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The SPCK and the Charity School Movement

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Chapter III

"After the orphan house manner as much as possible": Halle Pietism and the Charity School Movement

In about 1711 John Trevese, an Englishman studying at Halle, asked A.H. Francke for wisdom "in ordering the course of my studies", since his intention was to prepare himself to manage a charity school in England when he returned, "and that after the Orphan House manner as much as possible".[1] The significance of the charity school movement for the education of poor children is well attested: in the words of its major modern historian, these schools, despite their flaws, "provided tens of thousands of children in the eighteenth century with their only means of instruction".[2] But what is too little understood and appreciated is the role Halle Pietism had in the origins, organization, and animation of this movement. Largely using manuscript sources in the *A.H. Francke* Nachlaß in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, our purpose in this chapter is to highlight the German influences on this movement, bringing them to the attention of English scholarship for the first time. It will become apparent that the charity school movement would not have developed as it did apart from the contributions of Halle and Pietist representatives in London.

1. The Early Years of the Charity School Movement

The SPCK and the Charity School Movement

The roots of popular education in England go back to the seventeenth century when endowed elementary schools were formed. However, when many poor could not afford the fee for these schools, there developed a movement to provide free education for these children.[3] In 1688 Thomas Tenison, rector of St. Martin in the Fields, and Simon Patrick, the Dean of Peterborough, noting that two small free schools had been already formed, agreed to create another school for the boys in the parishes of St. Martin in the Fields and Covent

1 John Trevese to A.H. Francke, [Halle, c.1711] (*Nachlaß* 30.IX.376f).

2 Jones, *The Charity School Movement*, p. 344. This account, first published in 1938, remains unsurpassed.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 15-27.

Garden. Masters would be provided and children maintained free of charge so long as parents did not abuse this charity.[4] These free schools, established to counteract the Roman Catholic school in the Savoy,[5] were the prototypes of the charity schools, the first of which were instituted in the late 1690s.[6] By the summer of 1699 seven or eight schools had been started in parts of London and Westminster with 30-50 poor children in each school.[7]

From the beginning the charity schools were associated with the religious societies. In Josiah Woodward's *Account* of the religious societies the twelfth of fifteen "Orders of the Society" was that "each Member shall encourage the *catechizing* of young and ignorant People in their respective Families according to their Stations and Abilities".[8] One of the early charity school leaders informed Francke of their first schools and that "the Charge hereof is defrayed by some of the Religious Societies, and other Christians who voluntarily subscribe towards it".[9] Through another leader Francke had learned of "a particular Society of Gentlemen concerned in the promoting this very design in all places of England".[10] Given the connection of the charity schools to the religious societies, it is not surprising that the SPCK became integrally linked with them.

The SPCK coordinated the opening of numerous schools in London and aroused public interest in the charity schools. In the metropolitan area the Society usually interacted with the schools through their "Agents for Schools", three of the most prominent being Charles Bridges, Samuel Mitchell, and a Mr. Skeate.[11] Bridges was the most frequent early visitor to the Society, reporting on the efforts within parishes to establish schools and relaying information from the SPCK to parishes and religious societies.[12] Through its network of correspondents the SPCK stimulated interest in charity schools throughout Britain. The Society itself provided only limited financial resources,[13] though it contributed to the movement through its network of correspondents and charity school agents both the subscription method of

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4 Broadsheet with handwritten date of 14 Apr. 1688 (Lambeth MSS 952:80); [Journal] of Extraordinary Envoy Van-Dyckveld, 30 Apr. 1688 (BL, Add.34510:115b).

5 [Journal] of Van-Dyckveld, 19 Dec. 1687 and 6 & 30 Apr. 1688 (BL, Add. 34510:67, 110f,115b).

6 White Kennett, *The Charity of Schools for Poor Children Recommended in a Sermon ... May 16. 1706* (London, 1706), p. 32.

7 Samuel Mitchell to Francke, London, 15 Aug. 1699 (*Nachlaß* 30.XIV.568).

8 Woodward, *Account of the Religious Societies*, p. 129.

9 Samuel Mitchell to Francke, 15 Aug. 1699 (*Nachlaß* 30.XIV.568).

10 Charles Bridges to Francke, London, 7 May 1699 (*Nachlaß* 30.XIX.673).

11 SPCK *Minutes*, 18 May 1699 and 22 Feb. 1700, printed in: McClure, pp. 24,50-51; 18 Dec. 1718 (viii.211).

12 E.g. SPCK *Minutes*, 25 Jan. 1700, printed in: McClure, p. 43.

13 On 8 June 1699 Josiah Woodward reported on a charity school at Poplar "where twelve Scholars are taught at the Charge of the Society and four by him". (SPCK *Minutes*, printed in: McClure, p. 26)

finance and administration[14] and the charity school service and sermon. When subscriptions to a charity school were insufficient, a sermon or lecture was given after which a collection was taken at the door. In addition to these local sermons, the Society itself began in 1704 to hold a yearly charity school service and sermon, at which a collection was taken and after which the sermon was published. This tradition, which continued yearly until 1877, kept the schools before the public and the subscribers.

For the first quarter of the eighteenth century the SPCK coordinated the charity school movement which spread from London and Westminster to much of the British Isles. In 1725 the Society reported that the 1597 charity schools established in London and south Britain had provided education for 32,810 children.[15] W.K. Lowther Clarke, defending the SPCK from criticism that in the 1720s it relinquished its role as overseer of the movement,[16] has argued that "there is no evidence to show either that education of poor children ever was its primary objective or that it had the power to lead the country".[17] It is difficult in this matter to draw conclusions based on a perusal of the Society's *Minutes*; however, the testimonies of contemporaries provide solid indication that not only were charity schools the "Darling Employment" of the SPCK,[18] but the members of the Society were the "chief promoters" of this design in England.[19] Though it may not have created the institution, the crucial role played by the SPCK in the expansion of the charity school movement should not be underestimated.[20]

Bridges and Mitchell, Wigers and Mehder

M.G. Jones suggests that the news of Francke's work at Halle "exercised a remarkable influence upon the charity school movement in England, Wales and Ireland" and that when the SPCK wanted to organize an education movement for the poor, "it was the religious discipline on the German pattern which they commended as a cure".[21] In spite of this recognition the signifi-

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14 See pp. 97–98 below.

15 Account of the charity schools appended to: William Berriman, *The Excellency and Reward of Charity. A Sermon Preach'd ... May the 20th, 1725* (London, 1725), p. 43. Joan Simon, "From charity school to workhouse in the 1720s: The SPCK and Mr Marriott's solution", *History of Education* 17 (1988), pp. 113f, argues that the Society's statistics for counties like Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire are inflated and unreliable. However, Geoffrey Holmes, *Augustan England: Professions, State and Society, 1680-1730* (London, 1982), pp. 53f, asserts that there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the SPCK's statistics for the metropolitan area and that its ledger for distant counties, though not as accurate, probably erred on the low rather than the high side.

16 Jones, *Charity School Movement*, p. 59.

17 Clarke, *History SPCK*, p. 29.

18 Chamberlayne to Francke, Westminster, 29 July 1701 (*Nachlaß* 30.XXVI. 847).

19 Newman to Princess Sophia, [London,] 3 Aug. 1713, printed in: Clarke, *Eighteenth Century Piety*, p. 77.

20 *pace* Simon, "From charity school to workhouse", pp. 128f.

21 *Charity School Movement*, pp. 37f.