

CHAPTER 4

The Search for a New Pedagogy

I

THE REFORMERS' DEMAND THAT COMMON SCHOOLS SOLVE SOCIAL, POLITICAL, and economic problems forced those reformers to seek new methods, a new pedagogy, with which the schools could set about the task. When the major functions of the schools had been to reinforce parental and community values, symbolize cultural equality in the United States, and set memory tasks for students, their task was relatively simple. And since the schools' function was so unspecialized—they simply reinforced what several other institutions taught—they did not need to be, and were not, particularly effective. The Whigs, on the other hand, expected the schools to teach students values and behavior that they did not learn in their homes or in their community. The Whigs expected the schools to make immigrant children more like native Americans than like their parents, to make the children of the poor economically ambitious and socially virtuous, to make Catholic children Protestant. Whigs expected the school to change rather than reinforce the habits that children learned outside the school.

To accomplish such goals, educational reformers had to substitute for the haphazard methods of the past a pedagogy that was really capable of influencing children. The new method or pedagogy had to accomplish three things. First, it had to make schooling attractive to large numbers

of children who had rejected schooling in the past because idleness and vice were more alluring. Second, the new pedagogy had to insure that once in school children learned certain basic intellectual skills efficiently and in a manner that also contributed to their moral improvement. The new pedagogy had to combine the intellectual with the moral. Third, it had to insure that children learned certain moral values efficiently and permanently. The third task was the most important, as the Whiggish reformers viewed the school's major responsibility as moral rather than intellectual.

The second task—creation of a curriculum that simultaneously trained the intellectual and moral faculties—was the most difficult and the one most imperfectly accomplished in the nineteenth century. Not until William Torrey Harris applied his Hegelian interpretations to the curriculum and John Dewey suggested that the curriculum could be tailored to prepare a child for a socially virtuous life did educators successfully relate skill training in the common branches to moral training. Before that time educators relied almost exclusively on the time-honored device of teaching children to read with didactically moralistic texts. The hornbook used to teach colonial children their letters introduced "A" with the text: "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." Professor William Holmes McGuffey (1800–1873) used the same device in the famous and immensely popular (over 100 million copies have been sold since 1836) series of readers which he edited between 1836 and his death. As they progressed through the grades, children honed their reading skills on McGuffey's graded collections of excerpts from great books and didactic moral tales. Pedagogues in the common schools, like their colleagues in institutions of higher learning, also looked to mental discipline—requiring students to concentrate on difficult subject matter as recommended in the Yale Report of 1828—as a means of transmitting moral values along with academic skills. But pedagogical theorists of the first two thirds of the nineteenth century offered no new devices capable of relating skill training and moral training. In this chapter, therefore, we will concentrate on the reformers' progress in constructing a pedagogy that would attract children to school and change their moral behavior while they attended.

Their efforts occurred in the midst of a crucial change in the religious and social theory of child nurture that swept the United States between 1800 and the Civil War. The new pedagogy would rest upon this changed theory of the child. Traditional teaching methods had followed the Puritan view that the child was born sinful and had to be won—or, as was more common, perhaps, frightened—away from his natural inclination to evil. Children under ten or eleven could not willingly reject sin because they were not mature enough to experience a true conversion experience. They were in an unenviable position—not yet capable of rejecting evil,

but treated as if they were responsible for their evil actions. Parents and schoolmasters knew no way of hastening the conversion experience and assumed their job was to protect the young child as much as possible from evil influences from without and from his own evil nature. As he was incapable of inner control, of resisting sin by himself, he had to be disciplined externally. He was exhorted to fear the Lord, flogged and beaten in order to help him overcome the bodily passions which were believed to push him toward sin. Parents and teachers sought to break the child's will, for willfulness in children was the surest evidence of the power of evil over them. From the moral point of view, school was something of a holding action. According to strict Puritan doctrine, a person did not earn God's grace or saving power through the performance of good works or rigorous study or humble prayer. A man's fate was predetermined by God, and nothing a man did on earth could change his predestined fate. Thus, nothing a child learned in school affected his eventual receipt of or failure to receive grace. Adherence to Puritan doctrine was complete in no section of the United States and various compromises with predestination and man's inability to exert any control over his fate appeared quite early. No doubt parents and teachers hoped, even expected, that their efforts to teach children to fear the Lord, control their passions, and submit to the will of others did prepare them for eventual conversion, but such expectations could not become an official rationale for schools.

In the nineteenth century theories of child nature changed, especially among the liberal upper and middle classes and the churches they supported. Evangelist practices and imperatives after 1800 modified the theory of predestination by giving the individual some power to affect his fate before God. Another influence for change grew out of the fact that parents and ministers were discouraged by the low rate at which children of the converted experienced conversion. How to maintain the first generation's fervor for conversion and Christian witness in the second and subsequent generations had always been a serious problem for Calvinist religion. It was also difficult to explain in personal or doctrinal terms why the children of the saved were not saved themselves—yet an explanation was necessary each time a child of converted parents did not convert. These children, reared in Christian homes of converted parents, seemed to constitute a natural source of future church members. Responding to their own needs for building larger congregations and to the parents' need for security about the religious future of their children, the clergy worked out a new doctrine of child rearing that ultimately became known as Christian nurture. Horace Bushnell, a Hartford congregational clergyman, codified the doctrine in a treatise of that name published in 1861, but its major components influenced the conception of childhood held especially by the urban elite much earlier. The doctrine contained three major elements. First, the sudden conversion characteristic of the

revival meeting and Puritan literature was not the only kind possible. Some people would, of course, continue to experience the infusion of the light of the Lord all at once and in an instant turn from their evil ways toward righteousness. More commonly, an individual's conversion would be gradual. The maturing child might grow more and more convinced of the extraordinary beauty of God and holiness and gradually find himself more resistant to sin and more capable of submitting to His will. This doctrine of gradualism meant that all influences during childhood and adolescence might further or retard the child's eventual conversion. Parents and educators had vast new powers over the youngster's moral fate. A second component of the doctrine of Christian nurture derived from the Lockean psychological contention that a child's mind at birth was more or less empty, a *tabula rasa*. John Locke, of course, had referred, in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), to the absence of ideas in the minds of the newborn. He had not considered the presence or absence of the mark of original sin in babies. In the nineteenth century liberal clergymen and social thinkers extended his idea to contend that children were born naturally innocent or at least neutral. Evil existed in the world but was not inherent in individuals at birth. Therefore, Christian nurture required that parents and teachers protect the child from contact with and knowledge of evil. Isolating the child's innocence or neutrality from evil influences until the power of God had had an opportunity to do its work was a key to bringing children into the church. Third, Christian nurture held that the Lord should be introduced to children as a God of Love rather than as a Just and Angry God, as had been traditional. It called for more emphasis on Jesus and the New Testament than on the Old. In this way a child would learn to love the Lord rather than to fear Him, surely a more effective way to win a young person to religion.

This switch from the emphasis on fear to that on love accorded well with early nineteenth-century romanticism about the power of love, especially the power of family love. The move to the city had greatly changed the role of the middle- and upper-class woman. In the country she had been a true economic helpmeet to her husband, sometimes working in the fields, always tending a large garden, making bread, preserving vegetables, slaughtering meat, spinning, weaving, making the family's clothes, and raising a large family. In the city many of these tasks were greatly lightened and some disappeared altogether. Middle-class families were smaller, the husband often worked far from home where his wife could not help him, and food and clothing were purchased ready made. The middle-class woman sought other functions to compensate for the relative idleness in which she found herself. One function she chose was that of moral and spiritual guide for her husband and children. Instead of providing physical and economic help to her family, the woman was to employ her special nature as a woman to protect her family from evil and

win them to the Lord. By suffusing the home with the power of her distinctly feminine love, she would make a bastion against the cares and evils of the world outside. The home, under the woman's direction, became an oasis within the evil city. "In the home, hidden from the 'passion-stirring and tumultuous scenes of life,' the divinely meek nature of women redeemed fallen husbands and sons 'reeling from the haunts of dissipation,' " proclaimed, according to Barbara Cross, a treatise on the new function of the urban woman written in 1836.¹ The romanticism of the day often appeared to confuse the mother's role with God's, as in the following celebration, written in 1833, of the power of love to save the fallen. "How often has the profligate son, in the very midst of his dissipation and sin, been led to reflect and repent by a recollection of a mother's prayers and tears!"²

Christian nurture and the romantic role assigned to the urban woman made love the most powerful instrument in the moral reform of individuals. Advocates suggested that the judicious use of love in the home could greatly improve society by permanently altering the behavior of children. Of course, in the Whig reformers' view, such promises had gone unfulfilled as they identified the family, of the well-to-do as well as of the poor, as largely responsible for the breakdown in the network of social control. The Whigs sought to build institutions to shoulder the burden of inculcating values that the family had neglected. But in constructing these institutions the Whigs sought to include the family love that was thought to hold such moral power. Thus, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the "family plan" or "cottage system" was introduced in prisons, reform schools, and asylums. Under this system inmates were divided into small groups, each of which lived in a separate building under the supervision of "house parents." The working girls in Lowell were to live in institutions run on the family plan. Reformers supported the feminization of the teaching force because it was cheap but also because it promised to introduce feminine love into the common schools. Much of the school reform of this period must be understood as an attempt to introduce familial relations to mass institutions and to harness those relations to the task of moral and social control.

II

The demands that reformers placed upon the common schools to alter the behavior of large groups of children dictated that the schoolmen

¹ James Matthews, *The Religious Influence of Mothers* (New York, 1836), quoted in Barbara M. Cross, *Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America* (Chicago, 1958), 59.

² John S. Abbott, *The Mother at Home: Or Principles of Maternal Duty* (New York, 1833), 15, quoted in Cross, *Bushnell*, 58.

would seek new pedagogies; the age's romantic view of children dictated that that pedagogy would seek to employ methods of gentle and loving nurture. Horace Mann sought to frame such a pedagogy in the 1840s; his experiences testify to the earnestness of the reformers' search and the great resistance they met from conservative educators and parents who did not subscribe to the liberal doctrines of Christian nurture or to the genteel romanticism of the day.

Horace Mann rejected the methods that previous generations and the majority of the schools of his own time used to inculcate morals. He believed that the child was innocent rather than inherently evil. He wanted sectarian dogma eliminated from the school. Nor did he subscribe to the orthodox Calvinism to which Massachusetts residents traditionally adhered. Mann sought, instead, to identify a nonsectarian morality which could be taught to all children without violating anyone's sectarian beliefs. The idea that there might be a nonsectarian morality violated the beliefs of some faiths, but Mann persisted. The leaders of the more conservative denominations who were his critics in Massachusetts constantly charged either that he sought to enforce a Unitarian moral code on the schools rather than a nonsectarian one or that he was simply trying to eliminate religion and impose secularism on the schools. For many Unitarianism and secularism were synonymous. These criticisms had merit: Mann's morality emphasized rationality above piety, it depicted Jesus as an extremely ethical man rather than as part of the Godhead. It was a kind of natural morality, in some ways closer to Deism and pantheism than it was to the more orthodox doctrines of the Calvinist Congregationalists and Baptists who dominated New England numerically. Mann's proclivities are clear in the ordering and relative weight he gave to the various results he expected from the effective teaching of poetry.

In sentiment, it should inculcate all kindly and social feelings; the love of external nature; regard and sympathy for domestic animals; consideration and benevolence towards every sentient thing, whether it flies, or creeps, or swims; all filial, all brotherly and sisterly affections; respect for age; compassion for the sick, the ignorant, the destitute, and for those who suffer under a privation of the senses or of reason; the love of country, and that philanthropy which looks beyond country, and holds all contemporaries and all posterity in its wide embrace; a passion for duty and a homage for all men who do it; and emphatically should it present such religious views as will lead children to fulfill the first great commandment,—to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their mind.³

Such a separation of kindness, justice, duty, charity, and love from their proper relation to religion additionally marked Mann as a Unitarian.

³ Mann, *Eighth Annual Report* (1845), 132.

Morality, most of his critics agreed, was a function of religious belief and not something that could be taught separately. A religious belief was necessary to ethical living, the critics charged; after all, men without, or who held the wrong, religious beliefs were likely to behave unethically—Catholics, for example, could hardly be expected to be moral when they believed as they did.

It was just because of such attitudes that Mann and the other common school reformers thought it so crucial to find a common nonsectarian morality. The belief that morality was closely tied to a particular religious confession was divisive and, if implemented in the schools in urban and industrial areas, was sure to undermine the goal of enrolling all children in the schools. Sectarian teaching drove children from school; even Bible reading kept Catholic children from attending school. Common school reformers' objectives could not be reached if moral teaching were tied to sectarian, or even religious, teaching. This problem deeply concerned the reformers as they wished to reach just those children whose parents were most likely to be hostile to the sectarian religious teaching offered in the schools. In small communities and in turn-of-the-century cities population had been relatively homogenous in background and in religious belief. "Public" education could be both sectarian and well attended in these communities because the vast majority of a district's citizens usually belonged to the same denomination. In the polyglot cities such neighborhood homogeneity seldom occurred, and the establishment of schools with any denominational coloring was sure to alienate some of the families which the school reformers wished to reach. Sectarianism in the smaller communities had not been particularly divisive; but in the growing cities of the 1830s and 1840s a sectarian common school was a contradiction in terms.

Mann did not—nor did he wish to—abolish the use of the Bible in the public schools. He proudly announced that Bible reading in the common schools in Massachusetts increased while he was secretary to the Board of Education. But he was happy to report in 1844 that only a small fraction of the towns used the Bible as a devotional work; the rest used it as a reader, just as Mann recommended. The Bible was valuable as a history book, he argued, a religious Plutarch, full of "beautiful incidents in the lives of prophets and apostles, and especially, the perfect example which is given to men in the life of Jesus Christ." Mann complimented the Prussian schools for using the Bible in conjunction with courses on secular history. The Bible was also valuable for teaching reading because it so well combined moral example and beautiful prose—although Mann did find that the masters in one town refused to use the Bible as a text because "many of the verses [do] not end . . . with a full stop!"⁴ Mann believed that the increase in Bible reading correlated with a decrease in

sectarian teaching in the schools; he found less work on catechisms and less Calvinistic emphasis on sin and damnation.

Having rejected sectarian teaching as a means of inculcating morality in children, Mann needed a substitute. The moral stories and examples in the Bible and in the McGuffey readers provided one means of moral instruction, but it was hardly adequate to fulfill the goals of the reformers. The teaching of a rationalized, natural ethics like that of Unitarianism did not appear very promising: Unitarian rationalism had not been very effective in attracting significant numbers of adults to the denomination and it seemed even less likely to influence the moral behavior of large numbers of children. In his efforts to design a pedagogy capable of inculcating an acceptable social morality in children, Mann came to rely more on secular devices than on religious ones. Most important among them were the teaching of vocal music, the psychological theories of phrenology, and the doctrines of Pestalozzi as he found them implemented in Prussia.

Mann described the advantages of teaching vocal music under four headings.⁵ His sometimes labored reasoning and his quaint combinations of science and pseudo-science reveal the monumental difficulty school reformers faced in thinking through the new configuration in common schooling and in finding methods adequate to the tasks they had set for those schools. Vocal music's first advantage as a common school subject was that it was the most democratic of the fine arts. Everyone had ears and a voice to use without cost. They were cheaper than any other musical instruments, they were more convenient for the student to carry around with him, and proficiency in singing was not necessary before a person could derive joy from singing. Second, vocal music contributed directly and indirectly to good health. Singing exercised the lungs, thereby helping to prevent consumption (tuberculosis), said by Mann to be the largest killer in Massachusetts. Furthermore, singing expanded the lungs and brought "a greater quantity of air in contact with the blood." Blood is better "vitalized and purified" under such circumstances. "Good blood gives more active and vigorous play to all the organs of absorption, assimilation, and excretion. The better these functions are performed, the purer and more ethereal will be the influences which ascend to the brain." Indirectly, vocal music promoted good health by stimulating "cheerfulness and genial flow of spirits." In outlining the third advantage of vocal music as a common school subject Mann strained hardest to rationalize. Singing trained the intellect because harmonic relations were mathematical and a scientific approach to the study of music could exercise the same portions of the mind that arithmetic did. Mann's argument was correct but meaningless since subjecting music to mathematical anal-

⁴ Mann, *Seventh Annual Report*, 125; *Eighth Annual Report*, 76.

⁵ The discussion of vocal music is in Mann's *Eighth Annual Report*, 117–132.

ysis was not a practical possibility in the nineteenth-century common school.

Mann devoted most of his discussion on vocal music to extolling its fourth advantage, its "social and moral influence." Although he did not make the connection, it is clear that he believed music could play an important role in Christian nurture, in promoting love in children and protecting them from the influences of evil. Music, Mann argued, "holds a natural relationship or affinity with peace, hope, affection, generosity, charity, devotion. There is also a natural repugnance between music and fear, envy, malevolence, misanthropy." Music also was revitalizing. It could take over from the intellect when that faculty was overtired or overtaxed, it could "restore the energies that have been wasted by toil, revivify the spirits languishing with care, or cause the dawn of joy to arise upon the long watches of sickness." In 1843 Mann had visited a number of schools in Prussia and was very favorably impressed by what he saw, especially by the orderliness of the Prussian schools and the gentleness of the discipline needed to maintain that orderliness. Music was "not the least efficient among the means by which the schools of Prussia are kept in such admirable order, with so rare a resort to corporal punishment," he claimed. When combined with the amiability of the Prussian teachers, music made the Prussian schoolroom "the abode of peace and love,—a bright spot where the sun of affection is rarely obscured even by a passing cloud." Singing could be just as efficient a guarantor of orderliness beyond the classroom as in it. The director of a particularly orderly Prussian reformatory that Mann visited explained, and Mann repeated this explanation approvingly, that because the children in the institution sang all day, the devil could not corrupt them. Musical training also helped account for the superior order and tranquillity of the German people, according to Mann. Music "adds zest to all social amusements. It saves the people from boisterous and riotous passions. Pervading all classes, it softens and refines the national character."

Mann was not alone in his belief in singing's effectiveness as a mode of inculcating moral virtue. In 1838, five years before Mann visited Prussia, the Boston School Committee established instruction in vocal music in that city's public schools. The committee shared the hope that vocal music would promote morality and good order within and beyond the classroom. Music would help the child to "feel rightly" and "it is of more importance a hundred-fold to feel rightly than to think profoundly." What did "feeling rightly" mean? Schools in which children felt rightly, the school committee reasoned, would be sending forth "happy, useful, well instructed, contented members of society."⁶

⁶ Boston School Committee, *Musical Tract No. 2* (Boston, 1840); Boston School Committee Minutes, II, 106, quoted in Mary Ann Connolly, "The Boston Schools in the New Republic, 1776-1840" (Unpublished Dissertation, Harvard University, 1963), 274-276.

The significance of this far-fetched faith in singing is that the schoolmen and reformers evaluated subject matter in terms of its usefulness for moral inculcation, made morality and social control nearly synonymous, and openly sought to make children pliable to the wishes of the teachers. Music is "a moral means of great efficacy," Mann argued, because it "disarms anger, softens rough and turbulent natures, socializes, and brings the whole mind, as it were, into a state of fusion, from which condition the teacher can mould it into what forms he will, as it cools and hardens."⁷ That was the point. In order to fulfill the tasks they had set for it, the common school reformers felt it necessary to seek a pedagogy by which the common school could actually remold children to conform to the moral standards the reformers and schoolmen wished to impose. An effective school should have the power, in effect, to melt a child down and build him up again as a different moral being.

Phrenology offered Mann and other reformers that accepted the doctrine another means of remolding the common school student. Phrenology was a psychological doctrine that sought to explain intellectual and emotional development in terms of physical causes. It was a complex faculty psychology designed to give those who understood it the power to alter human nature and behavior. At its most ridiculous extreme, phrenology identified as many as thirty or forty mental and emotional traits or faculties, each of which was controlled by a separate portion of the brain. Some phrenologists mapped the portion of the skull which covered the brain in such a way as to show which faculties lay under which part of the skull and further claimed that a careful feeling of the bumps and depressions in the skull enabled them, with the aid of the map, to diagnose a person's character. The most extreme argued further that they could change a person's character by massaging the skull so as to stimulate areas that corresponded to desirable traits. For example, a phrenologist might argue that the faculty of amativeness (love) was controlled in that part of the brain that corresponded to the portion of the skull two inches above the left ear and that the faculty of combativeness was in a similar position above the right ear. Through massaging the area above the left ear and neglecting that above the right ear the phrenologist claimed that he could change an argumentative person into a friendly agreeable one.

It is quite easy to see how much this extreme form of phrenology would have appealed to educational reformers bent on finding ways to reshape children in conformity with society's moral standards. But few educational reformers accepted the theory that external manipulation of bumps would lead to character change.

⁷Mann, *Seventh Annual Report*, 126-127.

Even stripped of its theory of therapy and the idea that faculties were so precisely localized in the brain, phrenology remained a very useful doctrine for educators concerned with character change. In this guise phrenology should be viewed as a fairly complex faculty psychology not unrelated to the theories of connectionism and behaviorism that were to be so influential in twentieth-century educational theory. For educational reformers phrenology marked a great advance over the other available psychologies—even the traditional faculty psychology—of the day because it considered a host of moral and ethical faculties to be physically controlled in the brain. By taking traits such as obedience, duty, responsibility, kindness, reverence, hopefulness, righteousness, and conscientiousness out of the realm of the spiritual and religious into the realm of science, phrenology helped the reformers separate morals and ethics from religion and sectarianism. These moral traits were brought out in the open where they could be studied, measured, and affected independent of supernatural influence. As such, they, just like intellectual traits of language perception, comparison and causality, and combination, could now become objects for secular education to influence.

Phrenology was also useful because it promised tools to diagnose and classify children's character so that teachers would know how they might best be educated, especially morally. Throughout the United States phrenologists offered the public the opportunity to have their aptitudes tested through head reading, and young men in New York City regularly called on phrenologists to guide them in job seeking. One phrenologist wrote a book specifically for teachers entitled *The Scientific Basis of Education Demonstrated by an Analysis of the Temperaments and of Phrenological Facts, in Connection with Mental Phenomena and the Office of the Holy Spirit in the Processes of the Mind*. In it he urged the use of phrenological testing in the schools. When a teacher is aware that a child has a well-developed faculty for destructiveness, he can appeal to the child's faculty of executiveness (or building); if a child's faculty of combativeness is strong, his teacher should appeal to the child's sense of cautiousness or approbation. In this manner phrenology offered educational reformers and teachers the chance to effect substantial change in students' future behavior.

Because phrenology argued that human beings could become perfect if they allowed all their faculties to develop naturally, it accorded well with the early nineteenth century's romanticization of nature and with the reformers' belief in the natural innocence of the child. Phrenologists suggested that a person's faculties would develop naturally in a harmonious and balanced way, that a person growing up in ideal conditions would have just the right amount of kindness and just the right amount of combativeness. Educational reformers like Mann found this notion compelling and urged the schools to cooperate with nature, including human nature. Superficially, it may seem contradictory that reformers welcomed

phrenology because it helped them manipulate children's personalities, and that they used it to justify a belief that the best development for children was to leave their development to nature. They resolved the conflict in arguing that children's character needed manipulation only because careless families and wicked society had interfered with the children's natural development before they came to school. The school had to neglect unnaturally stimulated faculties and to strengthen unnaturally restrained faculties in order to compensate for the unnatural influence of parents and the social environment. The emphasis on natural development encouraged reformers like Mann to argue successfully for changes in the curriculum and in the school's physical plant that did have a significant effect on the school experience. Since the essence of education was balanced development of all the faculties, excessive concentration on linguistic and other forms of intellectual training had to be eased in favor of new activities like art and music and recess. Mann spent much of his time campaigning for better ventilated schoolhouses and school furniture designed to fit young bodies, arguing that cooping youngsters up in overheated buildings on uncomfortable seats was unnatural and therefore inefficient. Effective schooling would always appeal to and encourage the child's natural proclivities and protect him from unnatural influences. As Lydia Sigourney, a genteel poetess of the age, put it: schools must tune the harp so as not to injure its natural harmonies.⁸

III

Mann embodied the findings he made in a six-month tour of European schools in his Seventh Report, published in 1844, that was very critical of educational practices in Massachusetts. In essence he claimed that schools in the United States were ineffective because they sought to force knowledge into children and because, consequently, they devoted so much of their time to physically disciplining children. Mann recommended, instead, that they follow the Prussian model, in turn based upon the ideas of Pestalozzi, by gearing their instruction to the child's level of development and appealing constantly to his natural interests and his natural desire to learn.

Pestalozzianism had been known in America long before Mann's report was published. Indeed, Joseph Neef, who had been one of Pestalozzi's trusted assistants in Switzerland, migrated to the United States in 1806 and taught in a series of schools throughout the country, including that at the New Harmony utopian community, but he seems to have

⁸ Lydia Sigourney, quoted in Bernard Wishy, *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (Philadelphia, 1968), 21.

influenced few outside the utopian circle. A Pestalozzian arithmetic text appeared in the United States in 1821. Boston's first vocal music teacher was greatly influenced by Pestalozzi's ideas which he had encountered in Europe. Yet Pestalozzi's reputation in the United States was not high. It suffered because Americans associated him with Rousseau, an educational thinker whom Pestalozzi firmly admired, and the radicalism of the French Revolution. Mann apparently did not expect to win any support by associating his recommendations with Pestalozzi's name. Instead he identified them as Prussian. As has often been pointed out, Mann's description of the Prussian system was inaccurate in the extreme, idealized beyond recognition to enable Mann to criticize American practice more forcefully. What he chose to label as Prussian, however, were largely vestiges of Pestalozzian ideas which Prussia had adopted in revamping its school system after the Napoleonic Wars. Mann's recommendations, then, were clearly rooted in Pestalozzian ideas and should be recognized as such.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827) was born in Zurich of economically marginal middle-class parents (his father died when he was a small boy and left him and his mother in very straitened circumstances). Pestalozzi tried several callings, including the ministry, the law, and farming, but failed to make his way in any. The plight of the Swiss peasant of his day, forced to choose between remaining on the farm where productivity was not keeping pace with population growth and taking dehumanizing and debilitating work in a factory, very much moved Pestalozzi. He was particularly concerned at the destruction of the peasant's natural ties with the land and of his family life. Pestalozzi himself bought a farm upon which he attempted a number of agricultural reforms, hoping to set the peasant an example of how to make farmland support more people. He was unsuccessful in this venture, but on the farm he established a school in which poor peasant children would learn the common branches in conjunction with doing useful work on Pestalozzi's farm and spinning mill. Pestalozzi found himself an educator although he had no administrative capabilities. He taught in several different schools, all alike in that they ministered to the needs of children of the disadvantaged. He published several books that described his schools, his methods, and his philosophy. Most of his writings are dull and painfully vague, but in 1781 he published *Leonard and Gertrude* which presented in novelistic form his major educational ideas. A popular success, the novel gave Pestalozzi the beginnings of an international reputation which was confirmed by the success of the school he started at Yverdon in 1804. *Leonard and Gertrude* made two basic points. First, it held that children should begin learning by studying about things they could sense and things they already knew rather than by studying abstractions such as rules of grammar and number. The curriculum should rely on activities with which the child was familiar at home. The teacher should appeal to the senses before he

appeals to the reason. In brief, this was the philosophy underlying Pestalozzi's object method. Second, the ideal school should be homelike. Bonds of love between teacher and pupil should replace the normal authoritarian discipline of the school. Pestalozzi's emphasis was on learning by doing, on the natural goodness and curiosity of children, and on the importance of love to the learning process. These were the qualities that Mann identified, incredibly enough, with the Prussian school system in his provocative report of 1844.

That report started a pamphlet war (or, more accurately, a book war, as each "pamphlet" ran to 150 or more pages) between Mann and a group of thirty-one Boston schoolmasters—mostly teachers in upper elementary grade schools. The six heavy pamphlets of charge and counter-charge (Mann's *Report*, the 31's *Remarks on the Report*, Mann's *Reply to the Remarks*, the masters' *Rejoinder to the Reply*, Mann's *Answer to the Rejoinder*, and finally *Penitential Tears; or A Cry from the Dust*, by "The Thirty One," *Prostrated and Pulverized by the Hand of Horace Mann*) covered a number of topics; three merit discussion in this context.

The first was Mann's recommendation that reading should be taught initially by the "whole-word" method rather than by first teaching students to discriminate the sounds and the shapes of letters. The Prussian system of starting with whole words whose meaning and pronunciation children already knew was the best method because it naturally interested the children and gave them the most pleasure. Mann discouraged the teaching of the alphabet until the pupil had mastered a 1,000-word reading vocabulary. The masters disagreed with Mann's recommendations for several learned technical reasons. "The only philosophical and true" method of teaching, they contended, was to start from the smallest components of a subject and work up. They identified the letters of the alphabet as the smallest components in this case. They also pointed out that Mann's method lost the advantage that English had over Chinese. Since English words represent both ideas and sounds, a reader knows how to pronounce a word by looking at it. But Mann's method, by neglecting phonetics, failed to teach children how to pronounce words with which they were unfamiliar. The masters also mentioned, without comment, that Horace Mann's wife had a financial interest in textbooks which taught the whole-word method.

The masters' real objection did not lie in the realm of technicalities, however. They rejected the whole-word method because it relied on the philosophy that good teaching must relate to the interests and pleasures of the child. The masters were vehement in denouncing this doctrine: "The mere promotion of a child's pleasure should never form the basis of any system of education," they contended.

To gratify the child, should not be the teacher's aim, but rather to lay a permanent foundation, on which to rear a noble and well-proportioned

superstructure. If, while doing *this*, the teacher is successful in rendering mental exertion agreeable, and in leading the child from one conquest to another, till *achievement itself* affords delight, it is well; . . . But if, to cultivate pleasure seeking is his aim, he had better, at once, abandon his profession, and obtain an employment in which he will not endanger the welfare, both of individuals and society, by sending forth a sickly race, palsied in every limb, through idleness, and a vain attempt to gratify a morbid thirst for pleasure.⁹

The masters thought that learning should be difficult because hard work in school built character. Further, the experience of having to apply himself to subjects that did not interest him taught the student self-discipline and will power. Teaching students material in which they were interested made them soft and "passive" recipients of knowledge. Moreover, the pursuit of knowledge was difficult and to promise students it could be made "easy" was dishonest. The masters objected to teaching that led

pupils [to] become accustomed to depend, for their motive to mental effort, upon that excitement alone which is furnished by their teacher. We would have them stimulated to the pursuit of knowledge, by a love of that pursuit for itself, and by a proper appreciation of its results; and not by that temporary interest which is awakened by the pleasing manner or amusing speech of their instructor; for, the former influence, becomes a constant spring of action in the mind, while the latter, depends for its existence upon the presence of the teacher who exercises it. Further, we believe that care is necessary on the part of the teacher, lest the stimulation and excitement, which the pupil experiences under his influence at school, should be so strong, as to produce a reaction, and, when that influence ceases, to leave the mind disinclined to exertion; its energies exhausted, and its faculties deadened. This state of mind must surely be most unfavorable to a perception of those "social, every-day duties and obligations," to which Mr. Mann properly attaches so much importance.¹⁰

Object teaching would make the child intellectually lazy and thus morally and socially corrupt and pernicious.

The child's moral and intellectual growth depended not only on mental discipline: the masters contended that it also depended on the establishment of adult authority through the use of corporal punishment in the classroom. Mann, of course, disagreed, hailing the Prussian classroom in which parental affection ruled the classrooms and made corporal punishment unnecessary. The Prussian "teacher's manner was better than parental, for it had a parent's tenderness and vigilance, without the foolish dotings or indulgences to which parental affection is prone." In the German classroom "no child was disconcerted, disabled, or bereft

of his senses, through fear" of ridicule or physical pain.¹¹ Mann insultingly criticized American schoolmasters for attempting to rule children through fear. If teachers were more intelligent, he suggested, they would not have to employ corporal punishment. "A teacher who cannot rule by love, must do so by fear. A teacher who cannot supply material for the activity of his pupils' minds by his talent, must put down that activity by force. A teacher who cannot answer all the questions and solve all the doubts of a scholar as they arise, must assume an awful and mysterious air, and must expound in oracles, which themselves need more explanation than the original difficulty."¹² One can wonder if Horace Mann was not trying to rule through ridicule here. But Mann was less worried about the intellectual inefficiency of teaching through the use of fear than in the moral inefficiencies. Teachers who taught with love more effectively altered the behavior of their pupils, he argued, which should be the teacher's primary goal. Corporal punishment made children hard and surly and stifled their natural good will while a teacher's loving and trusting attitude encouraged the child to develop his natural goodness. Mann's report on Prussian education devoted a vastly disproportionate amount of space to analyzing institutions in which children lived all the time— orphanages, reform schools, and schools for the children of prisoners. Mann drew his examples of the effectiveness of institutionalized parental discipline from these institutions but then proceeded to generalize from these examples that his favored method of teaching was everywhere effective and could be used in the regular Massachusetts day school. That he found his model for the ideal common school in institutions which had total control over children is suggestive. To fulfill its objectives, he seemed to feel that the common school must have considerably more power than it then had, a power as great as that possessed by schools which took the child out of society to shape him in isolation.

Again, the masters found little that was persuasive in Mann's arguments. First, they criticized his utopian vision of the all-powerful school and the all-powerful schoolmaster. Men (like themselves) who actually taught (Mann had never taught school) faced children who were, in most of their lives, subject to social influences quite outside the school's control. The common school teacher, unlike the director of an orphanage or reform school, had to battle daily against parental influence. "The practical teacher learns by his daily experience, that the delicate relation of parent and child, will often rise mountain-high before him, when he feels his official duties (in disciplining the child) the most obligatory. The juvenile wanderer often finds the ready apologist in the doting parent."¹³ They also pointed out that the German teacher worked in an au-

⁹ [Boston Association of Masters of the Public Schools], *Remarks on the Seventh Annual Report of the Honorable Horace Mann, Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education* (Boston, 1844), 85–86.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹ Mann, *Seventh Annual Report*, 137.

¹² *Ibid.*, 127–128.

¹³ Masters, *Remarks*, 37.

thoritarian state in which children learned, from all social institutions, to obey; they, on the other hand, had to contend with children raised in a permissive polity. The masters did not advocate frequent use of corporal punishment but did contend that both proper classroom order and correct socialization depended on the threat of corporal punishment and its occasional use. Corporal punishment greatly aided the teacher's ability to counteract the evil influences beyond the school. More important, physical punishment taught children to function properly in the world of law and order beyond the classroom. They must learn to respect authority: "As the fear of the Lord is the beginning of divine wisdom," the masters wrote, "so is the fear of the law, the beginning of political wisdom." Mann, of course, would have disagreed with both halves of this proposition. Love was not enough, the masters argued. Children must be taught to do things they did not enjoy and things for which they did not understand the reason. "Implicit obedience to rightful authority must be inculcated and enforced upon children, as the very germ of all good order in future society."¹⁴ Basically the masters felt that children would not, under any conditions, want to do what was right. Mann, on the other hand, thought they would.

Another issue dividing Mann and the masters was the use of emulation as a goad to student performance in school. The argument was not nearly so vehement as the others described here, but Mann's position revealed a good deal about the kind of citizens Whiggish reformers expected the ideal common school to produce. In some ways emulation was the obverse of physical punishment: when a student did something right the teacher gave him a reward or changed his rank in class in such a way that the student was favorably distinguished from his classmates. Emulation worked in the classroom, its proponents held, because it appealed to the child's competitive instinct and made him work hard to learn in order to outshine his peers. The spelling bee long used in American schools was one form of emulation; Mann sympathetically described another form which he found in a Scottish school. In it, children stood in a row and the master began his questioning. Students exchanged places (passed up or down) according to their relative proficiency and earned chits for passing up past a certain number of their fellows.

When this sharper goad to emulation is to be applied, the spectator will see the teacher fill his hand with small bits of pasteboard, and, as the recitation goes on and competition becomes keen, and places are rapidly lost and won, the teacher is seen occasionally to give one of these tickets to a pupil as a counter, or token, that he has passed up above so many of his fellows; . . . [tickets are] given without any stopping or speaking,—for the teacher and pupil appear to have kept a silent reckoning, and when the latter extends his

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 127–128.

hand, the former gives a ticket without any suspension of the lesson. This gives the greatest intensity to competition; and at such times, the children have a look of almost maniacal eagerness and anxiety.¹⁵

Interestingly enough, Mann did not object to the psychological pressures engendered by such practices although he admitted that emulation might become too intense. He seems to have believed that the pressure fostered the child's intellectual development. Mann objected to emulative techniques on very different grounds. Emulation introduced the child too early to the competitive pressures of the world and taught him to copy the overly materialistic, competitive, and aggressive manner of adults living in the commercial urban society. It taught children to vie against each other rather than to cooperate in true community fashion. Emulation destroyed the home-like atmosphere appropriate to the classroom and introduced competition in a place where love and acceptance and cooperation should dominate. "I heard no child ridiculed, sneered at, or scolded, for making a mistake," Mann remarked of his experience in the Prussian schools. "On the contrary, whenever a mistake was made, or there was a want of promptness in giving a reply, the expression of the teacher was that of grief and disappointment, as though there had been a failure, not merely to answer the question of a master, but to comply with the expectations of a friend."¹⁶ In emulative practices the teacher displayed no such solicitude, moving on directly to the next student when the first student failed.

The masters did not make much of the emulation issue. As usual, they took the practical view: competition and emulation existed in the world of adults and children naturally copied that world. Since students would be competitive anyway, the masters thought it wise to channel that trait toward useful objectives. They agreed that emulation could be overdone, but otherwise thought that it fully accorded with the objectives of education. Emulation would teach children to internalize the desire to learn, to eschew reliance on outside inspiration. The masters contended that schooling's main objective was to teach independence of thought, self-reliance, and will power, all traits a person would need to live successfully in the United States. Elementary education should, they contended, "discipline and strengthen their [the students'] minds, and prepare them, as far as is possible, for that independent action, which will be required of them in the discharge of the duties of life."¹⁷ Mann's discussion of emulation and of competition suggests that he wished to protect children from the world of commercial competition and the spirit of getting ahead. Self-reliance and independent action were not as important for him as

¹⁵ Mann, *Seventh Annual Report*, 63.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁷ Masters, *Remarks*, 45.

they were for the masters. Mann praised one of the Prussian reform schools because in it "the children are not stimulated by the worldly motives of fame, wealth, or personal aggrandizement. The superintendent does not inflame them with the ambition, that if they surpass each other at recitation, and make splendid displays at public examinations, they shall, in the end, become high military officers, or congress-men, or excite the envy of all by their wealth or fame. On the other hand, so far as this world's goods are concerned, he commends and habituates them to the idea of an honorable poverty; and the only riches with which he dazzles their imaginations are the riches of good works."¹⁸ Although he referred to a school for the disadvantaged, Mann's recommendations against teaching ambition were not limited to that special case. Mann did not regard the Prussian reform schools as a special case but as models of operation for the public schools in his own country. He wished to proscribe the inspiration of ambition and of love of worldly goods in all schools in America. One way the educational reformers wanted schools to solve growing social problems in the United States was by serving as an antidote to the evils associated with materialism, competition, breakdown of community, ambitious consumption, and the substitution of pushiness for deference. Emulation in school would simply foster these undesirable traits. Instead, schools should strive to turn children into socially stable, cooperative, and politically deferent citizens content, if not with honorable poverty, at least with their unexalted place. This was the way that schools were going to foster the social stability for which the Whigs longed.

Unfortunately, Mann's disagreements with the Boston schoolmasters have come down to us as a battle exclusively over corporal punishment—in which Mann led the forces of humanitarianism against the medieval views of the masters.¹⁹ This interpretation has neglected the controversy's considerable significance for the debate on the nature of childhood, the purposes of schooling, and the development of a pedagogy adequate to the new demands being placed on schools. Mann can be said to have won the battle over corporal punishment. Although in Boston that method persisted well into the twentieth century, in most of the United States the arguments of Mann and reformers like him led to a vast reduction in the use of corporal punishment and to the adoption of an apologetic tone by those educators who continued to employ it. On the larger issues of the debate, however, there is little to suggest that Mann's recommendations for more natural pedagogical methods and a more enlight-

¹⁸ Mann, *Seventh Annual Report*, 77.

¹⁹ Michael B. Katz's analysis of the controversy in *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), Part II, is a conspicuous and insightful exception to this generalization.

ened view of the child were widely heeded. Mann's attempt to implement his vision of Pestalozzianism did not succeed in affecting classroom practice. His ideas—or, perhaps more accurately, a ritualistic homage to his rhetoric—appeared widely in the literature on educational theory in the next several generations. Willingly enough, American educators adopted Mann's rhetoric about humane and gentle teaching that cooperated with the nature of the child rather than fought it, but they failed generally to grasp or implement the spirit lying behind his recommendations.

Several things help account for this failure. By raising the issue of the Massachusetts teachers' intellectual and pedagogical ability in the tone he did, Mann probably damaged any chances his reforms had for implementation in American schools. The masters' many allusions to Mann's lack of classroom experience reveal how defensive Mann's slurs on their abilities had made them. That defensiveness—the typical defensiveness of the professional when he is criticized by outsiders—prevented the masters from understanding some of the merit in and spirit behind Mann's recommendations. The outsider-criticizing-the-professional drama of the Mann and masters imbroglio has been played out many times in the educational history of the United States; reformers' inability to recommend improvements in the schools without throwing educators into a rigidly defensive and unaccommodating position has been a continuing barrier to educational reform in this country. On the other side of the coin, the teaching corps, as Michael Katz has so perceptively pointed out, was most anxious to believe those parts of the reformers' ideas, Mann's especially, which promised to augment the teacher's power, his status, and the general population's belief in the centrality and significance of the teacher's role in American society. Teachers in the United States did not grasp Mann's ideas about cooperating with the natural development of the child, but they understood immediately the favorable implications of his praise of the teacher and the school as crucial to the preservation of American social order and his ideas that the school and the teacher were society's only available means of curbing crime and disorder. Teachers were only too glad to agree that they were the moral bastions of the developing society and that they should be placed in charge of the intellectual and moral nurture of all the children in the United States. When the reformer aggrandized the reputation of the teacher, he was listened to and followed; when he criticized the performance of those teachers, his recommendations fell on deaf ears.

Another cause reduced the influence of Mann's ideas about the schools' obligation to encourage the natural development of the child. Although there is no way of precisely measuring public attitudes on a question such as this, it seems more than likely that the majority of parents agreed more with the masters than with Mann that obedience to authority must be forcibly inculcated in children. The parent in Edward

Eggleston's *Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871) who demanded that the village schoolteacher "lick 'em and larn 'em" was probably more typical than the common school reformers liked to admit. Mann's admonition that the best way to solve the problems of disorder and lack of social control in society was to loosen the discipline of the school, or to substitute a subtler means of discipline the value of which was untested, seemed inherently wrongheaded to many, many parents. Mann may have had every confidence in the methods he advocated but the fact that he relied on exaggerated evidence from another country to bolster his recommendations suggests that convincing evidence of those methods' effectiveness was not readily available. It is not difficult to see why many would remain unconvinced by his exposition.

IV

Mann's advocacy of Pestalozzian educational ideas failed to change American education practice very much. Another version of Pestalozzianism, however, had a much wider popular and practical success after it was introduced at the Oswego Normal School in 1859. The reasons for this other version's success, when compared to the failure of Mann's version, further explain Mann's failure and illuminate the limits of school reform.

The "object method," as the Oswego version of Pestalozzian reform was called, emphasized a single strand of Pestalozzi's thought to the eventual exclusion of all others. The strand it chose to emphasize, moreover, was the narrowest, most easily codifiable, least crucial to redefining the nature of the relation between teacher and taught, and most easily separated from Pestalozzi's vision of the school as an inculcator of moral values. The object method, essentially, was a means of correlating the curriculum with the development of the child's mental faculties. As the faculty of sense developed well before those of understanding and reason, teachers should first approach children through the senses. "All knowledge is derived in the first instance from the perceptions of the senses, and therefore . . . all instructions should be based upon the observation of real objects and occurrences."²⁰ Oswego concentrated on teaching young children how to perceive rather than what to think. Teachers were to appeal to the children's senses by bringing into the classroom objects, or pictures of objects—thus the name of the movement—that the students could see and touch. Some objects were familiar, some complex; in all cases the point of the lesson was to have the children describe the objects as fully as possible—thus improving their power of observation. Upon being shown an orange, for example, the perceptive

²⁰ Edward A. Sheldon, *Autobiography* (New York, 1911), 145–147.

student was to describe it as natural, vegetable, opaque, foreign, impressive, odorous, sapid, edible, wholesome, juicy, refreshing, spherical, rough, reddish yellow, and he was to add that "we must thank God for it." At more complex levels the class might analyze a story or a poem, but the teacher was instructed constantly to draw pictures or provide actual examples of the physical objects discussed in the story, to act out himself or have the students dramatize parts of the story, and to get the children to refer the actions and lessons in the story to the context of their own lives.

Object teaching was based, quite clearly, on Pestalozzi's idea that young children should begin learning about things with which they were already in some way familiar and that they learned best by doing. What is significant is how quickly the Oswego movement lost sight of other aspects of Pestalozzi's ideas about education. Mann had mentioned the object method: his advocacy of the whole-word method of teaching reading had been based on it. For him the object method was simply a strategy; he was more interested in the idea behind it that good teaching appealed to the child's interests and natural desire to learn. He most admired Pestalozzi's emphasis on the power of love and familial relations to enhance the child's natural desires to be cooperative, selfless, and happy. For him Pestalozzi's greatest contribution lay in his insights into moral training. At Oswego the moral implications of Pestalozzi's educational ideas were lost in the effort to define and implement what the movement took to be Pestalozzi's primary pedagogical method.

The Oswego movement had begun with much wider goals: its founder had been as concerned with moral training as any of the Whig educational reformers of his generation. But, where Mann's pedagogical reform attempts had been largely restricted to encouraging schoolmen through writing and public speaking, the founder of the Oswego movement institutionalized his attempts at reform in an urban school system and in a teacher training school. In the process his goals were narrowed and his ideas simplified and rigidified as they were codified for transmission to large numbers of teachers and packaged for implementation in actual classroom situations.

The career of Edward Augustus Sheldon (1823–1897) neatly telescopes the progress of educational reform in the 1830–1870 period. Sheldon believed expanded and more efficient schooling would compensate for the breakdown of other forms of social control. Therefore, he sought to organize and codify the educational practices that he found and to force them upon the children to be reformed. Sheldon was born in rural upstate New York of economically marginal middle-class parents. He found school uncongenial and his work there was unsatisfactory until he experienced an "educational conversion" at the age of seventeen. His conversion led him to apply himself to his studies so assiduously at an

academy and then for two years at college that his eyesight failed and he was forced to leave school. He moved to Oswego and entered the nursery business but failed. Here he converted once more—this time to a belief that social control must be imposed on the depressed classes in urban America. Oswego, located on Lake Ontario in upper New York State, was a typical booster city of the period. Two thirds of the way along the Erie Canal and connected to it by a spur, it had visions of becoming a major lake port, but Buffalo and Rochester captured most of the lake-canal commercial traffic. Large numbers of Irish and French-Canadian laborers had been imported to the city to build the canal spur and when that task was complete they remained, unemployed or underemployed, to stagnate in the stagnating city. Oswego enjoyed all the squalor, vice, degradation, and potential instability that belonged to any larger city of the period. It displayed all the problems of urbanization and industrialization that had disturbed Whig reformers in other urban environments. These conditions very strongly affected Sheldon who, as a migrant from the rural regions, found them appalling and somewhat mysterious. In 1848, as he recalled in his autobiography, he decided to investigate the condition of the poor in Oswego. He found 1,500 persons unable to read and write (the population of Oswego in 1850 was 12,205). "As a country boy I had hardly known of such a person, and my astonishment may be well understood on finding such a degree of gross ignorance. To me it seemed like being in the midst of heathendom." He was convinced that reform was imperative. One Sunday, "as I passed through the streets . . . and saw great numbers of ragged, profane children romping the streets, having no idea of the sacredness of the day, my heart was pained within me, and I went to my room reflecting what might be done for these poor children." In 1848 education was an obvious solution and Sheldon, with the help of his roommates, organized a school for which he raised money through appeals at church services and prayer meetings. Through the school he established a program for providing clothing for destitute children, for finding foster homes for orphans and children of especially degraded parents, and for visiting the parents of his students. Sheldon had planned to enroll in a seminary the following year but instead found himself a schoolmaster in a charity school for "one hundred twenty to one hundred thirty wild Irish and French boys and girls." Sheldon's first experience with education beyond his own schooling, then, was as organizer and master of a ragged school designed to elevate poor children out of the wretchedness and immorality of their lot. His typically Whiggish efforts were not confined simply to the ragged school. "During the summer months I occupied my Sundays in distributing religious papers and tracts to sailors and boatmen. I also visited the jail for a similar purpose and for religious conversation and instruction."²¹

²¹ *Ibid.*, 74–78, 89.

At the same time Sheldon, sensing the inadequacy of a single ragged school, began campaigning for the city to establish a free school system. The politics of his campaign were quite similar to those in other cities. The city's elite supported the idea but one man whom Sheldon identified as "a politician" urged the city's Catholics to oppose a free school system on the grounds that it was a Protestant plot against Catholic children. The Catholics, with the help of other portions of the population, successfully blocked Sheldon's efforts. When it became clear that the mass of the city's population would not consent to the plan, Sheldon and his influential supporters determined to circumvent the popular will. In 1853 they persuaded the state legislature to pass legislation establishing free schools in Oswego; that legislation contained no provision for a popular referendum on the issue within the city. The law, Sheldon remembered somewhat gleefully, "was, in truth, sprung on the people, as one might say, contrary to their will."²² The need for reform was so great as to outweigh democratic principle.

Sheldon was appointed superintendent of the new system (he had briefly filled a similar position in Syracuse during the fight for free schools in Oswego) and he set out to placate the people upon whom he had sprung the system. Sheldon set about wiping clean the city's educational slate and erecting a totally new "machine" to educate the populace. He erased the old district lines, planned a thirteen-year graded course and implemented it at once, and fired a large number of teachers, many with friends on the board of education, through the expedient of having the board "blind-grade" a written examination which Sheldon had administered to all the teachers. The board did his bidding for him. Sheldon viewed education as a solution to the city's ills and set out in a business-like manner to establish the most efficient and most widespread schooling possible. What took some cities years and generations to accomplish—changing district lines, removing deadwood from teaching staffs, establishing a graded curriculum—Sheldon did within a single year, and he claimed that the reformed system cost the city only \$266.83 more than the old one. Almost overnight he created a complete educational system, and he was immensely proud of it. "I have good reason," he remembered, "for believing that I had organized and perfected the most complete educational machine that was ever constructed. By looking at my watch, I could tell exactly what every teacher in the city was doing."²³

While imposing this educational machine on an initially reluctant citizenry, Sheldon conducted a full-scale community relations program. Just as he had engaged widespread support for his ragged school through public fund-raising activities, he involved the whole community in establishing the free school system. The complexity of his arrangements, he

²² *Ibid.*, 93.

²³ *Ibid.*, 115.

recalled, made people curious and he took advantage of that curiosity by visiting homes to explain the new system to parents. He also involved the public in evaluating the schools, which devoted the last month of the school year to a series of written examinations designed to test the work done throughout the year. Sheldon claimed he personally prepared the questions for each examination and "I marked the answer to every question, keeping a personal account with each pupil and teacher." Then he tabulated the results and published the school-by-school and grade-by-grade results in his report to the board of education and sometimes in the daily newspapers. "In this way I kept up a high pressure on the schools. The rivalry and competition were something tremendous."²⁴ Here was emulation with a vengeance. He had the teachers and the pupils striving to outdo each other in front of the whole community. (There are certain parallels to the public competition of the spelling bee.) Thus, Sheldon met the formal objectives of the common school movement—free schools for all, centralized organization, and improved standards of teaching—with efficiency and dispatch. Common school reform occurred as rapidly in Oswego as in any city in the nation; but it was school reform that lacked Mann's concern with humane pedagogy. School reform implemented in the United States after 1830 probably resembled the kind that Sheldon initiated more than it resembled that which Mann recommended.

School reform began in Oswego in 1853; by 1859 Sheldon was aware that, despite its efficiency, it was failing to elevate the morals and character of the poor as it was intended to do. The machinery was perfect, but "there was something wanting to give life, spirit, I may say, soul to the school system," he remarked in his autobiography.²⁵ The absence of "soul" to which he referred can be interpreted to mean that the schools failed to attract and change the behavior of the poor. The formality, the memorization, the competitiveness drove them away. Seemingly intuitively, like Pestalozzi himself, Sheldon turned to the object method. Although a few of his teachers used objects in scattered parts of the curriculum, Sheldon seemed to have been unfamiliar with the method or the philosophy behind it when he set out, with a friend, to assemble sets of objects with which to teach reading and arithmetic in a systematic way. His efforts rested on a simple-minded Lockean psychology—that all ideas reach the mind through sensation—applied to the teacher-student relation. Since ideas come from sensations, learning should start with sensation, principally with perception. At the same time that he began to assemble his own teaching objects, Sheldon happened, on a visit to the schools in Toronto, to tour the National Museum where he saw objects

for teaching that had been designed by the Home and Colonial Infant and Juvenile School Society of London—the organization that pioneered object teaching in England. Sheldon bought the collection of charts, books, balls, cards, pictures of animals, building blocks, cotton balls, samples of grain, and specimens of pottery and glass from the museum—the Toronto schools did not employ object teaching—took them home, and put them to use in the lower grades of his educational machine. When the method seemed to promise eventual success, he set out to show his teachers how to use it. At first he established training classes on Saturday morning (which teachers attended "eagerly" without pay) but found them inadequate. He persuaded the city to establish its own normal school for teachers. The school imported an experienced object-method teacher from England the first year and, when she returned to England, Sheldon became head of the school (he had attended her classes the previous year). One of his most far-reaching reforms was to establish a practice school that closely resembled an actual city school and to require prospective teachers to spend a major portion of their training course practicing there. In a few years the state took over the school so that it could train teachers to go into every part of the state rather than simply train them for the Oswego city system. The object method of teaching taught at the Oswego Normal School became amazingly and almost immediately popular among educators. The National Teachers Association (soon to become the National Education Association) endorsed the method formally in 1865. The school was the most famous and influential teacher training institution in the Reconstruction era; school systems from all over the world sought teachers who had been trained there and its graduates, many of whom considered themselves missionaries spreading the gospel of object teaching, established new normal schools on the same pattern all over the country.

Sheldon seems to have comprehended the wider implications of Pestalozzi's ideas—that encouraging the child's natural development and substituting nonauthoritarian relations between teacher and student for authoritarian ones would increase the moral efficacy of the schools. But his writings subordinated these concerns to narrow explications of the psychology underlying the use of objects and the descriptions of how objects should be used in the classroom. The documents produced by the Oswego Normal School and its followers increasingly reduced complexities of Pestalozzianism to a few simple rules and "cookbook" maxims. As the missionaries of object teaching sought to convince thousands upon thousands of teachers and administrators of the worth of their system and to instruct them on its use, they were forced to simplify and codify its principles and practices. Publishers also played a role in narrowing and simplifying Pestalozzian principles: they could sell packages of texts and objects but not different attitudes between teachers and pupils.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 114–115.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

Object teaching became essentially a mechanical rule that required teachers to begin teaching an elementary school subject by appealing to the students' senses. In too many cases teachers simply inserted another step in the traditional memorization process. Material was introduced by an object or a picture of an object, but the children were then expected to go right ahead to learn the old abstractions as if no change had occurred. Charles Dickens' satire in *Hard Times* of the teacher ridiculing the gypsy girl who had spent her whole life around horses when she failed to respond to a picture of a horse by reciting its "description" (that it was a graminivorous quadruped with 40 teeth—24 grinders, 4 eye teeth, and 12 incisors—and hard hoofs requiring to be shod with iron, which sheds its coat in the spring) is apt to the American experience. The object method did make some difference in school practice; it was partly responsible for progressive changes in the teaching of geography, arithmetic, and reading which simplified those subjects by developing curricula that moved from the simple to the complex so that the child himself could synthesize the material. The object method also spurred the introduction of drawing and drawing from memory, activities which were expected to increase the student's powers of observation. The introduction of drawing also revealed the method's chief liabilities. Texts instructed the primary school teacher to introduce her five-to-eight-year-old pupils to drawing by teaching them to identify and define the elements of form—to wit, corners, sides, straight and curved lines, plane and curved surfaces, right, acute, and obtuse angles, equilateral and right-angled triangles, perpendicular, horizontal, and parallel lines, the square, the rhomb, and parallelogram, pyramids, prisms, cubes, circles, semicircles, circumferences, arcs, center, radius, diameter, cylinders, cones, spheres, hemispheres, and ovals. The child was to practice drawing these forms before going on to representational drawing. Oswego's attempt to psychologize education, to correlate instruction to the natural development of the child's faculties, too often simply substituted one kind of abstraction and rote memorization for another.

In sum, object teaching failed to become the comprehensive reform of the common school system that Sheldon had hoped it would be. Sheldon became an institution and a bureaucrat, a crusader for the adoption of a method rather than for encompassing reform. He ended up a tinkerer with classroom practice rather than an advocate of major changes in that system. In all these ways he differed from a reformer like Mann, a prominent politician whose interest temporarily focused on fundamentally changing and vastly expanding educational institutions as one component of a comprehensive program of social reform. Sheldon, although he began by envisioning schooling as part of a more general reform crusade, gradually lost his character as a general reformer and became a professional educator, interested in educational reform for its

own sake. With the founding of the normal school Sheldon became an educator's educator.

The educational reform that Sheldon advocated both contributed to and was shaped by the same turning inward. The common school movement generated widespread public interest and support; the Oswego movement's popularity was largely limited to those occupationally engaged in education. Its great attraction among them resulted from the boost it promised to give their professional status and independence as educators. First, it promised to make their efforts more effective, to make them more capable of attracting children to school. These promises of increased effectiveness were especially welcome in the years after the Civil War when outsiders increasingly faulted the teaching profession for failing to meet fully the demands that society had placed on schools and that the schools had willingly undertaken. Furthermore, the object method involved a jargon and a hardware that only those trained to use the method could interpret. This guaranteed educators a certain independence from lay criticism. Further, the method gave teaching the authority of science: the process of observation and then classification that the object method introduced on the elementary level was supposed also to be the method that enabled the natural sciences to advance so rapidly. And object teaching, with its supposedly precise psychological underpinning, gave the appearance of being more scientifically reliable than earlier pedagogies. Another attractive element was that the method clearly distinguished elementary from advanced teaching. Traditionally, the elementary teacher had been supposed to use, at a primitive and unspecialized level, the same methods employed by teachers at higher levels. Her work was merely a simpler version of more advanced techniques of the higher school, and her status among educators was consequently low. The most competent taught in academies and colleges; the less capable in elementary schools. In giving elementary teaching a method unique to itself, the object method allowed elementary teachers to claim a more advanced status without reference to the status of teachers in higher grades. All these advantages derived from the codified and formal aspects of Pestalozzi's ideas. They made object teaching attractive to educators but were not particularly appealing to a larger public. In consequence of its great popularity among educators, the object method was widely implemented in public schools in the second half of the nineteenth century, and it did not lose that popularity until its formalism and underlying psychology came under increasing criticism from educators and laymen alike during the Progressive era. Oswego's version of Pestalozzi's ideas gained wide currency in practice; the attempts to implement his more important ideas failed during the common school era and only after a half-century's hiatus was another attempt made to grasp and implement them.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

BERNARD WISBY, *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (Philadelphia, 1968), remains the best introduction to the nineteenth-century reformulation of the nature of childhood. HORACE BUSHNELL's *Christian Nurture* (1847; New York, 1861), is representative of a vast literature on modern child-rearing practices. An excellent biography of Bushnell which also offers many wider hypotheses on the period is BARBARA CROSS, *Horace Bushnell: Minister to a Changing America* (Chicago, 1958). CHARLES STRICKLAND, "A Transcendentalist Father: The Child-Rearing Practices of Bronson Alcott," *Perspectives in American History*, III (1969), 5-73, analyzes through autobiographical sources the actual experiences of a New England middle-class family. Similarities to the continental experience in the early nineteenth century can be seen in PHILIPPE ARIES, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York, 1962). PHILIP J. GREVEN, *Child-Rearing Concepts, 1628-1861* (Itasca, Ill., 1973), is a good collection of primary sources. The importance of women to the inculcation of virtue and character is examined in BARBARA WELTER, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, XVIII (Summer, 1966), 151-174, and MARY P. RYAN, "American Society and the Cult of Domesticity, 1830-1860" (Unpublished Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1971).

JONATHAN MESSERLI's volume, *Horace Mann: A Biography* (New York, 1972), is the best analysis of that central figure in mid-nineteenth-century reform. A laudatory work, yet one which contains a useful collection of primary materials, is MARY T. P. MANN, *The Life and Works of Horace Mann*, 5 vols. (Boston, 1891). CARLTON MABEE, "A Negro Boycott to Integrate Boston Schools," *New England Quarterly*, XLI (1968), 341-361, argues that Mann abandoned a definition of "commonality" that included blacks in order to secure and maintain as much white support as possible for the Massachusetts public schools. MICHAEL B. KATZ, *The Irony of Early School Reform* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), reminds us that Mann sought to use "soft" educational methods to further social goals defined by the middle and upper classes. A more neutral interpretation of the work of Mann is MERLE BORROWMAN and CHARLES BURGESS, *What Doctrines to Embrace* (Glenview, Ill., 1969), chapter 2. The *Annual Reports* of the Massachusetts Board of Education and the Secretary's Report, in which can be found Mann's best published statements, should be read by the interested student. LAWRENCE A. CREMIN, ed., *The Republic and The School: Horace Mann on the Education of Free Men* (New York, 1957), is an excellent collection of Mann's writings.

Phrenology and related mid-nineteenth century psychological theories are surveyed in JOHN D. DAVIES, *Phrenology, Fad and Science: A Nineteenth Century American Crusade* (New Haven, Conn., 1955), and ALLAN S. HORLICK, "Phrenology and the Social Education of Young Men," *History of Education Quarterly*, XI (Spring, 1971), 23-38.

Henry Barnard's educational philosophy is introduced most conveniently by VINCENT P. LANNIE in his collection, *Henry Barnard: American Educator* (New York,

1974). German educational ideals and practices entered the United States through the speeches and publications of VICTOR COUSIN and CALVIN STOWE; see Cousin, *Report on the State of Public Instruction in Prussia*, trans. Sarah Austin (1834; New York, 1835), and Stowe, *Report on Elementary Public Instruction in Europe* (Columbus, Ohio, 1837). On Pestalozzi's influence on utopian communities in America the student should begin with ARTHUR BESTOR, *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829* (Philadelphia, 1950), and JOSEPH NEEF, *Sketch of a Plan and Method of Education* (Philadelphia, 1808; reprinted in 1969). On his philosophy see GERALD GUTEK, *Pestalozzi and Education* (New York, 1968), and PESTALOZZI's *Leonard and Gertrude*, trans. and abridged by EVA CHANNING (Boston, 1885). His influence on the American kindergarten is examined in chapter 11.

The best studies of the "object method" and its operation in New York State are H. B. WILBUR, "The Object System of Instruction," *National Education Association, Addresses and Proceedings* (1864), 189-209, and WILBUR, "Object System of Instruction as Pursued in the Schools of Oswego," *American Journal of Education*, XV (March, 1865), 189-208, plus NED HARLAND DEARBORN, *The Oswego Movement in American Education* (New York, 1925), and ANDREW P. HOLLIS, *The Contribution of the Oswego School and Normal School to Educational Progress in the United States* (Boston, 1898). EDWARD A. SHELDON's *Autobiography* (New York, 1911), edited by Mary Sheldon, suggests his contribution to the standardization of the American public schools, and SHELDON's "Object Teaching," in HENRY BARNARD, ed., *Pestalozzi and His Educational System* (Syracuse, N. Y., 1888), acknowledges his reliance upon Pestalozzi. In *The Intelligence of a People* (Princeton, N. J., 1973), chapter 2, DANIEL CALHOUN examines SHELDON's work at Oswego. Normal school preparation is treated in MERLE BORROWMAN, *The Liberal and Technical in Teacher Education: A Historical Survey of American Thought* (New York, 1956).