

# POLICY & PROGRESS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

1902—1942

*by*

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IN SECONDARY EDUCATION  
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All wisdom is not new wisdom, and the  
past should be studied if the future  
is to be successfully encountered.

*The Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill on Post-War Education*  
21st March 1943

BRITISH COUNCIL CULTURAL SCIENTIFIC OFFICE  
CHUNGKING.

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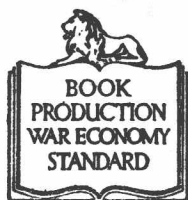
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## NOTE ON USE OF TERMS

IN 1926 the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education recommended in the Hadow Report "that education up to '11 plus' should be known by the general name of Primary Education, and education after '11 plus' by the general name of Secondary Education." Under the head of Secondary Education they thus wished to include all schools of a post-primary type. They further suggested that the name Grammar Schools should be given to all Secondary Schools following a predominantly literary or scientific curriculum, and that the name Modern Schools should be used for all Selective Central, Non-Selective Central, or Senior Schools.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately these suggestions were not generally adopted, and in 1938 it was still possible for the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board to miss the point of a question asked in the House of Commons through interpreting the term "Secondary Education" in its narrower sense. On 31st December 1938, the Consultative Committee published their long-awaited "Spens Report" on "the organization and interrelation of schools other than those administered under the Elementary Code which provide education for pupils beyond the age of 11 plus."<sup>2</sup> In the Spens Report they adhered to their former use of terms,<sup>3</sup> and gave reasons for its adoption.

In this book, for the sake of clearness, what the Committee called Grammar Schools will, as a rule, be referred to as secondary (grammar) schools. If the term "secondary" is used by itself in the narrower sense, it will be placed between inverted commas, as here. In quotations, however, the original words will be left unaltered.



## INTRODUCTORY

BEFORE entering on a discussion of Board of Education policy towards the education of boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 18, it is essential to attempt a picture of the extraordinary state of administrative and financial confusion into which the schools of England had drifted by the close of the nineteenth century, when the Board was finally established. Without some grasp of this chaotic background the modern reader might fall into the common error of under-estimating the services to education which have been rendered by the Board in the past forty years.

It will be the author's aim in the main part of this book to hold the balance between those who attack and those who defend the Board and their policy, and by explaining the peculiar difficulties that have beset their path, to reach a true estimate both of their achievements in the realm of secondary education and of their shortcomings.

# PART ONE

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### CHAPTER I

#### ENGLISH EDUCATION IN THE 'NINETIES

THE year 1895 is for various reasons a suitable point from which to start a survey of the educational scene in the closing years of the last century. It was in 1895 that the Bryce Commission on Secondary Education issued its famous report, and it was in that same year that both Michael Sadler and Robert Morant, the two men who were destined to play the chief parts in laying the foundations of a national system of education, began their official connection with the Education Department, Sadler as Director of the newly formed Office of Special Inquiries and Reports, Morant as his Assistant-Director.

Morant himself, in a paper read to the Education Club three years later, gave a brilliant metaphorical description of the way in which the existing educational system had come into being. It seems, he stated, as though a man has been

seeking to build a substantial house by working spasmodically on odd portions of the structure on quite isolated plans, fashioning minute details of some upper parts when he has not set up, nor indeed even planned out, the substructure which is their sole possible foundation and stay; his very best efforts being thus necessarily rendered abortive by the fact that, while he is hammering at this portion of it or that, he possesses no clearly thought-out plan of the structure as a whole; and when at last he comes to this most important step, after fifty years of these varied efforts, he finds all his available funds irretrievably sunk in the creation and maintenance of the basement and one or two outlying portions of the work, with no means left for making good those broader and

higher portions by which alone the building as a whole can be made complete and secure or be protected against "the act of God or the Queen's enemies."<sup>4</sup>

In this passage the elementary school system is clearly indicated as the "basement," the secondary school system as the non-existent first floor, which should form the "sub-structure" for the "upper parts," or university. The "one or two outlying portions of the work" seems to refer mainly to technical education, and the expression will gain in meaning when we consider the place Morant assigned to technical education when he had become chief architect. His biographer attaches some importance to this building metaphor, as revealing what he calls the "architectonic" quality of Morant's mind, and the reader may be reminded poignantly of it when considering the surreptitious act of demolition which Morant thought necessary before a satisfactory building could be erected.

## I PRIMARY EDUCATION

In primary education, using the term in the sense already defined, the splendid efforts both of School Boards set up by the Act of 1870 and of the Churches and other religious bodies "had almost succeeded by 1895," despite the extraordinarily rapid increase in population in the previous twenty-five years, "in providing a school place for every child entitled to one."<sup>5</sup> The upper age limit for compulsory attendance at school had been fixed at ten in 1876, and at eleven in 1893, but it was not increased to twelve till 1899. There was as yet, therefore, no question of the age of compulsory attendance at an elementary school overlapping the normal age of entry to the voluntary "secondary" schools.

The elementary system was, in fact, a completely self-contained and highly organized system for children from working-class homes, staffed by teachers of the same origin, who had had no contact with any other branch of education either during their childhood or in the course of their professional training, which began, if they were lucky, in a pupil-

## ENGLISH EDUCATION IN THE 'NINETIES

teacher centre, and ended, again if they were lucky, in a training college for teachers.

The responsibility for this system of schools rested on the Education Department, which worked under the wing of "the sleeping Committee of Council,"<sup>6</sup> as Sir Graham Balfour has aptly described it. From the offices of the Privy Council the Education Department "wove its web of annual Codes for the uniform regulation of the elementary schools,"<sup>7</sup> and tried without much success to maintain efficient contact with 2,568 School Boards and 14,238 independent schools. About one-seventh of the nation's children under eleven were being educated in private schools outside the national system. These were almost entirely from middle- and upper-class homes. Their parents feared, not without justification, that if they sent them to the public elementary schools they might acquire the bad speech habits and rough manners that were prevalent among poorer children. This attitude of aloofness was certainly strengthened by the knowledge that little or no special provision was as yet made for mentally defective children, whose presence in the overcrowded elementary schools added greatly to the teachers' problems and impaired the efficiency of the instruction. Nor was any provision made for cripples; and the duty to provide suitable education for blind and deaf children had only recently\* been imposed on school authorities.

### 2 THE INADEQUACY AND CONFUSION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

#### (a) *Non-local Schools*

In the realm of secondary education, in its widest sense, there was still a complete lack of system, except for the public schools and their "feeders," which had long been closed to boys from poor homes. Rescued from degeneracy by Dr. Arnold of Rugby and humanized by Edward Thring of Uppingham, the great non-local † schools and their modern

\* By the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act, 1893

† *I.e.* schools not confined to boys living in the locality, but drawing pupils from all parts of the country or of the Empire

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imitators were providing a fairly satisfactory but expensive secondary education for about 35,000 boys of the governing and professional classes, nearly all of whom were boarders.<sup>8</sup> These schools were entirely independent of State control, and with the preparatory schools, which had been established by private enterprise for the express purpose of preparing boys for their entrance examinations, they provided an exclusive education, leading to the ancient universities, for boys from the age of eight to eighteen.\*

### (b) *Grammar Schools for Boys*

The rise of these non-local schools had seriously hit many of the ancient grammar schools, but the Endowed Schools Commissioners, appointed in 1869 to give effect to the findings of the Schools Inquiry Commission of 1867, had by their energetic handling of moribund or misapplied endowments done much to revive them. Within five years they had worked out no fewer than 902 schemes for reforming individual schools,<sup>9</sup> and though in 1874 their functions were submerged in those of the less energetic Charity Commission, as a result of their labours "a large body of schools began to do solid work, to send pupils to the universities, and to inherit the spirit which the scholastic generation that followed Arnold's death had called into being."<sup>10</sup>

Mr. Norman Lowndes, who has gone very carefully into the matter,<sup>11</sup> has estimated that by 1895 over 75,000 children were receiving secondary education in schools of the grammar school type—a remarkable tribute to the work of the Endowed Schools Commissioners, if Matthew Arnold's corresponding calculation of 15,000 made in 1868 is anywhere near the mark.

It was impossible, however, as the Schools Inquiry Commission had asserted in 1868, to create a complete system of secondary education out of existing endowments. Many of the Elizabethan grammar schools had perished in the

\* For a fuller account of the public schools, see Ch. XXV.

financial crash caused by the Napoleonic wars, leaving gaps which had never been filled. Moreover, the rapid increase in size of the chief industrial towns had produced huge centres of population in which little or no provision for secondary education as yet existed.

(c) *Grammar Schools for Girls*

If the provision for boys was, on a general view, inadequate, it was still more so for girls. "The education of women was probably at its lowest ebb about half a century ago," wrote Miss Cobbe in 1904, thinking of the more expensive type of private school. "It was at that period more pretentious than it had ever been before and infinitely more costly; and it was likewise more shallow and senseless than can easily be believed."<sup>12</sup>

Cheaper schools for girls were at that time in little better case. The teachers were underpaid, the equipment was wretched, and the education confined to the three R's, supplemented by "a few dry facts."

The Schools Inquiry Commission by extending their reference to include the secondary education of girls opened up a new era in girls' education, but the amount of money that the Endowed Schools Commissioners were able to divert for the education of girls was limited, and in 1895, Mr. Lowndes has calculated,<sup>13</sup> less than a quarter of the 75,000 to 80,000 pupils in endowed schools were girls. A vigorous movement for the reform of female education, which began modestly enough in 1847 with what amounted to a series of popular extension lectures for women, led to the establishment in 1872 of the Girls' Public Day School Company, which founded fourteen "secondary" day schools in its first five years, and set a high standard for others to follow.

All attempts, however, to make up for the deficiency of secondary schools for girls were swamped by the enormously rapid increase of population at this period, and it soon became evident that only generous assistance from State funds could deal satisfactorily with the problem.

(d) *Higher "Elementary" Education*

The neglect of the backward in favour of the more intelligent children, and the general lack of thoroughness in elementary education disclosed in the report of the Newcastle Commission (1858), which had been appointed to promote sound and cheap elementary education "among the children of the labouring poor," \* had led almost inevitably to the establishment of a rigid system of "standards," with grants depending on a formal annual examination of the whole school by the inspector. The "payment by results" Code provided that grants should not as a rule be earned by children above twelve, though in fact at that time less than 20 per cent. of the children spent more than three years at school, and the great majority left before the age of ten.<sup>14</sup> The best elementary schools had begun to tackle higher work, but this "was severely discouraged by the Code of 1862. The curriculum was largely restricted to the three R's, and the only form of practical instruction that survived was needlework."<sup>15</sup>

The rigidity of the Code was gradually relaxed, but the process "was not carried sufficiently far to resuscitate many of the 'select classes' which had existed up to 1862."<sup>16</sup> Such progress as there was in higher elementary education took place outside the State system in a few country schools where "tops" were successfully organized by the local squires for older children.

In 1868 the Schools Inquiry Commission recommended the establishment of three parallel grades of higher or secondary schools, with leaving ages of 18, 16, and 14, each with its own appropriate aim. The non-local public schools would count as first grade, and the local grammar schools as second grade. Schools of the third grade, they thought, could be successfully established in every town of over 5,000 inhabitants.<sup>17</sup> This suggestion greatly impressed enthusiasts for elementary education, who tried to develop new schools of the third-grade type, as well as "tops" to existing primary schools.

\* Mr. Lowe's speech in the House of Commons, 13th February 1862

## ENGLISH EDUCATION IN THE 'NINETIES

The School Boards set up by the Elementary Education Act (1870) were for many years mainly occupied in building new schools to meet the shortage of school places. Meanwhile, however, the writings of Huxley, Matthew Arnold, Ruskin, and Herbert Spencer had fostered the growth of public interest in education, which led to the gradual expansion of the curriculum of elementary schools. From 1875 to 1895 the curriculum was divided into three parts: the obligatory subjects of the 1862 Code, the optional class subjects such as grammar, geography, and history, and the specific subjects for individual scholars in Standards IV to VI. These included foreign languages and various branches of pure and applied science. This enrichment of the curriculum had a marked effect on the length of school life, which was further increased by Lord Sandon's Act of 1876, which for the next five years provided three years' free education for pupils who had passed the Standard IV examination at ten years of age. The better enforcement of attendance bye-laws also aided this upward extension of the school-leaving age, and in 1882, for the benefit of the older pupils, a seventh standard was added to the previous six. A number of children, however, remained at school after passing the seventh standard, and "ex-standard" classes were formed for them. The School Boards, having supplied the most pressing needs in the way of new elementary schools, now began to turn their attention to the needs of these ex-standard children. Where the density of the population made it possible, they drafted these older children from a number of schools into one central school, a new type which came to be known as a "Higher Grade School," keeping its pupils to the age of fifteen at least. In 1894 there were sixty of these schools in England, exclusive of Monmouthshire and London.

"The growth of almost any English institution," it has been truly said, "proceeds by a series of accretions, largely independent of consistency but adopted for utility and tested by practical experience."<sup>18</sup> Higher grade schools are an excellent example of this process. Though they owed their origin to the elementary school, and were therefore still



officially classed as "elementary," their work was of a secondary nature. If some inquisitive ratepayer had asked how these schools came to be providing secondary education in a building erected for elementary education, the reply would have been that an elementary school had been defined by Act of Parliament as one "in which elementary education is the principal part of the education given," and that as only a minority of pupils proceeded to the higher work, it was permissible to charge the cost of the buildings to the rates.

A substantial portion of the cost of maintenance, however, came from the Science and Art Department. This department had originated in a Normal School of Design, established by the Board of Trade in 1837, which from 1841 onwards made annual grants to provincial schools of design. But after the Great Exhibition of 1851 had drawn attention both to the defects of British handicrafts and to the rapid advances being made by continental trade rivals who had organized their general and technical education, the Government decided to grant similar State assistance to the teaching of science.<sup>19</sup> The Department was therefore renamed "The Department of Science and Art," and provided with additional funds to assist the teaching of science in schools and evening classes. In 1859 the Department instituted a general system of examinations in science applicable to the whole country, on the results of which grants were paid. In order to qualify for a grant, a school had to be recognized as "an organized science school," or as providing "an organized science course." The Department lost no opportunity of extending its influence among grammar schools, higher grade schools, and evening continuation schools. These last provided part-time education for young people who had left school and were already at work, but wished to continue their education in their spare time. But in many cases the insistence on scientific training was excessive, and resulted in a narrow and lop-sided education. In spite of this, the number taking the examinations rose from 2,548 in 1862 to 68,581 in 1882,<sup>20</sup> figures which give clear indications of "the half-conscious striving of a highly