

but I can only find the subject mentioned twice, and the assertions made concerning it contradict each other. From the edifying stories told of his early perusal of the Bible, I conclude that he had learnt to read when very young, but that he was never more than half educated is certain. His writings are full of errors in grammar, and of clumsy and ambiguous expressions. The reader cannot help feeling that the writer was not a man of culture.

There is one story of Lancaster's childhood which deserves mention, because it shows that at an early age he had developed two of the qualities which characterized him through life—enthusiasm and imprudence. When he was fourteen he came across Clarkson's "Essay on the Slave Trade," and this so impressed him that he determined to go out to Jamaica to teach the blacks to read the Scripture. Without telling anyone of his attention, alone, and with only a Bible, a Pilgrim's Progress, and a few shillings in his pocket, he set out to walk to Bristol. Having reached this place he was received on board a vessel about to sail for America. He then wrote to his parents, and steps were taken to secure his return home. Soon after this he turned Quaker, and thus frustrated the intentions of his friends (who were Calvinists) that he should study for the ministry. During a part, or the whole, of the next four years—I cannot obtain any more definite information—he was assistant master in a boarding school. At the age of twenty, however, he started a school of his own. His father lent him a room in his house, while he himself made the necessary desks and forms. Thus a small house in a mean street in the Borough was, in 1798, the birthplace of our national system of education. It would be interesting to have full details of the infancy of a child destined so soon to grow into a giant, but the biographers of Lancaster, according to their habit of copious silence in the wrong places, do not vouchsafe to give us any. The few facts on the subject I have been able to glean lay scattered as incidental statements in controversial works on Lancaster; if the information I have to offer is both vague and meagre, my readers must blame the ignorance of perspective of those people who undertook to write the life of Lancaster—an ignorance which puts in bold outline and large proportions objects which should be in the background, while it gives objects which should occupy a central position in the picture a weak and sketchy outline, and a deep shading. As has been already stated, Lancaster's first schoolroom was in Kent-street. He soon had the pleasure of seeing this filled, and then so overcrowded that he was compelled to remove his school to a workshop. This in its turn soon became too small, and forced to quit it for a still larger room—the only indication of whose locality I can find is that it was "some distance from the paternal house." When this again became too small, the school made its final move (as nearly as I can make out, in 1801) into a room built expressly for it—a room familiar to thousands of the readers of *THE SCHOOLMASTER*, that, namely, in which the Practising School of the Borough-road Training College was, till within a few months ago, held.

In becoming a teacher, Lancaster followed the bent of his genius, for he had the hearty love for children, and the sympathetic, almost intuitive, knowledge of their nature which mark the born teacher. He entered into his work with the large enthusiasm which was so characteristic of him; he thought no labour too hard and no sacrifice too great in the service of his pupils; for them he spent body, mind, and substance, and as much of the substance of other people as he could

persuade them part with. On half-holidays he used to take large parties of his scholars upon excursions around London. On Sundays he used to have forty to sixty of them to tea with him, he providing the tea, and they bringing their own bread and butter. In the winter of 1799–1800 there was great scarcity in London, and the poor suffered fearfully. Lancaster, finding many of his pupils sinking for want of food, or absent for want of clothing, appealed to the generosity of some friends with such success that he was enabled to feed from sixty to eighty till better times arrived. He educated for nothing those children whose parents were too poor to pay the fees. He furthermore had living with him (for he seems to have set up a house soon after he commenced school-keeping) several orphans, to whom he thus stood *in loco parentis* in more than the legal sense of the words. It will be seen that Lancaster was a man of rare unselfishness; it is a pity to have to add that he was also a man of rare imprudence. Nature endowed him with a princely spirit; he forgot that fortune had not endowed him with a princely income. But if he had been nothing more than a kind-hearted schoolmaster he would, like the hundreds of other kind-hearted schoolmasters scattered over the country, never have been heard of outside his own district. To understand why he occupied such a large share of public attention we must consider the condition in which he found education and the changes he wrought in it.

We are not, at present, concerned with the education of the children of the wealthy; it will, therefore, be sufficient to say that that was carried on then, as now, by private tutors (generally good classical scholars), or by the great "public schools." These schools are proud of the *prestige* conferred upon them by their antiquity, and are hence very conservative of their methods. They have, therefore, undergone little change. The educational activity of the last years has, however, called into existence a number of schools somewhat resembling the old "public schools," and the windows of these, not being encrusted with the dust of ages, let in a little of the modern light.

The children of the *bourgeoisie* generally received a little of what was called education, in order that they might be distinguished from the "lower orders;" but this was given by people who knew little and hardly taught what they knew. The qualifications of a teacher were that he should know his letters, and should have failed at everything; that he should have a plate of brass on his door, and plenty of the same metal in his face. If he were asked to describe his method of instruction, he would be in the condition of Canning's knife-grinder, when asked for his story—

"Story! God bless you! I have none to tell, sir."

He greatly resembled Miss Rebecca Sharp, whose biographer says. "With the young people [her pupils] her method was pretty simple. She did not pester their young brains with too much learning, but, on the contrary, let them have their own way in educating themselves; for what instruction is more effectual than self-instruction?" When one considers the hollow humbug of many of the "Academies for Young Ladies" at the present day, the character of their predecessors eighty years ago may be easily guessed; in fact, the matter resolves itself into a proportion sum: What was the value of the education given in certain schools in the eighteenth century, if the value of that given in similar schools in the nineteenth be x (an unknown quantity indeed, and one which, it is to be feared, does not always stop short of being a negative)?