

**THE POPULAR EDUCATION OF THE  
BRISTOL AND PLYMOUTH  
DISTRICTS: WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO RAGGED SCHOOLS  
AND PAUPER CHILDREN**

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The Popular Education of the Bristol and Plymouth Districts: With Special Reference to Ragged Schools and Pauper Children by Patrick Cumin

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WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
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BY  
PATRICK CUMIN, M.A.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER TO THE COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO  
THE STATE OF POPULAR EDUCATION IN ENGLAND

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## PREFACE.

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THE following pages contain the principal part of the Report upon the Schools in the districts of Bristol and Plymouth, which I addressed to the Royal Commissioners on Popular Education. I fear that some things will be found stated in it not very palatable to many excellent persons. Already it has been attacked in various quarters: and not only the opinions, but the facts upon which they rest, have been vehemently controverted. It would be waste of time to repeat the erroneous statements which have been made on this subject; but the correspondence with Lord Shaftesbury, which will be found in the Appendix, may serve as an illustration.

It is not, however, for the purpose of reviving a mere personal controversy that any of the remarks addressed by me to the Commissioners are republished; but it is chiefly for the purpose of endeavouring to direct public attention to that most pathetic of all subjects—the condition of Pauper children.

In every large city there is a horde of young savages, or, as they are called, the Arabs of the

streets. Various schemes have been set on foot to civilise and tame them; and of these none commands more public sympathy than that of having Ragged Schools. Now in prosecuting my inquiries in Bristol and Plymouth, it became necessary to investigate the nature of these Schools, and to see whether they accomplished the purpose for which they were originally instituted. The result of my inquiries is contained in the following pages. But the important point is, that a very large proportion of these young Arabs consist of those who are, or have been, out-door paupers. These street Arabs, together with those who have been brought up in the schools within the workhouse, constitute a large proportion of the juvenile criminals; and the circumstances of both, especially those of children brought up in workhouses, are such as to make ruin almost inevitable. Although the Ragged Schools do something towards alleviating these evils, by absorbing a certain number, they leave a vast number in the streets.

It appears that on the 25th of March, 1859, there were 37,545 children in workhouses\*; and on the 1st of January, in the same year, there were 288,424 children receiving out-door relief; of these 288,424 there were 126,764 dependent on widows; 14,334 orphans or deserted; 6,676 the children of persons in gaol; and 3,997 illegitimate. More than 300,000 human creatures cannot be neglected with impunity.†

\* Senior, pp. 87, 75, 130.

† Appendix, No. 2.



I entreat those who take an interest in that host of human creatures—the waifs and strays of humanity—the 300,000 children of the State—who, unless provided for by the State, must inevitably be lost—to read the description of their condition in the following pages, and then to say whether they do not deserve very different treatment. Ragged schools, I repeat, have done something, but until effectual means are devised for the purpose of elevating the condition of the pauper children, both in the workhouse and out of the workhouse, no permanent improvement can be expected in juvenile crime. The evil must be stopped at its source, and the means to attain that object I have endeavoured to point out.

But my inquiries were not confined to Ragged Schools. They embraced a wider field; and it may be convenient to define its limits. The Commissioners having directed me, according to the terms of their commission, to confine myself to Popular Education, I adopted their definition of that term. By Popular Education the Commissioners understood the education of the families of day-labourers, mechanics, and the poorer classes of farmers and shopkeepers. To these I confined myself. I endeavoured to divide the population within the scope of my investigation into five classes, and to ascertain the means provided for the education of each. First, there are the independent labouring people, who earn wages. Their children are educated in the ordinary week-day, National, and Bri-

tish Schools, at a weekly fee of a *1d.* or *2d.* Secondly, there are the paupers within the workhouse — the in-door paupers, as they are called. These children are educated in the workhouse school, at the public expense. Thirdly, there are the vicious people — not so poor as to claim out-door relief. Their children are in the Ragged Schools, or remain uneducated in the streets. In this class may be included those illegitimate, orphan, and deserted boys and girls who pick up a precarious living in the streets. Fourthly, there are the out-door paupers — persons receiving parochial relief at their own homes. Their children are educated in the ordinary week-day schools, or in the Ragged Schools, or remain uneducated in the streets. Fifthly, there are the criminal children, who have been convicted of some crime, and have been sent to some Reformatory, to be educated and cared for. These five classes, I believe, embrace all the children who came within the scope of my commission; and I endeavoured to ascertain whether the machinery provided for the purpose of educating these several classes accomplishes the object for which it was originally instituted.

With respect to the independent poor, it is of the utmost importance that their independence should be respected. The rich have no right to demoralise their poorer brethren by aiding those who can aid themselves, or by relieving them from the obligation to take care of their children. If experience proves that some men or women, in a humble rank

of life, can afford to provide their children with decent clothing and a good education, it is mere demoralisation for the rich to supply such wants to other men and women in the same rank of life, who prefer to spend their wages in the gin-shop.

No one has a right, in order merely to gratify a weak sentimentality, to do anything which shall tend to emasculate that spirit of independence, which is one of the finest characteristics of Englishmen. There is no reluctance on the part of the great majority of the workpeople of this country to contribute towards the expense of their children's education. Out of 695,388*l.*, the income of certain schools (exclusive of the Parliamentary grant), a sum of not less than 302,731*l.* was last year contributed in the form of school-pence out of the pockets of the parents. But, besides this, the following pages furnish ample evidence of the noble character of the working classes of this country, and many touching proofs of the interest they take in the welfare of their offspring. One of the chief motives which has induced me to republish so much of the original Report, has been to show the character of the English workman, and the high value which he sets upon education.

There is probably no matter in which more caution is needed than in supplying parents with a gratuitous education for their children. It is true that amongst many of the poorer classes it is now an axiom, that to leave a child in the streets is to ruin it. But it is only of late years that in this