

THE EDUCATIONAL SITUATION  
IN NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND AS  
REVEALED IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.

MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE

Dorothy B. Rich

1954

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THE EDUCATIONAL SITUATION IN NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND  
AS REVEALED IN THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

Dorothy B. Rich

A THESIS

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## FOREWORD

The twentieth century has been called the century of education. The development of our modern standards of education began in the Victorian era as an outgrowth of the humanitarian attitudes engendered by the French Revolution.

How nineteenth century educational ideals developed, how they affected the novels of the period, and how the novelists may have affected the growth of the educational system in England--these are the subjects under consideration in the following pages.

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## CHAPTER I

### EDUCATION IN ENGLAND BEFORE 1832

To consider the educational philosophy of the Victorian era it is necessary to delve into the past to learn what ideals and ideas of education preceded the nineteenth century. It is important to know what the early Victorians inherited from their forebears, and to learn what conditions developed between 1800 and 1832 which led Victorian England to realize that she must do something to advance her people mentally.

England had long neglected the education of her citizens. She was behind many countries of Europe in providing free public schools for the mass of the people. Her endowed schools furnished training to the sons of the aristocratic and wealthy middle classes, but no provision had been made for the children of the working classes. "The State only slowly stepped into its proper place; more slowly in the case of England than in the case of any other of the leading European nations."<sup>1</sup>

The development of industry and the growth of social unrest at the end of the eighteenth century, following the French Revolution, had helped to bring home to the European mind the need of a national educational system.

Germany had been the first nation to see the value of education. As early as 1763, Frederick the Great had set up a public school system in Prussia. German reformers saw education as one of the surest ways to develop a happy,

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Craik, The State in Its Relation to Education, Macmillan and Co., London, 1884, p. 1.

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prosperous people with a strong, national spirit. Their schools carried pupils through only the elementary grades, but that was more than any other of the great European states did for a long time.

The slow, laborious steps which England took toward state education had their beginnings in the apprentice system, prominent in the fifteenth century, which provided for industrial education only. During the sixteenth century, the Reformation brought demands that people be able to read the Bible, and so rudimentary schools began to appear. The poorer classes were soon elbowed aside and the grammar schools of the period became schools for the upper and middle classes. The seventeenth century saw the church assume complete control of education. The Canons of 1604 secured to the church control of education and led to the establishment during this century of some seven hundred foundations for primary education.<sup>2</sup> The church continued in control throughout the eighteenth century. In 1782, Robert Raikes established the first Sunday school, and soon others were scattered all over the country.

Toward the close of the eighteenth century the most extensive efforts for popular education were made by Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster. To them must be given the credit for conceiving the idea of some sort of scheme for popular education, and of submitting a proposal by which it might be carried out. Each was animated by an earnestness in the cause which went far to arouse the zeal of others, but because of personal and sectarian jealousy there grew up two opposing camps in the domain of education which colored the thinking of the people and the legislation for schools throughout the entire nineteenth

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 8.



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century. Lancaster's followers were the Dissenters; Bell's were the recognized agency of the Established Church. Thus, at the turn of the century, when England was awakening to the need of doing something about educating her masses, progress was impeded by religious controversy between these two groups.

The religious issue was prominent in connection with the attempt at legislation made by Whitbread in his Parochial Schools Bill of 1807. This early attempt to legislate in favor of education for the lower classes was rejected by the Lords, mainly on the ground that it did not place education on a religious basis nor sufficiently secure control to the minister of the parish. The failure of the government to make provision for any system of universal education made it inevitable that education must be founded on a voluntary effort. As a result, societies were formed to establish church-connected schools, and in 1831, the National Society, representing the Church, was able to show that there were over 13,000 schools in connection with the Church, of which 6,470 were both day and Sunday schools, having a total attendance of 409,000.<sup>3</sup> This, of course, represented only a feeble beginning, and just how feeble the results of such an educational program were, became apparent, when, as late as 1845, a careful and elaborate report was made by the Rev. Henry Moseley on the Midland District. Craik, in summarizing that report, states:

... only about one in six, even of the children at school, was found able to read the Scriptures with any ease. Even for these the power of reading often left them when they tried a secular book. Of reading with intelligence there was hardly any; and about one-half of the children who came to school left, it was calculated, unable to read. Only about one child in four had mastered, even in the most mechanical way, the art of writing. As regards arithmetic, not two per cent of the children had advanced as far as the rule of three.

Such results were almost enough to damp the hopes of the

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<sup>3</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, VII, 980-986.

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most ardent advocates of the system. Something was clearly wrong. Even in schools where an apparent organisation was present, it was often delusive. The children were drilled into a certain monotonous regularity of movement; but individual instruction was almost unknown. The central evil of the whole was the want of a trained teaching staff; and its necessary result a want of system, of method, and of thorough organisation.<sup>4</sup>

These weaknesses, noted near the middle of the century, reveal how slowly progress was being made. The Victorians had inherited from the past a worn-out apprentice system, a haphazard organization of Sunday schools, a monitorial system which had failed because of untrained school men, and a religious controversy of such intensity as to cripple any constructive planning. Small wonder that the earnest reformers who were trying to build an educational system for England found the task so difficult and progress so slow that it was almost the end of the nineteenth century before England could claim to have free public education.

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Craik, The State in Its Relation to Education, p. 32.

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## CHAPTER II

### PROGRESS FROM 1832-1900

The steps by which free education came to the English people during the Victorian era parallel closely the path of the Industrial Revolution. The two movements were closely allied from the year 1802, when the first Sir Robert Peel sponsored a Bill which restricted children's labor in factories, and required that reading, writing, and arithmetic should be taught to them during part of each day. This was the beginning of the factory legislation which restricted the employment of children, giving them enforced leisure which the State sought to fill with education. "The State thus found herself face to face with a new task, to which voluntary agencies and casual endowments had proved inadequate; and we have now to watch the gradual and somewhat timid steps with which she advanced upon the work before her."<sup>1</sup>

Briefly, the first of these "timid" steps included: the appointment of a Select Committee for Inquiring into the Education of the Poor in the Metropolis, 1816; Committee on Endowments, 1818; Brougham's Education Bill, 1820.

The actual beginning of state supported education came in 1832, when the sum of 20,000 pounds was set aside for the construction of schools; but as there was no security for the efficiency of instruction nor for the maintenance of the buildings, a few years later these establishments were seen to be falling into ruin, or serving to house an admittedly inefficient school.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Craik, The State in Its Relation to Education, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 15.



In 1835, a Select Committee on Education, appointed to make a study of general education, reported their findings. A summary of that report reveals the following:

About one in eleven children was attending school; children of the lower classes who were in schools of any kind usually attended Dame Schools or Sunday schools, the latter of which were doing more good than any of the others; Dame Schools were most numerous and worst of all, and for the most part succeeded only in keeping the children off the streets; they were taught by women and a few old men, none of whom were trained for this work; they met in unwholesome rooms, cellars, and garrets; two or three books served all the pupils; sometimes there were no books at all; the cost per pupil was four pence per week; the conclusion of the Committee was that the 4,722 pupils in Manchester who attended these schools were very little affected by their attendance.<sup>3</sup>

The next step was taken in 1839, when 30,000 pounds was appropriated and a special staff of officers and school inspectors comprised the first Education Department. Training schools for teachers were proposed, but here as elsewhere, until 1870, when education was entirely dissociated from religious control, the sectarian controversy interfered with the proposal. The contention became so keen that the government was compelled to abandon the scheme.<sup>4</sup>

In 1843, the sum of 40,000 pounds was given for buildings, teachers' houses, grants to poor districts, and the building of Training Colleges.

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<sup>3</sup> Bernard Schilling, Human Dignity And The Great Victorians, Columbia University Press, New York, 1946, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Craik, The State in Its Relation to Education, p. 13.

The training of competent teachers was the nation's greatest need, and an effort was made to meet this need by an apprentice system copied from the Dutch schools whereby a selected number of the older pupils who intended to enter upon the profession of teaching; were apprenticed, at the age of thirteen, to the teacher. After five years as apprentices, they passed to a Training College to receive the professional training necessary to entitle them to have charge of a school.

But progress in school improvement was not evident as a result of the 1843 legislation. Schilling says that "by 1843 an investigator could say of the Birmingham district that children and young persons were entirely destitute of anything which can be called a useful education. Many, especially children employed in the mines, were allowed to grow up ignorant and degraded almost to imbecility."<sup>5</sup>

Cottage Schools were numerous in large towns; in 1845, according to a Committee report, one-fifth of the children of laborers attended these schools; the schools were situated in filthy surroundings, some in garrets which were so crowded that the pupils had to stand throughout the session; women often "taught" while doing their other work.

The Common Day Schools were better, but they, too, were very poor. The quality of the teaching was so low that the Committee concluded that this was the only profession which required no previous knowledge or qualification. They reported; no order, no system, too many classes, deficiency of books, poor instruction, and, in at least one instance, 120 children being taught in one room.

The Sunday school was apparently the best medium of instruction for

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard N. Schilling, Human Dignity and the Great Victorians, p. 20.

the common person. These were attended by nearly twice as many as all the other schools together. Eighty-six Sunday schools had a total enrollment of 33,196. Thirty-nine offered evening classes, teaching reading and arithmetic in addition to religion.

The Committee reported that these things kept the children away from school: weariness following long hours of hard work, illness, lack of clothing, and parents' selfishness in not wanting to lose the child's wages nor to pay his tuition.<sup>6</sup>

This reluctance of parents to lose the income from their children's labor was evident all through the '30's and '40's and even as late as 1858. In manufacturing towns, where the increase in population in the '30's had been rapid, the educational destitution was complete. Far less than one-half the children ever entered the door of a school, and those who were brought in received instruction which was of the very slightest use. In many cases the children were merely taken charge of for so many hours a day by someone whose health, age, or capacity unfitted him to gain a living in the most menial occupation.<sup>7</sup>

In 1842 an attempt had been made to limit the hours of labor and to provide schools which the children, partially employed, must attend. Again the religious question alarmed the Non-Conformists, who feared the Church was to be given a monopoly of education; again the agitation became so widespread that the government had to withdraw the obnoxious clauses pertaining to religion. The result was that the Dissenters from now on for a long period of time resented all state action relative to education, urging that all

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-30.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Craik, The State in Its Relation to Education, p. 16.

support be voluntary.<sup>8</sup>

With support and attendance both on a voluntary basis little progress could be made. Schilling states that children often went to work in the factories at the age of nine; in 1845, more than 10,000 children under eleven were at work in factories, while 167,144 between the ages of eleven and eighteen were thus employed.<sup>9</sup>

In the mines, at this same time, even worse conditions existed, where children never saw daylight, working fourteen to sixteen hours per day without enough to eat, without adequate clothing, completely ignorant of any better way of life. As Schilling points out:

The training of his mind would have been difficult even if he had been offered a good education. But the eighteenth century had seldom considered education for the poorer classes. Numerous charitable schools were available, but no general, organized system of popular education existed. Teaching the lower orders was looked upon as a kind of missionary work, a charitable act toward a neglected class concerning whose general intelligence and capacity a low opinion was held. They were not in any case supposed to be well educated ... the oral teaching of the church was thought to be quite enough; more than this would interfere with useful employment, and hence the mass of laborers were to be kept in ignorance ... the fear that educated masses would be discontented, that new knowledge in the spirit of those times would give the people hope and aspirations to rise out of their class perhaps did much to hold back popular education. The desire of those in power was to impress upon the poor the duty of loyalty and contentment, not to educate them so that they would not work hard and submissively for small wages.<sup>10</sup>

Although some in power may have favored holding back popular education, there were others who recognized the need for a more satisfactory system than that which existed. New attempts continued to be made to solve the seemingly insoluble question, but before much constructive work could be done it was

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Schilling, Human Dignity and the Great Victorians, pp. 9-30.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

necessary to inquire into the results of the system up to that point, to determine just what had been accomplished with the grants of money set aside annually since 1832 for educational purposes. To this end the Commission of 1858 was appointed. Their findings showed that little progress had been made in a quarter of a century.

True, about one in eight now had been in school at some time, whereas the number had been one in eleven in 1835. But attendance was not regular and was often only nominal. About two-thirds of those carried on the rolls were in the public school; the rest were in private schools whose inefficiency could not be checked upon, but in most cases was notorious. The conclusion was that seventy out of every hundred children were growing up in absolute neglect so far as the state was concerned.<sup>11</sup>

Accounts of the private schools brought before the Commission were pitiful; Craik reports a few instances:

... we read: 'It is impossible to describe the poverty and decay which everything indicated ... The chief text-book seemed to be a kitten, to which all the children were very attentive.' In another the teacher, 'a young man, very pale and sickly in appearance,' worked as a carpenter during the school hours; 'he expressed a strong wish to have an arithmetic book and a grammar for his own improvement.' In another a widow, seventy years of age, eked out by her school the pittance granted by the Union. Her total income was 3s.9d. a week. 'She complained of inability to buy meat, and without meat her strength fails.' No wonder that 'she is very weary of life, and hopes that her time on earth will not be long.'<sup>12</sup>

The commission report told of untrained teachers, discharged servants, paupers, cripples, consumptives in charge of schools. The conclusion was drawn that children could not reasonably be expected to remain in school much

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Craik, The State in Its Relation to Education, pp. 49, 50.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 50, 51.





beyond the age of ten or eleven, since they would then be gainfully occupied. Therefore, as these children were leaving school with only the little knowledge they had gained in a year or two, they should have an opportunity to continue their education in night schools.

That the knowledge gained was woefully little was evident in the lack of ability to read intelligently. Reading was often by sound only, without any attempt to convey meaning.<sup>13</sup>

The Commission was faced with two problems: how to get the children into school and how to extend the school system. As a result of the work of the Commission of 1858, a Revised Code as passed in 1861 showed three definitely progressive steps: schools must be held on approved premises, children must have a certain number of attendances, and they must pass individual examinations in reading, writing and arithmetic. Grants would be made according to results of this testing program.<sup>14</sup>

Craik discusses at length the strong points and the weaknesses of the New Code, which met with opposition from conscientious thinkers as well as inefficient teachers. The wrangling continued for a decade, during which the religious issue was also kept alive. Finally, in 1870, an Act was passed which dissociated public education from religious worship, giving over the management of schools to local School Boards, and requiring children to attend school between the ages of five and thirteen. This compulsory education was not free, but the Education Department paid the fees where poverty

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 55, Craik reports the following written answer to the question: "What is thy duty towards God?"

"My duty toads God is to bleed in Him, to fering and to leaf withold your arts, withold my mine, withold my sold, and with my sernth, to whirchp and give thanks, to put my old trash in Him, to call upon Him, to onner His old name and His world, and to save Him truly all the days of my life's end."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

rendered a parent unable to pay the amount himself.<sup>15</sup> In 1891, a law was enacted making education for elementary pupils both free and compulsory. Finally, after almost a century of bickering, England had arrived at Adam Smith's conclusion made some years previously: that the government should be responsible for popular education.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout this long, often discouraging struggle several writers of the era spoke out strongly in favor of education for the lower classes. Their opinions and recommendations as presented by Schilling are summarized here. Coleridge believed that the State must insure instruction for all in order to raise the general standard, that every person must have a chance for knowledge and improvement. He called for instruction in morality and religion. He was enthusiastic over the system advocated by Rev. Andrew Bell, whereby the younger were to be instructed by the older and more advanced pupils so that knowledge would thus overcome the ignorance of all.

Southey believed that national education was the most important function of a good government. No one should perish for lack of knowledge. At the very least, public education should teach people to "read, write, cypher, and understand their moral and religious duties." With Church and English parochial schools, he advocated, along with Coleridge, Dr. Bell's system whereby one master could superintend hundreds of scholars. He also believed that the established English religion should be a part of the basic curriculum.

Carlyle looked upon the lack of an education as a tragic waste. "That there should one man die ignorant who had capacity for knowledge, this I call a tragedy." As early as 1835, Carlyle considered trying for a position

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Schilling, Human Dignity and the Great Victorians, p. 37.

in the new scheme of national education. His recommendations were not extreme: children should be taught the alphabet and taught to read; teachers should be sent everywhere so that there would be no such thing as an Englishman who could not read; there should be penalties placed on negligent parents; proper behavior should be taught along with religious training.

Kinsley believed that it was God's will that children be educated and that the State had the obligation to provide such education. He used his novel, Alton Locke, to show the suffering a person would endure to get an education, and he felt that such sacrifices should not be necessary. He demanded universal education as a step toward universal democracy. Inspired by this belief, he helped Frederick D. Maurice found the Working Men's College, designed to give a liberal, not a vocational, training to men "conscious of unsatisfied and unemployed intellect." Based on close fellowship between the teachers and the students, this college is still alive today.

Like the other humanitarians, Matthew Arnold came to the feeling that education was the way upward for mankind. He stood for reform of education, especially for the middle class. He made his living as an inspector of schools, and he stood for public, compulsory secondary education. He held that the best way to raise the lower classes was to lift the middle class. His plan for organizing education from a central minister of education down through the local school boards is the plan in use today.

Ruskin, also, felt that it was the duty of the government to provide educational opportunities, but not to the extent that one would strive to lift oneself to a higher class. Rather, the aim should be to make man happier in his present station, and not encourage him to try to rise above it. Ruskin had very definite opinions about the organization of the schools, opinions which seem fairly modern. He called for the school to develop the

physical side of the pupil by teaching the laws of health and such exercise as riding, running, personal defense and offense, music, and manual training so that all would have a respect for manual labor as decent and honorable. Morality was to be stressed with emphasis on reverence, humility, compassion, obedience, truth, accuracy, gentleness, justice, and honesty. Ruskin felt that it is better to be ignorant of a thousand things than to be immoral. The intellectual side of the pupil was to be developed as fully as possible, with opportunities for the student to consult the world's great minds, the national libraries, the greatest books. Specific subjects recommended were: natural and biological sciences, mathematics, history, and such other subjects as gifted students could master.

Ruskin advocated three types of schools: the city school was to stress mathematics and the arts; the country school would emphasize natural history and agriculture; seamen's schools would teach physical geography, astronomy, sea fish and sea birds. Ruskin was here emphasizing his belief that wherever possible teaching should include knowledge immediately bearing on practical life and the mastery of that calling in which one's living was to be earned.

Ruskin's beliefs were also held by William Morris, who said that the aim of education should be the fullest development of individual talents. He believed that it should be determined what each person is fitted for and then he should be encouraged to develop his inclination fully. He held that each person should learn several handicrafts and have some skill in fine arts. In advocating that education should be offered to all men according to the capacity of their minds, he was forward in his thinking, and when he predicted that, as the nineteenth century was called the century of commerce, so the twentieth would be called the century of education, he

was accurately foretelling what we have seen come to pass.<sup>17</sup>

These, then, are some of the landmarks as Victorian England progressed toward universal education. These are some of the frank statements of the literary figures of the century. But what of the more subtle forms of indoctrination which played their part in effecting this progress? I refer to the novelists and their work, for certainly the novel, the most popular literary form of the Victorian era, had a wide audience to whom it could appeal. And the novelists, realizing their power and feeling, perhaps, their duty to mankind, added their voices to the growing demand for a better educated public, and thus made their contribution. What that contribution was, the next few chapters will reveal.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 55-186.

## CHAPTER III

### PHYSICAL CONDITIONS OF ENGLISH SCHOOLS

Physical conditions of the Victorian schools varied according to whether the school was a public or a private school, and within these two classes, according to the constituency which the school served.

David Copperfield himself attended two schools, both private institutions, which evidence this wide variation. Salem House, his first school, was a square brick building, bare and unfurnished.<sup>1</sup> The second school David attended was chosen for him by his Aunt Betsey and Mr. Wickfield. Here the surroundings were pleasant and inviting.<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Hughes reports Tom Brown's attendance at both public and private schools, in his case both rather better than the average for the time. The village was blessed with a "well-endowed school," a grey stone building, not unpleasant.<sup>3</sup> At nine years of age Tom proceeded to a private school where the surroundings were more than adequate.<sup>4</sup> He stayed there till time to enter Rugby, with its large campus and old buildings.

Governess positions, of course, provided pleasant surroundings. Charlotte Brontë mentions in *Shirley* the "pleasant schoolroom."<sup>5</sup> Miss

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens, The Personal History of David Copperfield, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1940, p. 75. Each subsequent reference to this novel will be to this same edition.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hughes, Tom Brown's School Days, Macmillan and Co., London, 1880, pp. 53-61. Each subsequent reference to this novel will be to this same edition.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 70

<sup>5</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Shirley, Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1880, p. 501. Each subsequent reference to this novel will be to this same edition.



Sharp was a pupil in a young ladies' academy which was located in a "state-ly old brick house."<sup>6</sup> Later she was a governess in a situation where she had her own pleasant bedroom opening out of the second-floor school-room.

The two descriptions of schools which brought the greatest storm of inquiry and pretest were Charlotte Brontë's description of Lowood in Jane Eyre and Dickens' never-to-be-forgotten picture of Dotheboys Hall in Nicholas Nickleby.

Lowood was based upon the Clergy Daughters' School established in 1824 by the Reverend Carus Wilson at Cowan Bridge. Founded for the daughters of poor clergymen, it was an extremely cheap school, and of necessity plain and cheerless. To this school the four eldest Brontës went when they were between the ages of seven and ten. A cold, hungry, comfortless place, Charlotte's description of it in Jane Eyre<sup>7</sup> brought an outcry, and she later said she should not have written it though every word was true.<sup>8</sup>

Mrs. Gaskell inspected the school at a later date and found it improved over Charlotte's description. Of necessity, great economy had to be followed, since parents of students paid barely enough for food and lodging, and subscriptions did not flow in freely to support this new and untried scheme. Mrs. Gaskell reported that careless cooking rendered food unpalatable; cold, unheated buildings brought illness which was unattended in many cases. These illnesses did lead to deaths, but records showed that

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<sup>6</sup> William M. Thackeray, Vanity Fair, Dodd Mead and Co., New York, 1924, p. 23. Each subsequent reference to this novel will be to this same edition.

<sup>7</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, Random House, New York, 1943, pp. 54-59. Each subsequent reference to this novel will be to this same edition.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Lane, The Brontë Story, Little, Brown and Co., Boston, 1953, pp. 55-58.

Mr. Wilson's concern had amounted to alarm when a fever broke out. He had secured the help of doctors and procured medicines, and although forty pupils had taken the fever only one had died. It was Mrs. Gaskell's conclusion that Charlotte had depicted all that impressed her as bad at the age of eight, and had seen little that was good.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of Mrs. Gaskell's more temperate report, it, along with Jane Eyre, brought such a storm of protest (Mr. Wilson's supporters were threatening libel action and old pupils were offering testimony on both sides) that her publishers thought it best to soften the harshness of her accusations. Mrs. Gaskell reluctantly allowed a number of passages to be cut and a paragraph or two added in justification of Mr. Wilson. With both sides flatly contradicting one another, Margaret Lane's conclusion is that "it still seems Mrs. Gaskell's description was not seriously unjust."<sup>10</sup> And Charlotte Brontë herself conceded only that "the school may have improved but to our imaginations things were horrible enough."<sup>11</sup> Indeed the register of the school as published in the Journal of Education in 1900 showed the number of deaths and withdrawals during the first eighteen months of the school to have been very high: seventy-two entered; twenty-eight removed; one died there; seven left school and died.<sup>12</sup>

That Charlotte Brontë could adopt fair attitudes is shown in the kind words she had for Miss Wooler's School at Roe Head where she was both pupil and teacher. The "comfortable family atmosphere,"<sup>13</sup> along with Miss

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 59-62.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 68-69.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 69-72.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

Wooler's talent, inspired in Charlotte a thirst for knowledge.

Even more telling in its influence was the Dickens description of Dotheboys Hall. He pictured the crowded school room with bare, stained, and dirty walls, the broken windows stopped up with copy books and paper, the two rickety desks for the boys, eight of whom shared one book. He exposed such atrocities as turning sick boys out to graze in turnip beds for an hour or two a day, beating sick boys, exposing boys to scarlet fever and whooping cough so that Squeer's own son's doctor bill could be hidden in theirs, putting five boys in one flea-infested bed, furnishing almost no food and killing the appetite for what little there was with doses of treacle and brimstone.<sup>14</sup> His vivid picture of crouching and cold little scarecrows caused an immediate reaction. As Dickens himself said in the preface to Nicholas Nickleby:

... more than one Yorkshire schoolmaster lays claim to being the original of Mr. Squeers. One worthy has actually consulted authorities learned in the law, as to his having good grounds on which to rest an action for libel... these contentions arise from the fact that Mr. Squeers is the representative of a class and not an individual. Where imposture, ignorance, and brutal cupidity are the stock in trade of a small body of men, and one is described by these characteristics, all his fellows will recognize something belonging to themselves, and each will have a misgiving that the portrait is his own....To this general description...there may be some exceptions and although the author neither saw nor heard of any in the course of an excursion he made into Yorkshire...it affords him much more pleasure to assume their existence than to doubt it.

Mr. Squeers and his school are faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible—that there are upon record trials at law in which damages have been sought as a poor recompense for lasting agonies and disfigurements inflicted upon children by the treatment of the master in these places,

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1868, pp. 42-116. Each subsequent reference to this novel will be to this same edition.

involving such offensive and foul details of neglect, cruelty, and disease as no writer of fiction would have the boldness to imagine—and that, since he has engaged upon these Adventures, he has received from private quarters far beyond the reach of suspicion or distrust, accounts of atrocities, in the perpetration of which, upon neglected or repudiated children, these schools have been the main instruments, very far exceeding any that appear in these pages.<sup>15</sup>

Such schools as Dickens was exposing in Nicholas Nickleby and other novels<sup>16</sup> were, of course, serving a low-type clientele. Many of the children were the illegitimate sons of people who wanted only to put them out of the way, to hear from them as little as possible, and to see them not at all. For such parents these schools were no more nor less than dumping grounds for children who, as one villager told Dickens, would be far better off sleeping in a London gutter.<sup>17</sup> Serving such a public, these schools were the worst, doubtless, of the time. But many others were but little better; nor did they improve rapidly, for by mid-century the physical conditions of the schools were only somewhat improved over the findings of the Select Committee of 1835.<sup>18</sup>

By the end of the Victorian era the number of such establishments as Dotheboys Hall had steadily decreased. How much of this decrease was due

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Preface, pp. xiii, xiv, xv.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Crothers, Children of Dickens, Charles Scribner and Sons, New York, 1926, p. 20; "Pip went to an evening school taught by an old lady who also kept a little store in the same room. He didn't learn very much, for the old lady used to go to sleep much of the time."

Charles Dickens, Hard Times, Oxford University Press, London, 1924, p. 1: "a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom."

Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, Oxford University Press, London, 1952, Book the Second, p. 214: "the school was a miserable left in an unsavory yard, oppressive, disagreeable, crowded, noisy, confusing."

<sup>17</sup> Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, Preface, p. xvii.

<sup>18</sup> E.L. Woodward, The Age of Reform, 1815-1870, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1938, Book IV, p. 455.

to the effect of the novel on the thinking of the public is not measurable. Hugh Walker says of Dickens: "The obvious purpose of Nicholas Nickleby is the reform of schools...Zeal for his purpose led to still greater excess...The assailant of an educational system...ought to be a reflective person. But of all great English novelists, Dickens was the least reflective."<sup>19</sup> But, in speaking of the same work, Amy Cruse says that although some people thought such a bad place could not exist, those who knew did not change him [Dickens] with exaggeration and "the effects of his blow seen in the rapid decrease of such establishments, showed that it had been struck with accuracy as well as force."<sup>20</sup> And again: "Many abuses were reformed...That much of this was due to the influence of books was owned by everybody..."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hugh Walker, The Literature of the Victorian Era, Cambridge University Press, 1921, pp. 685, 686.

<sup>20</sup> Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Reading, Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston, 1935, p. 147.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

## CHAPTER IV

### HEALTH EDUCATION AND CARE OF THE BODY

It is a natural step from the discussion of the physical characteristics of the Victorian school, with its attendant ills and fevers, to a consideration of the health education and provision made for the physical education of the nineteenth century pupil. These provisions varied according to the class of school, but the variation was more pronounced between the schools for boys and those for girls.

The novels of the century show no more organized physical activity for girls than walks or simple games of ball<sup>1</sup> or a play-hour in the evening.<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Brontë, reporting in Villette, describes the school in Brussels as a "foreign school of which the life, movement and variety made it a complete and most charming contrast to many English institutions of the same kind."<sup>3</sup> This contrast, however, was in the attention given to the physical well-being of the pupils and to the abundant good food provided, rather than to any organized physical education. Dancing, there as in England, seemed to be the only organized effort to teach a physical activity. David Copperfield attended dancing school at which he met little girls from a nearby private school.<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Sharp's letter of recommendation claimed she could teach dancing without the aid of a

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Lane, The Brontë Story, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Villette, Bigelow, Brown and Co., New York, n.d., p. 84. Each subsequent reference to this novel will be to this same edition.

<sup>4</sup> Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 258.

master.<sup>5</sup>

This lack of attention to the physical training and health education of the girls received but slight consideration except from three writers, Disraeli, Spencer and Kingsley. Disraeli, writing Sibyl in 1845, describes the horrible conditions under which girls as young as four and five worked in coal mines for as long as twelve to sixteen hours per day. Naked to the waist, clad in canvas trousers with iron chains fastened to a belt of leather running between their legs, these girls hauled tubs of coal over underground roads, laboring in darkness and solitude and living a worse life than the direst criminal. "Yet these are to be—some are—the mothers of England," Disraeli concluded.<sup>6</sup>

In 1861 Herbert Spencer complained of the neglect of physical training in girls' schools. His observation was that while boys' schools paid some attention to physical education, girls did not run and play, shout or laugh, but sauntered in ladylike fashion, afraid of producing a robust physique. Abundant vigor was considered plebeian; a fastidious appetite and relative weakness were held to be ladylike, and the dread of mistresses was that their charges might not be ladies.<sup>7</sup>

Thirteen years later Charles Kingsley pleaded for less stooping over desks to do sums and Latin and Greek, and for more health education, games, dances, songs, fresh air, and play. "Games," he said, "are conducive to physical and moral health;" "dancing is the most natural and

<sup>5</sup> Thackeray, Vanity Fair, p. 111.

<sup>6</sup> B. Disraeli, Sibyl; or The Two Nations, Tauchnitz, Leipzig, 1845, p. 145. Each subsequent reference to this novel will be to this same edition.

<sup>7</sup> H. . Routh, England Under Victoria, Harcourt, Brace and Co., New York, 1874, p. 153.

wholesome of all exercises." He also urged girls to copy Greek physical training.<sup>8</sup>

Physical education for boys in private schools followed a totally different pattern. Neglected in the schools that served the poor, athletics was over-emphasized in the private schools. While Charles Dickens himself had a smattering of dancing in the second school he attended, no other physical education seems to have come his way. That most schools for the lower classes did not offer such health education seems obvious from Mr. Squeer's advertisement for Dotheboys Hall. In it he offered to teach every conceivable subject but no mention is made of health education. We may rightly judge that had such instruction been expected Mr. Squeers would have offered it.

The schools serving the higher middle classes emphasized sports almost too much, if we may take the opinion of Wingfield-Stratford. "The barbaric scale of values, that exalts physical prowess above truth and beauty, passed from the fathers to the sons, and the aim of the public school discipline was more and more diverted from the production of scholars to that of sportsmen and athletes."<sup>9</sup>

Kipling suggests this development of the athlete in Stalky and Co., a book which stresses only incidentally the scholastic training of the late nineteenth century, but deals at length with the antics of several boys in a school for the fairly privileged class. A gymnasium class with dumbbell workouts, marching, and drills is described.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Kingsley, Health and Education, D. Appleton and Co., New York, 1874, pp. 83-88.

<sup>9</sup> Esme Wingfield-Stratford, These Earnest Victorians, William Morrow and Co., New York, 1930, p. 298.

<sup>10</sup> Rudyard Kipling, Stalky and Co., Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1913, p. 188. Each subsequent reference to this novel will be to this same edition.





But it is in such schools as Samuel Butler's *Roughborough* and Thomas Hughes' *Rugby* that we see the organized games which every boy was expected to enjoy. Butler records the hatred he felt for cricket and football because he was not up to playing, physically.<sup>11</sup> Hughes records with nostalgia the football teams on the Rugby field, and recommends football and cricket as great builders of team play, and boxing as a builder of character.<sup>12</sup> Hughes' observation is upheld in some measure by Wingfield-Stratford: "The strength of the public school system lay in the training it provided for the younger sons of the aristocracy...the power of command that the system engendered not only furnished the army...with officers who were...brave and popular...but was of inestimable value in the work of empire building."<sup>13</sup>

In summary, our conclusion here can be that while little attention was given to physical and health education for girls, or for boys of the lower class, competitive games and sports received so much attention in the upper class schools as to call forth a degree of concern. Interscholastic and intercollegiate meets began about the middle of the century and games became so absorbing that teachers invented a new word, "athleticism," to describe the situation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh*, Random House, New York, 1943, p. 176. Each subsequent reference to this novel will be to this same edition.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes, *Tom Brown's School Days*, pp. 299, 354.

<sup>13</sup> Wingfield-Stratford, *Those Earnest Victorians*, p. 298.

<sup>14</sup> Edwin W. Pahlow, *Man's Great Adventure*, Ginn and Co., Boston, 1932, p. 685.

## CHAPTER V

### THE VICTORIAN CURRICULUM

Health education was not the only subject neglected in the nineteenth century school. Although Mr. Squeers volunteered in his advertising to provide "instruction in all languages, mathematics, spelling, geometry, astronomy, trigonometry, geography, algebra, single stick, writing, fortification, and classical literature,"<sup>1</sup> we are not naive enough to suppose that he could provide all this even if he had been inclined to try. Indeed, his very grouping of the subjects leads us to believe he was not fully aware of their nature. When we read that he assured Nicholas that he could "advertise education by Mr. Squeers and able assistants without having any assistants" because "it's done all the time by all the masters"<sup>2</sup> we realize that the curriculum offered did not mean much. Later, as we observe his methods, we find that it meant even less.

What, in general, did the public schools and schools for the poorer classes teach? Mainly reading, writing, and cyphering, if we can judge by the secondary sources and by the novels themselves.

At mid-century Sir Walter Besant said, "Board schools think a man educated who can spell. Is that all the people want? Are they content to know nothing of history, economics, government, trade? If they want real education, send representatives to the School Boards."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> H.V. Routh, England Under Victoria, p. 183.

In the peroration to Huxley's lecture on A Lobster: or The Story of Zoology, given at South Kensington Museum, May 14, 1860, the need for science instruction was stressed. It was pointed out that although reading, writing, and cyphering were necessary, a Roman boy of the fourth century had been taught these subjects plus some Greek. Nineteenth century education must take note of the fact that science now ruled all, that modern civilization now rested upon physical sciences, that even the poorest boy would confront problems of science on every hand, that no effort was being made to prepare him to meet these problems, that science must be a part of every primary education, and that every schoolmaster must be a center of genuine scientific knowledge gained through personal acquaintance with the facts.<sup>4</sup>

Quite an order in 1860, when the Committee of 1851 had found two and one-half percent of the private school teachers still signing their census returns with a mark!<sup>5</sup> Even the tutors of some repute, or the fathers with Cambridge degrees, such as the Reverend Brontë<sup>6</sup>, could scarcely achieve this. The public school was apparently doing well just to teach the three R's.

The novels reveal that Pip went to an evening school taught by an old lady who also kept a little store in the same room. He didn't learn very much, for the old lady used to go to sleep most of the time. But he did learn the alphabet, and he was very proud when he found he could put the letters together to make words.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>5</sup> Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens. His Tragedy and Triumph, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1952, Vol. I, p. 291.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel McChord Crothers, Children of Dickens, p. 20.

The effort to learn to read, at least well enough to read the Bible, extended to adults. In Adam Bede, an old schoolmaster took adult students, men eighteen to thirty years of age, into his home and taught them to read, to write, and to do sums.<sup>7</sup> Devil's Dust in Sybil learned to read in the factory school and seized upon books as a means of escape from his degradation.<sup>8</sup>

Amy Cruse tells us that soon after the Queen's accession, a class of readers arose whose numbers increased through the '40's—people who wanted romances and escape from their humdrum lives, who read cheap newspapers, such as the Police Gazette and Lloyd's Penny Weekly Miscellany. They read avidly accounts of crimes and stories where virtue was rewarded and crime punished, but where the villain was still the most interesting character. Miss Cruse says, "Even when we reach the decent workingman we shall discover only here and there a reader"—a class of workmen striving to elevate themselves by perusing Newton, Locke, Watts, Shelley, Carlyle. Alton Locke is typical of this book-hungry city worker.<sup>9</sup>

The reading of novels by young people was sharply scrutinized, and many novels were forbidden, cut, or read aloud to them with the objectionable parts deleted. An example of the novels handled in this way is The Three Musketeers. George Eliot was expurgated or forbidden. Poetry was especially questionable and Byron was definitely taboo. Virgil and Milton held no reassurance, according to Miss Cruse, and Shakespeare must be

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<sup>7</sup> George Eliot, Adam Bede, Dadd, Mead and Co., New York, 1943, p. 179.

<sup>8</sup> Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Reading, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

read from Bowdler's edition.<sup>10</sup>

Such care extended to boys in private schools as well as to girls. The accepted private school curriculum for boys included English, mathematics, Latin, French, penmanship, and some history. Samuel Butler records that music received no kind of encouragement at Roughborough.<sup>11</sup> As we find no reference to it in other school programs for boys, we can safely conjecture that it was not included in their curriculum.

The Mill on the Floss is as revealing as any novel of the course of study prescribed for a boy. There is recorded the stern application to Latin Grammar and to Euclid, with the conclusion: "the classics and geometry constitute that culture of the mind which prepared it for the reception of any subsequent crop,"<sup>12</sup> and "all gentlemen learn the same things. Latin is part of the education of a gentleman."<sup>13</sup> To become a gentleman, Tom was exposed to The History of the Devil, by Defoe; Holy Living and Dying, by Taylor; Aesop's Fables; Filippo's Progress; and the dictionary, since there were so few books available. Greek history, Christian doctrine, and Latin literature proved to be of little use to him, since he did not become proficient enough to teach, and it was found that he needed bookkeeping and calculation to enable him to earn a living.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 63-39.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Butler, The Way of All Flesh, p. 183.

<sup>12</sup> George Eliot, The Mill On The Floss, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York, n.d., p. 127. Each subsequent reference to this novel will be to this same edition.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

Heggie is a satisfactory example of a girl whose alert mind should have received the effort wasted on her brother. Not satisfied to learn only drawing and embroidery, she taught herself Latin and Euclid. Jane Eyre, in addition to the piano and drawing, studied Goldsmith's History of Rome and Gulliver's Travels, and became proficient in French.

George Eliot was fortunate in the teachers she had in the village boarding schools which she attended. She made the most of the meager education offered to girls in those days, and, using her excellent mind, became a self-educated woman. Charlotte Brontë was taught reading, writing, and arithmetic by her father. Then she and her sisters were turned over to their aunt, Miss Bronwell, to be taught the household arts, while Reverend Brontë taught Patrick Latin and Greek. But Charlotte learned French at Miss Wooler's and became proficient in the language during her stay in Brussels. These two women were the exceptions rather than the rule, however, for most English girls were satisfied to know music, dancing, painting and embroidery, having little interest in History, geography, grammar, or arithmetic.

Wingfield-Stratford points out: "A feature of the time was the stress laid on accomplishments. References in diaries are continually being made to performing on the harp, trying the new pianoforte, or studying Italian." "Lady Ailesbury, writing in 1810, thus delivers herself: 'I...abominate the modern education of females. The drift of it is to make them artists and nothing else, which, if they are to earn their bread, might be useful. The mind and morals are never thought about, the head is cramfull of rubbish.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Esme Wingfield-Stratford, Those Earnest Victorians, p. 20.

Of all the "females," only the governess seems to have needed to earn her bread by using her brain, and even she was not expected to know very much. Fine needlework was prized more highly by her employer than a knowledge of science. Jane Eyre needed to be able to paint, play and sing, net purses, and read French books, but neither she nor her charges were expected to want to learn more. Too eager a thirst for knowledge was not a womanly quality, and as such would not attract a husband. As Anthony Trollope pointed out, the instruction a girl needed was how to please her future husband—how to darn, make good tea, dress neatly, and keep the buttons sewed on.<sup>16</sup>

This attitude prevailed far into the century. The formation of the Governesses Benevolent Association in 1841 and the opening of Queen's College for the training of governesses in 1847 were steps toward the improvement of the status of women teachers. By 1862 it was generally recognized that better education of women was the real key to improved conditions for governesses, and the growing tendency to train teachers for jobs caused "governessing to grow into a profession instead of a misfortune."<sup>17</sup> But it had taken more than half the Victorian era to achieve this.

In general, we can safely conclude that the curriculum was limited to the barest of necessities for the poorer classes and to dabbling in the arts and various ladylike accomplishments for the girls, and that it extended to popular classical education for the boys of the upper classes.

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<sup>16</sup> Anthony Trollope, Orley Farm, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1950, p. 294.

<sup>17</sup> Wanda Neff, Victorian Working Women, Columbia University Press, New York, 1929, p. 178.



## CHAPTER VI

### TEACHING METHODS OF THE VICTORIANS

Although the greatest need of the nineteenth century teachers was a better knowledge of the subject matter, an improvement in their teaching methods would have been helpful, too. The material which they did know was passed along to their charges in some very unusual ways, indeed.

Most ridiculous of these was Mr. Squeers' method of teaching—if we may dignify it with that term. Who can ever forget the ludicrousness of his instruction in "bottinney"—by having the pupil weed the garden. Or his definition of a horse—with the accompanying instruction to "go out and rub him down." "C-l-e-a-n" and "w-i-n-d-e-r" soon spelled a job for the unfortunate boy who drew those words for his lesson.<sup>1</sup>

Such a far-fetched system is, of course, typically Dickens, and we feel that some of the methods he describes stem from the unfortunate experiences he himself had suffered. For instance, Dickens had attended a Dame School, upstairs over a dyer's shop, kept by a grim old creature who was the later model for Mrs. Pipchin. When Charles showed puzzlement over his lesson, instead of help, he received a poke in the head with a hard knuckle.<sup>2</sup> His later experience at Mr. Giles' school was a fine one, for Mr. Giles proved to be a kind tutor. His two and one-half years at Wellington House Academy were somewhat better than the average, although here the sensitive Dickens was more impressed with the sadistic punishment given by the headmaster, the canings and smiting

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens, Vol. I, p. 13.

of palms with rulers, than with the subjects and methods of teachings.<sup>3</sup>

These unhappy experiences come out in David Copperfield, when, under the watchful eye of Mr. and Miss Murdstone, David became "sullen, dull and dogged," and could not do the "appalling sums," nor recite from memory the grammar, history, and geography.<sup>4</sup>

The first school David attended reflected the pictures Dickens held in his mind of the Academy. Here David was subjected to the humiliation of wearing a sign fastened to his back reading, "Take care of him. He bites." The cruelty of his having to wear this sign before his new friends, the canings, the delight Mr. Creakle took in seeing the boys writhing and crying, the headmaster's catering to the wealthier pupils and failing to stand back of the teachers—all these episodes probably stemmed from Dickens' unhappiness at Wellington House Academy.<sup>5</sup>

In Our Mutual Friend Dickens presents pupils half asleep or in a state of waking stupefaction under the supervision of "teachers animated solely by good intentions—no idea of execution—a lamentable jumble was the upshot of their kind of endeavors." Adult pupils were taught to read from the New Testament. They had no idea of the meaning. It was "a jumble of a school where:...spirits jumbled very night." But on Sunday night, the author informs us, the unfortunate infants were handed over to the proudest and worst of all the teachers. She would hold forth upon the "Sepulchre," using the word five hundred times but never once hinting at what it meant, while the poor little half-sick,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 47, 48.

<sup>4</sup> Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 66-86.

sleepy children were exchanging diseases. Even in "The Jumble," as Dickens christened it, an exceptionally sharp boy could learn something and impart it better than the teachers, could rise to become a Jumble teacher, and from there could go on to a better school.<sup>6</sup>

This better school, newly built, was like many others throughout the country. Here the schoolmistress, Miss Peacher, required on-the-spot conjugation of verbs used in ordinary conversation.<sup>7</sup> This catechism of pupils is an excellent example of satirical humor, but as E. Salter Davies points out: "Headstone (the decent school master who became a murderous villain) and Miss Peacher...represent a type of elementary teacher that was doubtless familiar enough in Dickens' day, but is now happily almost extinct."<sup>8</sup>

A new theory of educating young minds impelled Dickens to write ironically in Hard Times: "Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts. Nothing else will ever be of any service to them."<sup>9</sup> And in a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom Thomas Gradgrind observed Mr. McChoakumchild teaching. The author remarks that this teacher and some one hundred forty others had lately been turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles like so many pianoforte legs. Each had been put through an immense variety of subject matter, had answered volumes of head-breaking questions. "If he had only learnt a

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<sup>6</sup> Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, Book the Second, Ch. I., p. 214.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Introduction, p. xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Dickens, Hard Times, p. 1.

little less, now infinitely better he might have taught much more." And Dickens bewails "the mechanical art and mystery of educating the reason without stooping to the cultivation of the sentiments and affections."<sup>10</sup> His comment that children must never wonder about anything is reminiscent of the poke on the head with a knuckle which he had received in his first school.

Dickens' "happy time" with Mr. Giles is reflected in the new school to which David Copperfield was sent, which was "gravely ordered on a sound system," and ruled by democratic principles. The headmaster was the "kindest of men" to whom David became deeply attached. The boys were encouraged to be good students, to enjoy a good athletic program and plenty of liberty, and to become well thought of by the villagers. Under this happy system, David became the head boy in the school and was almost sorry when his schooldays came to an end.<sup>11</sup>

Thackeray is another author who reveals his own unhappiness in school in his later novels. Although, as Walker points out, "the schools found no reformer in Thackeray,"<sup>12</sup> indirectly he was pointing out the weaknesses of England's educational system in Vanity Fair. Rebecca's haphazard method of teaching left much to be desired. Her method was to leave her pupils alone, ignoring the younger girl whose interest in nature study was never encouraged by her teacher. The brighter pupil interested Rebecca, and they read together Smollett, Fielding, Gray, and Voltaire because Rebecca herself enjoyed the reading.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>11</sup> Dickens, David Copperfield, pp. 230-264.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh Walker, The Literature of the Victorian Era, p. 698.

Thackeray's picture of Swishtail Academy with its hazing and bullying was copied from his unhappy experiences at Charterhouse, but time mellowed his picture and in The Newcomes he describes Founders' Day at Grey Friars with a kindly nostalgia.<sup>13</sup>

Rudyard Kipling put this same nostalgic flavor into Stalky and Co., recalling little of the academic work except the term-end exams, but remembering the pranks, the social contacts with the teachers, and the punishments meted out justly and accepted as being deserved.<sup>14</sup>

George Meredith shows how the methods of Richard Feverel's father failed, as the parent sought to mould the boy from without, instead of allowing him to develop naturally from within.

Thomas Hughes suggests indirectly that the private school could be improved. He reveals that the one Tom Brown attended was kept by a gentleman with another as second master, but most of the work, and especially the discipline, was in the hands of two ushers, one of whom was always with the boys. These ushers were not gentlemen, were poorly educated, and were interested only in gaining a livelihood. They encouraged tale-bearing and favored the big boys, making them into bullies. Hughes makes a thoughtful suggestion when he says, "Let who will hear their lessons, but let a superior person be with them at play and at rest."<sup>15</sup>

At Rugby, Tom found the fair treatment and the punishment meted out by the Doctor to be just and good. The talks, chapel exercises, singing, and prayers were inspirational. The use of psychology in giving Tom a younger boy to defend was evidence of the thoughtful administration

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 687.

<sup>14</sup> Kipling, Stalky and Co., pp. 153-154.

<sup>15</sup> Hughes, Tom Brown's School Days, p. 62.

of the school, as was the supervised study arranged for the lower forms.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps we can look upon Charlotte Brontë as the author who presented the most vivid picture of what a well-ordered school should be like. There is no way of measuring the effect of her work, but the schools she described in Shirley, The Professor, and Villette, based on her Brussels teaching experience, must have stimulated some reflective thinking in England.

In Shirley,—a pleasant schoolroom with books in order; a school feast with children and teachers in holiday attire filling the churchyard and garden; the rector, scholars and teachers all enjoying ample food, music and a light-hearted good time—here is a picture far more pleasant than any given us by the men of the period.<sup>17</sup>

In The Professor, Miss Brontë must have startled her reader with some new ideas: "it is often well to act on one's own judgment and to lead parents rather than to be led by them;" and "the fitness of a professor is not a matter of age."<sup>18</sup> Proof of a young man's ability in handling his charges was noted by the visiting principal who observed the professor's way of seizing the upper hand, of getting command of his class and being able to cope with a few "smart-aleck" girls who had made plans to embarrass him. Not only was there admiration for his ability to handle his pupils, but also for his method of scaling his teaching down to his pupils' intellect.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 117-209.

<sup>17</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Shirley, pp. 247, 367, 501.

<sup>18</sup> Charlotte Brontë, The Professor, Bigelow, Brown and Co., New York, n.d., p. 67.

Miss Brontë paints her most vivid picture of a private school in Villette, a picture both pleasant and disturbing. Although there were many things wrong with Mme. Heger's school, Miss Brontë was still able to say that "many an austere English school-mistress would do vastly well to imitate her."<sup>19</sup>

"A strange, frolicsome, noisy little world was this school: great pains were taken to hide chains with flowers...Each mind was reared in slavery; but, to prevent reflection from dwelling on this fact, every pretext for physical recreation was seized and made the most of. There, as elsewhere, the Church strove to bring up her children robust in body, feeble in soul, fat, ruddy, hale, joyous, ignorant, unthinking, unquestioning."<sup>20</sup>

Pupils could not be pressed to do too much; long and severe mental application they would not bear. Whereas an English girl would bind herself to a task till completion, these girls just said it was too hard or too boring. They would bear any amount of sarcasm or wounds to their self-respect, but they would stage a small riot over three additional lines to a lesson. They were "gaining knowledge by a marvelously easy method...not making very rapid progress in anything; taking it easy." The real head labor was done by the teachers to save the pupils. It was "a foreign school of which the life, movement, and variety made it a complete and most charming contrast to many English institutions of the same kind."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Villette, p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

Madame's system was to see to the physical well-being of the pupils, keep them happy, and provide abundant good food, pleasure and holidays. She maintained her own unbroken popularity with the pupils at any cost to the teachers, taking to herself only what was pleasant and requiring her lieutenants to take care of any annoying crisis. If any teacher had appealed to Madame for help she would have been sent away. Teachers could not be weak or wavering or the pupils would rebel and would persecute the teacher, who would be forced to leave. There were so many teachers available in Brussels at this time that Madame would have found it much easier to get replacements than to deal with an unhappy situation. She had her spies and ruled by heartless espionage, but as she maintained an outwardly charming attitude her patrons were satisfied. This satisfaction reached its grand climax each year in the birthday fête in Madame's honor—a commend performance in which everyone had her special part.<sup>22</sup>

The only genuine working period of the school year was the last two months, which were given over to preparation for examinations preceding the distribution of prizes. Then everyone worked hard getting ready for a showy exhibition for the public, and all means were fair to this end.<sup>23</sup> Examination day was a grave day of importance, and the results presumably were satisfactory since Madame Heger's school continued to thrive, and Charlotte Brontë herself returned there to teach for the sum of sixteen pounds per year.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 83, 94, 149.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 179.



One voice which spoke out strongly in England for a Christian education for even the poorest class was that of Tom H., who said in the Prefatory Memoir to Alton Locke:

I know all that is doing in the way of education-, etc., but I do assert that the disease of degradation has been for the last 40 years increasing faster than the remedy. And I believe, from experience, that when you put workmen into human dwellings, and give them a Christian education, so far from wishing discontentedly to rise out of their class, or to level others to it, exactly the opposite takes place. They become sensible of the dignity of work, and they begin to see their labor as a true calling in God's Church... 'If your friend wishes to see what can be made of workmen's brains, let him, in God's name, go down to Harrow Weald, and there see Mr. Munro—see what he has done with his own national schoolboys. I have his opinion as to the capabilities of those minds, which we, alas!, now so sadly neglect.'

Each man has power to educate and use whatever faculties or talents God has given him, be they less or more. This is the divine equality which the Church proclaims and nothing else proclaims as she does.<sup>24</sup>

These equal powers and faculties were not being educated very well in nineteenth century England, mostly for lack of teachers adequately trained for the job.

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Kingsley, Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet, Macmillan and Co., London, 1911, Prefatory Memoir by Tom H.

## CHAPTER VII

### DISCIPLINE IN THE VICTORIAN SCHOOL

Had the Victorian teachers' methods been better, their discipline probably would not have been so severe. Lacking proper knowledge of subject matter and methods of interesting active young minds, many a teacher resorted to brutality to keep control of his charges. Bored with much learning by rote and dull reading aloud, many a pupil invited the excitement of punishment to relieve the monotony of hours in school.

The extreme brutality of Mr. Squeers to the unfortunate and friendless children in his care again provides the most horrible literary example of viciousness. From the time Squeers started on the journey to his school the cruelty began. Ill treatment of sick boys, little food while Squeers ate his fill, one drink for the entire group, no warmth although the little boys cried with cold,—the torture of such a journey to the children can only be imagined.

Arrived at the school, the children found that further cruelties were the custom. Beating of the boys whose fathers were behind in their pay, canings for writing critically of the school, taking of gifts and letters from the boys and using their money as his own,—all these and many other injustices were the rule rather than the exception. Beatings and canings until Squeers was too tired to lift the cane were in store for any boy who went against him. The poor children had no way to report this brutality, since they were only allowed to write a circular home at Christmastime, saying they "never were so happy and hope they may never be sent for."<sup>1</sup> One of these "happy" boys sneezed one day and

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<sup>1</sup> Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, p. 48.

"Mr. Squeers knocked him off the trunk with a blow on one side of the face and knocked him on again with a blow on the other."<sup>2</sup> Again, Squeers "looked at the little boy to see whether he was doing anything he could beat him for. As he happened not to be doing anything at all, he merely boxed his ears and told him not to do it again."<sup>3</sup> Such was the treatment of the children,—while Squeers put on a soft voice and an air of careful consideration for his boys in the presence of visitors.

David Copperfield had been sent to "the school where they broke the boy's ribs with whopping,"<sup>4</sup> where "a large majority of the boys (especially the smaller ones) were hit with the cane—half the establishment was writhing and crying before the day's work began and almost all before the day was over," and where "Mr. Creakle had a delight in cutting at the boys—like the satisfaction of a craving appetite."<sup>5</sup>

Dickens had encountered this punishment himself in Mr. William Jones' school, where the teacher enjoyed smiting palms with rulers, and drawing the boys' pants tight and caning them. Mr. Jones punished the day pupils less than the boarding pupils, for those who returned home each evening would tell their parents of the brutal treatment.<sup>6</sup>

Other authors who reported canings and infliction of bodily pain include Thackeray, who remarked that such bullying and torture were the accepted thing and "it would be ungentlemanlike to resist it."<sup>7</sup> Kipling

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens, Vol. I., p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> Thackeray, Vanity Fair, p. 56.

reported canings in Stalley and Co. Thomas Hughes, perhaps, gives the most authentic picture of accepted forms of punishment in use in private institutions for the better class of boys. Students at Rugby were "flogged for direct and willful breaches of rules," "flogged for bullying," and "thrashed so as to punish and not have to compel because they saw some good in him."<sup>8</sup> Hughes believed thrashing is good for some boys, and that severe physical pain is the only way to deal with some cases.

Rugby, like most other private schools, had what Hughes terms a "double set of masters--the lawful ones and the tyrants, responsible to no one."<sup>9</sup> These tyrants were the "fags" who put the younger students through such severe hazing that by our present-day standards, administrative interference would seem necessary. Boxing was recommended for settling arguments, but rarely did the lawful masters take a hand.

Punishment of a less brutal nature was given to girls, but often with more deep-seated effect. The humiliations which Charlotte Brontë records in Jane Eyre probably marked sensitive girls more permanently than the canings administered to the boys. These humiliating punishments included forcing a large girl to stand in the center of the room, making Jane stand on a stool for half an hour, not permitting the girls to speak to the guilty pupil, calling the girls by their surnames in an unpleasant manner, placing the word "slattern" on a girl's forehead and pinning untidily folded articles to her shoulder because she was not neat enough. For lapses of attention or errors in pronunciation the girls were sent to the foot of the class. The young ladies wore backboards,

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<sup>8</sup> Hughes, Tom Brown's School Days, pp. 206-208.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

and sat in stocks as a form of punishment, or they were switched on the neck with a bunch of twigs. A bread and water diet was the punishment for blotting an exercise. The school discipline was so strict that all must rise as at a signal whenever the head entered. Large girls were permitted to abuse smaller ones and coax them out of their share of food, so that "fagging," as it was practiced in the boys' schools, must have had its counterpart in female establishments.

Many and severe were the rules laid down by the school's governing board. But probably more cruel was the fear planted in the young minds that their souls would be lost, that hell and eternal damnation were in store for their wicked young hearts. They were so unhappy in their earthly state that dying young was to be hoped for, since Eternity would surely be better if they would prepare themselves by prayers, Bible reading, and the cultivation of a humble attitude.

The effort of the Lowood Board was to make their girls humble, genteel, and precise. They were to be "hardy, patient, self-denying."<sup>10</sup> Humiliation was the weapon "to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh."<sup>11</sup> The desire that the Lowood girls follow plain and simple ways extended so far as to forbid curled hair,—even if it curled naturally.

This extreme program designed for the building of character in poor orphans did not extend to all classes. George Eliot's novels show the use of extra lessons as punishment—an extra page of Virgil for slamming a door, for example. In fact, a longer lesson was a favorite punishment even for the boys in private schools.

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<sup>10</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

The efforts to build character in both the public and private schools of the era were successful, according to Wingfield-Stratford. "The efforts of the great reforming headmasters had not extended to the intellectualizing of the public schools. It is seldom that there is supply without demand, and the parental demand was not for intellect, but for character. And character the public schools did supply to an extent unapproachable anywhere else in Europe. The large amount of power delegated to the boys themselves, under the monitorial system, engendered habits of command and responsibility."<sup>12</sup>

With this statement from an eminent authority, we must conclude that the system, which included monitors, fags, hazing, and many other questionable practices, helped the English Empire to reach its full growth.

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<sup>12</sup> Euse Wingfield-Stratford, Those Earnest Victorians, p. 279.

## CHAPTER VIII

### VICTORIAN TEACHERS

The teachers of the Victorian era range all the way from Mr. Squeers of Nicholas Nickleby to the well-loved Ruth in fiction, and from Charles Dickens' first "grim old creature" of a teacher to Miss Wooller, who inspired Charlotte Bronte in real life. The consideration of these instructors, their position in life, and their contribution to their charges, must include the public and private school teachers, the tutors, and the governesses.

The non-literary material reveals particularly the poor preparation of the public and private school teachers. The Select Committee of 1835 had revealed that the Dame Schools were presided over by women and a few old men, and the Committee flatly stated that "in 1835, in Manchester, not a single Dame School teacher was educated for her employment."<sup>1</sup> And we further recall that "as late as 1851, two and one-half percent of the schoolmasters and mistresses in private schools signed their census returns with a mark."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, in 1851, twenty-five Training Colleges had been established and 6,000 pupil teachers were being trained for the work. Craik states that these training colleges had secured the devoted energy of men of great ability, but in spite of this, the education offered was very narrow. "The teaching of the schools was in the hands of men who had

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Schilling, Human Dignity and The Great Victorians, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Vol. I, p. 291.

scarcely any training, and who had often turned to the work because all other work had turned away from them."<sup>3</sup> Older pupils were set to teaching the younger ones, and after their period of apprenticeship, they passed on to one of the Training Colleges, often on scholarships. Thus, England tried to lift the educational standards by encouraging promising elementary pupils, and by assisting teachers in the Training Colleges to improve their knowledge and return to the schools to lift the standards there. The plan succeeded in adding a current of vitality to the educational system.<sup>4</sup>

The Commission of 1858 reported the schools still in the hands of untrained teachers, "recruited only from the ranks of those who had failed in other paths of life."<sup>5</sup> Nearly a third of the children of the country were going to school to teachers who were "dragging on a miserable and hopeless existence of the hardest drudgery."<sup>6</sup> The Revised Code sought to change all this, and in doing so occasionally dealt a hard blow to a decent Dame's School.<sup>7</sup> In demanding trained teachers in the public schools the State took a firm step forward, even though the training in no way ensured efficiency in the schoolroom. The examination of pupils periodically by a State examiner was therefore instituted, but the pressure on pupils and teachers alike produced a bad result.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Craik, The State and Its Relation to Education, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 83.



On the whole, however, the preparation and effectiveness of the teachers improved following 1870, and by the fourth quarter of the century much had been done to correct the worst evils of the schools and the instructors.<sup>9</sup>

Novels of the period did not neglect mention of the public school teacher, but refer more often to the private school teachers and to the governesses. Thomas Hughes, in *Tom Brown's School Days*, says the fundamental difference between the private and public school is that the private school believes in constant supervision outside of school hours. "Let who will hear their lessons, but let a superior person be with them at work and play."<sup>10</sup> Hughes then remarks that, although the private school he attended was kept by a gentleman, with another as second master, most of the work was in the hands of two ushers, who were not gentlemen, who were poorly educated, who were there only to make a living, who encouraged tale-bearing, and who turned the big boys into bullies.<sup>11</sup>

Charles Dickens attended a private school, Wellington House Academy, for about two and one-half years. It was "somewhat better than the average school of its class because its Welsh owner, Mr. William Jones, though no great scholar himself, had the judgment to employ competent masters."<sup>12</sup> Such private schools for both boys and girls were scattered all over England, making a modest living for their owners. In the case of girls' schools, there were so many that a large number

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Schilling, Human Dignity and The Great Victorians, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Hughes, Tom Brown's School Days, p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens, p. 48.

failed. In fact, Charles Dickens' mother sought to start such a school, with no experience and no training, but there was no response to the elaborate sign which she had made to advertise her new venture.<sup>13</sup> Even Charlotte Brontë, with her well-trained mind and foreign school experience, received not a single letter of inquiry in response to her advertisements for pupils.<sup>14</sup>

St. John Rivers helped Jane Eyre establish a private school of good repute. There were undoubtedly many such throughout the country. Their organization and control suffered by comparison with private schools on the continent, if we can take Charlotte Brontë's opinion. In Brussels, Miss Brontë saw a well-ordered school for boys and one for girls, which she describes in Villette. Miss Brontë says of the headmistress, "Many an austere English school-mistress would do vastly well to imitate her-and I believe many would be glad to do so, if exacting English parents would let them."<sup>15</sup>

But some of the English parents were not at all exacting. George Eliot stated in The Mill On The Floss, "The schoolmasters who are not clergymen are a very low set of men generally...men who have failed in other trades most likely."<sup>16</sup> Samuel Butler remarked that the headmaster moulded boys after himself. Those who did not appreciate his effort were given no chance; any boy who did not worship him and follow blindly was destined to unhappiness in school.<sup>17</sup> In describing Swishtail Seminary

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Lane, The Brontë Story, p. 204.

<sup>15</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Villette, p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> Butler, Way of All Flesh, p. 153.

for boys, Thackeray recorded much bullying by the teachers and much hazing of younger boys with the approval of the teachers. "Torture in a public school is as much licensed as the knout in Russia," Thackeray remarked.<sup>18</sup> "Blackening shoes, toasting bread, and flogging in general were offices deemed to be necessary parts of every young Englishman's education," he said.<sup>19</sup>

How mild these criticisms seem as we approach the one whose voice cried out the loudest against the low-principled schoolmasters of the time. David Copperfield, sent to a school near London, "the school where they break the boys' ribs,"<sup>20</sup> recalls the cruelty of his reception there, the lack of understanding on the part of all but one of the teachers. In recalling the bully, Mr. Creakle, David (and Dickens) says, "I am sure when I think of the fellow now, my blood rises against him with the disinterested indignation I should feel if I could have known all about him without having ever been in his power; but it rises hotly, because I knew him to have been an incapable brute, who had no more right to be possessed of the great trust he held than to be Lord High Admiral."<sup>21</sup> Fortunately, David later went to a school which was "gravely ordered on a sound system,"<sup>22</sup> where the headmaster was a kind man, where the boys lived according to democratic principles with plenty of liberty. Here David formed a close attachment for the head of the school and was so happy that he

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<sup>18</sup> Thackeray, Vanity Fair, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 567.

<sup>20</sup> Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

was almost sorry when his school days came to an end.<sup>23</sup>

But Dickens reserved his most scathing description for Squeers, head of Dotheboys Hall. In the preface to Nicholas Nickleby, Dickens tells how he became interested as a boy in a pupil who came home from a private school with a suppurated abscess which the teacher had ripped open with an inky pen-knife. This incident stimulated his interest in schools and provided the motivating force for his visit, incognito, to learn just how bad the schools really were. Such schools as Dotheboys Hall certainly existed; such masters as Squeers were numerous; such atrocities had been heard of by others. Edgar Johnson states, "Dickens never claimed, in fact, to be a pioneer who ferreted out hidden evils. The abuses he exposed had been heard of by thousands. It was part of his strength that what he told his readers they already knew to be true."<sup>24</sup>

No young man with any sort of sensibilities could be employed by such a person as Squeers, and Nicholas Nickleby could not remain long in an establishment which he characterized as "a den where sordid cruelty...runs wanton, and youthful misery stalks precocious; where the lightness of childhood shrinks into the heaviness of age."<sup>25</sup> The pay for this position was five pounds per year; Nicholas left to take a position as a private tutor at five shillings per week. But the life of a tutor was not pleasant either, if we may judge by Charlotte Brontë, who in *Shirley* has a young man say, "A tutor I will never be again..."

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>24</sup> Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens His Tragedy and Triumph, Vol. I, p. 291.

<sup>25</sup> Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, p. 335.

Not again will I sit habitually at another's table--no more be the appendage of a family."<sup>26</sup>

These male "appendages" to the families of the well-to-do and upper middle-class are not so frequent as their female counterpart, the governess. Boys were often sent to schools, but girls were usually instructed at home, and in the nineteenth century the governess became a firmly established institution in families of clergymen, farmers, and tradesmen, as well as the higher classes. The importance of the governess is proved both by the census figures and by her frequent appearance as heroine or minor figure in the novels of the period.<sup>27</sup>

The origin of the governess as a distinct and separate class of working woman was the servant who became the nursemaid and evolved into the teacher. Often these women had had no training, and were little more than paid errand girls. Some, with a smattering of education, were a shade above servants, although sometimes paid less. In this position of "neither fish nor fowl" they were snubbed both by their employers and by the servant class. Treated badly by their pupils, mistreated by the mothers, relegated to attic rooms with no company, no friends, and no recreation, they lived a lonely life--the worst which could befall a girl if we may judge by references from the novels which sought to present her plight. There was even a lack of books and reading materials for the governess in many households. Rebecca Sharp recorded: "I had my choice of amusement between a volume of sermons and a pamphlet on

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<sup>26</sup> Charlotte Bronte, Shirley, p. 501.

<sup>27</sup> Wanda Neff, Victorian Working Women, p. 153.



the corn laws."<sup>28</sup> Drab, indeed, was the life of the teacher.

The Brontës probably did more than any other writers to expose the dreary existence of the governess. Charlotte and Emily had hated their experiences as school teachers, both calling it "drudgery." As they did not naturally care for children, teaching was anything but a "delightful task" to them.<sup>29</sup>

Charlotte did not care for her experience as a governess, especially that feeling of being neither a servant nor a part of the family. Her experiences in Brussels, though more to her liking, were not pleasant enough to make her accept a teacher's post in Manchester at 100 pounds a year. She had earned as little as 15 pounds, and 20 pounds with 4 pounds deducted for laundry, so, for the times, the Manchester offer was good. But Charlotte declined and took to writing novels instead.

Many another young woman was not so fortunate. The daughters of impoverished gentlemen and of clergymen had little else to turn to for a livelihood. The girl who must follow this profession had no illusions about her future. Charlotte Brontë wrote to Mrs. Gaskell: "I hate and abhor the very thought of governessship...no one but myself is aware how utterly averse my whole mind and nature are for the employment."<sup>30</sup>

Jane Eyre expected to be treated coldly and stiffly. The tutor in Shirley was treated with dignity, but not drawn into the circle. He occupied a humble position, labeled as "servile."<sup>31</sup> The position of

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<sup>28</sup> Thackeray, Vanity Fair, p. 91.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Lane, The Brontë Story, pp. 135, 150.

<sup>30</sup> Wanda Neff, Victorian Working Women, p. 157.

<sup>31</sup> Charlotte Brontë, Shirley, p. 367.

teacher or governess was called "going into service" in The Mill on the Floss.<sup>32</sup> Rebecca Sharp, perhaps, resented this servile position more than any other heroine. She complained that for two years she suffered insults and outrage as an articulated pupil in the young ladies' academy she attended, only to face the hard lot of a governess where "I suppose I shall be treated most contemptuously. Still, I must bear my hard lot as well as I can." In reporting the contempt in which she was held, Rebecca said she "was determined to make myself agreeable—is it not a poor governess's duty?" And again she says, "We poor governesses are used to slights of this sort."<sup>33</sup>

This contempt was not imagined on Rebecca's part, for governesses were objects of scorn from both ends of the social scale. In Vanity Fair, one young man says, "Hang it, the family's low enough already, without her. A governess is all very well, but I'd rather have a lady for my sister-in-law...Let her know her station." The housekeeper at Amelia's remarks, "I don't trust them governesses; they're neither one thing nor t'other. They give themselves the airs and hupstarts of ladies, and their wages are no better than you and me."<sup>34</sup>

Although part of the discontent of the governesses came from their position in the household, much of it came from the incorrigibility of their charges. As the boys delighted in persecuting their tutors, so the girls thought the governesses should be good-natured in the face of all sorts of impudent behavior. The young teacher was at

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<sup>32</sup> Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Thackeray, Vanity Fair, pp. 23, 79, 114, 157.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pp. 73, 76.



the mercy of the children. Bullied and teased, she often was not physically equal to the task of managing them, as witness Anne Bronte, who describes the children's outrageous behavior in Agnes Grey.<sup>35</sup> In Pennia, Frank Clavering kicked his governess's shins so fiercely that he completely overmastered her. More often than not the employers did not want their children punished or forced, and failed to support the governess in her efforts to get better response to lessons, as well as better behavior. Governesses were ordered to walk behind their charges a few paces, were sent from the dinner table crying, were sent on menial errands, and were dismissed if their charges capriciously became tired of their lessons. With all the hardships attendant to this profession, it is small wonder that the question was asked in Nicholas Nickleby of an orphan about to be apprenticed as a teacher: "You have not been brought up too delicately for that, I hope!...You must try it and if the life is too hard perhaps dress-making or tambour-work will come lighter."<sup>36</sup> Wingfield-Stratford says, "If a wife left her husband, it was assumed that this could only be with a blackguard of the deepest dye...who would shortly abandon her, penniless, to the Thames or the schoolroom."<sup>37</sup> However, a few happy governesses are on record. Ruth, who won the children's love and respect and who was invited to join the family circle occasionally, is one of the rare examples.<sup>38</sup>

To be able to fill the position of a governess one needed to be

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<sup>35</sup> Wanda Neff, Victorian Working Women, p. 169.

<sup>36</sup> Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> Euse Wingfield-Stratford, Those Earnest Victorians, p. 163.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, Ruth, Oxford University Press, London, 1906, p. 111.

qualified to teach a variety of subjects. The heads of schools wrote letters of recommendation which listed more accomplishments than an employer had a right to expect. Such a letter as Miss Finkerton wrote to recommend Rebecca Sharp will serve as an example:

Either of these two young ladies is perfectly qualified to instruct in Greek, Latin, and the rudiments of Hebrew; in mathematics and history; in Spanish, French, Italian, and geography; in music, vocal and instrumental; in dancing without the aid of a master; and in the elements of natural sciences. In the use of the globes both are proficient.

The additional information is given that one girl also knows the Syriac language and the elements of constitutional law, but as she is only eighteen and of pleasing appearance, perhaps she would be objectionable. It is suggested that older ones, pitted with smallpox, may be more acceptable.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the schoolroom activities, these young girls often had to take full charge of the family needlework, sewing far into the night. Small wonder that a Governesses' Benevolent Association was formed, largely as a result of the Victorian novels and articles appearing in Punch and other periodicals, to afford some security for these unfortunate middle-class women.

The entire system under which these men and women worked to instruct the youth of England was unfortunate both for them and for their charges.

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<sup>39</sup> Thackeray, Vanity Fair, p. 111.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE EFFECT OF EDUCATION ON THE VICTORIAN NOVEL

The extension of education to the lower classes resulted in a wider reading public and a growing demand for reading material. There was a greater interest in newspapers, magazines, and novels. Matthew Arnold stated in 1884, "The influence of poetry and literature appears at this moment diminishing rather than increasing. The newspapers have a good deal to do with this. The Times...is a world, and people who read it daily hardly feel the necessity for reading a book....But literature has in itself such powers of attraction that I am not ever anxious about it."<sup>1</sup> That he did not need to be anxious about a decline in reading, especially of the novel, has been amply demonstrated since 1884. In fact, all through the Victorian era the growing literacy of the English people had unlocked the doors of the well-stocked libraries in the big houses of the eighteenth century. Reading, especially aloud, was much in favor.<sup>2</sup>

This widened audience included the middle and lower classes of people who were not educated well enough to cope with complicated material filled with classical references and presented in an intricate form. Therefore, while interest in poetry and other literary forms might be diminishing, the demand for simple novels which all could understand was increasing. This popular demand necessarily lowered

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Huxley, ed., Thoughts on Education. Chosen from the Writings of Matthew Arnold, Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1912, p. 250.

<sup>2</sup> Esme Wingfield-Stratford, Those Earnest Victorians, p. 292.

literary standards.<sup>3</sup>

Although this growing public demanded less sophisticated themes and treatment, they demanded a higher moral tone. Quinlan says this was an era of advance in decency, religion and education, and an era of decline in drunkenness, profanity and vulgarity.<sup>4</sup> In an effort to adhere to the demands of a moral, virtuous people, with whom appearances weighed heavily, writers and publishers alike strove to keep in line with Victorian convention. One of the requirements set by the Victorian reader was that the good must flourish while the wicked perished. "Writers of fiction...flew in the face of experience and morality by contriving that virtue should be rewarded and vice punished."<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps no other novel could meet the demands of the Victorian audience better than Silas Marner. Written in simple language, about plain, country people, it presents as unsophisticated a theme and plot as we are likely to encounter. Free from classical allusions which might hamper reading aloud in the family circle, it meets with forcefulness the demand that good must win over evil. Dunstan and Molly Farren meet their just fates; Godfrey is punished in proportion as he has done wrong; even the old Squire must be deprived of grandchildren as a punishment for his negligence in rearing his own sons. On the other hand, Silas and Eppie achieve pure happiness. Finally, Dolly Winthrop is there to voice the simple philosophy which could guide the Victorian to final happiness. Simple and unaffected, this novel, acclaimed by many as George Eliot's best, was pleasing to the average

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<sup>3</sup> Maurice J. Quinlan, Victorian Prelude, Columbia University Press, New York, 1941, pp. 253-280.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Esme Wingfield-Stratford, Those Earnest Victorians, p. 58.

Victorian, whose judgment of its value is often upheld by modern readers and critics.

The Victorian mind responded favorably to direct appeals to the emotions, and the novels, especially those of Dickens, made use of the emotional approach. Such sentimental scenes as the meeting of Lucie and her father or the death of Lucie's son in A Tale of Two Cities are likely to jar on the modern reader. But we remember that Dickens himself was a very emotional man and that apparently he was writing for an emotion-loving public. That his method was successful is attested by the extreme popularity of his novels and his readings, and there is no knowing how great his influence was in effecting the reforms he sought. Amy Cruse tells us that many abuses were reformed and that much of this was due to the influence of books. Dickens' public was an enormous one. He was popular with all classes and his books brought them together. People were no longer in two classes by the '30's "The spread of education and establishment of free libraries had made a difference in their reading habits. The relation between the Rich and the Poor had entered on a new phase."<sup>6</sup>

This dawning consciousness and deepening concern for the social evils of the time gave rise to the problem novels or novels of purpose, and these became prominent and popular. It is Hugh Walker's opinion that "questions between capital and labour, the evils of the workshop and the factory, the sins of trade unions and horrors of intemperance, when they become the motive of the novels, are apt to beget characters

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<sup>6</sup> Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Reading, p. 150.



which are rather the incarnation of intemperance...than simple human beings. And so far the objection to the novel of purpose is fully justified."<sup>7</sup> From an artistic sense he may be right, but the novel of purpose made its way and justified its existence in Victorian England. Novelists pointed up the conditions which all knew to be present, and what Edgar Johnson says of Dickens may possibly be said of others of the Victorians: "Dickens never claimed, in fact, to be a pioneer who ferreted out hidden evils. The abuses he exposed had been heard of by thousands. It was part of his strength that what he told his readers they already knew to be true."<sup>8</sup> As Dickens' readers were legion, we can rightly conclude that his books and those of other Victorian novelists did influence profoundly the age of reform in England.

One other effect on the novel of the new social attitude must be noted. That is the use of realism in theme, in setting, in dialogue, and in character. Heroes were such people as poor weavers, ordinary factory owners and workmen, or school teachers—the commonplace person rather than the lord of the manor. Of all these characters, one stands out as a distinct new type of heroine—the governess. She appears frequently in the Victorian novel because she could be presented as of genteel background; she could be depicted as oppressed by her employers, her pupils, and the servants in the house. Often she was insulted, slighted, made miserable. But love could come to her; she could even marry her employer and be raised to the aristocracy. Such a romantic figure could not be overlooked in the emotional atmosphere of the novel;

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<sup>7</sup> Hugh Walker, The Literature of the Victorian Era, p. 957.

<sup>8</sup> Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens, Vol. I, p. 291.

and how easily she fitted into the formula of virtue rewarded!

Often real governesses turned author and used their pens to describe the lot of these Victorian working women. Examples are Anne Bronte, Agnes Grey; Lady Blessington, The Governess; Mrs. Jameson, essays on governesses and other working women; and Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre. The last-named did the most toward making the governess an intelligent heroine, creating a woman of dignity and force. "The result of the wealth of literary material concerning the governess between 1832 and 1850 was a wider interest in all classes of working women... That labour should be no disgrace was the final accomplishment of the governess in literature."<sup>9</sup>

By way of conclusion, we may say then, that these were the effects of the new education on the Victorian novel: a wider reading public composed of people of simpler tastes who demanded less sophisticated writing; somewhat lower literary standards; higher moral standards; inclusion of realistic presentation of social problems; and the introduction of a new type of hero and heroine.

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<sup>9</sup> Wanda Hefl, Victorian Working Women, p. 184.



## CHAPTER X

### CONCLUSION

Of all the Englishmen who helped to crystallize educational ideas the two who probably contributed the most were John Locke and Matthew Arnold. Locke was termed, by Thomas P. Neill, the seventeenth century Angelo Patri,<sup>1</sup> whose advanced opinions in the field of educational theory and method are still among the objectives aimed at, rather than achieved, by educational reformers.<sup>2</sup> Locke's purpose was the individual education of a gentleman's son, not the formation of a school system, but Some Thoughts Concerning Education, published in 1692, is a landmark along the road of educational progress. Matthew Arnold applied many of Locke's ideas for the training of the individual to the education of the group.

Arnold, as the inspector of English schools and the investigator of educational systems on the continent, was a critic of educational ideas and methods who could appreciate the best in them while exposing their defects. His voice deserved to be heard more than any other in nineteenth century England, and yet he long regarded himself as one crying in the wilderness.

Yet in the course of years his voice has made itself heard more widely than the voice of many another who wrote on education. In him was something of the prophet...He saw popular education develop in many ways

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas P. Neill, Makers of the Modern Mind, Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee, 1949, ch. V.

<sup>2</sup> Charles W. Eliot, English Philosophers of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, The Harvard Classics, Vol. 37, introductory note, p. 4.

during his lifetime, not always on the lines he desired; but while various practical details which he advocated in the subjects and methods of teaching have been left aside, the larger ideals at which he would have education aim have constantly shaped the developments of popular education during the years that have passed since his death.<sup>3</sup>

In general, these ideals were the same as those expressed by the novelists of the period. Arnold pleaded for: a general raising of the education level of the people as a whole; the lifting of the culture of the teacher, and the improvement of the teacher's situation, both as to payment for services and as to position in the community; the development of character by means of disciplinary training and exposure to the finest thoughts of the ages, especially as expressed in good poetry; teaching a pupil ideas and ideals, not merely information; and following a gradual, natural method of teaching so that pupils might learn with ease and happiness. Many of these ideas are reminiscent of Locke, and most of them find more than one champion among the Victorian novelists.

If we look for a proponent of the idea that the educational level of all the people should be lifted we may cite Disraeli, as he expresses the horrors of belonging to the lowest class; Kingsley, as he shows Alton Locke struggling to get an education; or Dickens, especially in Nicholas Nickleby.

If we seek one who advocates lifting the culture of the teacher and of holding him in better esteem so that he may have a more profound influence over his charges we may name Charlotte Bronte, whose continental teachers did enjoy a better position than did the teachers in

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard Huxley, ed., Thoughts on Education. Chosen from the writings of Matthew Arnold. Introduction, pp. v, vi.

England; Thackeray, whose clever, unmoral Becky Sharp struggled desperately to rise in society; and Dickens, who advocates a wholesale house-cleaning of small-minded, uncultured teachers.

If we consider character development through careful discipline, we think of the kind, thoughtful teacher of Jane Eyre at Lowood; the gentle punishment of Epie in Silas Marner; the chapel sermons and private talks which influenced Tom Brown; the understanding master who dealt out just punishment to Stalky and Co. Conversely, we have the unjust punishment meted out to David Copperfield and to the schoolboys in Nicholas Nickleby, with its accompanying ill effects.

Some of these same examples uphold the idea that children should be happy while they are learning. Jane Eyre's pupil, David at his second school, the children in Charlotte Bronte's Brussels schools, Ruth's pupils, the older girl who studied under Becky Sharp's supervision—all these progressed faster under happy circumstances than Dickens' many characters did under adverse conditions.

The Victorian novelists held the development of character to be more important than the accumulation of information. Mr. Gradgrind came to see the fallacy of placing too much emphasis on mere statistics in Hard Times. The lack of character in Pendennis is the result of a mother's adulation. Richard Feverel's weakness is the result of a father's system which did not allow for the natural development of a boy, which violated nature and natural impulses.

Locke's four objectives of education were, in this order, virtue, wisdom, good breeding, and learning. Nearly two hundred years later Matthew Arnold gave the aim of education as follows:

What a man seeks through his education is to get to know himself and the world; next, that for this knowledge

it is before all things necessary that he acquaint himself with the best which has been thought and said in the world; finally, that of this best the classics of Greece and Rome form a very chief portion, and the portion most entirely satisfactory. With these conclusions lodged safe in one's mind, one is staunch on the side of the humanities.<sup>4</sup>

The Victorian novelists, too, were "staunch on the side of humanities," and their thinking, as revealed in the novels of the period, is found also in the best educational philosophy of the twentieth century.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

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