English national education, a sketch of the rise of public elementary schools in England

Holman Henry
The Victorian Era Series

English National Education
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A Sketch of the
Rise of Public Elementary Schools in England

By

H. HOLMAN, M.A.
Formerly Scholar of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge
and one time
Professor of Education at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth
Author of "An Introduction to Education" &c.

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Preface

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

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

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

The aim of this volume is to supply this knowledge, with
...far as that is possible
handbook. Only the main
and even that has had
periods of history in parts. The earlier periods
are the more likely to be known to the readers, and because it is the
most often afford us the true
of... the true
and value. To the reformer such know-
known, or he may destroy what he most desires
whilst even the revolutionist will best know what not
his undoing, by a study of the real nature of what he
means to improve out of existence. There is so preponderating
amount of the past in the present, that we can only fully know
the latter through the former.

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

H. H.

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