

EDUCATION, ELEMENTARY

Until 1870, England and Wales had no national system of education. Elementary education was provided primarily by religiously affiliated educational societies and paid for by parents and charitable subscribers. England lagged behind other European countries partly because of the British reluctance to compel parents to send children to school but mostly because prolonged political squabbles over the role of religious education stalled parliamentary attempts to establish a national system.

It was clear long before 1870 that state-supported education was inevitable. Utilitarians supported mass education as a means of inculcating middle-class values in the working class, thus ensuring social order. British industry increasingly required a literate, numerate work force. Humanitarians argued that some degree of formal education should be a British birthright.

British education at the beginning of the century was uncentralized. Local authorities, usually parishes, provided for the destitute in workhouses and industrial schools. Ragged schools, begun by philanthropists and organized in the Ragged School Union (1844) continued to provide charitable education until the 1870s. Rural areas often boasted craft "dame" schools, where children worked at cottage industries like straw-plaiting and lacemaking and listened to the occasional perfunctory reading of the Bible; children who attended these schools contributed some of their earnings to its upkeep. The Sunday School Society (founded 1785) flourished, providing the poor with reading and sometimes writing instruction well into the century; by 1851, over two million students were enrolled. Middle-class children attended private schools and paid fees, while most upper-class children were educated at home, at least until they were old enough for boarding school.

Two religiously affiliated societies, the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Church of England (1811) and the British and Foreign Schools Society (1808), took on the bulk of the task of educating working-class children for most of the nineteenth century. They

could afford to run large-scale programs because they used the new monitorial system of teaching, developed originally by Andrew Bell in India. This system posited a school where students were grouped by ability; the top group would learn from a teacher, then divide to teach the lesson to students in lower classes. The National Society used Bell's method, while the British Society adopted a version especially modified for English students by Joseph Lancaster. The system was cheap because one teacher could instruct large numbers of students, and the mechanical, oppressive quality of learning was not thought to be a disadvantage, as it taught children orderliness and respect, qualities desirable in the working-class adults they were to become.

By 1833, the government had begun giving small grants to aid the societies in building schools and later in training teachers. In 1839, the first government agency for education was established, the Educational Committee of the Privy Council Office, with James Kay-Shuttleworth (1804-1877) as its secretary. The most important government figure of the century in English education, Kay-Shuttleworth instituted government inspection of schools that received grants and in 1846 started the pupil-teacher program to counteract the shortage and poor quality of elementary teachers. Pupil-teachers were promising students who stayed on in their elementary schools to teach and were themselves tutored by the senior teachers; eventually they competed for places in training colleges to become full-fledged teachers.

Meanwhile, the educational societies struggled for dominance. The National Society had the support of Anglicans and Conservatives, while the British Society appealed to Nonconformists and Radicals. The Wesleyans had schools of their own and in 1847 the Catholic Poor School Society was formed. The question of how much educational autonomy should be relinquished in return for government grants became a primary concern. The Voluntaryist movement (1843) successfully raised money for schools that accepted neither government money nor controls until it foundered in 1867.

The difficulty over government controls centered on religious education. Though many areas contained several schools of dif-

ferent affiliations, others had only a single school. If a child's religious background differed from that of the school, the government wanted to ensure the child's right to refuse sectarian religious training as a matter of conscience. The scheme adopted in 1831 by the British government for Irish elementary education had combined non-sectarian religious training for the school as a whole, with optional sectarian instruction given by clergy to those students who desired it. The government hoped that such a system might be instituted in England, but the National Society refused to acknowledge that religious instruction might be separated from any other educational activity, and the other societies feared that the National Society's influence would induce Parliament to promote Anglican instruction over other religious training.

There was also the question of what curriculum was most beneficial to the working-class child. The Newcastle Commission argued in 1861 that the government should advance the teaching of rudimentary skills in the basic subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Accordingly, in 1862, Robert Lowe introduced the Revised Code, which tied government grants to annual examination results in these three areas. The system, popularly known as "payment by results," standardized previously varied elementary curricula, as schools that had stressed crafts, domestic subjects, drawing, applied science, and other academic subjects deemphasized them to concentrate more on those that produced revenue. Other organizations soon offered grants for some additional subjects; the Department of Science and Art, for instance, increased the amount of its support for the study of science. Though the Revised Code was universally disliked, it was not wholly dismantled until 1895.

The advances in pedagogic theory of the nineteenth century, with the exception of the sublimely pragmatic monitorial system, were centered mostly on infant schools. The theories of Johann Pestalozzi, a Swiss teacher, were particularly influential. He believed that education should be developmental, drawing out the inherent abilities of children by means of contact with the concrete sensory environment; he pioneered the object lesson, in which students acquired information by asking and answering questions about an object

presented by the teacher. Object lessons were popular in England, but undersupplied teachers all too often had to make do with describing an object rather than producing it for the class, negating the effect Pestalozzi had intended. Robert Owen and Samuel Wilderspin, among others, extended Pestalozzian theories in their own English infant schools. Later in the century, Friedrich Froebel's German kindergartens were emulated. The New Code of 1871 raised the age of children undergoing examination for grants to seven, so infant schools maintained innovative curricula after many elementary schools abandoned them.

Education for middle- and upper-class children also became more standardized as the century progressed. Increased competition for places in public and grammar schools, due largely to rising middle-class expectations and to educational reforms at these schools, produced more preparatory schools and made it less common for children to be educated at home. Girls' education became more substantial as socioeconomic conditions changed; no longer was early marriage a near-certainty, and women had to consider finding employment, whether for support or occupation. Greater opportunities in higher education for women produced more high schools, often staffed by university women, and thus more feeder schools for girls at the elementary level. Though domestic subjects and "accomplishments" were still stressed, academic subjects at a high level were increasingly available. Coeducation was common in Scottish parochial schools and in working-class schools, but grammar and preparatory schools remained largely single-sex. Infant schools were coeducational as a matter of course.

From 1870, the Elementary Education Act sponsored by W. E. Forster, provided national elementary education in England and Wales. The demand for such education had increased steadily through the century, particularly as government limits on child labor minimized the economic value of a child kept out of school. Voluntary schools were not always adequately distributed, and before 1870 the government had no authority to set up schools of its own where they were needed. Repeated efforts to pass educational acts founded on two issues: the conscience clause

and the process by which rates would finance schools, for if schools were supported by local rates, local boards would insist on controls unacceptable to many voluntary schools. When the act was finally passed, it substituted local rate aid for the private charitable contributions that had filled out the voluntary schools' budgets in the past and established local school boards; schools that chose to remain voluntary were excluded from rate aid, but continued to receive grant money. In 1880 education was made compulsory until the age of ten.

In many cases, poorer children attended the recently created board schools while more affluent children continued to patronize denominational schools. Better distribution of educational resources was possible once the government had the power to create or close schools. Some curricular innovation took place, particularly in higher-grade voluntary schools, where students sometimes stayed until the age of fourteen or fifteen and studied subjects similar to those found in grammar schools. In general, the school-leaving age rose. As the century ended, British attention shifted to secondary education, which was to be made universally accessible in England with the Balfour Act of 1902.

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