Traditions of Popular Education

The circulation of *The Forum* was climbing in 1892—and no wonder. The stuffy, moribund New York monthly had suddenly sprung to life under the imaginative editorship of Walter Hines Page. Energetic, knowledgeable, uncompromising in his journalistic standards, the progressive young southerner was running article after article that the would-be conversationalist simply could not afford to miss: Henry Cabot Lodge and Jacob Schiff on politics, Jane Addams and Jacob Riis on social reform, and William James on psychical research. Well-nigh anything *The Forum* printed was likely to be discussed, but Page himself never anticipated the controversy destined to arise over Joseph Mayer Rice's series on the schools.

The year 1892 was much like any other, and Dr. Johnson's injunction about the fatal dullness of education was as pertinent as ever. Yet Page had been intrigued by Rice's pedagogical criticism. Apparently all was not right with the nation's much vaunted schools, and Page, ever the journalist, sensed news. Moreover, if anyone could come up with some first-rate
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articles, it was Rice. Astute, opinionated, and sharp in his judgments, Rice was a young New York pediatrician whose interest in prophylaxis had led him to some searching questions about the city’s schools—questions so pressing that he spent the period between 1888 and 1890 studying pedagogy at Jena and Leipzig. He returned bearing some fairly definite ideas about a “science of education”—dangerous luggage for a young man of thirty-three—and spent 1891 looking for a means of publicizing them. A series of columns in Epoch, a small New York weekly, and a piece in the December Forum provided his first opportunities. His pungent writing inevitably attracted comment, and near the end of 1891 Page offered him a novel proposal.

On behalf of the Forum Rice was to prepare a firsthand appraisal of American public education. From Boston to Washington, from New York to St. Louis, he was to visit classrooms, talk with teachers, attend school board meetings, and interview parents. He was to place “no reliance whatever” on reports by school officials; his goal was to render an objective assessment for the public. The proposal could not have been more welcome. Rice left on January 7, 1892. His tour took him to thirty-six cities; he talked with some 1200 teachers; he returned late in June, his notes crammed with statistics, illustrations, and judgments. The summer was given to writing, and the first article appeared in October. Within a month he and Page both knew they had taken an angry bull by the horns. By the time the final essay had been published the following June, Rice’s name had become a byword—frequently an epithet—to schoolmen across the nation.

Rice’s story bore all the earmarks of the journalism destined to make “muckraking” a household word in America. In city after city public apathy, political interference, corruption, and incompetence were conspiring to ruin the schools. A teacher in

Baltimore told him: “I formerly taught in the higher grades, but I had an attack of nervous prostration some time ago, and the doctor recommended rest. So I now teach in the primary, because teaching primary children does not tax the mind.” A principal in New York, asked whether students were allowed to move their heads, answered: “Why should they look behind when the teacher is in front of them?” A Chicago teacher, rehearsing her pupils in a “concert drill,” harangued them with the command: “Don’t stop to think, tell me what you know!” In Philadelphia the “ward bosses” controlled the appointment of teachers and principals; in Buffalo the city superintendent was the single supervising officer for 700 teachers. With alarming frequency the story was the same: political hacks hiring untrained teachers who blindly led their innocent charges in sing-song drill, rote repetition, and meaningless verbiage.

But the picture was not uniformly black; here and there Rice found encouraging departures from the depressing rule. In Minneapolis “a very earnest and progressive corps of teachers” was broadening the school program around the three R’s and dealing sympathetically with children from “even the poorest immigrant homes.” In Indianapolis, where politics had been firmly excluded from the management of schools, competent “progressive” teachers were attempting to introduce the idea of unification” into the curriculum, combining the several subjects “so they may acquire more meaning by being seen in their relations to one another.” At LaPorte, Indiana, Rice saw exciting progress in drawing, painting, and clay modeling, as well as encouraging efforts to teach pupils “to be helpful to each other.” And finally, at Francis Parker’s world-famous Cook County Normal School, “one of the most progressive as well as one of the most suggestive schools” he had seen, Rice found examples par excellence of the “all-side” education of children: nature study, art, social activities, and the three R’s all taught by an inspired, enthusiastic staff.

The final article in the June Forum was a call to action. All citizens could have the life and warmth of the “progressive school” for their children. The way was simple and clear: led by an aroused public, the school system would have to be “ab-
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olutely divorced from politics in every sense of the word"; direct, thorough, and scientific supervision would have to be introduced; and teachers would have to endeavor constantly to improve their professional and intellectual competence. "The general educational spirit of the country is progressive," Rice concluded; it remained only for the public in local communities throughout the nation to do the job.

The response to Rice's series was electric. Newspaper reaction was about what one would expect—a rather general sympathy typified, perhaps, by a January editorial in the Boston Daily Advertiser: "... it must be admitted that the examples which he has cited do show a regrettable condition of affairs, and one that decidedly demands improvement. There is far too much of the mechanical in the existing system, especially in the 'busy work,' which here, as almost everywhere else, means a hindrance rather than a help to child education." The Chicago Dispatch thought it "a shame and a disgrace that Chicago's public schools cannot be kept above the level of ward politics"; while the Detroit Free Press believed Rice's criticisms "so full of sound sense and of suggestion for improvement that they must commend themselves even to those who have been hit the hardest, and result sooner or later in correction of the defects and abuses pointed out." More intriguing, however, was the reaction of the professional press—a reaction that ranged from chilling disdain to near-hysteria. Boston's Journal of Education characterized Rice as a young man who had "demonstrated beyond cavil that he is merely a sensational critic. ..." "Education, widely read by classroom teachers in New England, ran a scathing editorial in December, picturing Rice as a carping journalist who had "recently abandoned the work of physicking his patients for a course in pedagogy in Germany." Comments in succeeding months only elaborated this theme, pillorying the Forum series as radical, high-university, expert-type criticism by an intellectual snob who had completely missed the point of American public education.

In New York the editor of The School Journal early adopted a wait-and-see attitude, writing in a November issue: "Dr. Rice has entered a new field. We have said repeatedly that at some time the schools would have the electric light turned on them, and have asked if they were ready. We ask it again." Two months later, after Rice's article on New York had appeared, The School Journal was less concerned with illumination. Rice's criticisms were "weak and inconsequential" if the schools produced results, that was all that could be asked of them. Not to be outdone by its older and more respected competitor, the magazine School excoriated the series from the beginning. It interspersed barbed editorials with letters from self-appointed defenders of the schools who contended that Rice's foreign training, lack of classroom experience, inadequate evidence, and anti-public-school bias had rendered him unfit to judge American education. By March the editor of School had vowed he would provide the self-styled "expert" no more free advertising by commenting on his errors—a pledge he broke only once (in April) to castigate The School Journal for giving "timid, half-hearted support to the cheap criticisms and the charlatanism of an alleged expert in The Forum." And so the criticism mounted—along with the circulation of The Forum. The appearance of the essays in book form in October only fanned the fires, which burned brightly into the summer of 1894 and then died down. Rice himself remained undaunted. He continued to write for The Forum, and some of his later articles such as "The Futility of the Spelling Grind" (providing evidence from tests on 33,000 schoolchildren that there is no significant correlation between amount of time de-

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7 Ibid., 306-7, 354-7, 377-8, 501-3, 567.
8 The School Journal, XLV (1892), 444.
9 Ibid., XLVI (1893), 153.
10 School, IV (1893), 180, 193, 199, 210, 211, 250, 260.
11 Ibid., 322.
voted to spelling homework and competence in the high art itself) were widely read and quoted. In 1897 he became editor of the magazine—with disheartening results in the business office. Two more books flowed from his pen: one on Scientific Management in Education (1913), the other on municipal government. He even founded a society for educational research. But when he died, in 1934, he was virtually unknown, remembered only—when at all—as one of the founders of the American testing movement. An unfortunate fate for this erstwhile progressive, but an occupational hazard of those who would father reform. For reform movements are notoriously ahistorical in outlook. They look forward rather than back; and when they do need a history, they frequently prefer the fashioning of ideal ancestors to the acknowledgment of mortals.

I

Rice's disclosures must have come as a bitter pill to Americans of the nineties; for if anything had been established in the public mind by a half-century of public-school propaganda, it was the sense of an inextricable relationship between education and national progress. The great pre-Civil War architects of universal schooling—Horace Mann in Massachusetts, Henry Barnard in Connecticut, John Pierce in Michigan, and Samuel Lewis in Ohio—had hammered relentlessly at this theme in their quest for political support, picturing each local district school as a bulwark of the Republic and a repository of popular hopes and aspirations.

Consider Mann, as the leading example. The commanding figure of the early public-school movement, he had poured into his vision of universal education a boundless faith in the perfectibility of human life and institutions. Once public

* The Forum, XXIII (1897), 163-72.

* The one on municipal government was a plea for scientific public administration called The People's Government (Philadelphia, 1915). Rice also published a Rational Spelling Book for the schools in 1898.


schools were established, no evil could resist their salutary influence. Universal education could be the "great equalizer" of human conditions, the "balance wheel of the social machinery," and the "creator of wealth undreamed of." Poverty would most assuredly disappear, and with it the rancorous discord between the "haves" and the "have-nots" that had marked all of human history. Crime would diminish; sickness would abate; and life for the common man would be longer, better, and happier. Here was a total faith in the power of education to shape the destiny of the young Republic—a kind of nineteenth-century vision of ancient Athenian pædeia. Little wonder that it fired the optimism of the American public.

The theory supporting Mann's faith represented a fascinating potpourri of early American progressivism, combining elements of Jeffersonian republicanism, Christian moralism, and Emersonian idealism. Mann understood well the relationship between freedom, self-government, and universal education. Like Jefferson, he believed that freedom could rest secure only as free men had the knowledge to make intelligent decisions. But for Mann the problem went deeper; it was fundamentally one of moral elevation. "Never will wisdom preside in the halls of legislation," he once wrote, "and its profound utterances be recorded on the pages of the statute book, until Common Schools . . . create a more far-seeing intelligence and a purer morality than has ever existed among communities of men." Mann recognized that knowledge was power, but the power to do evil as well as good. Hence, the education of free men could never be merely intellectual; values inevitably intruded.

To raise the question of values, though, was to raise other problems. Mann was tremendously impressed with the diversity of the American people. Yet he feared that conflicts of value might rip them apart and render them powerless. Dreading the destructive possibilities of religious, political, and class difference, he sought a common value system within which
diversity might flourish. His quest was for a new public philosophy, a sense of community to be shared by Americans of every background and persuasion. And his instrument in this effort would be the common school.

Mann’s school would be common, not as a school for the common people—for example, the nineteenth-century Prussian Volksschule—but rather as a school common to all people. It would be open to all, provided by the state and the local community as part of the birthright of every child. It would be for rich and poor alike, not only free but as good as any private institution. It would be nongovernmental, receiving children of all creeds, classes, and backgrounds. In the warm associations of childhood Mann saw the opportunity to kindle a spirit of amity and respect which the conflicts of adult life could never destroy. In social harmony he located the primary goal of popular education.

The genius of Mann’s design, and the hub of a built-in dynamism that has characterized American public education ever since, was the vesting of political control in the people. Through state legislatures and local boards of education, popularly elected representatives rather than professional schoolmen would exercise ultimate oversight. The manifest reason was that public supervision must follow public support, and this, of course, was reason enough. Yet the relationship went far deeper. For by the artful device of lay control the public was entrusted with the continuing definition of the public philosophy taught its children. When Mann himself set out to define this philosophy, what emerged was a not uncommon nineteenth-century blend of natural law, faith in progress, capitalistic morality, and liberal Protestantism. But Mann’s own definition is less important than the enterprise he set in motion, for it is in this political process by which the public defines the commitments of the schools that one finds the decisive forces in American educational history.

In the realm of curriculum Mann’s thinking was ordinary enough. He was inclined to accept the usual list of reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, English grammar, and geography, with the addition of health education, vocal music (singing would strengthen the lungs and thereby prevent consumption) and some Bible reading. In the realm of pedagogy, however, his ideas were of a different order, reaching again and again for fresh solutions to the age-old problem of how to educate free men. To begin, Mann was one of the first after Rousseau to argue that education in groups is not merely a practical necessity, but a social desideratum. Rousseau had contended in *Emile* that the ideal pedagogical situation is one teacher, one child; yet even he had counseled his readers to turn to Plato’s *Republic* for guidance on mass education. Now Mann was arguing that the tutorial relationship could never serve the social ends of education, that only with a heterogeneous group of students could the unifying goals of the common school be achieved.

Once this is granted, however, other problems arise. A free society concerns itself with individuals, not masses. How, then, can the values of individuality be reconciled with the teaching of children in groups? Mann by no means solved the problem, but—to his great credit—he did recognize it. He counseled, for example, that children differ in temperament, ability, and interest, and that lessons should be adapted to these differences. He insisted that the discipline of a free school must be the self-discipline of the individual. “Self-governance,” “self-control,” “a voluntary compliance with the laws of reason and duty,” are the phrases he used to describe the ends of republican education. He rejected blind obedience on the one hand and anarchic willfulness on the other. For Mann the essence of the moral act was free self-choice; and insofar as his ultimate purposes were moral, only in the arduous process of training children to self-discipline did he see the common school fulfilling its commitment to freedom.

Granted these insights, Mann’s resolution is still not without its theoretical difficulties. He was attracted to the naturalistic pedagogy of the Swiss reformer Pestalozzi, but like Pestalozzi himself, was deeply committed to moral instruction. How does one free a child and shape him at the same time? The problem goes back to Rousseau, and ultimately to Plato. Rousseau, of course, never solved it. Mann sought his answers in the
"science" of phrenology, as popular an intellectual fad as any that swept nineteenth-century America. Phrenologists assumed that the mind is composed of thirty-seven faculties—for example, aggressiveness, benevolence, and veneration—that govern the attitudes and actions of the individual. Behavioristic in outlook, the theory maintained that human character can be modified, that desirable faculties can be cultivated through exercise and undesirable faculties inhibited through disuse. Remembered too much today as merely an entertaining method of reading character from the contours of the skull, the theory provides important insights into the pedagogical reformism of the 1840's. It reached for a naturalistic explanation of human behavior; it stimulated much-needed interest in the problem of child health; and it promised that education could build the good society by improving the character of individual children. What a wonderful psychology for an educational reformer! Emerson himself called a foremost treatise on the subject "the best Sermon I have read for some time."

The struggle to achieve popular schooling is one of the fascinating chapters in American history. Under Mann's aggressive leadership Massachusetts in many ways taught the nation the ideals of universal education. In almost every state citizens organized to battle in the cause of public schools. The political coalitions they formed frequently drew together the oddest collections of otherwise disparate interests. As Howard Mumford Jones has pointed out, the successful school leader was one who could with consummate skill simultaneously touch the heart pride of the workingman, the pocketbook nerve of the wealthy, the status aspirations of the poor, and the timid defensiveness of the cultured before the onslaught of the unlettered masses. Yet the very strangeness of these coalitions holds

7 One of the first books Mann read after accepting the post as Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education was James Simpson's Necessity of Popular Education (Edinburgh, 1834). The volume leaned heavily on the writings of Pestalozzi and the English phrenologists.

the key to understanding them; for the politics of education, while related to larger political crosscurrents, has exhibited unique tendencies over the past century, tendencies too often blurred by the commonly held fiction that education is non-political.

The fight for free schools was a bitter one, and for twenty-five years the outcome was uncertain. Local elections were fought, won, and lost on the school issue. The tide of educational reform flowed in one state, only to ebb in another. Legislation passed one year was sometimes repealed the next. State laws requiring public schools were ignored by the local communities that were supposed to build them. Time and again the partisans of popular education encountered the bitter disappointments that accompany any effort at fundamental social reform.

Yet by 1860 a design had begun to appear, and it bore upon it the marks of Mann's ideal. A majority of the states had established public school systems, and a good half of the nation's children were already getting some formal education. Elementary schools were becoming widely available; in some states, like Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania, the notion of free public education was slowly expanding to include secondary schools; and in a few, like Michigan and Wisconsin, the public school system was already capped by a state university. There were, of course, significant variations from state to state and from region to region. New England, long a pioneer in public education, also had an established tradition of private education, and private schools continued to flourish there. The Midwest, on the other hand, sent a far greater proportion of its school children to public institutions. The southern states, with the exception of North Carolina, tended to lag behind, and did not generally establish popular schooling until after the Civil War.

On the whole, universal education had won clear—if sometimes grudging—acceptance from the society at large; and visitors from abroad were already accepting it as a characteristic American innovation. Thus, the Polish revolutionary Count De Gurowski could observe enthusiastically in 1857: "On the com-
mon schools, more than any other basis, depends and is fixed the future, the weal and the woe of American society, and they are the noblest and most luminous manifestations of the spirit, the will, and the temper of the genuine American communities and people. . . Europe has polished classes; learned societies; but with less preponderating individual training, America, the Free States—stimulated, led on by New England, by Massachusetts—they alone possess intelligent, educated masses.  

III

Victories must be consolidated, and it fell to the teachers of a succeeding generation to confirm the pioneering work of Mann and his contemporaries. In the red brick buildings of the cities, in the white frame schoolhouses of the countryside, and in the roughhewn cabins of the newly settled frontier, the teachers of the seventies and eighties sought to translate the mandate of universal education into real schooling for real children. Their work has not been well remembered, for historians in their zeal for crusading pioneers sometimes ignore the equally important, if less colorful, figures who succeed them. The decade following the Civil War brought new schoolmen to the fore: Barnas Sears of Massachusetts, J. L. M. Curry of the Peabody Education Fund, Edward Sheldon of the Oswego (N. Y.) Normal School, John Eaton of the Federal Bureau of Education. Towering above them all, however, and undoubtedly the commanding figure of his pedagogical era, was William Torrey Harris.

Harris, a New Englander who had gone West as a young man of twenty-two, distinguished himself first as superintendent of the St. Louis public schools (1868–80) and subsequently as United States Commissioner of Education (1889–1906). From 1859 until his death in 1909, his career represents a rather remarkable marriage of the intensely idealistic philosopher and the eminently practical schoolman. The same Harris who worked for years to master Hegel’s Logic and who founded

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1 Adam C. De Gurowski: America and Europe (New York, 1857), pp. 292, 308.

crisis. Clues appear in the very first issue of the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, in which Harris observed that the "tendency to break with the traditional, and to accept only what bears for the soul its own justification, is widely active, and can end only in the demand that Reason shall find and establish a philosophical basis for all those great ideas which are taught as religious dogmas." For Harris neither naturalism nor mysticism would suffice; but in Hegel's rationalistic doctrines of the dialectic, of absolute truth, and of self-activity, he found a way—however tortuous—of reconciling his boyhood Christian beliefs with the methods and findings of science. More generally, Harris used Hegel to confirm what was worth conserving in a society pervaded by change; Hegel enabled him to accept a new America without repudiating the old. In Hegel's rationalism Harris found religion.

Much that Harris believed and did in education can be understood in simple pragmatic terms. He had the sensitivities and abilities of a natural-born administrator. But his most fundamental contributions can only be grasped in light of his Hegelian commitments. Consider, for example, his confirmation of the public-school ideal. That he should echo the faiths of Mann and Barnard is only natural for a man born and reared in ante-bellum Connecticut. "The spirit of American institutions is to be looked for in the public schools to a greater degree than anywhere else," he wrote in 1871. "If the rising generation does not grow up with democratic principles, the fault will lie in the system of popular education." A year later he cautioned: "An ignorant people can be governed, but only a wise people can govern itself." Common schools increased opportunity; they taught morality and citizenship; they encouraged a talented leadership; they maintained social mobility; they promoted popular responsiveness to social evolution. Mann and his contemporaries would have nodded in hearty approval.

But as one reads on, subtle differences appear. While the reformism of the 1840's is preserved, it takes on a new tone. The school is the "great instrumentality to lift all classes of people into a participation in civilized life." But what is civilized life? For Harris it is a life of order, self-discipline, civic loyalty, and respect for private property. The civilized man possesses the view of the world entertained by the society of which he is part. "Education is the process of adoption of this social order in place of one's mere animal caprice"; it is "a renunciation of the freedom of the moment for the freedom that has the form of eternity." Hence, the purposes of education must be tied to time-honored principles deeply imbedded in the wisdom of the race. While the free individual contributes his share to social evolution, what he proffers can be but an infinitesimal addition to a vast social whole.

Yet had not Mann also assured the businessman that public schools would preserve order, extend wealth, and secure property? Of course, he had; his Fifth Report to the Massachusetts Board of Education is a classic example of such reasoning. And Mann, too, had ventured his definition of the civilized life. But the difference between Mann and Harris is a crucial difference of emphasis. Mann's common school was to contribute substantially to fashioning an emerging social order governed by a new public philosophy; Harris's was merely to play a part in confirming an order that had already come into existence.

The difference becomes clearer on analyzing Harris's recommendations regarding the school program. To begin; much more than Mann he recognized that the school is but one of several educative institutions, and thus sharply limited in power. The child is molded by family, church, civil community, and state before he ever comes to school, and their influence continues unabated during his years as a student. What then

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3 *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, I (1867), 1.

4 Sixteenth Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the St. Louis Public Schools (St. Louis, 1871), p. 28.

5 Seventeenth Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the St. Louis Public Schools (St. Louis, 1872), p. 58.


becomes the distinctive task of formal education? Harris replied with four principles: schooling must always be deemed preliminary to the larger education of life—an education continuing through adulthood; the school should teach only what the pupil is not likely to pick up from intercourse with the family circle, with his playmates, or with his fellow workmen; the school program should embrace only such matters as have a general theoretical bearing on the world in which the pupil lives; and lastly, the school must not trespass on the just domain of the Church—moral education, yes, religious education, categorically no.  

Harris never forgot these principles in dealing with the content of education. "The question of the course of study...", he once wrote, "is the most important question which the educator has before him"; the curriculum was to be the means by which the child would be brought into orderly relationship with his civilization. Harris agreed with Rousseau that the child is born weak, but from that point forward their thought diverged. Rousseau's naturalism was to Harris "the greatest heresy in educational doctrine." Institutions, Hegel taught, are not opposed to man; they enable man to achieve his truest expression. Hence in Harris's view the school must lead the child to freedom by leading him away from his primitive self. The goals of the process could only be determined by orderly study of adult life and institutions; education would have to be social science par excellence. The key to the process is the Hegelian doctrine of self-estrangement. The natural self, the self of instinct and impulse, must be connected with the larger society; its transient likes and dislikes must be subordinated to civilized wants—"rational objects." In the process new versions of the self emerge and are joined to the primitive self in a continuing dialectic of alienation and return. The essence of the enterprise is discipline, a discipline stressing orderly behavior in the kindergarten; mastery of the fundamentals in the elementary school (Harris called them the "five windows of the soul"—mathematics, geography, literature and art, grammar, and history); and concentration on the classics, languages, and mathematics in the high schools and colleges. The end product is the self-active individual, the reasoning person who can exercise true freedom in the terms of his own civilization.

Harris the administrator, however much the practical man, was ultimately guided by Harris the theorist. Like his counterparts in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago, his concerns began and ended with the ever-pressing problem of numbers. It is one thing to sing the praises of universal education; it is quite another to provide it. The city superintendent of the seventies was faced with thousands of children eager for education and too few teachers and classrooms to serve them. Moreover, he had at his command few precedents for classifying and grouping his flood of charges. Harris's answer was the graded school, organized by years and quarter-years of work, with pupils moving through on the basis of regular and frequent examinations. For the system to function at all, planning and order were needed; and Harris's superb sense of detail never rested as he sought constantly to improve economy and efficiency. He devoted himself to attendance reports, to textbooks, to the collection of school statistics, to the standardization of pedagogical terminology, to the lighting, heating, and ventilation of school buildings, to teacher salary schedules, and to the continuing supervision of instruction. And his Hegelian love of institutions sustained him through every step of the way, for in the completely evolved system would lie the finest educational expression of the new urban civilization.

Ultimately, Harris's social philosophy became an apology for the new urban industrial order, while his pedagogy rendered service to its educational needs. But it is futile to contend that his pedagogy is wholly static. The doctrine of self-activity cannot but leave the way open to change, while the social analysis he deemed central to the determination of educational policy allows for reform as well as reaction. Moreover,
the continuing tension between social adjustment on the one hand and individuality on the other—a tension so dear to Harris—lends an unmistakable dynamism to his system. Yet granted this, the temper of Harris's pedagogy is patently conservative. His emphasis is on order rather than freedom, on work rather than play, on effort rather than interest, on prescription rather than election, on the regularity, silence, and industry that “preserve and save our civil order.” His attempt to define the precise functions of the school tended inevitably toward formalism, while his steadfast resistance to demands for trade and vocational education made him the tête noire of those pressing for change. In the end, Harris consolidated the revolution Mann had wrought; but as if in the terms of his own Hegelianism, his pedagogy itself became the target of a succeeding generation of protest.

IV

Whatever the high-minded philosophies that justified them, the schools of the 1890's were a depressing study in contrast. Everywhere, mundane problems of students, teachers, classrooms, and dollars had become overwhelming. Rural schools, built during the educational renaissance of the forties and fifties, had been allowed to fall into disrepair and disrepute. Cut off from the pedagogical mainstream and frequently beset by problems of rural decline, they remained ungraded and poorly taught. Recitations averaged ten minutes per subject per class, and untrained teachers continued to concentrate on “the same old drill in the same old readers.” McGuffey had been good enough for mother and dad; he would certainly do for the youngsters.

In the cities problems of skyrocketing enrollments were compounded by a host of other issues. In school buildings badly lighted, poorly heated, frequently unsanitary, and bursting at the seams, young immigrants from a dozen different countries swelled the tide of newly arriving farm children. Superintendents spoke hopefully of reducing class size to sixty per teacher, but the hope was most often a pious one. Little wonder that rote efficiency reigned supreme. It needed none of Harris's elaborate Hegelian justifications; it was simply the basis of survival.

As school budgets mounted, politicians were quick to recognize one more lucrative source of extra income. In the continuing consolidation of hamlets into villages, villages into towns, and towns into cities, school boards grew to fifty, seventy, or indeed, more than a hundred members. Responsibility being difficult to define, corruption reared its ugly—if familiar—head. Teaching and administrative posts were bought and sold; school buildings—like city halls and public bathhouses—suddenly became incredibly expensive to build; and politics pervaded everything from the assignment of textbook contracts to the appointment of school superintendents. In short, the school system, like every other organ of the urban body politic, was having its growing pains.

Joseph Mayer Rice was not the first to protest against these unspeakable conditions. Francis W. Parker, called by Dewey the father of progressive education, had undertaken the reform of the Quincy, Massachusetts, schools as early as 1875; and while he himself had made little effort to publicize the work, the “Quincy System” had attracted national—indeed worldwide—interest. Following upon the revelations of the Russian system of technical instruction at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876, businessmen in New York, St. Louis, and Chicago had sharply criticized the narrow intellectual emphases in the secondary school program, demanding a central place for manual training and vocational education. And no early Grange convention was complete without its resolutions.

8 Rice gives the best journalistic picture of the urban schools. In 1903 Walter Hines Page, then editor of The World's Work, sent Adele Marie Shaw on a school-appraisal expedition similar to Rice's. Her series was much like the earlier one in The Forum, and testified eloquently to the persistence of the conditions Rice had exposed a decade earlier. See The World's Work, VII (1903-4), 4204-21, 4460-6, 4520-33; VIII (1904), 4795-8, 4883-94, 4996-5004; XXXIV (1901-2), 428-32.
deploring the lack of practical agricultural training in the rural schools and colleges.

Yet pedagogical protest during the seventies and eighties was local, intermittent, and frequently innocuous. By contrast the nineties brought a nationwide torrent of criticism, innovation, and reform that soon took on all the earmarks of a social movement. And it is at this point that Rice’s articles appear to mark a beginning. His Forum series was the first to weave the many strands of contemporary protest into a single reform program; it was the first to perceive the educational problem as truly national in scope; and it was the first to apply the technique of muckraking in attacking the political corruption and professional intransigence infecting the schools. The progressive movement in education begins with Rice precisely because he saw it as a movement. It is this growing self-consciousness more than anything else that sets the progressivism of the nineties apart from its sources in previous decades.

Once under way, the movement manifested itself in a remarkable diversity of pedagogical protest and innovation; from its very beginning it was pluralistic, often self-contradictory, and always closely related to broader currents of social and political progressivism. In the universities it emerged as part of a spirited revolt against formalism in philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences. In the cities it was but one facet of a wider program of municipal clean-up and reform. Among farmers it became the crux of a moderate, liberal alternative to radical agrarianism. It was at the same time the “social education” demanded by urban settlement workers, the “schooling for country life” demanded by rural publicists, the vocational training demanded by businessmen’s associations and labor unions alike, and the new techniques of instruction demanded by avant-garde pedagogues. It embraced the kindergartens of St. Louis and the State University of Wisconsin, venerable Harvard, and an arriviste New York professional school named Teachers College, Columbia University. It enlisted parents and teachers, starry-eyed crusaders and hard-headed politicians. And in less than two generations it transformed the character of the American school.

Education and Industry

Americans have always loved a fair, and the great Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 was one of the best of them. Five years in the making, it had cost over $11 million; fifty-eight governments had been represented; and almost ten million persons had been in attendance. Besides providing the sort of once-in-a-lifetime extravaganzo so dear to the popular heart, the Exposition had testified eloquently to worldwide progress under the benevolent influence of science and technology. It had served its hosts as “a school of incomparable excellence” in manufactures, in agriculture, and especially in the arts; and there was no denying that American industry itself had scored an impressive triumph. Whatever else the Centennial contributed to a not reticent national pride, it had demonstrated conclusively that in the worldwide competition for industrial supremacy the United States was a power to be reckoned with.¹