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EDUCATION IN BRITAIN, 1750–1914

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and formerly

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For Tom and James

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PREFACE

Much writing on the history of education used to be concerned with 'Acts and Facts' recorded almost in a vacuum and divorced from the general history of the period in which they were set. Fortunately, such an arid and ahistorical approach has now largely been displaced. Modern textbooks on the history of education in Britain, however, do tend to concentrate mainly on the part played by education in national politics and on the development of institutions and administrative structures. Consequently, there is now no shortage of good textbooks dealing in detail with these important aspects of the subject, especially for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For that reason (and because this series is particularly concerned with 'Social Perspectives') I have chosen not to add yet another text treading the same path. Faced with restrictions of space, I have preferred to limit detailed treatment of political and administrative matters (though not to ignore them) and to give more space to aspects of the relationship between education, society and the economy which have concerned social and economic historians in recent years. The literature on these topics is, indeed, now very extensive, a fair proportion of it being in articles and in books not obviously concerned with the history of education. In order, therefore, that this volume may prove a useful introduction to what is now a very large field of study, and so that readers may reasonably easily take further what is surveyed here in outline, I have provided in the Notes exact references to the sources (with page references where appropriate) on which each specific part of the text is based, as well as a Bibliography listing all the secondary sources referred to in the Notes.

Since some confusion arises (especially with overseas readers) over the use of the term 'public' both for Victorian elementary schools and for the prestigious fee-paying boarding schools of the period, I have distinguished the two throughout the text by adopting a capital 'P' for the latter and a lower case 'p' for the former.

This book is not unique in embracing the general history of education in all parts of Great Britain (Scotland, England and Wales), but I am not aware of any recent text that does so. Though the task of covering all three countries has restricted the space which would have been available had I treated only England and Wales or only Scotland, I have felt it important to try to avoid the spatial parochialism which often still seems to attach to this area of historical scholarship.

I am grateful to Donald Withrington for answering some queries on the statistics of Scottish schooling and to my wife for her unfailing support and positive criticism. I must thank, too, the officers of the Macmillan Press for permitting me to exceed somewhat the originally agreed wordage intended for this volume.

W. B. STEPHENS