble background, able to rise by his abilities] and gave Scotland a place in many academic disciplines that is out of all proportion to its size. As the Church of Scotland historians A. L. Drummond and J. Bulloch remark respecting the education system outlined in the *First Book of Discipline*:

It was intended to give a training in faith and character to every child, to inform his mind, to teach him to earn a livelihood, to make him a good citizen and an independent man, and to provide openings for an educational elite, whatever the social background.'

The National Church's Pioneers in Education

In the years that followed the Reformation and the establishment of Presbyterianism, its churches and its schools often sat side by side in many towns and villages. But by the beginning of the nineteenth century Knox's ideal of a church and school in every parish was breaking down. This was due in part to the twin factors of moderatism in the church and industrialization in society. Against this background we focus on two figures, the one well-known and the other almost forgotten.

¹ A. L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Church in Victorian Scotland 1843–1874* (Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh), p. 84. The fact is that Knox believed in compulsory education of the young in society, as it was for 'the business of life and the purpose of eternity' (A. M. Douglas, 1985, *Church and School in Scotland*, The Chalmers Lectures, 1982, [Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh], p. 52). This was an emphasis of the Reformation. The great Reformer Martin Luther wrote, 'Even if there were no souls and there were not the least need of schools for the sake of the Scriptures and of God, this one reason would suffice to cause the establishment of the best schools everywhere, namely that the world needs accomplished men, and women also, for the maintaining of its outward temporal prosperity.' (Cited in J. MacInnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland, 1688 to 1800* [Aberdeen University Press], p. 19).

The first was Dr Thomas Chalmers who ministered in the parish of St John's in Glasgow between 1815 and 1847, and whose place in history was secured by his central role in the Disruption of 1843.

The second, a person largely forgotten, was his close friend and an elder on his session, David Stow. He ought to be remembered as an educational pioneer and the driving force behind Chalmers' St John's experiment, but sadly this is not the case. Many evangelicals are aware of Dr Chalmers' labours, but few realize the Reformed background to Stow College and the Jordanhill teacher-training complex. It is the purpose of this article to introduce the reader to David Stow² and his many achievements.

Fenwick Stow held a family property in County Durham. At some point he sold this estate and gave his two sons a choice of profession. One went into the navy and rose to the rank of Admiral, while the other moved to Paisley and began life as a merchant. This second son, William, who was the father of our subject, David Stow, soon showed himself to be a capable businessman and rose to the foremost rank in the manufacturers of Paisley. For many years he also served as the magistrate of the town. A frequent visitor to William Stow's family home was Dr Love whose sermons and example no doubt made an early impression on David, born on 17 May 1793.

David Stow received a classical education at Paisley Grammar School and attained an 'honourable place' in his classes. Fraser records that:

The instruction in school was then mechanical; it was little more than a dull routine of words without explanation and therefore in most instances meaningless. The memory was taxed most unprofitably, and the religious instruction was little more than the reading of the Bible, which teachers managed to make the most distasteful of school-books.³

² The main life of David Stow is by the Rev. William Fraser and is entitled *Memoir of the Life of David Stow, Founder of the Training System of Education* (London, 1868). This memoir which, to my knowledge, has never been republished remains the key text on Stow, despite having been written shortly after his death (which occurred on 6 November 1864).

³ Fraser, *Memoir*, p. 8.

At eighteen, Stow began a career with a commercial firm in Glasgow. Each day, as he travelled to work, he observed the poverty in areas of that city, such as the Saltmarket. There he saw children who never went to school and parents who never went to church. Stow became impressed with the need for home mission, as Glasgow was full of people with as little knowledge and understanding of the gospel as those in the darkest parts of India and China. Drummond and Bulloch comment that in 1831 Stow reckoned that:

Out of Glasgow's 200,000 inhabitants 30,000 were Roman Catholics who provided as best they could for their children's education, a quarter of the rest were able to pay, a half fulfilled their responsibilities as well as they could with more or less inadequate means, but the remainder allowed their children to grow up in ignorance and anarchy . . . Two-thirds of the children, he considered, might be described as educated, but only one-third could read 'pretty well' and of these 'very few understood the meaning of what they read'. As for their knowledge of the Christian faith, one in six of those whom he questioned 'had never heard the name of Jesus but from the mouth of profane swearers'.⁴

Sabbath School Societies

It was in this climate that William Collins and David Stow began a society to institute and conduct Sabbath Schools. David started this work by collecting at random the idle and the vagrant and persuading them to accept instruction. Realizing that skimming willing pupils from a wide range of areas made it very difficult to visit homes, he resolved to focus on an area, in particular to move from the front streets to the back streets and slums. He focused his attention not on the pleasant suburbs but on the densely populated Saltmarket, between St Andrews Street and the Cross, and soon knew the personal circumstances of not only many of the children but also of the families in that area.

David Stow saw the effect of this concentrated effort in uplifting the moral tone of that debased area; he viewed his Sabbath Schools as a key

⁴ A. L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688-1843: The Age of the Moderates* (Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1973), p. 146.

means of social regeneration. It was this work that caught the eye of Dr Thomas Chalmers who was at the height of his popularity as a minister and who was keen to use parochial bodies for the moral advancement of the community.

In 1817 Stow, then aged 24, was collaborating with Chalmers in supplying poor relief to families. For the next two years the two laboured at what became known as the 'St John's experiment', where they assumed under the aegis of the church those social functions now normally undertaken by the State. Fraser comments that Dr Chalmers found this a depressing work, with some of his supporters being too impulsive and others too cautious, but in Stow he found a judicious and devoted helper. In 1821, at the age of 28, Stow was chosen as one of the elders of St John's Church.

Fraser shows that Stow was remarkably progressive in his educational approach and his teaching style; disruptive pupils were reasoned with, rather than expelled. The Sabbath School movement spread and Stow was later to assert, 'I consider [that] had Dr Chalmers done nothing more than promote the principle of this local system of Sabbath schools, he would not have lived in vain.'⁵

As a consequence of these labours Stow saw that there was also a need for day schools.

Encouraged by Chalmers the Sabbath School movement spread; but Stow saw this was not enough. Six days' exposure to the evils of the slums was not to be counteracted by an hour's teaching on the Sabbath evening. A day school was necessary, and one that would impart habit-formation as well as head knowledge.⁶

Organizing Day Schools

David Stow and William Collins⁷ started church day schools. The Glasgow Infant School Society was formed in 1826 with Stow as the associate secretary. In 1827, a school was created in Drygate for older pupils. Stow was also eager to purchase gardens and green space to

⁵ S. J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1982), p. 103, citing *The Witness*, 19 June 1844.

⁶ S. Mechie, *The Church and Scottish Social Development, 1780-1870* (Oxford University Press, London, 1960), p. 140.

⁷ Of the book-publishing house, William Collins and Sons.

enable the children to have a playground. This approach is typical of Stow's desire to make learning enjoyable, and this practice was surprisingly ahead of its time. His views stemmed both from his own negative childhood experiences and from his subsequent reading of educational thinkers like Pestalozzi⁸ and Wilderspin.⁹ Indeed, he invited Wilderspin to his infant school and sought his advice.

Cruickshank¹⁰ says:

Stow followed Wilderspin in his emphasis on the development of the senses by the use of pictures and shapes, in his stress on emotional and physical development by music and movement, and in his insistence on the employment of a female assistant. But his fundamental aim was much more explicitly moral and religious than that of Wilderspin.¹¹

Stow supported the abolition of corporal punishment in schools. A teacher from his own childhood had pierced scholars' ears with sharp pointed pens, and in Stirling a schoolteacher was thought of as being caring when 'he allowed pupils, after they had been corrected, to cool their smarting palms on the schoolroom's iron pillars'.¹² Fraser gives several examples of Stow sitting with difficult pupils, talking to them

⁸ Henry Pestalozzi (1746-1827) was born in Zurich, the son of a Swiss surgeon. A biography of him was written by Roger de Guimps (1890). The 1898 edition of his life begins with the words, "'In half a century from now every social stay will be shaken.'" These words were spoken eighty-three years ago by a man who, to save the poor, had made himself poor; who had lived as a pauper with paupers to teach paupers to live like men; and who, after having sounded all the depths of the moral and intellectual poverty hidden beneath the brilliant civilisation of his time, had come out of the experience terrified for the future of society, but bringing it a means of salvation.' (See J. A. Green, *Pestalozzi's Educational Writings* [Edward Arnold, London, 1912]).

⁹ Samuel Wilderspin, 1792-1866, who had the larger influence on Stow, was an educational theorist. His entry in the *Companion Dictionary of National Biography* reads, 'Advocate of infant-school system; clerk in merchant's office; opened infant school in Spitalfields, 1820, and subsequently spent his life in developing the system throughout the United Kingdom; published works on the education of the young (1994:3218).'

¹⁰ Marjorie Cruickshank (1920-83), author of the definitive *A History of the Training of Teachers in Scotland*, was a lecturer in education at Jordanhill College of Education (1962-6).

¹¹ M. Cruickshank, *A History of the Training of Teachers in Scotland* (University of London Press Limited, Edinburgh, 1970), p. 33.

¹² James Scotland, *The History of Scottish Education*, 2 vols., (University of London Press, London, 1969), Vol. 1, p. 201.

and reasoning with them about their behaviour and seeing a change as a result.¹³

Stow was clearly a gifted teacher, not only in terms of his ability to maintain discipline but also in his instinct for gaining children's interest and helping them to learn. He set multiplication tables to verse and mathematics to rhyme. He was an advocate of regular holidays and the provision of playgrounds at school. He was deliberately opposed to trying to make pupils memorize information that they did not understand. His opposition did not stem from the view that this information would be useless to them in later life, but rather from a conviction that intellectual stimulation should be provided regardless of age – and that the subject matter should be adapted to the abilities of the child.

He gives two examples of incidents which summed up the failing of education in many areas:

Most ludicrous scenes have taken place occasionally in public examinations. A case occurred in one of the borough towns in England, which illustrates the rotation system. The public examiner, among other written questions which he was to ask, put this one, 'Who made the world?' The child answered, 'Noah, Sir'. The examiner said, 'I beg your pardon, children, I am wrong; that child is not here (meaning the child who was to answer the question); I ought to have asked, "Who made the ark?"'

¹³ This style of teaching discipline is in stark contrast with that employed by John G. Paton, the celebrated missionary to the New Hebrides, who, before setting off to Tanna, served as a school teacher in Glasgow. His life contains the following incident in his teaching career: 'The following week, a young man and a young woman began to attend the night school who showed from the first moment that they were bent on mischief. By talking aloud, joking, telling stories and laughing, they stopped the work of the school. On my repeated appeals for quiet and order, they became more boisterous, and gave great merriment to a few of the scholars present. I finally urged the young man, a tall powerful fellow, to be quiet or at once to leave, declaring that at all hazards I must and would have perfect order; but he only mocked me, and assumed a fighting attitude. Quietly locking the door and putting the key in my pocket, I turned to my desk, armed myself with the cane, and dared any one at his peril to interfere betwixt us. It was a rough struggle, he smashing at me clumsily with his fists, I with quick movements evading and dealing him blow after blow with the heavy cane for several rounds, till at length he crouched down at his desk, exhausted and beaten, and I ordered him to turn to his book, which he did in sulky silence' (J. G. Paton, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1), p. 47. I think this incident, coming from such a source, illustrates the patience and the remarkable achievements of Stow in the Saltmarket.

In a similar vein he gives the following account:

During a public examination, the creed was being repeated – the boy at the top of the class commenced, 'I believe in God the Father;' the next boy said, 'God the Holy Ghost.' The examiner checked him, and said, 'You are wrong, my boy,' to which the boy replied, 'Please, Sir, the boy who believes in God the Son is not here; I believe in the Holy Ghost.'¹⁴

Following the establishment of the infant and senior Drygate schools, largely through his own personal financial support, in 1835 he sought to expand the work and to gain parochial support for his endeavours. Along with Chalmers he was a firm believer in the establishment principle and thought that it was the duty of the church to provide education. He also held that this ought to be done with the support of the State, so accordingly he co-founded the Glasgow Educational Society. This society published George Lewis's famous critique *Scotland, a Half-Educated Nation* in order to discredit the volunteers and to promote Stow's ideas for teacher training. In it Lewis called for increased state financial assistance to schools. However, instead of waiting for this assistance the society began to create model schools¹⁵ with four stages: initiatory, junior, senior and a school of industry for females. In 1836, they also branched out from strict schooling and began the building of Dundas Vale Normal College.¹⁶ The aim of this college was to create properly trained teaching staff for the model schools. This dramatic programme brought financial difficulties and, despite Stowe's personal giving, the debt on the building amounted to £10,677 which crippled any further efforts toward extension and improvement work. In 1841 the Normal College received its first government grant under the condition that it be transferred from the Society into the control of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland¹⁷.

¹⁴ D. Stow, *The Training System, Moral Training School and Normal Seminary for Preparing School Trainers and Governesses*, 10th Edition, (Longman Brown Green and Longmans, London, 1865), p.120.

¹⁵ 'Model' in this context simply refers to Stow's ideas of 'picturing out', having bodily exercises as part of the curriculum, and having Bible Training. Model schools had an inside and an outside classroom.

¹⁶ The construction of this Normal College began on 14 November 1836 and was completed in Autumn 1837.

¹⁷ It is worthy of note that of the £10,677 debt, the Education Committee of the Church

Impact of the 1843 Disruption

Believing in the establishment principle, Stow entrusted his life's work to the Church, not knowing of the seismic changes that were about to take place. In 1843 the Church of Scotland was split into two. Nearly 500 of her ministers left the establishment. Churches, manse, glebes, gardens and schools all over the land were suddenly without ministers and teachers. Stow was a firm supporter of Chalmers, who was one of the 500, as were his staff, but they hoped that they would be allowed to continue the work that they had created in the Normal Colleges and the Model Schools. The Church of Scotland Education Committee thought otherwise and decreed that all the staff would have to sign their allegiance to the General Assembly. Elizabeth Morse records:

In May 1845, in a dramatic gesture of repudiation, Stow and his fellow directors, teachers, fifty students, and 700 pupils assembled in the Normal College. With Stow slightly flushed with emotion, others in tears, the company left the building in a procession, joined by the old janitor and his wife, who locked the door behind them. They walked through crowded streets to their new premises, where they carried on as usual, conducting classes in tents until new buildings could be erected.¹⁸

The building of new premises was not quite so straightforward; Stow was still saddled with the greater part of the £10,677 debt. The effect it had on the many Free Church schoolteachers was an overlooked part of the Disruption struggle. It is beyond the scope of this article to chart the history of the Free Church Education Scheme, but, for readers who have been interested by this account, the heroic attempts of the newly formed Free Church to build a rival establishment of schools in each of its parishes is a fascinating story. Some of the efforts of the Free Church were linked with those of David Stow, who built another Normal Seminary, called the Free Church Normal Seminary, to train its teachers.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Morse is the author of the entry for David Stow in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

This seminary operated side by side with the original – together they now form the nucleus of the Jordanhill teacher training complex.

The Death of a Major Champion of the Education of Youth

By 1860 his age and state of health took Stow out of active duty within the college. He died on 6 November 1864, in his seventy-first year. Fraser records, 'As he departed, leaving behind the soft radiance of his humility, those who knew him best most earnestly breathed the prayer, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."'

In Stow we have someone who not only believed in the injunction to 'train up a child in the way that he should go' but one who also held to the biblical establishment principle. He did not seek to build a system that was the preserve of a few children of Christian parents; rather he followed the demands of his Master to win the world for him. He took to heart the text, 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might', and his repeated advice to his students was 'Do not talk about what should be done, but do it'.

I began by drawing a comparison between the degree to which David Stow is known at the beginning of the twenty-first century and the knowledge we still have of his close friend and minister, Thomas Chalmers. This article may go a little way to restoring interest in the life and witness of David Stow, the noted educational reformer.

Yet, I believe that the greatest testimonial to David Stow will come on that great day when all things are made known; when many that are on the Saviour's right hand will acknowledge him as the human instrument that was employed by their Redeemer. Fraser comments:

In dispensing the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the elders, in Presbyterian Churches receive the bread and wine from the minister who presides, and they afterwards give both to the communicants; and on one occasion Mr Stow had the privilege, as elder, of putting into the hands of no less than seventeen former pupils, young disciples of his Master, the memorials of His love for them, and the pledges of their faithfulness to Him.¹⁹

¹⁹ Fraser, *Memoir*, p. 60.