

SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ALL

Origins and Development in England

H. C. Dent

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SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ALL

ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLAND

BY

H. C. DENT

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PREFACE

THE Education Act, 1944, made a period of secondary education compulsory for every boy and girl in England and Wales. The Education (Scotland) Act, 1945—now incorporated in the consolidating Education (Scotland) Act, 1946—and the Education Act (Northern Ireland), 1947, did the same for Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively. The relevant Sections of these Acts have been brought into operation; secondary education for all now obtains throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In England and Wales it came into force in April 1945, in Scotland in June of the same year, in Northern Ireland in April 1948.

An unprecedented experiment, of the utmost importance, has thus been launched. What course will it take? How valuable will it prove? Many years must elapse before full answers to these questions will be known. But they will be known the sooner, and with more certainty, if continuous critical study of the experiment is made as it proceeds.

This book is offered as a contribution to such study. It contains a brief survey of the routes by which England arrived at secondary education for all, an examination of the present position, and some suggestions for the future. It is not a work of research, being based entirely on easily accessible sources of information, but I hope that it may stimulate both research and experiment. If that happens, its main purpose will be served.

My indebtedness to many writers on education, and to a far larger number of practising teachers and administrators, is great. I thank them all. I wish particularly to

thank the following: the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office, for permission to quote a very large number of extracts from Government publications over a period of eighty years; Dr. R. H. Tawney and Messrs. Allen and Unwin for raising no objection to this book's being entitled *Secondary Education for All*, though they published in 1922 a book under the same title; all the authors (or their executors) and publishers whose books have been drawn upon for quotation; Professor H. C. Barnard, Mrs. Barbara Drake, Mr. J. L. Jolley (Home Research Secretary, the Fabian Society), Mr. G. A. N. Lowndes, Dr. R. H. Tawney, Mr. J. V. C. Wray (Secretary of the Education Committee, the Trades Union Congress), Mr. E. W. Woodhead, Mr. Michael Young (Secretary of the Research Department, the Labour Party), and Dr. Robert Fitzgibbon Young, all of whom supplied me with valuable information; Mr. John Armitage, who read the book in manuscript and made many helpful criticisms and suggestions; and Miss Joyce E. Burrell, for her usual impeccable secretarial help.

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PART I
EVOLUTION

CHAPTER I

NINETEENTH-CENTURY GROPINGS

“SECONDARY education for all” is a 20th-century concept, as yet imperfectly understood. The 19th century made elementary education obligatory for all, and tentatively began to offer secondary education to the intellectually able. The present century is painfully realising that that is not enough, that a complex industrial civilisation cannot be sustained on so slender a foundation of knowledge and skill. To-day almost every country is expanding secondary education; and England has led the way by making it not only available to every child but compulsory for all.

The idea of secondary education for all is in its infancy; that of *secondary* education for anyone is not much older. It dates only from the second half of the 19th century. The classical education which was given in the Grammar schools of England (and Europe) almost unchanged for a thousand years and more, down to the middle of the last century, is to-day frequently referred to as “secondary education”; but this description is wholly inaccurate. The Grammar-school course was never a “second stage”; it was a highly specialised form of education, originally the foundation for both general and professional education, later purely vocational, and finally, as its vocational value decreased, in England at any rate more and more

a ritual, a kind of prolonged initiation ordeal necessary for the acquirement or indication of superior social status. Until about one hundred years ago, when it was rapidly disintegrating, no one ever thought or spoke of it as "secondary education." If for no other reason, because the term was not known in England.

The words "primary" and "secondary" are said to have been first applied to education in France, in 1792. In the *Rapport et projet de décret sur l'organisation générale de l'instruction publique* which he submitted to the Legislative Assembly in April of that year, Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet proposed the setting up of *école primaires* in villages and *écoles secondaires* in Departments. Ten years later the terms were used in a French Education Act, but half a century was to elapse before they became current in England and much longer before they acquired any very precise meaning. Admittedly, they were occasionally to be found in published writings. As early as 1808 R. L. Edgeworth, in his *Essays on Professional Education*, used the term "primary education" once or twice in a sense not wholly unacceptable to-day and on one occasion¹ referred to "secondary schools." But it seems clear from the context that what he meant by the latter was not secondary schools in the modern sense at all, but the upper classes or an upper division of the "initiatory" schools which he desired to see set up to prepare boys for entry to the "great" or "public" schools.

Though he referred to "primary education," Edgeworth never used the term "secondary education." So far as I know, this first appeared in print in an English publication in April 1832, in one of a series of letters contributed to the *Sheffield Courant*² by Dr. Thomas Arnold,

¹ Second edition, 1812, p. 43.

² And later reprinted in the *Miscellaneous Works of Thomas Arnold*, published in 1845. See p. 229.

then headmaster of Rugby School. But, again, the context suggests that what Arnold had in mind was something quite different from what is understood to-day by "secondary education." He was pointing out that it was difficult for teachers in commercial schools to obtain appropriate academic qualifications because the country had "no regular system of secondary education." But as he went on to lament that "anything like local universities . . . it is as yet vain to look for," it would appear that he was thinking of something more nearly approaching an Oxford College than a county secondary school.

It was the prophetic insight of Thomas Arnold's son Matthew which first compelled England to think and to talk seriously about "secondary education." Becoming more and more gravely perturbed about the backward state of this country's education as compared with that of her Continental neighbours (whose systems he knew better than anyone else), and foreseeing the deteriorative effect this must have upon national culture and efficiency, throughout the 1850's and 1860's Matthew Arnold sounded incessantly the warning: Organise your secondary and your superior instruction.

Thanks to him, the term "secondary education" found its way into the Report of the Schools Inquiry Commission in 1868. It turned up again in the Final Report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the working of the Elementary Education Acts—the Cross Commission of 1888. But it did not acquire what might be called official status until the commission (dated March 2, 1894) which constituted the Royal Commission on Secondary Education—the famous Bryce Commission of 1894-95.

The term "secondary education" first appeared in an Act of Parliament in the Board of Education Act, 1899, but it was never statutorily defined until the Education

Act, 1944. Even the definition contained therein can hardly be called particularly illuminating:

full-time education suitable to the requirements of senior pupils, other than such full-time education as may be provided for senior pupils in pursuance of a scheme made under the provisions of this Act relating to further education. (*Section 8 (i).*)

But however much definition may have been lacking or imprecise, the idea of secondary education has been slowly maturing in England for at least a hundred years. During the 19th century progress was being made along two quite separate and independent routes: by way of modifying the classical curriculum of the Grammar school and by way of recurrent upthrusts by the elementary school. No connection was established between these two routes during the 19th century; it was not, indeed, until the 1920's that the second was officially acknowledged¹ to be pioneering the way towards a new form of secondary education.

In the first decade of the 20th century a third route was opened by the invention of the Junior Technical school. This had to wait till 1938 for official recognition as "secondary."²

The endowed Grammar schools³ of England were probably never in a worse state than during the first half

¹ In the report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education on *The Education of the Adolescent* (the Hadow Report), H.M. Stationery Office, 1926.

² In the Consultative Committee's report on *Secondary Education, with special reference to Grammar Schools and Technical High Schools* (the Spens Report). H.M. Stationery Office, 1938.

³ "In the construction and for the purposes of this Act, unless there be something in the subject or context repugnant to such construction, the words 'grammar school' shall mean and include all endowed schools, whether of royal or other foundation, founded, endowed or maintained for the purpose of teaching Latin and Greek, or either of such languages." The Grammar Schools Act, 1840, Section 25.

of the 19th century. But this was the darkest hour before the dawn; reform was at hand, was already in progress in several of the schools which during the previous century had acquired the status of "great" or "public" school. Between about 1790 and 1860 a line of distinguished headmasters—notably Butler of Shrewsbury (1798–1836), Goddard of Winchester (1796–1809), Arnold of Rugby (1828–42), Hawtrey of Eton (1834–52), and Vaughan of Harrow (1844–59)—revolutionised the moral tone and the discipline and considerably modified the curriculum of the English public schools.

The influence of these and other reformers of the public schools was carried to a wider sphere in three ways. First, through the foundation of many new "public schools"¹; second, through the appointment of men who had served under reforming heads to the headships of leading day schools; and third (this took place later), by the appointment of similar men to the headships of smaller, often insignificant Grammar schools. Many of such men took up these appointments with the deliberate intention of reforming—transforming might be a more accurate word—the schools of which they took charge. An outstanding instance was Edward Thring, who between 1853 and 1887 turned the tiny, somnolent Grammar school at Uppingham into the most progressive public school in the country.

Outside the public schools reform spread slowly. It had not gone far in the smaller Grammar schools by 1864, when, following the report, published in that year, of the Royal Commission on the administration of the nine recognised "public schools,"² a further Royal Commission

¹ There were more than twenty important foundations between 1841 and 1868.

² Winchester, Eton, Charterhouse, Harrow, Rugby, Shrewsbury, Westminster, St. Paul's, Merchant Taylors'.

was set up "to inquire into the education given in schools not comprised within Her Majesty's two¹ former commissions." In particular, this commission was to:

consider and report what measures (if any) are required for the improvement of such education, having especial regard to all endowments applicable or which can rightly be made applicable thereto.

The Schools Inquiry Commission, as it was officially designated, did its work most thoroughly. It inquired into the condition of 942 schools, of which 782 were endowed schools, and reported in detail upon them all. The picture its Report presented was varied, but in general depressing. Five hundred and fifty of the Grammar schools sent no boys on to the universities, and most of them did not even enter pupils for the "local" examinations recently established by university examining bodies. The teaching of the classics was usually poor; in Cumberland, Westmorland, and Cornwall, remarked the Commissioners acidly, its main purpose appeared to be "to furnish the pretext for the neglect of all other useful learning."² The teaching of modern subjects was worse than that of the classics.

Individual schools were in scandalous condition. At Whitgift, Croydon, there had been for over thirty years a headmaster but no pupils. At Kingston, Surrey, the head was using the pupils' dormitory as a billiard room. At many schools nepotism was rampant, the head's relatives or friends comprising the staff and their children the only pupils.

Professor H. C. Barnard rightly says in his *A Short*

¹ The other Commission referred to was that appointed in 1858 to inquire into the state of elementary education.

² *Report*, p. 133. Quoted by R. L. Archer, in *Secondary Education in the 19th Century* (Cambridge University Press), 1937 edition, p. 83.

*History of English Education from 1760 to 1944*¹ that "The Report of the Schools Inquiry Commission is a document of the greatest interest because it contains many of the germs of the subsequent reorganisation of secondary education in this country." But he adds, equally correctly, that "those germs lay dormant for very many years." They did so not only because the Government of the day rejected most of the Commission's recommendations, but also because many of the proposals made in their Report were at the time impracticable. If it be remembered that two years were still to elapse and a prolonged and embittered debate to ensue before England could make up its mind to have a national system of elementary education, it will at once be realised how impossible it was to effect far-reaching reforms in the field of secondary education.

The Government confined their attention to securing better facilities for secondary education by :

various changes in the government, management and studies of endowed schools, and in the application of educational endowments, with the object of promoting their greater efficiency, and of carrying into effect the main designs of the founders thereof, by putting a liberal education within the reach of children of all classes.

That quotation is from the preamble to the Endowed Schools Act, passed in 1869. It is no exaggeration to say that to this Act is largely due the renaissance of the Grammar school. It provided for the appointment of Commissioners empowered to alter existing school endowment schemes and to make new ones "in such manner as may render any educational endowment most conducive to the advancement of the education of boys and girls."² If it can hardly be said that the Act fulfilled its declared purpose of "putting a liberal education within

¹ University of London Press, 1947, p. 154.

² Endowed Schools Act, 1869, Section 9.

the reach of children of all classes," at least it put secondary education within the reach of many more children than before. By the end of the 19th century the labours of the Endowed Schools Commissioners and of the Charity Commissioners who in 1874 took over their powers had resulted in the approval by Parliament of 902 new or amended schemes. Of these, 235 were made by the Endowed Schools Commissioners.

Among the new schemes many were for the education of girls. The Schools Inquiry Commission, upon representations from the leaders of the growing movement for the higher education of women, had wisely decided to interpret their terms of reference broadly enough to include a thorough investigation of "the important though hitherto much neglected subject of female education."¹ This investigation revealed that less than 2 per cent. of all endowments for secondary education provided for girls' schools. In fact, there were altogether only fourteen endowed schools for girls in the country, and of these two were elementary schools.

The Commission recommended a much more equal division of endowments as between girls' and boys' schools, and in particular that whenever an educational endowment was being scrutinised with a view to revision of its terms, the claims of girls were to be considered along with those of boys. The Endowed Schools Act gave effect to this recommendation in Section 12, which read: "In framing schemes under this Act, provision shall be made as far as conveniently may be for extending to girls the benefits of endowments."

The Endowed Schools Commissioners (and later the Charity Commissioners) made good use of their powers under this Section. Within ten years 45 new schools for

¹ *Report*, Vol. I, p. 661. Quoted by J. W. Adamson in *English Education, 1789-1902* (Cambridge University Press, 1930), p. 259.

girls had been endowed; by the end of the century there were 86 endowed secondary schools for girls, containing over 14,000 pupils, and a further 31 endowed schools with places for girls as well as boys.

Private enterprise supplemented public initiative. The Girls' Public Day Schools Company, Ltd. (now the Girls' Public Day Schools Trust) was founded in 1872 "to supply for girls the best possible education corresponding with the education given to boys in the great public schools of the country"; by 1897 it had established 34 schools containing over 7,000 pupils. The Church Schools Company, Ltd., founded in 1883, had by the same time 24 schools; and many other private schools for girls were started during these years.

What was in the long run more important than numbers was the fact that so much encouragement was given by the Schools Inquiry Commission to the movement for equal opportunities in education for women and girls that from then on this never looked back. Whether the pioneers of this movement were wise in insisting upon the same curricula and the same examinations for girls as for boys is another question, still debated and still without final answer.¹

The Schools Inquiry Commission, it need hardly be said, got nowhere near the idea of secondary education for all. Their ambition, modest enough to modern minds, but no mean one in 1868, was to provide secondary education at the rate of 10 places per 1,000 of the total population. But they did have a vision of a national system of secondary education, supervised by a central statutory body presided over by a Minister of the Crown. Unhappily, this proposal was among those rejected by the Government; over thirty years were to elapse before it was taken up and acted upon.

¹ See *The Education of Girls*, by John Newsom (Faber, 1948).

The secondary education the Commission wished to see provided was to be at three different levels. This idea, in part no doubt suggested by the contemporary evolution of schools, appears to have grown out of a technique adopted by the Commission early on in their investigations, when "for their own guidance in considering particular schools [they] adopted a division of three grades which, while expressed in terms of length of school life, was based upon the presumed future occupations of the pupils." This grading was, as the Commission acknowledged,¹ "grounded in social distinctions," which at the time were perhaps as clearly marked and as exclusive as ever in modern English history. As that great historian John William Adamson commented,² it "reflected the general contemporary opinion as to the type of schooling which was thought fitting for particular occupations and well marked social ranks."

The Commission recommended a system embodying the following three grades of schools:

Grade I. Leaving age 18-19. For the sons of well-to-do parents or well-educated parents of "confined" means. Aim: a liberal education followed by a university course. Curriculum: the classics, mathematics, modern languages, science, and religious instruction.

Grade II. Leaving age about 16. For the sons of parents of "straightened" means, or parents who desired their sons to go into the Army, the law, medicine, engineering, or the Civil Service; "and probably for all but the wealthier gentry." Aim: a general education, somewhat more "realistic" than that of Grade I, not followed by a university course but by specialised professional training. Curriculum: Latin at least of the classical languages, religious instruction, "a certain amount of thorough knowledge of those subjects which can be turned to practical use in business: English, arithmetic, the rudiments of mathematics beyond arithmetic, in some cases natural science, in some cases a modern language."

¹ *Report*, Vol. I, p. 16.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 259.

Grade III. Leaving age about 14. For the sons of "the whole of the lowest portion of what is commonly called the middle class." Aim: a general, not a vocational or technical, education (among the Commissioners "there was an almost unanimous agreement in favour of general education"). Curriculum: Language, mathematics, natural science, drawing, and religious instruction. Under the heading of language possibly Latin, but certainly one language other than English. Emphasis on mathematics and drawing.

The Commission urged that the third-grade schools should be varied in kind. "It would be wise," they said, "to put no obstacle in the way of a free growth of very various kinds of school."

It would be fascinating to explore what influence this recommendation of three grades of secondary schools has had, directly and indirectly, on educational thinking in this country, right down to the present day. Probably much more than has ever been suspected. Certainly the three grades bear a marked ancestral likeness to the present-day tripartite organisation of secondary education, a likeness heightened by the fact that the Commission estimated that eight out of ten children for whom they thought secondary education should be provided would want no more than third-grade schools.

It must be added, though, that the Commission thought that out of existing educational endowments scholarships ought to be provided to enable poor but gifted pupils, whatever their social status, to transfer from a lower to a higher grade of secondary school. This was in accordance with the basic idea upon which their recommendations were built: that of the "educational ladder." Their advocacy of this represented a great advance—no official body had done so before—and it influenced governmental policy for many years. In fact, though it was progressively more generously interpreted and though the idea of awards provided out of public funds supplanted that of

scholarships extracted from endowments, the concept of the educational ladder dominated policy right down to 1944.

The lists of subjects suggested by the Schools Inquiry Commission for their three grades of schools show clearly that the age-old monopoly of the classics had been broken. In the third-grade school the Commissioners did not even insist upon Latin, and in all grades mathematics, science, and modern languages found a place, though not always a very secure one.

The fundamental change in the Grammar-school curriculum during the middle decades of the 19th century was the inclusion of science, secured only after a long and confused struggle. The complicated story has been well summarised by Professor R. L. Archer in his *Secondary Education in the Nineteenth Century*, to which interested readers must be referred.

Despite the far from unsuccessful efforts of the Endowed Schools Commissioners, the Charity Commissioners, and private enterprise to expand the quantity and improve the quality of secondary education, the former was still inadequate and the latter generally poor when the Royal Commission on Secondary Education began its investigations in 1894.

Mr. G. A. N. Lowndes in *The Silent Social Revolution*¹ "hazards a guess" that there were in existence at that date about 800 endowed and proprietary secondary schools which were later to be incorporated in the national system of secondary education established in 1902. But the number of the schools was much more impressive than the quality of the education they gave. Mr. Lowndes's conclusion is² that:

apart from those pupils in attendance at certain of the specially

¹ Oxford University Press, 1937, p. 45.

² *Op cit.*, p. 55.

favoured schools, usually those in large towns, probably not more than 30,000 out of a total attendance of 75,000 [in endowed schools] were as yet receiving an education which would be recognised either in point of quality or length of school life as a sound secondary education to-day.

Mr. Lowndes estimates¹ that in addition to the pupils in the endowed schools there were perhaps some 34,000 in "proprietary schools not conducted for profit." But these schools, with rare exceptions, catered only for the children of relatively well-to-do parents. As he says:²

The ancient grammar schools . . . and a handful of Higher Grade schools . . . provided what was virtually the sole avenue by which the brilliant child of poor parents might attain higher education.

Which means, according to Mr. Lowndes³—none of whose figures or estimates has, I believe, ever been disputed—that although 218 of the Secondary schools were in receipt of grants from local authorities, some on condition that they offered scholarships to needy pupils, "in 1895 probably not more than from 3 to 6 out of every 1,000 children leaving the elementary schools can have passed on to one of the endowed grammar schools." A very long way indeed from "secondary education for all."

Such inquiries as I have been able to pursue suggest, indeed, that this idea had not yet been born, though, as will be recorded in a following chapter, within ten years it was not only to appear in almost full-grown form on the agenda of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress, but to be accepted by both those bodies and incorporated in their educational policy. I cannot resist the feeling that it must already have been forming in some minds. Such a revolutionary idea does not normally in

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 101.

this country gain acceptance by official bodies, even progressively-minded bodies, before it has been advocated for a long, long time by the creative spirits who give it birth.

However, lacking evidence to controvert it, I accept Mr. Lowndes's dictum¹ that in 1895:

. . . the idea of secondary education as a second stage in education following upon a primary stage was . . . virtually unknown in England. The grammar schools were generally regarded as schools which catered for a different social order from that attending the elementary schools, although a few scholars from the elementary schools might, it was thought, profitably spend a couple of years at a grammar school after leaving the elementary school at 13 and before becoming apprenticed.

How the first of these ideas grew and the latter was gradually modified during the 20th century, will be told in following chapters.

I think it was R. H. Tawney who first remarked that the tendency of primary education to thrust up into the secondary sphere is almost as old as primary education itself. Certainly this has been true in Britain. It was notably demonstrated in Scotland, where from the Middle Ages on the parish school never felt itself restricted to primary education, but as a regular practice educated the "lad o' pairts" up to a standard fitting him for direct entry into the university.

The upthrust began much later in England, first because until the 18th century there was no organised system of primary education, and second, because when this did begin to take form, the country was in the throes of the Industrial Revolution, with the unhappy result that the labour of young children was considered infinitely more important than their education. Consequently, until comparatively recent years it was difficult enough to retain

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 50.