

**EDUCATIONAL
ADMINISTRATION: TWO
LECTURES DELIVERED
BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM IN FEBRUARY, 1921**

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Educational Administration: Two Lectures Delivered Before the University of Birmingham in February, 1921 by Sir Graham Balfour

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SIR GRAHAM BALFOUR

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*Two Lectures delivered before the University
of Birmingham in February, 1921*

BY

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EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

I

PUBLIC AUTHORITIES - THEIR HISTORY

EDUCATIONAL Administration is one of those subsidiary services which are in themselves without value except in so far as they secure the success of their object. Learning and teaching are the first and chief acts of education, but even in their simplest form they involve the beginnings of administration, which in the earliest stage devolves solely upon the teacher. Even the Irish 'hedge-school' involved, I suppose, the selection of a hedge, and when it comes to the provision of a book and a pencil, we are face to face with the supply of school materials. In private schools even to-day the whole administration is in the hands of the head master, but when the acceptance of education is made a duty obligatory on every child in the state there arises the need for setting the teachers free to practise their art and for giving the work of educational administration to be carried out by officials upon a correspondingly extensive scale.

The growth of almost any English institution proceeds by a series of accretions, largely independent of consistency, but adopted for utility and tested by practical experience. This certainly holds good with the educational administration of England, which can hardly be understood without a brief historical survey of the last

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eighty years. By this we shall see why English education is dealt with by the authorities central and local, and not by independent commissioners or philosophically constructed bureaux as in America or on the Continent of Europe.

It is almost incredible that ninety years ago there were in England neither central nor local public education authorities, unless we reckon the governors of endowed schools and the governing bodies of the universities and colleges.

In 1830 there were in existence a number of educational trusts, many of which were greatly neglected or abused: by 1837, the total number of these reported upon by Lord Brougham's Commission was 28,840, of an aggregate capital value of about a million and a quarter pounds. The only controlling authority over these trusts was the Court of Chancery, which was a byword for procrastination. There were no parliamentary or other public grants for education, and no official body, except the Treasury, to receive them if they should be made.

First as to the Central Authority. In 1833, the year after the Reform Bill, the first grant, which amounted to £30,000 'for the purposes of education', was made by the House of Commons. It was stoutly opposed in the House by William Cobbett and Joseph Hume, two prominent Radicals of the day, but was carried by 76 votes to 52. By the Appropriation Act it was paid to the Treasury 'for the erection of school houses in Great Britain', and by the Treasury was handed over to the two large voluntary societies founded in 1811 and 1808, the National Society and the British and Foreign School Society. Not to enter too precisely into details, approximately the same amounts and same general method of

disposal were continued for six years, but in 1839 came the crisis. The Government determined to set up an official body dealing with education, but evidently saw that there was no chance of carrying such a measure through Parliament. Accordingly, in April the Queen issued an Order in Council appointing a special committee of the Privy Council to administer the money voted by the Commons. But so unpopular was this step that the House of Lords by a two-thirds majority resolved to present an address of protest, and a like proposal in the Commons was only lost by five votes. The annual grant of £30,000 in the Commons was subsequently carried only by two votes. So nearly did the first beginnings of state education in England come to shipwreck, even after six years' experience.

The new Committee of Council (for which there existed a precedent in that Committee which became the Board of Trade) consisted of the Lord President of the Council, the Lord Privy Seal, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Home Secretary, and the Master of the Mint. They proceeded to appoint Dr. Kay (afterwards Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth) as Secretary, and before the end of the year the appointment of the first two H.M. Inspectors was sanctioned. The State Central Administrative Establishment with expert advisers was now an accomplished fact.

No Act, however, dealing directly with education was placed upon the Statute Book until 1856, when the 'Education Department' was founded under this title, and to the 'Educational Establishment of the Privy Council' was added 'The Establishment for the Encouragement of Science and Art', founded in 1836 by the Committee which had since become the Board of Trade. The old Committee of Council on Education

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continued in existence for another forty years, in nominal charge of the Education Department, but by the new Act the Committee received in 1856 a Vice-President who was henceforth definitely responsible in the House of Commons for the work of the Department.

It was not until 1899 that an Act was passed substituting for the Committee of Council a Board of Education consisting of a President of its own, the Lord President of Council, the Principal Secretaries of State, the First Lord of the Treasury, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. There is also a Parliamentary Secretary. Exactly what benefit was secured by substituting a Board for a Committee, I have never—as the Irish preacher said—‘been able to understand or even to explain’, since both bodies were mere parliamentary figments and had no living existence.

It is not known whether this Board of Education has ever met, but it is on record that its predecessor, the Committee of Council, did hold at least one meeting in circumstances described by Lord George Hamilton, who was at the time its Vice-President. In 1879 Sir Stafford Northcote, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, induced the Duke of Richmond, then President of the Council, to agree to cutting down the Vice-President's Education Estimates without consulting either the Vice-President or Sir Francis Sandford, the Permanent Secretary of the Board. Lord George went to the Prime Minister, Lord Beaconsfield, and made his protest. ‘He listened intently, and after a minute's reflection said, “Is there not a thing that you call the Committee of Council upon Education?” “Yes,” I said, “there is.” “Am I on it?” “Yes.” “Very well then, tell the Lord President I wish it to be summoned at once.” It was summoned, and I should think for the first and

last time in its existence all the official members of this heterogeneous body met. We sat in a semicircle, Lord Beaconsfield in the centre and I at the extreme outside. "I understand", said Lord Beaconsfield, "that the Vice-President has a statement to make to us." I then proceeded to state my case as best I could, letting down the Lord President and the Chancellor of the Exchequer as much as possible. When I had finished there was a dead silence, whereupon Lord Beaconsfield remarked, "I move that the Committee of Council upon Education do agree with the Vice-President". There was not a word of opposition to this motion, both the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Lord President looking rather foolish.' Such was the only recorded meeting of the body which for sixty years nominally directed English national education.

The most recent precedent, or at any rate the closest analogy for the establishment of a Board was in the case of Agriculture in 1889, a Board which has since acquired the up-to-date title of Ministry: it remains to be seen whether the same honour will be bestowed on education and what difference, if any, it will produce. At any rate, whatever other effects may have been produced by the Board of Education Act in 1899, it rendered possible the policy which has been followed ever since 1905 of having the chief official representative of national education in the House of Commons. At first this change seemed only to have substituted for a mere figurehead some active politician with less interest in education than in his own promotion to some more popular office, but in 1917 the opportunity of education came at last, and the nation secured an able and enlightened expert who turned out to be a born parliamentarian. Some of us who have claimed that