

# THE NATION AT SCHOOL

*A SKETCH WITH COMMENTS*

*by*

F. S. MARVIN

*'Gentlemen of education were pretty much the same in all countries; the condition of the lower orders, the poor especially, was the true mark of national discrimination.'*

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON

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## PREFACE

**E**DUCATION is so universally important, and we talk and think so much about it, at least for our children, that it is surprising that so few attempts have been made to describe simply, and estimate fairly, what is being done in England under that name. If you turn to such accounts as exist, either in books or encyclopaedia articles, they will be found to be mainly either pleadings on behalf of some special system and denunciations of what does not agree with it, or else detailed and technical accounts of some one set of schools, or what the Government has done or should do to promote education in a certain direction. The former type of writing may be mildly exciting, but conveys little light or knowledge; the latter is mostly caviare to the general, unreadable, for instance, as the article on 'Education' in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. As a rule it appeals only to the specialist who is taking up education as a profession.

Education like any other craft must have its mysteries; it is natural and right that it should. But since, in the last century, the State everywhere has organized a complete and elaborate system of schools and institutions fitting into one another and serving a multitude of ends, the teaching itself has been obscured by the network of administrative regulations and devices which now forms the larger part of the mystery. Few indeed now penetrate the whole, and the work itself for which the machine exists, the work performed upon the young minds themselves, is apt to retreat into a distant background. It is the main purpose of this little book to bring this essential thing into prominence, and to present it as concretely and intelligibly as possible. The genesis of State action is sketched, especially so far as Great Britain is concerned, and then an outline given of

what is now going on. But, inasmuch as it is impossible to describe the actual in a matter of such intense and universal interest without indicating some personal leanings, it will be found that the author's own convictions and ideals appear here and there, it is hoped without destroying the general truth of the picture. It may, however, make the argument clearer, and would certainly be honest, to admit at starting what these main prepossessions are. They are not many and may be put quite shortly.

The first, and most important, is that effective education must rely much more than current practice seems to imply on personal effort and conviction. To aid these, the parents are called upon to be more active in the earlier stages, and the community to encourage and assist, but only within narrow limits to dictate, later on.

Next to personal taste and effort, the thing most needed in all types of education at the present is greater intellectual coherence. The mass and variety of aims and subjects and details of all kinds are overwhelming. More unity, which the moral reformer is seeking through forms of service and international harmony, can be gained in the intellectual sphere only by the concept of evolutionary progress. History in this broad sense must play a larger part.

Looking at effects broadly and in their social aspect, the results of the efforts of a hundred years have been encouraging. This appears clearly enough throughout the volume. That the weaker side is intellectual interest and concentration is the author's most abiding impression after a lifelong association with the facts. To strengthen this and gain also a deeper enjoyment of the goodness and beauty of men and the world, would seem the best objects of the next advance.

As the improvement of technical training is now an

immediate concern of the Board of Education, I have added a short Appendix on that subject by my son Mr. A. N. Marvin who has been specially studying it, and wish at the same time to add a grateful acknowledgement of the service rendered me by Mr. H. B. Jenkins of the Board of Education and by Mr. F. Page of the Oxford University Press for their reading of the chapters in MSS.

F. S. MARVIN.

WELWYN GARDEN CITY

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