

The Whipping Block

Edited By
James Burr Hamilton



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THE WHIPPING BLOCK

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A STUDY OF ENGLISH EDUCATION

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Edited by

JAMES BURR HAMILTON

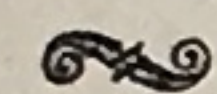
"Dr. Davies, when Headmaster, seems to have used the birch plentifully, and when a kind of rebellion took place in his day, the first action of the boys was to wreak their vengeance upon the block upon which so many of them had knelt for execution."

FH

FLANDERS HALL : *Publishers*

SCOTCH PLAINS, NEW JERSEY

PUBLISHER'S NOTE



*The opinions expressed in this book
are the opinions of the author, edi-
tor, or of the authorities quoted.
They are not necessarily those of
Flanders Hall.*

Printed in the United States of America

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

THIS treatise, filled with provocative argument and written with the respect that always accompanies sound criticism, is not intended exclusively or even primarily for the professional student. But the cultured layman will find it both interesting and informative. Its basic thesis is simple: What England needs most of all is education. Subsidiary to this are three corollaries: In the matter of elementary education England is far behind other countries. Her course of study, inadequate always and in some respects antiquated, is administered by untrained teachers. And her school buildings, even if we assume that the present fight for improvement is to be continued, will not approach a reasonable degree of perfection before the close of the present century.

This is a familiar story. The demand for more education is universal; the cry for better education is incessant. And if the stand taken in this study were the writer's own, there would be questions without end and objections without restraint. For England enjoys the rating of a world power, a fact in itself that should connote the best of educational opportunities for the ambitious many, and the highest of educational advantages for the gifted few. And this is precisely what England has, but on an exceedingly limited scale. The pupils that can pay for it can get a good education in the private schools. The students with the prerequisites can take advanced work in the universities. But there are re-

strictions of all kinds; there is opposition from every direction; there is a shortage in teachers, buildings, and funds. The generous quotations from the authors listed in the bibliography prove the main thesis and more than prove the corollaries.

England's trouble has been caused, strange as it may seem, by a doctrine that is essentially sound. Education has to grow from the top. Thomas Jefferson knew this. He knew that the university must come first, supplying the teachers for the college, which supplies those for the high schools, and so on down to the lowest grades. In the matter of universities England has done well. But there has been a hindrance somewhere that has prevented the educational system from descending from the apex and spreading out to the grades.

The writer's sources speak for themselves. But let us go beyond them. In *The Oxford History of England: 1815-1870*, E. L. Woodward writes: "There were deep-seated prejudices against educational reform, and an indifference which was almost more troublesome than prejudice. From the point of view of self-made men, an educated working class meant an increase in labour troubles." Education at best has its hurdles to leap; but there is nothing so nearly invincible as prejudice or more deadening than indifference.

Or take the words of England's Grand Old Man in education, H. A. L. Fisher (1865-1940). In his lecture delivered at Oxford, his own Alma Mater, in 1919, entitled *The Place of the University in National Life*, Mr. Fisher said: "A University is one thing, a Training College is another, and no University can train too

many teachers without losing its proper character as a center of learning and general inquiry." Words of greater wisdom cannot be spoken. Yet, they throw at least a faint light on the plea throughout the present study for better teachers in England. But Mr. Fisher, on the other hand, opposed the very thought of the secluded scholar who closed his year with the making of still more degrees. The scholar, he contended, should not merely lecture in the university but should speak to the people down town, bringing them a resume of the latest in research. Sound, if practical.

The study is replete with suggestions, but it is necessary to keep current and regional terminology in mind when reading. There is an attack, by implication, on the teaching of "dead languages." It was precisely the instruction given in these that made Germany's *gymnasias* famous and her universities possible. There is a direct assault on the pupil-teacher in England. If by "pupil" we mean student, it is but fair to report that admirable results have been obtained in this country by the student-teacher process. England's school houses may be extremely bad, but we have the best school buildings in the world—and a State with a \$10,000,000 capitol and less than a \$1000 a year for teaching is no exception. England's Eton and other schools of similar class may have daily floggings, but such schools draw the wastrels of the aristocracy among their students.

In other words, the study is provocative; but that is always true of education. England is no exception. Her universities are world-famous. The graduates of her private schools have filled the highest offices within the

power of men to bestow. If her other schools of all kinds and degrees fail to provide the masses with education—the thing that all the world needs most—there must be an explanation and there should be a remedy.

This study gives the one and suggests the other. It proceeds, too, from the triple angle of self, other writers, other countries. The dangers inherent in subjectivism are averted by quotations, the one-sidedness that would surely emerge if England were studied alone is avoided by comparisons with other countries. The study is truthful, but not pessimistic; cautious, but not reactionary. It is a timely contribution to the proper understanding of one of the gravest problems that can possibly confront any people.

AUTHORS' PREFACE

THE story to be told in these pages is so strange, and in such utter contradiction to our conventional idea as to what factors go to make up British democracy, that we have refrained as far as possible from presenting conclusions of our own. Instead, we have chosen to let leading Englishmen speak and to add to their many comments a few from foreign observers.

Some of the quotations used may be felt to be merely informative; others are entertaining; a few, we are unhappily aware, will be considered tiresome. For this, we beg forgiveness, pleading that a high-class sense of humor seldom survives long in the rarefied atmosphere of great academic learning.

In England as in other countries, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries constituted an era of fight for popular education. But Old England's elementary education in 1900 was inferior to New England standards of 1800. Holland, France, Prussia, in the days of Napoleon, had completed an educational system which England did not equal until the age of the automobile and airplane—if she equalled it even then.

Was the unique conservatism of the tight little isle responsible for this unwarrantable delay? Or was it the egoism of the upper classes? It will be for the reader to decide.

One feature of this study is the light it throws upon

the extraordinary contrast between the English national spirit bent on "holding what we have," and our own readiness to "try everything once". The English spirit has developed, or rather left virtually unshaken, a hide-bound caste system which places almost unconquerable obstacles in the way of men from the lower classes who attempt to "make good". We on our side of the Atlantic pride ourselves on our efforts to provide equal opportunity for everybody. In America, every boy and girl has a chance to attend High School, and every gifted boy or girl a chance to go to College. In England? Read for yourself.

Acknowledgment is gratefully made to H. Holman. We have quoted freely from his book *English National Education*. It is the classic history of eighteenth and nineteenth century English schools, and of the fight for their improvement. We are also deeply indebted to the other writers whose names are given in the appended bibliography. And we owe much to W. H. Wolf-Rottkay, whose collection of facts and quotations has been used extensively.

I Elementary Education

IN most countries, a fairly clear idea prevails as to what the normal citizen must know; what he should be able to do; and which features of his character are most worth developing. A nation's educational system is shaped, or at least profoundly influenced, by these ideas. If the kind and scope of the facilities provided for the education of a country's youth allow of a conclusion as to that country's ideals, America has reason to be proud. In the case of England, it is more charitable to assume that the past and present condition of the schools should not be considered as an indication of her philosophy or humanitarianism.

The bare facts are these: in Massachusetts, at a convention held in 1821, Webster was able to boast of the system of universal primary education which had been introduced in all the New England states. In reactionary Prussia, school attendance was compulsory as early as 1717. In Holland, a law passed in 1814 provided a set of rules for the schools which were universal long before that year. In England, the decision to introduce elementary schools throughout the entire country was not taken until 1870, after British primary education had become the laughing-stock of the world.

Even then, half-hearted administration of the act lost further valuable decades. Malthus' complaint,* written

* Malthus: *Essay on Population*. London, 1798.

in 1798, was still true in some areas at the end of the nineteenth century.

“It is a great national disgrace,” wrote Malthus, “that the education of the lower classes of the people in England should be left merely to a few Sunday-schools, supported by a subscription from individuals, who can give to the course of instruction in them any kind of bias which they please. And even the improvement of Sunday-schools (for, objectionable as they are in some points of view, and imperfect in all, I cannot but consider them as an improvement) is of very late date.”

The spirit of these Sunday schools has been characterized by a Frenchman * in the following words:

“The distinction between ‘schools for the rich’ and ‘schools for the poor’ was made as early as the eighteenth century. For it was in the eighteenth century that the belief developed that it would be dangerous for the rich if the poor were educated. It cannot be denied that the day rich and poor sit on the same school benches the poor may discover that they are no less intelligent than the rich, and it might come to pass that the poor thus get ideas which are not exactly favorable to the rich.”

At a time when in other civilized countries universal education had become a time-hallowed institution, the ruling class of England was content to hand out to the less privileged a semblance of instruction in the form of charity. These Charity Schools were run by the established Church; and the stagnation of extreme conservatism prevalent at that time had degraded the

* Jean de la Poulaine, *Le Colosse aux Pieds d’Airain*, Paris, 1899, p. 157.

Church to the level of a tool in the hands of the small class in control of the country’s affairs. Mandeville, eighteenth-century anti-clerical writer, was among those most violently opposed to this state of things. He is quoted in the classic work * by H. Holman, who goes on to say:

“It will be seen from this that the design underlying the movement was by no means too generous or disinterested. As Mandeville very bluntly says, in his *Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools* (1723), if they would ‘agree to pull off the mask, we should soon discover that whatever they pretend to, they aim at nothing so much in Charity-schools as to strengthen their party, and that the great sticklers for the Church, by educating children in the spirit of religion, mean, inspiring them with a superlative veneration for the Clergy of the Church of England, and a strong aversion and immortal animosity against all that dissent from it. To be assured of this, we are but to mind what divines are most admired for their Charity sermons, and most fond to preach them’.”

One such divine was Bishop Butler who, in a sermon preached on the occasion of the anniversary of St. Paul’s School for the Poor, explained to his wealthy sponsors that the object of such an institution was, not to allow the children of the poor to escape from the conditions into which they had been placed by birth, but rather to grant them the assistance which they were entitled to demand in their natural environment; and that this could best be accomplished by educating them in the principles of religion and civil life. He often described his aim to give the children that knowledge

* Holman: *English National Education*, London, 1898, p. 31.

which would enable them to occupy themselves with general work*.

In a charity sermon preached in 1745, Bishop Butler actually said: "Nor let people of rank flatter themselves that ignorance will keep their inferiors more dutiful and in greater subjection to them."**

"From which we may conclude", says Holman, "that there was much of the feudal spirit amongst the principal supporters of the schools, and that a most humiliating spirit of submission and dependence was expected from those who were taught in them."

It thus appears that while the Clergy and the ruling class were, occasionally, at odds with each other as to the means, they were in perfect accord as to the end which was to keep the poor in their place. To this effect, the Church wished to instruct them "in the principles of religion and civil life" so as to tie them even more securely to their "natural environment"; while laymen considered even such an "education" dangerous. The latter attitude has been defined by Holman*** in the following words:

"Mandeville's violent attack on charity schools deserves some notice, as it undoubtedly expresses, in a somewhat extreme and exaggerated form, a general feeling amongst the upper classes of that time. He argues that since drudgery, obsequiousness, and mean services are necessary for the wealth and security of a nation in which slaves are not allowed, it is better that those who are to occupy positions as laborious poor

* Jean de la Poulaine: *Le Colosse aux Pieds d'Airain*.

** Holman: *English National Education*, p. 32.

*** Ibid.

should be used to it from the very first; to give the poor knowledge is to make them discontented and rebellious, and likely to change them into rogues and vicious persons, since virtue, obedience, and honesty are most found among the ignorant and poor; and that those who are to do the hard and dirty work must be inferiors in knowledge and understanding, for 'a servant can have no unfeigned respect for his master as soon as he has sense enough to find out that he serves a fool'."

Such views survived the end of the feudal age. They continued to be the lodestar of England's upper class. As a specimen of what was actually said in the House of Commons, an address* by Mr. Davies Giddy is worthy of notice. He explained that "However specious in theory the project might be, of giving education to the labouring masses of the poor, it would, in effect, be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness; it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in society has destined them; instead of teaching them subordination, it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors; and in a few years, the result would be that the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power towards them, and to furnish the executive magistrates with much more vigorous laws than were now in force."

* Ibid. p. 54.

The laboring classes, realizing the futility of waiting for government action, began to provide educational facilities of their own. This movement was particularly strong between 1820 and 1835, and a number of organizations were formed. "But", says Holman,* "even these efforts at self-help and self-improvement were viewed with suspicion, and met with direct and indirect opposition from many. The views of such found expression, for example, through writers in *Blackwood's Magazine*, in which it is said that mechanics' institutes would be used to form the labouring classes into a disaffected and ungovernable faction; that the only education fit for poor people was a religious one, which 'renders them patient, humble, and moral, and relieves the hardship of their present lot by the prospect of a bright eternity'."

The "schools" that fulfilled such aims, and which had been founded in that spirit, are characterized as follows:** "Of the educational value of the instruction given in these Sunday-schools it will be most charitable to say little. Thousands of individuals, ignorant of anything but the most meagre learning themselves, and wholly without knowledge of the end or method of imparting knowledge to others, but full of a righteous zeal to help their fellows, were let loose upon all sorts and conditions of scholars. And nothing is, as a rule, more dangerous, and often destructive, than uninformed zeal."

Still, uninformed zeal may be better than moral worthlessness. Of the earlier Charity-school teachers,

* Ibid. p. 53.

** Ibid. p. 36.

Mandeville wrote* as those who "either actually persecute with birch or else are soliciting for such a preferment . . . Wretches of both sexes . . . that from a natural antipathy to working, have a great dislike to their present employment, and perceiving within a much stronger inclination to command than ever they felt to obey others, think themselves qualified, and wish from their hearts to be masters and mistresses of Charity schools."

But that on the whole no appreciable improvement was made early in the nineteenth century is revealed by the report submitted in 1816 by a House of Commons committee of investigation. In dealing with the charity schools it was found that very gross neglect, misapplication, and often worse faults, were committed in the carrying on of the charitable trusts for educational purposes. When presenting the report of the committee to the Commons, Brougham stated** that there were in London 120,000 children wholly without means of education.

The lot of Brougham and his fellow reformers cannot have been an enviable one. "Great ill-feeling towards Brougham resulted from this, largely prompted by class prejudices and selfish interests and fears. He was regarded with feelings of personal hatred by many, and Tories generally declared they would not permit such a man to come to their houses, even to weed the garden."***

While in free America as in absolutist Prussia an excellent, state-enforced educational system had long been

* Ibid. p. 34.

** Ibid. p. 56.

*** Ibid. p. 56.

in existence, democratic England did not have even the beginnings of such an institution. That in some quarters this state of things was considered highly unsatisfactory, and that the efforts of Brougham and his friends were not totally isolated, is shown by an article in the March, 1833, issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Education*. The writer proposed that the children be taught to read and write, and given instruction in arithmetic, geography, drawing, geometry, music, religion, and morals. In every village there would be a school organized on the lines of the Prussian system. Parents would be compelled to pay a small fee, and attendance would be compulsory for boys up to fourteen years of age, for girls up to thirteen. Unfortunately, this and other constructive suggestions were to remain unheeded for decades.

England was far from ready for such plans, as was soon to be demonstrated by events. A half-hearted attempt in the right direction was made in 1833 with the adoption of the Factory Act. This ruled that a proportion of the children working in factories were to be given elementary schooling. Any illusions we may hold as to the spirit back of this law and the possibility of translating its provisions into practical action, are speedily dispelled by Holman, who writes:* "The desperate need for efficient teachers became the more urgent when the Factory Act of 1833 compelled a very large number of children to be taught, but made no provision of either schools or teachers. To satisfy the act coal-holes and engine-houses were turned into schoolrooms,

* Ibid. p. 43.

and one of the factory hands, or his wife, made the teacher. The certificates of attendance required by the act were usually signed by the schoolkeeper's marks. In mining districts those who went to school at all were, as a rule, taught by miners or labourers who had lost health or been disabled. Many of the schools were taught by persons who did the work because of 'old age'; 'to get a bit of bread'; 'to keep off the town'; or because they were unable to work, or out of employment."

The thoughtlessness which foredoomed the plan, the complete lack of understanding of social problems, in a word, the absence of social consciousness and conscience which have so often been evident in the history of the British commonwealth, could scarcely be better summed up than in Holman's words. After a brief description of the elementary school system in Prussia, Holland, Canada, Scotland, and New England, he says:* "Notwithstanding all this precept and example, England had, so far, been content to be without a national ideal and system. Now there was to be an awakening, but one so full of distorted views, unworthy aims, and party conflict, that it was for a time almost a greater reproach than the absence of desire and effort."

The nature of this "awakening" is revealed in the minutes of debates in the House of Commons, and in the reports submitted by Parliamentary committees appointed to study the questions of national education. These papers are crushing evidence of the lack of 'desire and effort' among the members of Parliament to solve the school problem on its own merits—indeed, to

* Ibid. p. 51.

undertake constructive action regarding any of the country's serious social problems. The century which brought recognition in the four corners of the world to British ideals of civilization and progress, witnessed, in the homeland, a strange state of things.

At the beginning of that century, there was scarcely a trace of government care for the instruction of the masses. To dispense the charity of education was a task for the Church and for private organizations. If we bear in mind the peculiar position of the Church at that time as an adjunct to the ruling class, the true nature and aims of charity education are made evident by the name of one such organization, the "National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church". It was founded in 1811. The object of such teaching was simply to propagate the fear of God who made the lowly lowly and did not desire a change. To instil this spirit into the pupils, it was thought useful to utilize as much biblical matter as possible. "An idea of the ludicrous and absurd extent to which the religious aim was pursued by the National Society may be gathered from the following examples from a book on arithmetic, prepared for the schools by the secretary of the Society: 'The children of Israel were sadly given to idolatry, notwithstanding all they knew of God! Moses was obliged to have three thousand men put to death for this grievous sin. What digits would you use to express this number?' 'Of Jacob's four wives, Leah had six sons; Rachel had two; Hillah had two, and Tillah had also two. How many sons had Jacob?'"** Texts of scripture were used as

* Ibid. p. 40.

copy for writing, reading was generally confined to the Bible, and instruction in geography was concerned almost wholly with Palestine.

About 1830, public feeling over the extraordinary state of elementary education became so strong that it was necessary to pass the Factory Act of 1833 and to introduce a semblance of government supervision. The resulting debates in the House of Commons were illuminating. "On 3rd June, 1834, . . . in the discussion . . . the education given to the poor was declared to be as deficient in quality as in quantity, and to consist mainly in the teaching of words which conveyed no real ideas, or such dim and doubtful ones as to be of no real benefit."* "In June, 1838, Mr. Wyse, the Chairman of Committees for the Central Society of Education, . . . in support of his motion . . . said that of two million children between the ages of seven and fourteen years, in England and Wales, one-half was fully uneducated. In England, the proportion of educated children to the whole population was 1 in 14; in New York 1 in 3 . . . Of those regarded as receiving education, in England, more than half received it in Sunday-schools, where it was of the most inadequate and superficial kind. Whilst every country in Europe except England had its board of education, in this country the work of looking after this important matter was handed over to a government department, equivalent of our bureaus or divisions, which could not possibly manage it effectively."** Mr. Wyse made many other speeches in which he complained bitterly, to his fellow

* Ibid. p. 62.

** Ibid.

members in the House of Commons, of the shameful conditions that prevailed. "As he said, bad teachers and bad methods; a very limited circle of subjects and those taught in the worst manner—from a wretched supply of ill-written books in many cases—in the worst situations, and under the most unfavourable physical and moral circumstances; such were the leading characteristics of all schools as shown by inquiries lately made, either in or out of that House, upon the subject. The two schools societies had never had a regular body of inspectors, and up to that hour no inspection existed on the part of the government, that is, the first of all securities for the proper application of these educational funds had not yet been established."*

Further proof that neither a sincere wish to improve conditions nor the ability to act constructively was present is to be found in the amateurish nature of the efforts made: "For six years the sum of £20,000 was administered by the Treasury through the two schools societies. It is hardly surprising to find that the money was practically wasted. The officials charged with the duty of granting it had no real knowledge or qualification for their work. Hence no care was taken to insist on good school buildings, and their proper maintenance, or on the employment of efficient teachers. There was only rather more money to be spent, in many cases by those who had already shown how negligent, and *worse*, they could be in the control of public funds. In a few years

* Ibid. p. 68.

the school buildings were falling into ruins, and formed but more bad homes for more bad schools.

"Here we have a glaring example of the greatest weakness and most mischievous element in the so-called education system, *viz.* the absence of expert technical knowledge in those who constituted the court of final appeal...*

"All, therefore, that was obtained from Parliament was the vote for £30,000 and the constitution of an education department—the Committee having been already constituted by an Order in Council dated April 10, 1839. In the same year that this sum was voted for the education of some three millions of children, £70,000 was voted for building royal stables."**

In view of that spirit, it is not surprising that grants for schools should have been made difficult. An Order in Council of September 24, 1839, laid down procedure to this effect, the key article reading as follows:

"Art. 4—Before an application for aid shall be entertained, the committee will require to be satisfied, by reference either to the inspectors or to the National or British and Foreign School Society, or, if the school be in Scotland, to some competent authority there:—

- 1st. That the case is deserving of assistance.
- 2nd. That there are no charitable or other funds or endowments which might supersede the necessity of a grant.
- 3rd. That the site of the school-house has been obtained with a good legal tenure; and that, by conveyance

* Ibid. p. 61.

** Ibid. p. 70.

to the trustees, it has been duly secured for the education of the children of the poor.

4th. That it is reasonable to expect that the school will be efficiently and permanently supported."

In a young, progressive country, the method thus outlined could have brought excellent results. In England, to leave education in the main under a system of private initiative, charity endowments and the like merely meant that the old abuses would remain. The system was one against, rather than for, genuine universal education. "The principle of political fears now supplements the principle of religious fears. People seem to have realized the force of Paley's dictum: 'To send an uneducated child into the world is injurious to the rest of mankind; it is little better than to turn out a mad dog or a wild beast into the streets'.* Yet to provide the masses with a real opportunity to learn, and to develop ideas of their own, would be as dangerous as to leave them in total ignorance. "Contrast this miserable motive with the Prussian principle: It is my duty towards myself to develop to the utmost the powers with which I am endowed; it is my duty towards my neighbour to help him develop his; we can best help each other through the state; the state therefore establishes a complete system of education, making the lowest kind imperative for all and the highest accessible to all."

For even in absolutist Prussia, the sense of responsibility to the people and for the people was strong. As early as the eighteenth century, it provided general in-

* Ibid. p. 86.

struction by developing a set of principles, and ensuring their observance. Even in liberal nineteenth-century, England had not yet won recognition for her elemental tenets of educational statecraft! "This continued impotence of parliament to provide a national remedy for what every single member of both houses admitted to be a national disgrace and danger, is probably one of the most striking features in the whole of its history."* Was it really impotence, or was it not rather unwillingness? "Initiation was left entirely to localities, and even if the most neglected districts did demand help, they were sent away empty unless they came already half-filled. Instead of being regarded as the most profitable national investment for increasing the productive capacity of the country, and as a cheap insurance against many social and political dangers, the grant seemed rather to be regarded as somewhat of the nature of a necessary bribe to the 'lower orders', an undeserved benevolence to the poor, and a bulwark of religion and morality against the barbarism and crime which undoubtedly existed amongst the very poor."**

Twenty years after the adoption of the Factory Act, conditions were still practically unchanged. Elementary education about 1850 presented the following aspect: "Even in the schools aided by the government grants only about a fourth of the teachers had been through a training-college course, and as many more had attended for a short period at some school where they might receive some slight training. There was, therefore, still

* Ibid. p. 65.

** Ibid. p. 86.

a large number of the untrained and untaught in them." *

So much for the teachers. As for the pupils, "Of the two and a half millions of children who, it was estimated, ought to be at school, only slightly more than one and a half millions were in public schools of any sort—including private adventure, dame, and charity schools—and of these less than one half were under inspection. The attendance of pupils was very irregular and intermittent, being distributed over about four years in the case of children between six and twelve years of age. About one-third attended less than one hundred days, twenty-three per cent attended one hundred and fifty days, and forty-one per cent attended one hundred and seventy-six days—the smallest number qualifying for the capitation grant.

"Only ten per cent attended the same school from three to four years. This state of things was regarded as leaving great room for improvement, but compulsion was not recommended, because the demand for child labour was increasing, and independence was of more importance than education. . . . Even in the best schools three out of every four children left before reaching the highest class, and therefore with only such a pretence of knowledge as was to be gained in the lower classes. They got little more than a trick of mechanically pronouncing the letters, and the words which they read conveyed hardly any ideas to their minds. They left school, they went to work, and in the course of a year they knew nothing at all." **

* Ibid. p. 106.

** Ibid. p. 151.

II

Education Over The Counter

ENGLAND has been called a country of anachronisms. Amusing instances often mentioned are the round ruler, still used in many offices because what was good enough for the father is good enough for the son; and the quarantine of six months for dogs and other animals brought into the Kingdom, a precaution which veterinary science has long made superfluous.

Not so harmless anachronisms are the slums and most of the schools. Mr. Churchill not long ago said it was a good thing the Germans were doing something about the former. That the residents of those areas, squalid as their homes may have been, should have felt the same gratitude to the Nazi bombers seems doubtful. Inhumanly speaking, the need to destroy the indescribable holes in which hosts of Englishmen still lead a life of dull depression is so crying that the Prime Minister's quip seems excusable.

Actually, there are sufficient grounds to speculate whether the present war is not somewhat of an indirect blessing for England. For one hundred and fifty years or longer, the country has been frozen in a caste system which has delayed moral and material progress. Instead of being lowered, the walls between the rich and the poor have been made higher. Promises that there would be

education and opportunity for all were given time and again. But even today for a man from below to advance to the knowledge and earnings of those more favored by birth is still difficult though not wholly impossible in England.

During and after the World War, and during and after the depression, it was felt that the working classes would be given their due. While the emergency lasted, the entrenched interests encouraged such beliefs; after it was over, the defenses they had built proved their solidity. Maybe the direct impact of the present war, which comes so much closer to the people in all walks of life than did any other English war since the middle ages, will prove strong enough to tear down those ramparts of inequality, and remove from the faces of those in power the democratic mask that may hide behind oligarchy. If common suffering, and miserable nights spent huddled together in subway stations, are not strong enough to create more durable understanding of the rich for the poor and their rights, no force on earth is. If the people who are now showing the same noble spirit they proved in the last war are again disappointed, the ruling classes of England hardly deserve a better fate than that which may ultimately overtake them.

What is needed above everything else is education. The whole antiquated system, from Oxford down to the village schools, must be re-shaped in the spirit of democracy and for the promotion of sound knowledge. Newspapers in December reported that a German bomb had smashed the ancient whipping-block at Eton. It may be necessary for the forces of a rejuvenated England to

smash the entire edifice of which that block was a symbol.

Child labor, that fatal corollary of great poverty, was largely responsible for the low attendance figures. The schools, privately founded and unhampered by any kind of generally accepted standard, were as bad as they were few, and it cannot therefore be said that the truants missed much. What could they have learned in "Dame schools and private adventure schools, in which no person was too old, poor, ignorant, feeble, sickly, or totally unqualified to be thought, by themselves or others, unfit for teaching, [and which] had nearly one-half of the scholars. The teachers in these schools were drawn from the ranks of domestic servants out of place; discharged barmaids; vendors of toys and lollipops; keepers of small eating-houses, mangles, and lodging-houses; needlewomen; milliners; consumptive patients in an advanced stage; cripples almost bedridden; intemperates; out-of-work persons of various callings; outdoor paupers; and persons of seventy or even eighty years of age. The schools were held in cellars, bedrooms, kitchens, shops, workshops, and other wholly unsuitable places, in which the ordinary domestic and industrial work was carried out at the same time as the school-work. Only a few of the private-adventure schools were in the hands of educated persons, and these, as a rule, had not received any previous training for, or had experience in, their work."*

In such an environment, and with such mentors, the

* Ibid. p. 154.

only knowledge the children gained thoroughly was bound to be of rather special nature, not ordinarily taught in schools. As for instruction, owing to the political considerations already mentioned and to the ignorance of the teachers in other fields it was confined in the main to religious subjects. In the House of Commons in 1851, Mr. Fox pointed out that "Religious and secular instruction were kept distinct in all other schools. It was only when education was given to the poor, when it was to be administered as a sort of charity, that religion was inculcated—not for the sake of its own benignant influences, but for the sake of keeping the poor in order and tranquillity." *

The system had not improved. Just as there was no real willingness to better the lot of the poor in other respects, there was no willingness to provide education for them. Half measures if any were all that rich England afforded, to absolve its conscience or to take the edge off the dissatisfaction of the masses. The most effective means to prevent growth of such dissatisfaction was still considered to be teaching Bishop Butler's philosophy of a hundred years before; that God was the God of the wealthy, and that he looked with disapproval upon attempts of the poor to overcome the barriers of the caste system.

Of such a state of mind no better description is available than the words of Svend Ranulf, the Danish sociologist. What he wrote of pre-revolutionary eighteenth-century France sounds as if he had been thinking of nineteenth-century England. He spoke of "The prevalence among the bourgeoisie of the opinion that, for

* Ibid. p. 145.

the sake of the social order, the people must still be kept in awe by the belief in God as a severe judge, and in the torments of hell, even though such beliefs are now felt to be degrading and unbecoming for intelligent and cultivated men of the upper classes. Here the selfish motives of the care for the morals of the people are obvious." *

After decades of hesitation and obstruction, England was finally compelled in 1870 to follow the example so long given by other civilized countries: to make school attendance compulsory. The debates in the House of Commons again exposed the well-nigh antediluvian conditions from which the 1833 Factory Act had failed to bring relief. W. E. Forster in one debate said, "There must be a million and a half of children who remained untouched by the influence of the schools. Those who went to school were but imperfectly educated; there was much absolute ignorance; and what might be good schools became bad schools, because their pupils attended them for only two or three days in a week, or only a few weeks in a year. The result of the State leaving the initiative to volunteers was, that when State help had been most wanted, State help had been least given; and where State power should be most felt, it was not felt at all. Notwithstanding the large sums of money voted by parliament, there was a vast number of children badly taught, or utterly untaught, because there were too few schools, of which too many were bad schools. There was a large number of parents in the

* Svend Ranulf: *Moral Indignation and Middle Class Psychology*. Copenhagen, 1938, p. 32.

country who could not, or would not, send their children to school.”*

Holman sums up the situation when the act was passed in these words: “When . . . (the Act of 1870) came into force it was found that there was not school accommodation for more than half of those who ought to be at school. This is hardly a matter for surprise, since the returns were mostly supplied by clergymen and others little qualified for the work, and concerned to show a favourable state of things.”**

The lack of efficient organization continued to be the bane of English education long after 1870. A system was introduced under which the school inspectors of the government awarded so-called examination premiums; and as a result an incredible system of graft and subterfuge came into being. “Whilst, however, the total absence of proper examination is a bad thing—for examination, rightly used, is a real part of true education—examination as the be-all and end-all of teaching is equally vicious, and it was this which the new regulations brought about. Not only was it bad for teaching, but it was bad for morals. The money motive can never be a very exalted one; and where daily bread, professional reputation, and possible wealth—in the case of what is known as school farming, *i.e.*, allowing the teacher to be responsible for the whole or a certain part of the expenses, and then to take all the surplus income—were at stake, it was inevitable that by far the greater number should be forced into mere money-grubbing. Children were no longer human beings to be made

* Holman: *English National Education*, p. 182.

** Ibid. p. 156.

strong and perfect in their humanity, but money-making machines out of which the last penny must be squeezed. If they could by any trick or compulsion be made to hold, and display, sufficient memory matter to satisfy the inspector, then all was well.*

“So demoralizing and degrading was the money motive that children were brought to the examinations with throats bandaged and skins peeling from scarlet-fever. An inspector says that after, as he thought, having completed an examination, a manager came to him, and asked ‘If I would examine five children who were waiting in the class-room, as it was unsafe to introduce them into the school-room, and I subsequently found the mother of one of these children crying outside the door from anxiety respecting her little boy, who had been brought out of his sick-room in order to be present at the inspection’.”**

J. Dover Wilson, editor of a monumental survey and apologia, *The Schools of England*, while recognizing the gravity of the situation took a more lenient view. Said Mr. Wilson in his introduction:

“It has been said that the British Empire was founded in a fit of absence of mind. The rebuilding of our educational system in the nineteenth century was equally unpremeditated. Institutions were established or ideals realised as the occasion required, and their originator was now some great headmaster or headmistress, now a religious community, now a city guild, now an examining body, now a public authority, whether central or local, but most often a small group of public-

* Ibid. p. 158.

** Ibid. p. 169.

spirited men and women—like the founders of the great university of London—who saw a crying need, hoisted a banner, set up an association, collected the funds, and if they succeeded, as they generally did, bequeathed to the nation one more wing in our haphazard scholastic structure. It is an untidy way of doing things, a way leading to much waste of energy, a good deal of overlapping, and not a little friction and inefficiency—a way very irksome to precise and autocratic minds, and very different from that in which the systems of France and Germany took shape. The untidiness reaches its maximum naturally enough in a matter like the training of teachers, in which all other parts of the system are in some measure concerned. Listen to Lord Esher's impatient comment upon a recent book dealing with this subject. 'This volume', he writes, 'is brimful of industry and research, but through no fault of its author the English system of training teachers remains in great part unintelligible to the ordinary reader. After reading it twice through I understand the method of training teachers in France, I realise the system in vogue in the United States of America, but I have not the foggiest idea how the majority of teachers under our English system are selected and trained.' It is not difficult, especially if one is head of a university department for the training of teachers, to sympathise with this exasperation.'*

Englishmen have not infrequently felt that it was their God-given right to look down, from the pinnacle of their own perfection, upon other nations, and to utter good-humored or contemptuous criticism of their way

* J. Dover Wilson: *The Schools of England*. Chapel Hill, N. C., 1929, p. 11.

of life. An understanding of how they have failed to solve the most important problem of their own community may awaken some doubt as to the justification of such pronouncements.

England, with its tremendous resources, had not succeeded at the beginning of the twentieth century in providing satisfactory education for the masses. Other countries had an abundance of able, well-trained teachers; in England, there was a sad lack of such men and women. Responsible educators thought the situation extremely serious: "For upon the speedy provision of elementary education depends our industrial prosperity, and the safe working of our constitutional systems. Upon the speedy provision of education depends also our national power. Civilized communities throughout the world are massing themselves together, each mass being measured by its force; and if we are to hold our position among men of our own race, or among the nations of the world, we must make up for the smallness of our number by increasing the intellectual force of the individual."*

The sins of the fathers are visited on the sons. Such sins of omission as those committed, wilfully or through neglect, by the ruling classes of England in the field of popular education can scarcely be made good. It is therefore not surprising that even today foreign visitors are indignant over what they see in the country's primary schools. These last few years, the Government has made considerable effort towards improvement. But such endeavors, encouraged if not prompted

* Holman: *English National Education*, p. 184.

by mounting indignation at home and abroad, have done more towards throwing light upon conditions as they exist, than towards convincing non-English observers of the presence of an honest will to eliminate such conditions.

The Board of Education in 1937 budgeted 25 per cent more funds for building new and modernizing old schools; the press acknowledged that £200,000—a million dollars in round figures—would be spent weekly on school construction; a further £1,463,371 was provided in the last pre-war budget, 1939-40. Conditions being what they are, such appropriations are no more than a drop in the bucket.

Some evidence as to the nature of those conditions is contained in the Black List of dilapidated schools, published in 1924 by the education authorities, and in the 1937 program of the London Teachers Association* which demanded a speed-up in the repair of old and disreputable school buildings.

Additional evidence is supplied by Hugh Quigley and Ismay Goldie. Of a suburban area, containing workers' dwellings, private homes, and some fine mansions, and with not a few important factories nearby, they said in 1934: "As it is, the only council school in the Esher district dates from 1859, and it would be impossible to enforce the Education Act owing to the fact that no accommodation exists to take the children. One school has been erected some miles away on the Kingston By-Pass on one of the most dangerous and unsuitable sites in Britain."**

* Cf. *London News-Chronicle*, Jan. 25, 1937.

** Hugh Quigley and Ismay Goldie: *Housing and Slum Clearance in London*. London, 1934, p. 188.

In his recent book, *Youth in British Industry*,* John Gollan made this statement: "In the course of an address to the Educational Association's Conference at the beginning of 1937, he (Dr. F. H. Spencer, formerly chief inspector of the London County Council) said that only about four per cent of our elementary schools were fit for the education of the children of a civilised people. Many local authorities had not built a single new school for a generation. According to the *Daily Herald* for January 8th, 1937:

'Here are some of his impressions gained during recent visits:

'Cathedral City. All school premises are deplorably bad, dating from 1860 to 1880. No decent playgrounds. Space desperately limited.

'Large Manufacturing Town. Schools intolerably handicapped. Badly lighted, badly equipped. Children too cold to be educated, sitting at antiquated desks in rigid rows.

'Rural Area. Of the 20 schools inspected, 15 ought to be blown up. Ten had no internal supply of water for washing. Only one had hot water. No halls for physical training. Playgrounds smaller than in towns. Built in Pseudo-Gothic style, with the base of the windows usually high above the children's heads.

'London Suburb. Twelve schools; one rather good, one not too bad; eight very bad indeed; and one 'dark, dank, noisome hole' without cloakrooms, staff rooms and sanitary arrangements'."**

* Gollanz, London, 1937.

** John Gollan: *Youth in British Industry*. London, 1937, p. 206.

Even more depressing is what Joan Beauchamp says in her book:

“The meanness of the Government in providing for the education of the nation’s children affects all teachers, handicapping their work by the size of the classes, the unsuitability of many of the buildings and the lack of provision for the comfort of teachers and children. . . .

Many of the school buildings, particularly in rural districts, are old and unsuitable, and there are still over 1000 schools on the official black list—condemned as unfit for use—and it has been estimated that four-fifths of our schools need to be rebuilt or reconditioned. An official of the N.U.T. (National Union of Teachers) states that:

‘The rate of deterioration in the other schools is quicker than the pace of the Government in renovating the black-listed schools, and if a new survey were made at the moment, instead of the black-list being less, owing to renovation, it would be greater than ever before.’

A teacher, who has just retired after 45 years’ service in an elementary school in a rural area writes:

‘In most urban and rural areas the buildings and furniture are very unsuitable. My own school was a terribly draughty and barnlike place, built 70 or more years ago for a boy’s school. There was a main room and two classrooms. At first the main room was heated by two open grates (out of the Ark), and then two stoves were put in to replace them. If you were near the fire you could keep warm, but the room generally was ice-cold.’ . . . This teacher also complains that her school was used every night for ‘local meetings of every kind, whist

drives, and even canary and rabbit shows’. This means, of course, that the school caretakers have inadequate time to get the schoolrooms aired and cleaned, and the standard of cleanliness in some areas is amazingly low. In the Rhondda Valley at the recent elections I attended many meetings held in schoolrooms and was absolutely shocked at the disgusting state of the floors, which looked as if they had not seen a scrubbing brush for years! Teachers have told me that in some schools the floors are scrubbed once in three weeks. One head teacher on arriving at a new school was amazed at the condition of the towels, used communally by the children. She found that the allowance was one clean towel per 100 children per week!” *

Dealing with a specific case which may or may not be typical, Ellen Wilkinson, Member of Parliament for the ship-building center of Jarrow, wrote recently of conditions in that city’s schools. Said Miss Wilkinson:

“The elementary school buildings are out of date and some are insanitary. They were all built in the years of Jarrow’s prosperity at the end of the last century. Several of them have not yet got electric light, which makes modern developments, like school films, impossible. In many the class rooms are simply partitioned cubicles in what used to be a large hall. The mercy is that they are partitioned at all. The sanitary and washing arrangements are primitive, the playgrounds hemmed in by other buildings, for most of the schools are in the most crowded part of the town. Only one school has a playing field of its own. There are proposals for erecting new schools on the new estates, and a fine new secondary

* Joan Beauchamp: *Women Who Work*. London, 1937, p. 65.

school has been built. But most of the children of today, and, for that matter, their children, will still be in these unsatisfactory conditions unless help is quickly given. The Board of Education will not pay more than 20 per cent towards the cost of renovating old schools. It is impossible for Jarrow to raise the 80 per cent or the amount needed for new schools; so the children will continue to suffer.” *

On a more general plane, George Lansbury, the famous politician, stated what was necessary. “But in the preparations for a new England one of the most important things will be to pull down about two-thirds of the existing schools. Some of them are so unfit for their purpose as to be material for the Inspector of Nuisances. They are dark, heavy buildings, with narrow windows which look like imitation Victorian churches. They should be pulled down and their places taken by airy, large-windowed buildings which will be more of the bungalow than the church-and-prison type.” **

It is to be doubted whether Mr. Lansbury got to the root of the evil. For, after all, spirit is more important than matter. The underlying cause of the sad deficiencies in England’s education would seem to be the state of mind which allowed the buildings, and the entire practice of instruction, to fall into such decay. The consequences of such a state of mind have been making themselves felt for a good many years, and in every province of national life. As early as 1909, H. Stanley Jevons, in a series of articles devoted to the causes of unemployment, stated that “Perhaps the most obvious primary

* Ellen Wilkinson: *The Town That Was Murdered*. London, 1939, p. 255.

** George Lansbury: *My England*. London, 1934, p. 25.

cause is the unsatisfactory character of our national system of elementary education, which is responsible for the existence of a body of men who grow up without the power of doing the roughest work well, and are incapable of keeping steadily to any kind of labor, being wholly deficient in perseverance, ambition, initiative and thinking power. A few boys leave school hardly able to read and write, many without having had their powers of thought developed in the least, and without any kind of technical knowledge of the simplest description which could be of use to them in any trade. Most of our boys leave the primary schools without having had aroused in them a wholesome ambition and a power of anticipation of their probable future wants (which should be taught by stimulating the imagination), and without any knowledge of the nature of the employments open to them in different trades.” *

Enlightened egoism, had it been present, would have kept England’s ruling class from allowing such conditions to develop; for they have sapped the strength of the country. It is to be hoped that social upheavals brought about by the present war will lead to fundamental improvements in education, for without sufficient instruction and well-being of the masses a civilized, industrial nation cannot in the long run continue to exist. If England is to live, short-sighted class egoism must die. What must be eliminated is not only an educational setup which in some respects is tantamount to the encouragement of illiteracy, but a distribution of the national income which, instead of strengthening the young

* H. Stanley Jevons: “The Causes of Unemployment,” *Contemporary Review*, May, 1909.

and preparing them for an active life, weakens them through insufficient provision of food and heads them towards a life of misery.

Of such conditions evidence was given in a short article in the London *Daily Herald* for January 5, 1926. Under the caption "Million Unfit Children", the paper said: "No less than 1,000,000 children at school are so physically and mentally defective as not to be capable of deriving reasonable benefit from education, 'declared Mr. Cahill, vice-chairman of the Council of the British Association, speaking in London last night on the physical condition of the people.'" More recent proof was contained in the *New Leader* of December 3, 1937. According to this journal, a report of the school authorities written late in that year stated that the proportion of under-fed children in Merthyr was 130 in 1000, in Newcastle 172, in Pontypridd 210. In Pontypridd, it was stated, one in five boys or girls of school age did not have enough to eat.

Queen Victoria used to say to her children that the most important qualities of a gentleman were kindness and helpfulness towards everyone. That precept has not had enough influence on England's ruling class. Its attitude towards those to whom fate did not grant such a privileged station is unenviable.

III

Secondary Schools

WHILE even today primary education in England bears sad reminders of gross neglect, the expectation would seem justified that things in the secondary schools are, and were, less bad. That in agreement with England's nineteenth-century ideals of democracy and progress, generous opportunity to obtain a more complete education would await those few from among the poorer classes who, overcoming all obstacles, secured sufficient elementary schooling, is a natural assumption.

But even in this respect rich England failed. Its idea of a gentleman, that ideal of a cultured, well-bred and well-connected individual, was not, and could not be made, available to those who in the view of the chosen few were eternally doomed to bear, from the cradle to the grave, the stigmata of poverty and social inferiority. While this spirit has lost some of its apparent rigidity, and is no longer discussed so openly, it nevertheless continues to govern the better-class Englishman's attitude toward any attempt at throwing his hallowed gentlemen's schools open to 'hoi polloi'. Such attempts have been no less frequent than those at reforming the grade-school system; their fate has been no better than that of, say, the efforts in favor of slum clearance. No real improvement was possible, since there was always enough resistance to break the spirit of high-minded reformers. The obstacle to well-planned secondary education was

the same as that to orderly primary schooling: the opposition of the ruling classes and, henceforth, of the Government.

England's "Public" Schools, originally a preserve of the aristocracy, fought a bitter fight to keep the sons of the newly-rich from their doors; having lost that battle, they opposed the admission of poor boys from the lower classes.

The first phase of that fight, which ended when the rich industrialists, merchants and shipowners of a new age gained entrance for their sons to Eton, Harrow, Winchester and the other schools which were the holy of holies of aristocracy, gave birth to the word 'snob'. In these boarding schools, which long held a monopoly on secondary education, pupils who did not belong to the nobility were compelled to append to their names the letters "s.nob."—*sine nobilitate*. The other boys pronounced it snob, and the term quickly became the generally accepted epithet for social climbers and, more universally, for people who try to appear more than they are. Of conditions in these schools, Edward C. Mack writes: * "As we have seen, there were many from the mercantile classes in the schools by 1810. Often their presence resulted from a snobbish desire to imitate the aristocracy . . . Snobbery probably increased among the upper classes in direct proportion to the danger to their prestige from the influx of the new rich. These new, rich, when they were accepted, were probably the most

* Edward C. Mack: *Public Schools and British Opinion, 1780-1860*. London, 1939. p. 77.

snobbish of all, since insecurity is the great producer of social contempt."

The appalling degree to which this conceit of caste grew towards the few boys from the lower classes who were admitted to public schools is described in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. As late as 1831, it was not impossible for an Eton boy to write: "I cannot consider the game of football as being at all gentlemanly; after all, the Yorkshire common people play it."*

Such an attitude shows with sufficient clarity the treatment a boy from the under-privileged classes would have to expect from his schoolmates. Two unfortunate scholars have reported their experiences: "Anthony Trollope's comments, written long afterwards, surely reflected a good deal of early nineteenth-century feeling. 'The indignities I endured are not to be described. As I look back it seems to me that all hands were turned against me—those of masters as well as boys. I was allowed to join in no play. Nor did I learn anything—for I was taught nothing.' Thomas is even more explicit. 'What a paria I was among these denizens of Mark's and other pupil rooms! For I was a "town-boy", "village boy" would have been a more correct designation; one of the very few who, by the terms of the founder's will, had any right to be there at all; and was in consequence an object of scorn and contumely on the part of the paying pupils.'" Mack,** who reports these utterances, comments: "There must . . . have been much bitterness among the snubbed and mistreated boys of the lower class."

* Ibid. p. 85.

** Ibid. p. 134.

Their sons meting out "scorn and contumely" to the impecunious free-places, the fathers took a more rational but no less reactionary view. "There were diehards who found only evil in the 'temporizing spirit of indiscriminate concession' which would allow those below the professional classes into the Public Schools. These are not 'the doctrines from which, in our youth, Public Schools derived their vigour'. 'Why should we bring into undue contact, and unnecessary collision, those between whom an almost impassable gulf is to be fixed as soon as they cease to be schoolboys', a gulf created by the 'wise policy of civilization'."*

That the beneficiaries of this 'wise policy of civilization' felt the influence of a possibly more modern-minded House of Commons upon the fate of secondary education to be a danger, and opposed Government interference by every means, is in keeping with such utterances. "To the upper classes the independence of the Public Schools from the Government was the most sacred of all their features. Even those of the ruling classes who, in the thirties, ceased to be thorough-going conservatives, were not willing to sanction Government interference. Public Schools have responsibility to a 'far higher tribunal than that of public opinion'. They must do their own reforming."** The tribunal to which the Public Schools were responsible was that of class or self-interest.

It has since shown that there was no ground to fear lest the breeding-places of the English caste spirit be subjected to forcible reform. Exaggerated respect for

* Ibid. p. 142.

** Ibid. p. 139.

inherited wealth has up to this day kept the social barriers nearly intact, and the Public Schools, which today as in the past are the ideal springboard for a public career, continue to be well-nigh inaccessible to any but the sons of the rich. The traditional lack of social understanding which is characteristic of England's nobility was soon copied by the new money aristocracy, which came into being about the end of the eighteenth century. "In a word," says J. Dover Wilson,* "I suggest that the principal cause of the disgraceful condition of English education between 1750 and 1840 was the fact that the Government of the country, once the province of a skilled bureaucracy, had become the private property of the landed class. Birth and bribery, not brain, now gave the entry to political, official, and professional life. Why then bother too much about education? For where there was no climbing to be done, what was the use of a ladder? . . . As for the children of 'the labouring poor' at this period, if a charity school or a dame school happened to be found in their neighbourhood they might consider themselves fortunate."

Even in our day the ambition of an Englishman is to send his boy to Public School, for he knows that none but the schools of the rich can provide his child with reasonable expectation of a successful career. As a concession to modern ideas, England has been compelled to organize, with a good deal of hesitation and in insufficient numbers, secondary schools for the children of the less privileged; but these establishments have so far been unable to break the monopoly of the Public Schools. According to an article in the *London Times*,

* *The Schools of England*. p. 10.

Educational Supplement, of May 6, 1939, Public School attendance in the ten-year period 1929-1938 showed the following development: The lowest group, with fees for board and tuition totalling no more than £130 per year, registered an increase of 8½ per cent in the number of pupils. Schools in the medium group, fees up to £185, with the exception of Wellington, Sherborne, Felsted, Gresham's School, Holt, and King's School, Canterbury, showed a decline of 11 per cent. Schools in the top group, Radley (£185), Uppingham (186), Leighton Park (189), Stowe (189), Rugby (201), Winchester (210), and Eton (245) remained unchanged, while Harrow (240) showed a loss. The *Times* seeks the explanation for this development in the plutocratic standards of English education; the advance shown by the least expensive schools in spite of lower birth rates cannot be understood on other grounds; stability in the top group of expensive and exclusive schools is because only the select few gain access.

The function of these schools in the English system was recently explained by Professor John Hilton, teacher of Industrial Relations in Cambridge. In August, 1937, in an address reported at some length in the *London Times*, Professor Hilton, who was then heading Cambridge's liberal summer school, explained that it was no more than natural that an Eton boy would make a better general or bishop or judge or minister than a boy from Hackney village school. If he did not it was his own fault, for to every pound spent at Eton 2½ pence were spent on the education of the Hackney boy.

That one boy was born to rich parents and another to poor could not be avoided, and Professor Hilton felt that it did not matter nearly as much as another question, whether a workingman's son was able to win for his knowledge and ability the same recognition, and the same place in society, that a rich man's child could. He denied that such opportunity existed, although innumerable children from the working classes had sufficient ability to go far. But to go far a good start was required; a man had to come from the right school and to wear the right school tie. There was no point in making fun of the old school tie, he felt, since it took its wearer places, while a man with the wrong tie had about as much chance as a man without a shirt. Of 56 bishops, 52 had been to Public School, 38 of them to one for Lords. Of 24 deacons, 19 were Public School boys, 13 having attended one of the top group. Of 156 judges, 122 came from Public School, 75 from a first-rate one, 152 of 210 high officials earning more than £1000 wore Public School ties, 70 of a pattern acceptable in any company. Of 82 directors of the Big Five (England's leading banks), 62 attended Public School. Of the 21 Cabinet Ministers then in office, 20 went to Public Schools, 15 to highly exclusive ones; 17 attended University, 13 of them Oxford or Cambridge. A Cabinet meeting, he said, was in a way a Public School reunion. Napoleon made a remark about every soldier carrying a marshal's baton in his knapsack. The same could be said with respect to England, but with the addition that a considerable proportion of Englishmen in leading occupations also went to the Marshal's school, played football with the Marshal, and joined the Marshal's club. An ounce

of club was better than a ton of baton. The best jobs, according to him, were marked Reserved for the Sons of the Rich and Mighty. Hilton concluded that in England there was but little opportunity for social advancement, and that unless the entire educational setup was changed there would never be. Public School attendance would have to become immaterial, actual knowledge being the only criterion. Public Schools were everything but public, and were not even under public control. The only way out was to make a law forcing each Public School to recruit half its pupils from the elementary schools, by ability only, and to have terms that the parents could bear.

Professor Hilton's speech is merely another illustration of the fact that what counts in England is not so much ability as the school tie. Unless that tie is the proper one a man cannot be a "gentleman."

The purpose in creating the Secondary Schools was to provide the less privileged classes with some sort of substitute for the Public Schools which were not open to their sons. That these schools would open up the road to success for the talented, placing them on a par with Public School boys, was not even expected. But that, as it developed, large numbers of able boys from the working classes could not even gain access to them came as a severe disappointment. Kenneth Lindsay arrived at the following conclusions:*

"It has become increasingly clear in the course of this study, that, whatever the percentage of elementary

* *Social Progress and Educational Waste*. London, 1926. p. 85.

school children who are capable of profiting by secondary education may be, and even if fees are abolished, as at Bradford, for secondary schools, there is still another barrier which is perhaps the most serious of all. Lord Shaftesbury said over fifty years ago, 'The extent to which persons in London depended on the labour of their children, their Lordships would scarcely be aware of ...'

"It was discovered in 1908 that out of 469 schools on the grant list in the country, the average length of school life was under three years in no less than 409. Kent gave two main reasons for this:

1. Poverty, or domestic misfortune.
2. Indifference or ignorance of parents."

In the two intervening decades no material improvement had occurred. "But it still, unfortunately, remains the case that, while estimates of the proportion of pupils 'capable of profiting' by secondary education differ, the percentage actually entering secondary schools is, for the country as a whole, far below the lowest of them. The shortage of secondary school places is one serious obstacle, which, incidentally, combined with the great increase in the demand for secondary education, has had the effect of converting the free-place examination from what it was intended to be, and what it is described as being in the Statement quoted above—a qualifying examination—into an examination of a highly competitive kind. The lack of means on the part of parents, which prevents them from dispensing with the earnings of their children, is a hardly less serious mat-

ter. The figures presented . . . of the number of children who, after winning free-places, are obliged to refuse them owing to poverty, tell, indeed, a story which few thoughtful persons can contemplate without grave disquietude."

"Even where fees have been abolished altogether, and where secondary education is free, the number of refusals of free-places exceeds the number of acceptances, as the figures from Bradford testify. This is all the more serious because among the refusals are 50 per cent of the first 200 on the list, and—a statement which is true also of Manchester—a number of the abler children prefer the shorter course at the central school to the full secondary school course. Thirdly, the Director of Education in Manchester informs us that, even were all their schools free, 60 per cent of the children would not be able to afford a full course of secondary school education. London has chosen another way out of the difficulty, if, indeed, it should not be described as an evasion of it. Although the total population of maintained secondary schools has doubled in the last ten years, the percentage of free-places to fee-payers has actually diminished. An alternative, however, in the shape of sixty central schools has been provided, and each year some 5000 children are drafted into these schools from the public elementary schools. We are inevitably led to the conclusion that the two stumbling-blocks are:

1. Shortage of accommodation
2. Poverty of parents."

According to Mr. Lindsay conditions are similar in other areas such as Middlesex and Birmingham.

As we have seen, even the schools which were to be a surrogate for the real thing are not sufficiently available for children from the lower classes, only a proportion of these boys and girls getting the chance to develop their mental powers. Poverty of the parents in all too many cases excludes their children from secondary education. W. Fraser Mitchell, Lecturer in Education at the University of Reading (England), wrote recently:* "It is the fact that children of high ability are still in large numbers excluded from the academic type of Secondary School, while many less bright children attend these schools simply as a consequence of their parents' ability to pay for them, that is open to serious criticism".

Lindsay complained that "No one can say how much trouble, delinquency, blind-alley work, human maladjustment and human waste could be saved by spending more money, and spending it more wisely, on those members of the nation under 18 years of age. We are dealing with imponderables, not with a profit and loss account. But vast fields of labour are at once opened up when we recognize that the capacities, qualities, and desires of the individual are the most precious of all raw materials, and that by guidance and due care we can direct those capacities, qualities and desires into some channels rather than others, to the benefit of all concerned." **

* *Social Progress and Educational Waste*. p. 29.

** "Recent Tendencies in English Education." *International Education Review*, 1938. No. 1.

He was, indeed, aware of England's greatest weakness when he concluded that "Sheer poverty and bad environment being the twin opponents of educational advance, there must go hand-in-hand with greater accommodation a more profound and sympathetic *civic feeling*."*

The super-conservative attitude of which we have seen evidence time and again was bound to make its disastrous effects felt not only in the provision, or rather lack of provision, of schools, and in the selection of educational matter, but in teaching methods as well. One particular weakness, the pupil-teacher system, admirable if wisely administered, but here adopted because of the lack of trained teachers and not entirely abandoned until after 1900, gave rise to innumerable protests. "But if we are to attach any value to the ideas of the great writers on education, then the notion of children educating children is altogether monstrous and mischievous. That they can teach each other certain tricks of voice and hand does not require a Lancaster or Bell to tell us, but that they can in any sense guide and assist the development of the mind and body is, on the face of it, an absurd suggestion. As well set children to physic each other, for the fallacy is about on all-fours with a notion that one who has taken a pill is fit to be a physician. The system was a thoroughly bad one, and has clung, with disastrous effects, to our schools down to the present day."**

The final realization that such a method was definitely harmful did not lead to its immediate elimination. "The

* Ibid. p. 179.

** Holman: *English National Education*. p. 39.

pupil-teacher system was also regarded as unsatisfactory, after fifteen years' trial, and it was continued only as a supplement to the normal-school course. It was recognized that it produced only routine teaching, and arrested the progress of improvement by perpetuating the methods, whether good, bad, or indifferent, learnt in a certain school. But England is the country in which dead systems of education live."*

Pedagogic backwardness was not confined to elementary schools; it was evident as well in those institutions whose task it was to produce English gentlemen. Of the methods in vogue at Eton and Oxford, Thomas Carlyle said in his "Latter-Day Pamphlets" that their silly verse, their College logic and their incoherent language, which was neither English nor Germanic but Greek and Latin, would scarcely turn out leaders, and that the country did not need words but manly wisdom and virtue. "What a strange ignoring is here," of all that had been written and done concerning education and instruction, as well of what was being done in the schools of Holland and Prussia at that very time! But the argument that it is of the nature of the English genius to thus hammer out success from its failures—due to self-satisfied ignorance concerning other people's knowledge—is used at the present time to excuse, if not to justify, the many and mischievous anomalies which still exist in our so-called national education. Whilst, however, it may be satisfactory to our national self-complacency to reflect that, in spite of all, we have managed to effect something that is good, it would per-

* Ibid. p. 109.

haps be more creditable to our sanity if we had done much less that has proved so disastrously wrong.”* Holman seems to have been particularly annoyed because English education could not measure up to that of Germany. “Exactly; so our manufacturers have remained unfettered by any scientific system in their factories, while their German rivals have laboratories and expert scientists as permanent parts of their factories, and are thereby outstripping us in the world’s race for wealth. So will they excel us in their schools, as long as we hold that it is the business of our teachers to force knowledge into scholars’ minds, and not to be fettered by any scientific knowledge of the nature of those minds.”**

In his book, *Public Schools and the Public Needs*,*** G. G. Coulton complained that teachers at the Public Schools were totally ignorant of matters which were commonest knowledge abroad, and that the teaching of foreign languages in these exclusive institutions was in particularly bad shape. He said that it was almost impossible to find a man who really mastered the language, could teach what he knew, and was an educated man.

Osbert Sitwell recently published a bitter satire on the antiquated system and its methods. In an article entitled, “Send the Public Schools to Germany,”**** he stated as his private war aim the forcible deportation of the Public Schools to Germany. Only England’s Pub-

* Ibid. p. 199.

** Ibid. p. 199.

*** London, 1901.

**** London, April, 1940.

lic Schools could save Germany from itself, and the world from Germany. Every normal boy being at heart a tyrant, it was good for him if he were made the victim of tyranny, and the Public Schools were nothing but a better kind of concentration camp. They would therefore be in the nature of a serum against the concentration camp spirit. Sitwell was sure that a man who had suffered all its horrors—the food, the thrashings, compulsory attendance at church, and the jokes of the masters—would later defend his freedom to the last. By boring the boys, the teachers awaken in them a healthy horror of mental effort and distaste of modern science. Lazy men, *i.e.*, Public School alumni, never do much harm. No lazy man invented dynamite, incendiary bombs or death-rays. All the damage is done by active men with active minds. If only Hitler and Goebbels had been through a good English Public School, life would be much better today, for the Germans as well as for the English. Therefore, the Public Schools would have to be transferred to Germany, so that the next generation may develop a predilection for dead languages, and dead ideas instead of live ones. The boys would learn to prefer Caesar’s wars to those of Frederick the Great and Bismarck, and to prefer football to every other occupation. A classical education on the English model would lead them unconsciously to take the part of the Romans against the barbarian Germans, Belgians and Britons, and to become partisans of civilization. If Europe were to live, Germany must learn to yield, and that was best achieved by the English Public School system.

The educational system of which Mr. Sitwell complained has been shaped by the insular spirit of England's ruling class. Primitively, egoistically, that caste opposed genuine progress, and made persistent effort to kill lower-class competition before it was born. That the effect of this spirit should have made itself felt also in the education of the chosen few is scarcely surprising. Yet such narrowness and lack of real interest can only lead to disaster. A country will find it difficult to manage its affairs if "The average John Bull, whether middle class or aristocrat, hardly cares whether a boy learns anything at a Public School or not."*

The question may well be asked if this singular indifference to educational matters may not have other roots than the capitalist outlook of the country's ruling class. How is it possible that a whole nation should have tolerated for many generations a system under which the chosen few proclaimed ignorance as the foremost principle of education, and indifference as the maxim of educational policy? How is it possible that no storm of protest arose to vindicate the people's right to knowledge?

To answer these questions it is necessary to cast a glance at certain features of the English character. John Ruskin's thoughts may throw some light on the problem. Said he:

"I say first we have despised literature. What do we, as a nation, care about books? How much do you think we spend altogether on our libraries, public or private, as compared with what we spend on our horses? If a

* Mack: *Public Schools and British Opinion*. p. 144.

man spends lavishly on his library, you call him mad—a bibliomaniac. But you never call any one a horse-maniac, though men ruin themselves every day by their horses, and you do not hear of people ruining themselves by their books. Or, to go lower still, how much do you think the contents of the book-shelves of the United Kingdom, public and private, would fetch, as compared with the contents of its wine-cellars? What position would its expenditure on literature take as compared with its expenditure on luxurious eating?

"I say we have despised science . . . We are glad enough, indeed, to make our profit of science; we snap up anything in the way of a scientific bone that has meat on it, eagerly enough; but if the scientific man comes for a bone or a crust to *us*, that is another story. What have we publicly done for science? We are obliged to know what o'clock it is, for the safety of our ships, and therefore we pay for an Observatory; and we allow ourselves, in the person of our Parliament, to be annually tormented into doing something, in a slovenly way, for the British Museum . . ."

Gustaf F. Steffen, well-known Swedish economist and politician, has said: "The average Englishman is almost totally lacking in mental and esthetic inclinations, more so probably than any other European. He shows, on the other hand, remarkable spirit of enterprise when it comes to dealing on a grand scale with cruder problems such as those of industry, colonization, world trade, democratic politics, etc.; he also has the coolness and tenacity of character required to ensure success in these

* John Ruskin: *Sesame and Lilies*.

occupations." Wyndham Lewis, an Englishman, has stated* quite openly that art in its various forms does not figure among the accomplishments of Britons, and that no Englishman who understands or values the arts would call Great Britain a country of artists.

Robert Briffault, who prefers life in the United States to his native England, wrote:** England, whose most eminent cultural contribution has been her share in scientific advance, is in its general culture the most unscientific of countries. A wide range of ignorance is indeed as much the mark of perfect English education as a priggish acquaintance with scholarly tradition. Cultivated Englishmen pride themselves upon their ignorance on any matter that may be recognized as outside the orbit of British tradition, and at the mention of, say, an American author or a geographical name, even that of a place within the British Empire, will take pleasure in the triumphant tone in which they will declare: "Never heard of it."

This pride of ignorance, the synthesis of insular superiority and insufficient education, has made the average Englishman singularly blind to foreign people and their civilizations. "A deep study of human values, of the individual characteristics of strangers or the general features of humanity, is foreign to the English way of thinking" says Dr. H. H. Aall, the Scandivanian philosopher.*** "No one can cloak himself in icier indifference towards his neighbor than an Englishman. He has no interest for the mind in general, nor for its

* *The Mysterious John Bull*. London, 1938.

** *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*, New York, 1938. p. 105.

*** *Nordens Skjaebne*, Oslo, 1917. p. 159.

special expressions in other countries.

"But everywhere he goes and whomsoever he meets, an Englishman never forgets his deep contempt of 'foreigners'. In a country an Englishman honors with his visit, its citizens are 'foreigners', and he is 'at home'. When an Englishman married to a Norwegian girl, who had expressed his disdain of the 'foreigners', meaning us, was told that in reality he was the foreigner, he answered, 'An Englishman is nowhere a foreigner.' True to his strong self-reliance and his contempt for others, an Englishman is ignorant beyond all limits."

Such comments, whether violent like that of normally dispassionate, intellectual Aall, or matter-of-fact like that of Briffault, all have one thing in common: They stress as the most striking feature in the English national character that self-satisfied complacency which is resented by everybody, and envied by none. There is no doubt that there are events in England's history which would seem to justify such an attitude; the same is true of the history of every country. But a nation that succumbs to the temptation to rest on its laurels erects thereby well-nigh insuperable barriers to progress; it becomes stale; it remains ignorant. It is of little practical importance whether, originally, ignorance was caused by complacency, or complacency by ignorance, or whether both grew from deeper roots. What is of cardinal importance is that so long as complacency continues, and English souls are not shaken by searching doubts of their own perfection, no really effective steps are possible to improve national education.

That this state of mind, and the developments it has caused, are fraught with danger, and that in their present shape they are a threat to England's national life, has been recognized by a number of English thinkers. Professor F. Clarke, head of the Institute of Education in London, said in Cambridge in 1937 that he feared the English view of political developments was too one-sided; liberal thought was undergoing a crisis, and to lay the blame for this crisis on no one but the dictators was over-simplification; the problem was nearer by; and Englishmen would have to be very sure of themselves before they had a right to seek solace in the thought that their island was a fleece destined to remain bone-dry while everybody else was being wetted by the waters of change. Were they not unconsciously taking certain facts in the English situation for granted, and feeling free without having paid the full price of liberty? Closer investigation might reveal that English liberty was a relatively limited thing.

Andrè Siegfried, the celebrated French author and close friend of England, was even more outspoken—so outspoken that for the English issue of his book the translators had to tone down a few clauses. Said he: *

“The Englishman not only shrinks from the effort needed to solve his problems; he will not even formulate them. His mental laziness is extraordinary. It bores him to think, and he is particularly hostile when anyone raises a discussion of principles, upsetting his peace of mind. When he is forced into a corner, he content himself with half-explanations, or some snap judgment which will give him an excuse to think no more

* *La Crise Britannique*. Paris, 1931. p. 115. *England's Crisis*. London, 1933. p. 141.

about it. Perhaps this explains why these people who live so leisurely, in comparison with others, always give the impression of charming repose. Their traditional calm is so soothing to the nerves that, with little effort, one could imagine that time itself had ceased to flow. Such an atmosphere is fatal: ‘Wake up, John Bull!’

“This lack of realism—this vague, indolent method of setting aside realities—deceives the people as to the respective merits of other nations. The chosen few are well informed, no doubt, but the average Englishman stays at home in his island, and even when he travels, he regards the Continent with all the condescension of a colonial towards a native. He cannot believe that Europe has been modernised, that her hotels have proportionately more bathrooms and running water than have his own, or that her dangerous competition arises, not, as he pretends to himself, from lower wages, but from her modernised plant and her spirit of emulation and progress.

“There is something comic in this injured superiority, which makes the Britisher consider unfair the competition of rivals who work harder and are satisfied with less pretentious earnings. Proud of his standard of living, he is pleased to think that, shut up in his castle, he will always be able to ignore the competition of people who are not afraid of strenuous work. Nothing is more foreign to present-day British mentality than the recognition that success cannot exist without endeavor. They wish to reap without having sown, to gain without having labored, in a word, to use a typically English phrase, to get something for nothing. Though earlier generations have understood and practised the hard,

healthful philosophy of merit, so vigorously preached by Cobden, Englishmen today seem content to rely on tradition. 'We have Abraham to our father', they seem to say, and to think that that gives them a right to things....

"Sport, the favorite pastime, claims a frightening proportion of the people's energy, and from the French point of view, lowers their preoccupations almost to a level of childishness. A cricket match becomes a national event which empties the offices and the workshops, monopolizes all attention, and drives care aside. 'National Disaster' is written in enormous characters on the newspaper bulletins. Is it the two million unemployed? Or the fall in exports? Not at all, it is simply the defeat of a champion cricket team."

Of course, for all the people to meet on the common ground of national sports, and on that ground alone, is a perfect solution from the point of view of a satisfied privileged class. But for modern countries, a meeting of minds on grounds more directly related to national existence is inescapably necessary. A community shows its spirit in the way it solves its problems.

For the past twenty years, successive British cabinets have made real efforts to catch up, so far as possible, with the other nations that have outdistanced England in matters of education. Consideration of the opposition they have found in some quarters, and the inertia in others, only enhances the value of what they have achieved. They have done something about the worst and most dilapidated schools. It is not much, but at least it is a beginning, and it is probable that insofar as the physical plant is concerned England will be

equipped for education before the end of the twentieth century.

Whether by that time the education meted out in the buildings will be up to modern standards depends on whether a complete change in attitude towards education can be achieved. Present methods are inadequate. England is miles removed from the goal of giving to promotion of talent the democratic solution which is a prerequisite for the healthful life of a modern industrial country. All other democracies—and even some dictatorships—have recognized that for both moral and practical reasons able children must be given encouragement regardless of the financial or social status of their parents. In England, nothing has been greatly changed. Yet today more than ever, a nation's brains are its best capital. In every other civilized country, selection of the fittest is acknowledged to be the cardinal problem of education. In England, the rule still seems to be: Keep the Rich on Top.

All things considered, that can not be the will of the great English people. They have long sensed that there is something rotten in the state of Denmark. But they do not realize, or are reluctant to concede, that unless they do something about it themselves there is little chance that anything will be done. It is possible that despite the system of old traditions, preconceived notions, and ignorance, which English capital has so successfully built for its own protection, the present war may awaken the people to a sense of their responsibilities to themselves and their country. If that comes to pass, this war will have served at least one useful purpose; for even a rude awakening is better than none at all.

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