

**Alison L. Prentice and
Susan E. Houston, eds.
FAMILY, SCHOOL AND SOCIETY
IN NINETEENTH CENTURY
CANADA.
Toronto:
Oxford University Press, 1975.
294 pp. \$6.95.**

Here is a double rarity for those interested in the history of Canadian education, a book that is useful and provocative. It challenges the placid view that education has improved immensely (or at all); it draws attention to two neglected groups in education, parents and students; and it suggests tremendous gaps in our knowledge of the history of education in Canada. And it accomplishes all this in the least promising of formats, selections from letters, speeches, and reports relating to Canadian education in the nineteenth century.

It does so with some faults and it might be as well to mention these from the start. Almost two-thirds of the selections are drawn from Ontario, fewer than one-tenth from Quebec, and most of the rest from Nova Scotia. It is a remarkably generous proportioning for a Toronto publication but still a reminder that Canadian geography is a neglected subject in Ontario. There is almost no reference to teacher training though it was surely an important development in the later part of the century and its premises can reveal much about the failures of public education. The educational objectives of business and state suffer a similar neglect, being represented only by their platitudes. And, despite a conscious attempt to include them, children speak only occasionally in the documents and only to adults. More insight might have been provided by a sampling of their slang and such street songs as "No more schooldays, no more books,..." Even in the nineteenth century, children's language revealed a visceral understanding of what school was really all about.

On the positive side, this book is

essential reading for anyone who believes that education has advanced since the bad old days. Except for the jargon, most of the nineteenth century conflicts, theories, and posturings have a contemporary ring. In 1872, for example, a Toronto truant officer said of a child, "From the appearance of the boy, his clothes, etc. I think him a fit subject for an Industrial School." So would he be today, though the same selection process would be carried out by a battalion of teachers, counselors, and administrators armed with euphemisms.

One is struck, too, by the persistent and increasing separation of school and family. As state schools replaced earlier types, they proved to have as little interest in either child or parent. The child was squeezed into whatever slot pleased dominant groups and the parent had power only to obstruct and that only to a limited degree. Bureaucracy came early and participation scarcely at all. Most of all, these documents show how little and how shallowly we have studied the history of Canadian education. For the little, we must blame Canadian historians lost in delusions of grandeur in their political Lilliput. For the shallowness, look to the literary efforts of educators. On every page of this book are suggestions of areas that are unexplored and some that are scarcely thought of. Any researcher looking for a topic will find this a mine of ideas.

The editors have grouped the selections into categories and have prefaced each category with a brief but thoughtful essay. It is a measure of their excellence that one could wish for much more of them. There is also an annotated bibliography which serves as one more reminder of how much is yet undone.

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