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# ENGLISH NATIONAL EDUCATION

A Sketch  
of the Rise of Public Elementary Schools in England

By  
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## PREFACE

Not wealth but the power to produce wealth is the true measure of the commercial prosperity of a country. Not men but minds are the first requisites for superiority in production. Not handcraft but braincraft is the prime source of productive excellence. Not a worker but an intelligent worker is the mainstay of the industrial world. Not a machine but the creative and guiding intelligence is the greatest economizer. Mind is the great parent machine, and the great master machine. The mechanical is never the highest expression of the rational. Therefore, the best capital of a nation is the brain-power of its people.

What did Prussia do when humbled to the dust by France? Reformed her schools. What did France do when crushed by Germany? Reformed her schools. The competition of nations is a battle of minds. Not the mere fighter, but the thinker is victor to day. It would appear that the French were not less heroic, but worse organized, in their last great war. Germany is our rival in trade because she is our superior in schools. Just as Waterloo was said to have been won in the playing-fields (and class-rooms — epigrams are always incomplete) of Eton, so the world's commerce is being won and lost in our schools.

If this be so, our country can have, in practical affairs, no higher interest, no suprema duty, and no more valuable investment than is to be found in securing an unequalled system of national education. It behoves every intelligent citizen, therefore, to know what is involved in this matter, what has been done, and what is still required. We ought to concern ourselves very seriously about what is being done to raise to its highest powers the collective reason of the nation, by developing the minds of the individuals, and whether we are most effectively cultivating, improving, and expanding the rational resources — the chief beginning and chief end of national greatness — of the kingdom.

The aim of this volume is to supply this knowledge, with regard to our public elementary schools, so far as that is possible within the limits allowed by a small handbook. Only the main stream of development has been followed, and even that has had to be treated somewhat slightly in parts. The earlier periods have been most fully treated, because the more recent are likely to be more or less familiar to the readers, and because it is the beginnings of things which most often afford us the truest in-sight into their nature and value. To the reformer such knowledge is indispensable, or he may destroy what he most desires to develop; whilst even the revolutionist will best know what not to do, after his undoing, by a study of the real nature of what he means to improve out of existence. There is so preponderating an amount of the past in the present, that we can only fully know the latter through the former.

There is, therefore, an endeavour in the following pages to set forth the ideals which determined the actions of those who built up the present system of public elementary schools, and the actual steps which they took to realize their aims. The inner life of the school: its organization, methods, teachers, subjects, and scholars; the inner intentions, so far as revealed by words and deeds, of the promoters of schools; and the real results achieved, are the main topics which we seek to describe. Whether the country has been establishing a system of national education, or only a partial system of schools, and whether we are strengthening the mind or only storing the memory, are questions which have to be frequently asked whilst reading the history of its efforts. Schools, scholars, and teachers are indispensable, but, having got them, it then becomes the more important that we should have a scientific system of education — that is, a method of dealing with the mental powers, based upon a scientific knowledge of them, and designed to develop and perfect them — and that our well-trained teachers should be scientific educators. These would seem to be the standards of criticism by which to judge the value of what has already been done, and what remains to be accomplished for national education.

H. H.

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*The business of education is not, as I think, to make them perfect in any one of the sciences, but so to open and dispose their minds, as may best make them capable of any, when they shall apply themselves to it. — JOHN LOCKE.*

*The primary principle of education is the determination of the pupil to self-activity — the doing nothing for him which he is able to do for himself. — SIR WILLIAM HAMILTON.*

*In education the process of self-development should be encouraged to the fullest extent. — HERBERT SPENCER.*

## **English National Education.**

### **CHAPTER I. THE REIGN OF THE VOLUNTARY SYSTEM.**

Primary education, for the children of the working-classes, did not exist, in any general sense, till the beginning of the eighteenth century. It is true that almost all the grammar and other endowed schools, so freely founded during the sixteenth century and earlier, made provision for the education of "poor scholars". But either this had never meant much more than exhibitions, as we should now call them, for the children of those whose parents' means had become very much reduced, or it may have been intended only for a few bright and fortunate individuals, who, by some happy accident or good fortune, came under the favourable notice of those who were able to secure their admission to a school. Thus it is said that George Abbott, who afterwards became Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University and Archbishop of Canterbury, was first brought into notice because of some remarkable circumstances attending his birth. He was born in 1562, and his mother was the wife of a poor clothworker at Guildford. Before his birth, his mother dreamt that, if she could eat a jack or a pike, her child would become a great man. When taking a pail of water from the river which flowed by the house, she found therein a jack, which she forthwith cooked, and ate nearly the whole of it. The matter was noised abroad, and several persons of quality, on hearing of it, offered to stand sponsors at the child's christening. The offer was gladly accepted, and, doubtless as a result of this, the boy was afterwards sent to a Free Grammar School in the town, founded by a grocer of London, in 1553, for thirty "of the poorest men's sons" of Guildford, to be taught to read and write English, and cast accounts perfectly, so that they should be fitted for apprentices. From the grammar school he went to Balliol College, Oxford. His elder brother was also fortunate, and became Bishop of Salisbury; whilst his younger brother became a rich London merchant, Lord Mayor, and member of Parliament.

But such remarkable successes were very few and far between, and only serve to impress upon one the neglected condition and profound ignorance of the great majority. Speaking of the general condition of things at this period (the sixteenth century), with regard to the education of the children of the very poor, Mr. A. F. Leach, a writer of great authority, says: "We may approach this matter from another point of view, and ask whether it is likely that, in days when the labouring-classes were still serfs, and Parliament actually petitioned the Crown against their being allowed to go to the Universities or Schools, that bishops and lords and county gentlemen would, at great expense and labour, found educational institutions for the benefit of half a dozen poor choristers? The poor who are spoken of in these old foundations are not the poor in our sense, the destitute poor, unsuccessful among the labouring classes, but the relative poor, the poor relations of the upper classes. That occasionally bright boys were snatched up out of the ranks of the real poor and turned into clerics, to become lawyers, civil

servants, bishops, is not to be doubted. But it was the middle class, whether country or town, the younger sons of the nobility and farmers, the lesser landholders, the prosperous tradesmen, who created a demand for education, and furnished the occupants of Grammar Schools."

The same writer says that of 159 schools existing at the time of the Reformation, of which records still remain, 93 were Grammar Schools which were not free, 21 were Free Grammar Schools, 23 were Song Schools (in which boys were trained for church choirs, and received a kind of superior elementary education), and 22 were Elementary Schools. Now these last named were by no means schools for the very poor, but schools in which only reading, writing, and arithmetic were taught. In some of them only reading was taught, in others only writing, and in others only arithmetic. The class of pupils who attended such schools may be judged of by the fact that Sir Isaac Newton was sent to a village school, where he was taught reading, writing, and arithmetic; and that the great Dr. Johnson was first taught reading by a dame who kept a school for little children in Lichfield. Primary schools such as these appear to have been first established in the fourteenth century; but Mr. Herbert Spencer holds that there were elementary schools in the villages as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

But most of the really primary schools which existed were entirely private in their nature, and there seems to be no evidence of any endowment or corporate control of them, except in so far as we might include the Song Schools. Indeed, the nearest approach to anything like state education was in the reign of Alfred the Great, who is said to have given one-eighth of his whole revenue to founding; a school for the sons of the nobles. He is also believed to have re-established many of the old monastic and episcopal schools. It was his desire that "all the youth of England ... should be well able to read English". He compelled every person of rank or substance, who, either from age or want of capacity, was unable to teach himself to read, to send to school either his son or a kinsman, or, if he had neither, a servant, so that at least he might be read to by some one. Thus some at least of the very poor doubtless received an education from the state in those days.

Also, inasmuch as some of the Grammar Schools were established by royal charter, and sometimes endowed from the royal exchequer, or were under some kind of public control as to their endowments, they may be said to have been semi-state institutions. And since, in some cases, little more than reading and writing, and Latin, with a little arithmetic, were taught, these were hardly more than primary schools. Few besides the clergy and those belonging to the learned professions, such as law and medicine, knew much, if anything, of Latin. Thus, Dekker, a dramatist who lived and wrote at the beginning of the seventeenth century, makes one of his characters, a man of substance, who is asked, "Can you read and write, then?" reply, "As most of your gentlemen do — my bond has been taken with my mark at it".

From the earliest times there have been schools, conducted by the clergy, in which the sons of the very poor might find a place and obtain the learning which might lead to their rising to fame and fortune. For example, it is recorded that Sampson, Abbot of St. Edmund's, a son of the people, rose to be a bishop, and became a peer of parliament, during the reign of Richard I. But such opportunities were almost wholly confined to those who were desirous of entering the church, and were thought capable of being of service to her interests. In fact, up to quite recent times, the ranks of the clergy were largely recruited from the sons of the labouring poor, in the same way as the clergy of the Roman Catholic Church are, for example, in Ireland at the present day. In former times education was, for the most part, of the church, by the church, and for the church; and it was only as the advantage, or necessity, of extending it to the laity, for the purpose of confirming and expanding the influence and authority of the church, was realized, that knowledge was more generally imparted. A very striking piece of evidence of this limitation is given us in the old law called the Benefit of Clergy, which was passed in the eleventh century. By this law a cleric could claim to be handed over from a secular to a clerical court. After a time the ability to read was considered sufficient evidence to establish the claim to this privilege, which was not finally abolished till 1706.

Two other ways in which a few of the children of the people received what may be called a