

## *The Development of Education in the Nineteenth Century*

The Industrial Revolution, with its dislocation of the population, created many problems. There was a concentration of population around the industrial centres which led to problems concerning health and housing. It also raised the question of the education of the people more sharply than before. There was no state educational system for the common people, and a majority of the working class was completely illiterate. The only schools available for the working classes were of three kinds—the dame schools, the schools supported by private subscription, and the charity and Sunday schools.

In many villages, 'dames' (old women) taught the children the alphabet for a small fee. These schools were places of 'periodical confinement' where children were looked after, rather than places of instruction. The children belonging to the working class attended these schools till they were old enough to work in the factories.

Most of the schools run with the help of private subscription were not very good. These schools used the monitorial system. By this system, a whole school could be run by one teacher in one room with the help of child monitors. Clever boys or girls learnt a short lesson from the teacher and repeated it over and over again to the other children until they learnt it by rote.

Charity and Sunday schools were mostly free and had been conducted since the end of the seventeenth century by the *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge*. They taught reading and writing and the children were expected to learn the catechism by heart. Sunday schools normally aimed at teaching children to read the Bible. The only aim of these charity and Sunday Schools was to save the souls of men and women by bringing them up as Bible-reading, evangelical Christians.

Children from well-to-do families were luckier than those from poor ones. When they were very young, they had nannies to look after them. Then, when the boys were older, they attended public schools such as Eton and Rugby. The girls continued their

education from home under the supervision of governesses. They were taught singing, sewing and piano playing. All this changed by the end of the Victorian age as all children below the age of twelve had to attend schools.

In 1818, an official report described the educational activity in Great Britain as a 'lamentable deficiency'. This was particularly true of the education of the poor. Voluntary effort was confined almost entirely to the towns and cities; country districts were completely neglected. Even in cities like London, thousands of people were illiterate.

Though primary education of the masses was neglected, the secondary education of the upper classes underwent remarkable development. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were three kinds of secondary schools—grammar schools, public schools and private academies.

**Grammar schools** were founded mostly between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries by endowment as free schools for instructing poor boys in Greek and Latin grammar. Due to inflation, the endowments became inadequate to run these schools in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They started taking paying students along with free students and gradually the former replaced the latter completely. Slowly, the rich and the aristocracy began to claim the education of these schools. So, instead of local schools for the poor, they became famous as exclusive **public schools** for the rich. In spite of this change, these schools still clung tenaciously to their old function of teaching Greek and Latin grammar.

There was little reform of the public schools by the government in the first half of the nineteenth century. Educational reform was aimed at the elementary system only. But there were several headmasters whose zeal brought about a lot of changes in the public schools and made them prestigious institutions. Outstanding headmasters were **Samuel Butler** of Shrewsbury and **Thomas Arnold** of Rugby. The public schools were notorious for indiscipline. Arnold focused on the moral education of the boys. Education for Arnold was inseparable from religion, and his constant aim was to train a boy to be 'a Christian, a gentleman and a scholar'—in that order. He believed that senior boys of the sixth form could influence the whole school. He retained the

practice of flogging and he insisted on the right to expel any boy whose influence on the school he felt was bad. As far as studies were concerned, Arnold continued the classical tradition, but he introduced modern history, geography and modern languages. Through the work of such headmasters, public schools became very popular in the Victorian age. Some of the famous public schools were **Eton, Harrow, Rugby and Westminster**.

**Private academies**, founded by dissenters, were meant for the middle class. The discipline here was better than in the public schools. These schools imparted a more scientific and modern education, but were not considered to be as important as the public schools.

Secondary education of girls was not given any importance in the nineteenth century. Attention was focused on women's education only in the last few years of Queen Victoria's reign.

Several changes were brought about in university education also. These changes could be examined under three headings—changes in staff, in syllabus and in students. Up to the nineteenth century, the staff of Oxford and Cambridge comprised of clergymen only. By the end of the century, many of the staff were laymen. This was a major change since, for centuries, it was the tradition of these universities to appoint only clergymen. Anyone aspiring to an academic career had to take a religious test. **The Test Act of 1871** abolished this practice and threw open the gates of universities to any deserving candidate.

Another change in the universities concerned the syllabus. Up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the 'classics' was the chief subject that was taught. Slowly, the study of sciences and modern languages was included in the syllabus. Scientific education became so predominant that it almost displaced humanism in the twentieth century. Today, value-based education is hardly considered valuable. It is true that technologically and scientifically, the youth of the twentieth century are very advanced, but as far as high culture and civilisation in the true sense of the word are concerned, they lag far behind the youth of mid-nineteenth-century England.

Slowly, universities began to admit woman students also. Some colleges were created exclusively for women, such as St Hilda's,

St Hugh's and Somerville. There were others, such as All Soul's and Christ Church, which were co-educational. Although women were admitted into colleges in the nineteenth century, they were not granted degrees till 1920.

After the passing of the Reforms Bills of 1832 and 1867, the middle classes and the working classes were given the franchise. The authorities felt that without a proper education, these people would not be able to exercise their franchise properly. Hence educational reforms became necessary in order to enlighten the masses.

The first step taken in this direction was the establishment of a grant of twenty thousand pounds a year to help private agencies in the field of education. An educational committee was set up to look into the running of schools. Matthew Arnold was one such inspector and, like his father, contributed greatly to the field of education. Training colleges for teachers were set up in order to improve teaching methods.

Gladstone's **Education Act of 1870** was the greatest of all reform acts. Before 1870, there was hardly any national system of education in England. Through this act, primary education was made available for every child in England. Ten years later, Gladstone's government made attendance at elementary schools compulsory. Primary schooling was made free in all public elementary schools in 1891. Another innovation that Gladstone brought about in 1870 was the throwing open of all posts in the civil service to the public. These posts were decided by a competitive examination and not by superiority of birth.

By Gladstone's act, there was to be at least one public elementary school in each district. These were under state supervision. The act also decided that these elementary schools should exclude from their teaching any 'catechism'. Elementary education improved tremendously after 1870. Between 1870 and 1890, attendance at school rose from 1.25 to 4.50 million.

Another important act in the field of education was Balfour's **Education Act of 1902**. By this act, elementary education was restricted to children under fifteen. For older children, central schools were started. Slowly, provisions were made for the control of secondary schools by the State.

# DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN THE VICTORIAN ENGLAND

*Synopsis* : Introduction — realization of the importance of education — the different kinds of schools in the earlier period — development in Secondary Education of the well-to-do. Dr. Arnold and his education reforms — circumstances drawing the attention of the Government — Gladstone's Education Act of 1870 — The Test Act of 1871 — study of professional subjects—establishment of London and other universities — development of women's education — introduction of competitive examinations — rise in school attendance — establishment of Board of Education — County Councils given the power to provide for Primary and Secondary Education—conclusion.

Importance of education was not fully realized by the people of England before the nineteenth century. This is evident from the fact that there was no uniform system for the whole country. Different sections of people followed different systems and standards and obviously development of education in the country was retarded.

In the earlier period there were many kinds of schools in England. There were public schools which provided education at a high charge for the upper and middle classes. For the benefit of the poor the National Society, under the guidance of the Church of England, conducted schools where the pupils had to pay only small fees. In addition to these Church schools there was a large number of private schools for the upper classes of people. The Dissenters and the Roman Catholics were shut out from the Government schools, either by law or by custom. So they were forced to run their own institutions, some of which were well conducted but very expensive. Some of the private schools were cheap but they were scandalously managed. It is one such school, "Do-the-boys Hall", which Dickens has described in his famous novel "Nicholas Nickleby". Most of the private village schools were far below the standard. Unfortunately enough there was no central authority to control the educational activities of the country. Speaking in general, Primary Education of the poor was neglected in England throughout the eighteenth century and in the early part of the nineteenth century.

Though education of the masses was neglected, the Secondary Education of the well-to-do underwent remarkable development. Children of the upper and middle classes went to the public schools which were founded by Kings and town corporations in the earlier centuries. These schools were the training grounds for the ruling classes. The Duke of Wellington was believed to have said that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. Whether this story was true or not it was a fact that every Englishman of eminence was an old student of one of the public schools such as Eton, Harrow or Winchester. But unfortunately, these schools became notorious for indiscipline. However a change for the better was brought about by Dr Arnold, the illustrious headmaster of Rugby and father of the poet Matthew Arnold.

The great educationist was headmaster of Rugby for full fourteen years from 1828 to 1842. He emphasized the study of religion and introduced the monitorial system for maintaining discipline among students. Another good thing that he did was the introduction or organized games. As a matter of fact so much importance was given to games that it gave room for critics to say "they toil at games and play with books". This system of education meant for the over-all development of the personality of the student was universally copied in other public schools and later in the schools established by the Government.

One thing that helped the Government to think of a uniform system of Primary Education in England was the passing of the Second Reform Bill in 1867. According to the Act, a large section of the working class got the right of vote. Robert Lowe, who vehemently opposed the Bill sarcastically said, "We must educate our masters". All right-thinking people were convinced that education of the masses was necessary to make democracy a success. The outcome of this conviction was Gladstone's Education Act of 1870. The Act made provision for the establishment of a School Board in every district. It was the duty of the Board to provide education for children between the ages of five and twelve. This education was cheap but not free; one-third of the expenses would come from a Government grant of money, one-third from a local tax which each School Board had power to collect and the remaining third was to

come from school fees. Thus for the first time in the history of England a national system of education was set on foot.

The education Act of 1870 was followed by many other Acts which brought about revolutionary changes in the University Education as well. Hitherto the custom was that any one aspiring to get an academic post either at Oxford or Cambridge had first to pass a religious test. By the Test Act of 1871 this practice was abolished, with the result that in the last three decades of the nineteenth century most of the staff of the two Universities were laymen. More than that, the study of physical sciences was introduced and there were eminent men of science like Clerk Maxwell and J.J. Thomson at Cambridge. In the industrial centres new Universities were founded to encourage the study of professional subjects. Thus the University of London was established in 1836, and other Universities of Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle and Cardiff followed. All these institutions were the outcome of progress in scientific and technical education which characterized the middle of the nineteenth century. There was a separate college for scientific instruction which became in 1890 the Royal College of Science.

Meanwhile, sufficient attention was given to women's education also. In 1848 Queen's College for women was established and was quickly followed by Bedford College, Cheltenham College and several good private schools. Some of the examinations of Oxford and Cambridge were opened to girls as well as boys. The newly-formed Universities opened their classes to both men and women. London University gave its degrees to women for the first time in 1879.

There was one more reform which gave a boost to the development of education in the Victorian period. Gladstone abolished patronage in all public offices and made competitive examination the normal entrance to the Civil Service. Trained intellect was henceforth to be a youngman's best passport, instead of social patronage or fashionable friends.

The year 1870 was a turning point in the educational history of England. Ever after that Elementary Education made remarkable progress. Between 1870 and 1890 the average school attendance rose from one and a quarter to four and a half millions.

A Royal Commission was appointed to study the system of education in the country. In 1895 the Commission reported that the system working in England was defective in many respects, when compared to the highly centralized and efficient German system. To remedy the situation the Board of Education was established in 1899. Three years later something more effective was done by the then Prime Minister Arthur James Balfour. In fact his education Act of 1902 laid the foundations for education in Britain during the twentieth century. The School Boards were abolished and the power to provide for education, both Primary and Secondary, was given to the elected County Councils and certain large Borough Councils. Private agencies were compelled to bring their schools upto a certain standard of efficiency, to become eligible for financial assistance from the Government. Thus a great step forward was taken towards the establishment of a uniform national system of education.