

## BOOKS

W. G. Fleming, *Ontario's Educative Society*. 8 volumes. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971 - 1972.

Advertised as "the most comprehensive study of Ontario's educational system ever attempted", this eight volume, 3800 page work examines provincial educational developments in the post-war period with a particular concentration on the decade of the 1960's. Fleming has provided future generations of historians with massive amounts of raw data, the personal insights of one who was close to the centre of decision making during the period, and some suggestions as to why Ontario regained the educational leadership among Canadian provinces during the 1960's.

All aspects of the formal educational structure are treated. Volume One, *The Expansion of the Educational System*, introduces some of the current socio-economic issues and describes the quantitative growth of the education system. In Volume Two, *The Administrative Structure*, the bureaucratic growth of the provincial department of education and local school boards is examined. Volume Three, *Schools, Pupils, and Teachers*, focuses on aims of education and curriculum change. In Volume Four, *Post-Secondary and Adult Education*, we are given details of the phenomenal expansion in university education and the rise of the colleges of applied arts and technology. Volume Five, *Supporting Institutions and Services*, is largely a tribute to Fleming's own institution, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. The remaining volumes, scheduled for publication later this year, propose to cover additional aspects of the educational scene — *Significant Developments in Local School Systems* and *Educational Contributions of Associations*. The final work in the series, *Education: Ontario's Preoccupation*, is designed as a companion volume "prepared for a wide readership".

The work naturally invites comparisons with an earlier "comprehensive study of Ontario's educational system", the mammoth twenty-eight volumes of *The Documentary History of Education in Upper Canada* written and edited by J. G. Hodgins between 1894 and 1910. Both Hodgins and Fleming attempted to document and explain periods of growth and innovation in Ontario education — the 1844-1876 and 1960-1970 periods respectively. Both received financial and moral support from the provincial department of education. And both used their studies to identify certain heroes and villains. In Hodgins case there was a deliberate glorification of Egerton Ryerson at the expense of Ontario's

earlier educational leader, John Strachan; with Fleming the heroes are the two education ministers of the 1960's, John Robarts and William Davis, while the villain is their predecessor of the 1950's, William Dunlop.

Fleming too readily dismisses Dunlop as the arch-reactionary because of "his stress on the fundamentals" and quickly brands him as an inept administrator because of his alleged mishandling of the elementary school teacher shortage and the university expansion crisis of the 1950's. Dunlop, we are told, left "a system plagued with structural and curricular rigidities" and a department "characterized by defensiveness, negativism, and resistance to change" (II, 11). Robart's assumption of the education portfolio in 1959 is welcomed as a "fresh breeze". But wait — Robarts is merely the herald for the later arrival of the new messiah! "Davis's appointment as minister in 1962 was an event of such importance that it can hardly be exaggerated." The series then proceeds to chronicle the outstanding achievements of the Davis regime. "In a sense they are all Davis' achievements, and few will begrudge calling the period the Davis era" (II, 30).

Granted, the Dunlop years were not particularly exciting or innovative years in Ontario education. But Fleming fails to consider additional circumstances of the 1950's — the "yesterday" orientation of the Leslie Frost government, the relative shortage of funds compared with the following decade, and the general sluggishness that pervaded Canadian education in the post-war years. Of course the accomplishments of the 1960's were impressive by comparison. But to give total credit to Davis is to overlook such factors as the availability of more money for education (especially federal money) and the challenge to Ontario from educational advances in Quebec, the United States, and elsewhere. And within the province itself there were many other individuals whose contributions to educational change should not be overlooked — university spokesmen like Claude Bissell, Murray Ross, and J. A. Corry; alternative school pioneers like Robert Davis of Everdale Place; opposition politicians like Walter Pitman; and Lloyd Dennis of the Hall-Dennis Commission. The sense of hero worship that permeates the series means that we still await an objective assessment of the "Davis years" in Ontario education.

Fleming's preoccupation with Davis and the provincial department of education results in a focus on the institutional aspects of education. Indeed, throughout the series there is a tendency to equate "schooling" and "education". The reader is overwhelmed by chapter after chapter on schools, colleges, and universities, on local school boards and the provincial department. Alternative forms of education outside the bureaucratic structure are treated incidentally if at all. Thus a chapter entitled "Radio and Television" concentrates on the use of these media for formal instructional purposes — CBC school broadcasts and ETC — but ignores

their broader educational role. A chapter on "Miscellaneous Educative Institutions" further confirms a bias that education takes place only in institutionalized settings — preferably those blessed by W. G. Davis! Where are the free schools, Rochdale College, the youth culture, travel, summer camps and other kinds of educational experiences? The reader is left with the nagging suspicion that Fleming's obsession with formal institutions and structure is characteristic of the entire provincial educational establishment during the period.

In addition, the concentration on structure leads to a neglect of process. What was it like to go to school or university in Ontario in the 1960's? We are given the most detailed explanations of curriculum changes and structural alterations, but little on what it was like to be a student. At times it is difficult for the reader to remember that education supposedly has something to do with kids! There are 448 pages on university developments, but only one paragraph on the social and psychological barriers to university attendance. The growth of the Metropolitan Toronto School Board is chronicled in detail, but no attention is given to the "south of Bloor Street controversy" involving the alleged streaming of lower class children into terminal programs. Teachers fare only slightly better than students, while parents are nowhere to be found. The forthcoming Volume Six, *Educational Contributions of Associations*, will not alleviate this problem unless it goes beyond a discussion of the traditional teachers' and parents' bureaucratic organizations.

The overwhelming impression created by Fleming is that formal schooling has and will contribute to an onward and upward progression of society. All that is needed is more and more of the same. Quantitative growth is stressed, while any discussion of the quality of education provided is missing. The author has posed the traditional questions that might be asked of post-war Ontario education. But education needs writers who can also pose alternative kinds of questions. What kind of society is to be perpetuated? What kinds of educational experiences will produce individuals able to survive in that society? Do these educational experiences have to be confined to schools and universities? Who decides? These questions were undoubtedly raised — and partially answered — in Ontario during the 1960's. But the search for this sort of discussion through thousands of pages of factual details is not a rewarding one for the reader.

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