

**ENGLISH NATIONAL  
EDUCATION: A SKETCH OF THE  
RISE OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND**

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English national education: a sketch of the rise of public elementary schools in England by H. Holman

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**H. HOLMAN**

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# English National Education

A Sketch of the  
Rise of Public Elementary Schools in England

By

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## Preface

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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

regard to our public elementary schools, so far as that is possible within the limits allowed by a small handbook. Only the main stream of development has been followed, and even that has had to be treated somewhat slightly in parts. The earlier periods have been most fully treated, because the more recent are likely to be more or less familiar to the readers, and because it is the beginnings of things which most often afford us the truest insight into their nature and value. To the reformer such knowledge is indispensable, or he may destroy what he most desires to develop; whilst even the revolutionist will best know what not to do, after his undoing, by a study of the real nature of what he means to improve out of existence. There is so preponderating an 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 education, 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 indispensable, 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 a 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 education.

H. H.

WOODFORD GREEN,  
*April, 1898.*



## Contents

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<i>CHAPTER I</i>		
<i>The Reign of the Voluntary System</i>	- - -	<i>Page</i> 9
<i>CHAPTER II</i>		
<i>The Reign of the Voluntary System—Continued</i>	- -	28
<i>CHAPTER III</i>		
<i>The Days of Doles</i>	- . . . .	52
<i>CHAPTER IV</i>		
<i>The Committee of Council on Education</i>	- -	66
<i>CHAPTER V</i>		
<i>The Committee of Council on Education—Continued</i>	-	85
<i>CHAPTER VI</i>		
<i>A Semi-state System</i>	- - - - -	114
<i>CHAPTER VII</i>		
<i>A Semi-state System—Continued</i>	- - -	140
<i>CHAPTER VIII</i>		
<i>Codes and Cram</i>	- . . . .	161
<i>CHAPTER IX</i>		
<i>The Partial Reign of Law</i>	- . . . .	181
<i>CHAPTER X</i>		
<i>The Partial Reign of Law—Continued</i>	- -	207
<i>CHAPTER XI</i>		
<i>Retrospect and Prospect</i>	- - - - -	235
<i>INDEX</i>	- - - - -	252

*The business of education is not, as I think, to make them perfect in any one of the sciences, but so to open and dispose their minds, as may best make them capable of any, when they shall apply themselves to it.*—JOHN LOCKE.

*The primary principle of education is the determination of the pupil to self-activity—the doing nothing for him which he is able to do for himself.*—SIR WILLIAM HAMILTON.

*In education the process of self-development should be encouraged to the fullest extent.*—HERBERT SPENCER.



# English National Education.

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## Chapter I.

### The Reign of the Voluntary System.

Primary education, for the children of the working-classes, did not exist, in any general sense, till the beginning of the eighteenth century. It is true that almost all the grammar and other endowed schools, so freely founded during the sixteenth century and earlier, made provision for the education of "poor scholars". But either this had never meant much more than exhibitions, as we should now call them, for the children of those whose parents' means had become very much reduced, or it may have been intended only for a few bright and fortunate individuals, who, by some happy accident or good fortune, came under the favourable notice of those who were able to secure their admission to a school. Thus it is said that George Abbott, who afterwards became Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University and Archbishop of Canterbury, was first brought into notice because of some remarkable circumstances attending his birth. He was born in 1562, and his mother was the wife of a poor clothworker at Guildford. Before his birth, his mother dreamt that, if she could eat a jack or a pike, her child would become a great man. When taking a pail of water from the river which flowed by the house, she found therein a jack, which she forthwith cooked, and ate nearly the whole of