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Changes in Educational Policies in Britain, 1800?1920. How Gender Inequalities Reshaped the Teaching Profession

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This study is the fruit of more than a quarter of a century?s work dedicated to overcoming the neglect of women in traditional histories of Scottish education. Throughout that time, the author?s argument has been remarkably consistent: as expressed here (p.6), ?the Scottish structure of education was more patriarchal and rigid in its treatment of women teachers as an occupational group relative to their English counterparts in terms of economic status? while schoolmasters in Scotland fared better than those in England in terms of salary, social status and intellectual prestige.

Helen Corr has identified key elements in Scotland?s tradition, or myth, of the democratic intellect: the importance of Presbyterianism and the integral role played by the dominie, or parish schoolmaster, in forging a distinctive sense of masculinity through its educational system, one which was bound up with a sense of national identity established before the Union with England and Wales. Historians of Scottish education see that tradition as embedded in the education act of 1696, and revived by an act of 1803 which improved the position of the dominie, shown to be under threat in the *First Statistical Account of Scotland* (1790?99). While there is a debate over whether the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act dealt a deathblow to the democratic tradition by introducing inferior English practices, the dominie remained a revered figure into the 20th century, reflected in memoir, novel and poetry. From the Reformation, by law there was to be a school

and a schoolmaster in every parish, paid for from the local rates. Fees were charged, but the school was to be provided, the master to be paid a minimum wage, and the children of the poor were to be supported by the local community of ratepayers. The dominie had to subscribe to the Established Church, and was expected to have had a university education (if not a completed degree). He was also expected to combine teaching with service as the local minister?s assistant (for which additional duties the teacher was paid). The dominie was often a frustrated minister, unable to find his own parish; but nevertheless as a teacher he saw himself, and was seen as, playing a key role in preserving and maintaining the tradition of the ?democratic intellect?. Indeed, the dominie was the embodiment of that tradition, serving as the link between parish school and university which was distinctive to Scotland.

A great deal of national sentiment was invested in the figure of the ?lad of parts? from remote villages and humble social origins being empowered by parish schooling to climb into the professions, and the dominie was often a former lad of parts. As Corr contends, this was a masculine ideal, yet even by the 1790s the parish school was only part of a network of schools. The dominie alone could not serve the needs of a growing population, while many teachers outside the parish system (in voluntary, private, and charitable schools) were female. Here we might see the beginning of a gendered division of labour in the teaching profession, particularly in the Lowlands where the private schools often catered for younger children and girls, with the schoolmistress teaching basic literacy (especially reading) as well as sewing and knitting to the girls. She thereby took some of the pressure off the parish school, allowing the dominie to concentrate on teaching the older children, especially but not only the boys, more advanced subjects. Whereas such schools and schoolmistresses reflected an already existing gendered division of labour, at least until the 1830s they were not seen as undermining or challenging the dominie. Rather they were supplementary to the parish school, and it was believed that the dominie encouraged the habit of education and served as a model for others.

Corr?s focus is on the Lowlands, but parallel with the emerging gendered division of labour there was a geographical division. In the Highlands and Islands, generalised poverty meant that few lads of parts took the low road to the universities. Indeed, Highland boys as much as girls were likely to be taught outside of the parish system before the 1872 Act, and by a schoolmistress. Yet even in the Highlands and Islands that link between the parish school and the university was seen as important, though not so much for poor boys as for the sons of small farmers, tradesmen and ministers.

Thus, the educational tradition placed great importance on the appointment of the teacher. The parish school over which he presided was believed to develop a common culture for the whole nation, in contrast to the social and sexual segregation of English education. Corr?s study is stronger on the period after 1870 ? really after the 1872 Education (Scotland) Act ? than on the rest of the 19th century; and whereas generally she contextualises developments in working-class girls? education (her main focus) within the process of industralisation, relating those of their middle-class counterparts to the rise of feminism, she also examines the latter?s championing of a domestic education for the daughters of the poor, which intensified in the later 19th century. A closer look at the range of middle-class girls? education, however, would have brought out similarities with England, particularly in the trend towards single-sex schooling. As Corr notes, early Victorian Scotland felt the strains of industrialisation, urbanisation, and growing divisions within Presbyterianism and English influences. She pays less attention to immigration and migration, and while she acknowledges (p. 60) the growth of Catholic schooling in Scotland from the middle of the 19th century, she does not integrate that into her analysis. This is a pity, since Catholic schools in Scotland relied heavily on lay schoolmistresses in contrast to the centrality of the religious orders in other countries. Nor does Corr examine the relationship between Catholic education and the Presbyterian tradition; instead, she concentrates on the relationship between capitalism, gender and patriarchy, suggesting that education was shaped by this and overlooking what it might have contributed. The pressures she identifies threatened the traditionally high status of the dominie. In particular, Anglicisation was presumed by the Scottish teaching profession to include lower standards in terms of curriculum and teaching, which were both associated with the numerical domination of elementary schooling in England by women. Hence, the sharp increase in Scotland of female teachers after the 1872 Education Act was seen as undermining not only the dominie but also national

harmony by narrowing the education of the poor to the elementary branches. Even certificated mistresses were seen as being of inferior status to the university educated schoolmaster: the former was trained, the latter intellectually educated.

Corr reveals how the development in Scotland of teacher training from the 1820s, and the introduction from England of the pupil-teacher system in 1846 provided Scottish women with points of entry into publicly-funded education and what had been an exclusively male profession. The pupil-teacher system was greatly resented by dominies as undermining the traditional link between universities and schools and narrowing the scope of education in the latter, and in 1847 the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) was set up in an attempt to protect and enhance their professional status. Four years earlier, the split, or Disruption, in the Church of Scotland had a great impact on teacher training, as the new Free Church of Scotland sought to rival the established church. Both aimed to preserve church control of education, and indeed the 1872 Education Act did not change the system of teacher training, which continued to be dominated by the churches into the next century. While Corr acknowledges this, she neglects the influence of religious beliefs and practices on teachers? attitudes towards gender roles. The training colleges strove to maintain the scholarly traditions of the parish schools by keeping Latin in the curriculum for men. Corr contrasts this with the female curriculum of teacher training colleges where the emphasis was on the narrow range of subjects which they were expected to impart to working-class girls.

As this study shows, Scottish teachers, male and female, tended to be better qualified and educated than their English counterparts. Corr acknowledges that while teaching had a higher status in Scotland than in England, there were fewer professional opportunities for women in Scotland. In the second half of the 19th century, the Scottish economy grew dramatically, but that growth was narrowly based on the predominantly male sector of heavy industry. The 1872 Education Act, however, resulted in a huge demand for teachers, opening up a respectable means of becoming self-supporting in a key male profession for the daughters of skilled workers and the lower middle-class. In 1851, 65 per cent of Scottish teachers were male, 35 per cent female; but by 1911, the positions were reversed, with 30 per cent male and 70 per cent female. As demonstrated here, this feminisation of the teaching profession did not bring equality, reflected in persistent salary differentials. In the 1870s the average female salary was scarcely more than half that of the male. 20 years later, the gap had widened, and women were earning on average just under half the male salary. It may be that the higher salaries paid to Scottish schoolmasters was a way of defending their higher professional status and the cultural aspects of the proud Scottish tradition, which as Corr argues was at the expense of women teachers. Further, that there was no strong equal pay movement among Scottish women teachers might also be seen as confirmation of the strength of patriarchy in the Scottish education system. Indeed, Corr contrasts the feminism of the first woman president of the National Union of Teachers (NUT, 1911), Isabel Cleghorn, who championed equal pay, to the pragmatic position of Elizabeth Fish, the first woman elected president of the EIS (1913). Fish counselled that the circumstances militated against equal pay. She noted the schoolmistress was seen as simply a class teacher, and an over-abundant one at that, whereas male recruits to the profession possessed a scarcity value, and were still seen as dominies. While Fish?s position prevailed, Corr presents a case study of rank and file EIS schoolmistresses in Glasgow who were in favour of equal pay. Generally, she sees the NUT as both more political and having a stronger feminist strand than the EIS, but she acknowledges (p.135) that the majority of female teachers remained outside both organisations and only a minority of female members rose to positions in the leadership.

Like most daughters of Church of Scotland ministers, Elizabeth Fish had been expected to earn a living. The close connection believed to exist between education and Presbyterianism led some to argue that women ought to be well educated because self-improvement was a religious and moral duty. Interestingly, no evidence has been found of a Presbyterian campaign against women?s entry into higher education. True, the tradition of university educated masters teaching in the parish schools had led to the assumption that female teachers were inferior to males; but the late Victorian period gradually gave rise to another assumption, that if women were to be employed in the Board schools then they too should have the opportunity of a university education, in keeping with the national tradition and local practice. Of course, women?s position in Scottish universities remained peripheral, and generally working and lower middle-class girls were

discouraged from university education by a bursary system which favoured boys. Yet, however few in number, that a minority of female teachers could now achieve a university education was seen as one way of ensuring that teaching retained its professional status in keeping with the educational tradition. Nevertheless, as Corr highlights, schoolmasters continued to monopolise headships.

Thus, the traditional co-educational system, which survived the 1872 Education Act, favoured male authority. On the one hand, the history of the Scottish teaching profession reflects the patriarchal nature of Scottish society in the 19th century. On the other, it reveals a much more complex situation than simply concluding that Scotland was peculiarly patriarchal, in thrall to Knox?s infamous remarks about the ?monstrous regiment? of women. Knox did not aim his ?first blast of the trumpet? against women in general. It was Knox who insisted on the spiritual equality between women and men, and that education for all ? regardless of gender as well as social class ? was essential. Certainly, the male parish schoolteacher continued to be seen as the epitome of the democratic intellect, but in practice, the dominie often depended on his wife (or sister) to run the school, and increasingly on his daughter as pupil-teacher who would follow him into the profession. Hence, as the Board school system expanded after 1872, women made career gains and gradually, if grudgingly, were recognised as junior partners in preserving the educational tradition, so central to national identity. While Corr attempts (p.3) to place Scotland in ?a comparative context with England and Wales? for the period between 1800 and 1920, a broader European perspective would have shown the Scottish experience to be less distinctive (for example in the preference for mixed-sex schooling) than the English comparison suggests.

A preoccupation of sociologists as well as historians of Scottish education continues to be this question of how Scottish education is distinctive: education is still linked with national identity, with its separate institutions and different traditions taken as a symbol of Scotland?s identity as a nation within the United Kingdom. This key aspect rather gets lost sight of in the final chapter. Although the period identified in the subtitle of this book ends in 1920, there is a lengthy ?postscript? which surveys the situation after 1920 and particularly since the 1960s. The aim seems to be to underpin Corr?s argument for historical continuity in the persistence of gender inequalities in the structure of education and the tacit acceptance of this by women teachers in Scotland. Her explanation, however, departs from the Scottish situation and rests heavily on secondary literature, concluding (p. 245) that the ?fragmentation of feminism and the polarisation of different political and ideological agendas between women activists? has meant that education remains a bastion of male power. The study ends with a call (p.2 46) for education to foster ?a new generation of young men and women to engage in global action for a more egalitarian world?.

Unfortunately, the book is marred by poor proof-reading, clumsy expression, imprecision, repetition, and some factual inaccuracy. The author seems particularly sensitive to criticism of her earlier work, not least by this reviewer, that it was (p. 160) ?over simplistic and far too sharply drawn?. Anyone reading the journal articles and chapters in edited collections written by Corr and published in the 1980s and 1990s (listed on pp.254?5) will be struck by the repetition of key arguments about the relationship between the Scottish educational tradition and gender inequality: indeed, some passages seem simply to be repeated here in the form in which they were originally published. Helen Corr?s own early work was a valuable part of the challenge to the gender blindness of ?the celebrated myth of egalitarianism? (p. 50); this book remains stuck very much within that pioneering position.

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