THE

CHARITY SCHOOL MOVEMENT
In Memoriam

M. E. J.
THE CHARITY SCHOOL MOVEMENT
A STUDY OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY PURITANISM IN ACTION

by
M. G. JONES, M.A.
Fellow of Girton College
Lecturer in History in the University of Cambridge

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PREFACE

This book is an attempt to present a study of eighteenth-century elementary education, not as the history of educational ideas, nor as the history of administration, in which two garbs the history of education usually appears, but as the study of a neglected aspect of social history. Its main interest lies in the different reactions of philanthropic men and women in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales to the movement for establishing schools on a religious basis for the children of the poor.

In expressing my thanks to those who have helped me in collecting materials for this book I must mention first my gratitude to the Secretaries of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in London and the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge in Edinburgh who gave me access to the Societies’ papers when they were not, as they are to-day, open to public inspection. The first part of this book is based primarily on the wealth of material which languishes almost unknown in the archives of the London Society. Its minute books, letter books, miscellaneous papers and, above all, the invaluable abstracts of correspondence cannot safely be neglected by students of eighteenth-century religious and social history in the four countries of the British Isles, for the charity school movement in its different forms owes its inception to the London Society. In its archives may be found the carefully considered plans of the members of the Society for the education of the poor and of the organization which it established to this end. Of even greater importance are the letters which poured into the Society’s offices from correspondents in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, informing it of the local conditions which permitted or frustrated the realisation of the Society’s ideals.

The records of the Scottish S.P.C.K. (now kept at H.M. Register House, Edinburgh) are equally valuable for an appreciation of religious, social and economic problems in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. They provide an even more detailed and complete picture of local conditions than that which is given by the London S.P.C.K. The minute books of the Society and of its executive body, the Committee of Directors, are throughout the century remarkably full of detail. Unlike
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the London Society which, after the first quarter of the eighteenth century was diverted from the education of the children of the poor to mission work overseas and the publication of religious works at home, the Scottish S.P.C.K. maintained continuously its interest in the schools which it set up. Its minute books, its miscellaneous papers, including the returns of parish ministers to specific enquiries and its correspondence with the “innovators” in agriculture and industry in the Highlands, provide the material for a detailed study of the prevailing religious and social conditions in the north of Scotland.

To the Bishops of Durham, Ely, Lincoln, Llandaff, Norwich, Peterborough, St David’s and Worcester I owe much gratitude for their permission to use the materials in the diocesan archives. The Speculum Diocesae Lincolniensis, edited by the Rev. R. E. G. Cole, Archbishop Herring’s Visitation Returns, edited by Canon Ollard and the late Rev. P. C. Walker, and the Wake MSS. at Christ Church, Oxford, which contain many references to schools for the children of the poor in the first half of the eighteenth century, suggested to me the possibility of finding similar stores of information in the returns to other episcopal visitation inquiries in the later half of the century. Unfortunately none of the above registries appear to possess returns comparable in detailed information with those inaugurated by Archbishops Wake and Herring. Here and there as in the returns to the visitation articles of the Bishop of Ely in 1787, or in miscellaneous papers like those in the diocesan registry at Worcester, there is evidence of considerable activity in the education of the children of the poor, and it is difficult to believe that among the mass of unknown and unclassified materials in the diocesan registries there is not further information of the interest of the church in education.

From the librarians of the British Museum, the National Libraries of Scotland, Ireland and Wales, the University Libraries of Cambridge, London, Edinburgh, Aberystwith, Bangor and Cardiff, the Bodleian and Christ Church, Oxford, Marsh’s Library and the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, and the Public Libraries at Cardiff, Bristol, Gloucester, Dumfries, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Brentford, the Friends’ Library, Bishopsgate, London, the Libraries of the Congregational and Baptist Unions, I have received unfailing courtesy and help. To them and to the Headmasters and Headmistresses who have given me access to their school records I wish to express my appreciation and my thanks.
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Among those who have taken a kindly interest in the book or have put me in touch with sources of information unknown to me I am especially grateful to the late Principal J. H. Davies of Aberystwyth, who placed his library at my disposal, to the late Dr Thomas Shankland of Bangor, whose study of the S.P.C.K. in Wales was the pioneer work in the subject, and to the friend who called my attention to the invaluable and hitherto unknown reports of the schools of the Welsh Trust for 1675 and 1678. The Reports, printed in full in the Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies, vol. ix, Part i, November 1937, establish the claim of Wales to be the pioneer of charity school instruction and make clear the active participation in it of the clergy and churchwardens of the Established Church. I am greatly indebted to Dr Thomas Richards and Mr R. T. Jenkins of Bangor for their advice and criticism, and to the Rev. Arvon Davies, Miss D. M. Griffith and to Mr T. J. Owen for information. Professor Timothy Corcoran, of University College, Dublin, and the late Mr Robert Dunlop, one-time lecturer in Irish History at Manchester University, made suggestions which I have incorporated in Chapter VII. Dr John Mason of Queensferry, Edinburgh, generously lent me his MS. material on the schools of the Forfeited Estates in the Highlands, and Professor J. W. Adamson gave me much valuable advice many years ago when I began to write this book and later, when it was completed.

I want also to thank those of my pupils who have, from time to time, sent me information, or have copied materials for me. To Mrs J. H. Clapham, who has given unremitting care to the making of the index, and to my other friends Dr M. D. George, Miss H. M. Cam, Miss I. F. Grant, Dr H. M. Wodehouse, and in particular Professor Eileen Power, whose help has throughout been generously given, I find it difficult to express my gratitude.

M. G. J.

GIRTON COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE

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