

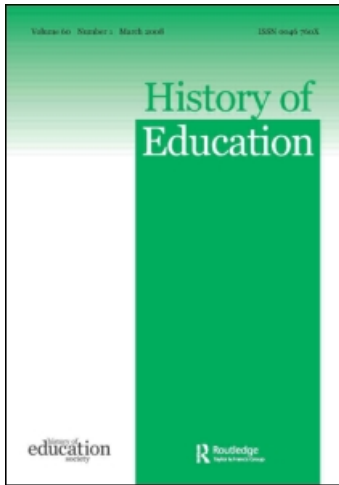
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Philip Gardner ^a

^a Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 1QA, UK

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‘There and not seen’: E.B. Sargant and educational reform, 1884–1905

PHILIP GARDNER

Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, 17 Trumpington Street,
Cambridge CB2 1QA, UK. e-mail: pwg1000@cam.ac.uk

For historians who seek to engage the educational past primarily as a record of the actions of individuals and groups within particular historical contexts, rather than primarily as a series of linguistic or discursive effects, research convention offers two principal alternatives. The first, and far older, tradition settles its sights upon the elevated world of the great educational policy-maker or the mould-breaking administrator. The second approach, associated chiefly with the progressive turn to social theory and to feminist analysis in the later decades of the twentieth century, looks instead to the educational experiences and aspirations of broader social constituencies, most obviously organized labour and women and, in particular relation to schooling itself, classroom teachers, school pupils and parents. One consequence of the operation of these two broad approaches has been the establishment of an analytical division between the great symbolic poles of ‘policy’ and ‘practice’, which has probably come to assume a greater significance than it should.¹ One way to explore this distinction further is to concentrate particularly on historical figures who appear poised somewhere between the conventional ‘downward’ and ‘upward’ models, whose working lives may be seen actively to link the spheres of policy and practice in complex or unexpected ways.

In introducing Arthur Acland as one of the protagonists of his 1973 study of the Liberal Imperialists, H.C.G. Matthew noted that this particularly noteworthy figure for the history of British elementary education remained at that time ‘an ill-documented and rather shadowy figure’.² As the case of Acland illustrates, the dearth of documentation or the absence of a bright public spotlight are in themselves poor grounds for turning away from an initially inaccessible or apparently obscure individual. The significance or influence of the actions of historical figures cannot be simply weighed out in such terms, no more than they may be ultimately resolved by the claims of this or that subsequent interpretation. A contemporary of Acland, leaving Rugby School at about the same time that he was entering it, was Edmund Beale Sargant (1855–1938). Like Acland, Sargant maintained a deep interest in popular education throughout his lifetime. And like Acland again, though to a yet greater extent, Sargant has been passed over by history. Perhaps this is as it should be; perhaps the limelight never was his in the first place. On the other hand, if Sargant remains largely unknown to British educational historians today, are we simply to conclude that his influence was correspondingly unimportant in the educational world of his own time? Though he was neither an archetypal classroom practitioner, nor a career policy-maker,

1 Sandra Taylor, Fazal Rizvi, Bob Lingard and Miriam Henry, *Educational Policy and the Politics of Change* (London: Routledge, 1997), viii.

2 H.C.G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists: The Ideas and Politics of a post-Gladstonian Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 8.

does he—along with others similarly suspended between the well-defined worlds of practice and policy—yet have a claim on the attention of history?

References to E.B. Sargant in recent historical writing are very few and far between. On the rare occasions where his name has come to light, it has invariably been in the briefest or most inconsequential of terms, scarcely tantalizing historical curiosity. The handful of references that do exist are, in fact, more interesting for their methodological assumptions than for their substance, illustrating the deductive tendency to classify an unknown historical figure by making specific assertions derived from a known historical context. Thus we learn, for example, that because Sargant spent time at Toynbee Hall, he was a ‘progressive’; because he was later in South Africa, he was a ‘fiery imperialist’; and because he served with Lord Milner on the 1913 Royal Commission on the University of London, he ‘was the educationalist in Milner’s circle’.³

Who, then, was E.B. Sargant? Where are the sources, if any, for telling his story, and for assessing his contribution to educational reform? More importantly, where is the justification for seeking to do so in the first place? The beginnings of an answer to these questions lie in a most unusual historical document.

Specimens of work in an elementary school is a slim volume of some 132 pages, thirteen inches by eight, bound impressively in board covers bearing the title in gold-tooled lettering.⁴ The bulk of the content is devoted to the reproduction of a notable collection of original stories, poems and illustrations produced by schoolchildren, clearly the ‘specimens of work’ alluded to in the title. The remainder of the book comprises a substantial background introduction written by the school’s founder, and is signed: ‘E.B. Sargant, School Field, South Hackney, June 12th, 1894’. The title page, decorated with a symmetrical border of vine leaves, bears, in large inked stylized letters, the words ‘School Field Magazine 1890–94’. Though the volume carries a pasted label declaring the publisher as Longmans, Green and Co., the enterprise was evidently privately undertaken, with none of the pages—including Sargant’s introduction—being typeset.⁵ The entire content is restricted to hand-written prose and poetry, together with original illustrations, all on lithographed pages that display the work in its unadulterated state. In effect, this is a home-spun school magazine, if of a highly impressive quality, wrapped in an elegant cover. The manifest pride of its presentation resides alike in its expensive professional appearance coupled with the genuineness of its desire to exhibit to a public audience the authentic and unaided work of talented and painstaking child-authors and child-artists. Sargant was clearly immensely proud of this volume, regarding it as a cumulative statement of the achievement of years of work as well as a signal of what a more enlightened pedagogical and organizational regime might hold out for the future of the generality of British elementary schools. The book was also a monument to the school itself, which was about to end its short life. As Sargant wrote in a letter to the local press in May 1894, ‘The closing of the school comes suddenly at a time, when not feeling able any longer to support the whole burden of its cost, I was endeavouring to find assistance towards its continuance from year to year. I had every hope of being successful in this attempt, but meanwhile my landlords received, unexpectedly, proposals for a long lease of the house from Michaelmas day, and

3 R.A. Evans, ‘The University and the City: the educational work of Toynbee Hall, 1884–1914’, *History of Education*, 11/2 (1982), 113–25, 124; Rykie van Reenen (ed.), *Emily Hobhouse: Boer War Letters* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1984), 493; Negel Harte, *The University of London 1836–1986* (London: Athlone Press, 1986), 186.

4 I am most grateful to my colleague, Dr Peter Searby, for originally bringing the volume to my attention.

5 *School Field Magazine 1890–94, Specimens of Work in an Elementary School* (London: Longmans, Green, 1894), xxx.



Figure 1. School Field Magazine: title page.

decided to accept the new tenant.⁶ Such was the school's end. Let us now briefly turn to its beginning and to its historical and local context.

In May 1888, a new school with the curious name 'School Field' opened in South Hackney in London's East End. At first sight, this is an unexceptional fact. With the passing of the watershed Education Act of 1870, the appearance of newly constructed

6 Ibid.

schools across the metropolis had become a commonplace event. The sterling, brick-built Board schools of late Victorian Britain stood out as landmarks, ubiquitous if still novel, across the cityscape. Wherever they opened, they rendered obsolete those older forms of elementary schooling, which were the best that many of the children of the earlier nineteenth century had been able to expect. The voluntary schools supplied by church and by chapel struggled to keep up with the standards of accommodation and levels of equipment that their new rate-aided competitors could afford. And as for the ragged patchwork of working-class private schools that had met episodic local demand for the basic skills of literacy, these simply disappeared, one by one. By the late 1880s, schools of this sort had become few indeed. Their time had gone. This is what makes the inauguration of the new school in South Hackney so unexpected and so remarkable. For the school was a private one of just this kind, with funding from neither church nor state, each child contributing a nominal 2d. per week in fees. At such a very modest cost, the school was patronized mainly by those drawn from the working classes.⁷ Indeed, it was designed to cater, in the words of its founder, 'for the education chiefly of the children of the poor'.⁸ A list giving a 'fair sample' of parental occupations for those attending the school begins: 'Tea-traveller, house-decorator, grocer, bus-conductor, engineer, clerk, shoemaker, carpenter, picture-frame maker, painter, cabinet maker, wheelwright, custom-house officer, starch-maker, fitter, engine driver, ...'.⁹

Such details allow us legitimately to classify the newly opened enterprise as a 'working-class private school', one of the last of a once extensive and ubiquitous cultural form. But they also alert us to the fact that this particular school was actually a singular and highly exceptional example of this form. That its founder provided a detailed written description of the school, as well as a reasoned justification for its establishment, indicates that we are dealing with something quite out of the ordinary. An invariable characteristic of the generality of nineteenth-century working-class schools is that their keepers did not themselves record or advert to their activities in writing. They left no written traces. 'School Field' was quite different. It did not shrink from the gaze either of the public or of the education official. Instead, it consciously reflected on and celebrated its own existence and its range of achievements across its short lifetime. On this ground, though in terms of its clientele—along with the reasons parents may have had for using it—the school may be seen as being related to a longer cultural tradition, this was no classic private adventure school. It was in fact not a school 'of' the working class at all, but a school 'for' the working class. It was provided by the agency of another, as surely as were the schools supplied by the Churches or by the School Board. This is why, rare and evocative as they are, we should not concentrate only on the descriptive substance of the record of 'School Field', as given in *Specimens of work in an elementary school*. Our attention also needs to focus on E.B. Sargant as the individual who simultaneously provided a school for local children to

7 A small number of private adventure schools with fees set at a level (9d.) to attract lower middle-class children operated in Hackney. The most resilient of these was Mrs Goffin's, which had been operating (and was therefore inspected under the survey of local provision required by the 1870 Act) in 1871, off Kingsland Road. Mrs Goffin's school was still going in 1888, with the same number of pupils—40, mixed—and the same fees as in 1871, though she had moved to new premises in Scawfell Street. At this later date—the same year as the opening of the new school in Hackney—the School Board was seeking to conduct a further inspection of Mrs Goffin's, but had been frustrated: 'No reply received to three communications sent to Mrs Goffin.' PRO, ED 14/42. School Board for London. 'Statement as to non-certified schools in the Bye-Laws Report.'

8 School Field Magazine 1890–94, xix.

9 Ibid., xxiii.

use in the 1880s, and a written record of it for historians to contemplate in the here and now.

Let us turn, then, to some more extensive account of the life and educational activities of Edmund Beale Sargant. Sargant came to elementary school work not by training, family tradition, vocation or career ambition. For him, it was an educational engagement that instead grew to represent a statement of deep ethical and moral conviction. This was a commitment, moreover, that seems to have inflected all the other major endeavours of his working life, each of which, in one way or another, ceaselessly circled around the central concerns of education and, particularly, of teaching. At one point in this odyssey, Sargant would write that, '(m)y wanderings have been so complicated that I almost despair of describing them'.¹⁰ His was indeed a complex story. Though powerfully drawn towards the idea of elementary school teaching, he had neither the background nor the training of the typical elementary teacher; no experience of elementary schools, no pupil teaching, no college training. Sargant grew up in an advantaged world where these things were unknown and in which any thought of elementary school work would simply never have arisen. In a period of sharply drawn educational hierarchies and minimal social mobility, he was excluded from the world of the elementary school as surely as the nineteenth-century working-class autodidact was shut out from Oxford or Cambridge. In a peculiar inversion of the experience of Jude the Obscure, Sargant maintained a personal fascination and a desire for elementary school teaching that could be fulfilled only at a distance. In broader policy terms, of course, the effective exclusion from the elementary school of men and women from backgrounds such as Sargant's was an indication of a mounting crisis in long-term teacher supply, as the traditional pupil-teacher system came under increasing critical pressure in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹¹

Sargant was born in 1855, the son of a highly successful London barrister who headed a large and talented family whose members went on to achieve the kinds of success in life for which their privileged upbringing and education—at Eton and Trinity, at North London Collegiate and Girton—had prepared them. Charles became a high court judge, Ethel a celebrated botanist, Walter the acclaimed headmaster of Oakham School, another brother and sister a noted sculptor and gifted painter respectively, a further sister remaining at home.¹² Edmund Beale Sargant's career was to be far more unconventional, taking him from Trinity College, Cambridge, where he lingered for some years having secured a first in the Natural Sciences Tripos in 1878, to Samuel Barnett's Whitechapel settlement at Toynbee Hall, newly founded in 1884.¹³ Sargant was one of the original group of settlers

10 Cambridge University Archives, MS Add. 9281/24. Letter dated 9 October 1900, from Sargant to Aves, Subwarden of Toynbee Hall.

11 '(H)aving regard to moral qualifications, there is no other available, or, we prefer to say, equally trustworthy source from which an adequate supply of teachers is likely to be forthcoming.' PP 1888 XXXV, *Final Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Working of the Elementary Education Acts (England and Wales) (Cross)*, 88. Also see the dissenting note in the Minority Report which commends 'the valuable influence of women of superior social position and general culture'. *Ibid.*, 242; also Wendy Robinson 'In search of a "plain tale": rediscovering the champions of the pupil-teacher centres 1900–1910', *History of Education*, 28/1 (1999), 53–71, 56.

12 See 'Sir Charles Sargant', *The Times*, 28 July 1942, 6; 'Miss Ethel Sargant, F.L.S.' *Annals of Botany*, XXXII (1918), i–v; William T. Stearn, 'Biographical Notes', *Journal of the Society for Bibliography in Natural History*, 4/7 (1968), 368–72; PRO, HO144/1035/178724. Mary Sargant-Florence. Memorial for Certificate of Readmission; John Barber, *The Story of Oakham School* (Wymondham: Sycamore Press, 1983), 104.

13 PRO, RG11/1668/112. 1881 Population Census. Also see Standish Meacham, *Toynbee Hall and Social Reform: The Search for Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'Victorian Philanthropy: the case of Toynbee Hall' *The American Scholar*, 59 (1990), 373–84.

attracted to East London by the forceful idealism of Barnett's ambitious project to reinvest the supposedly lost urban poor with moral leadership and intellectual guidance.¹⁴ The young Sargant doubtless saw himself, in common with many like-minded others, as offering his service to the regeneration of the nation, as one of those 'young men with the generous warmheartedness that belongs to early manhood (who) will not be slow to break through artificial divisions, and to sympathise with, and after a time understand, the hopes and aspirations, the hardships and difficulties, of the artizan's [*sic*] life'.¹⁵

One of the principal philosophical wellsprings for the social and educational programme of Toynbee Hall, of course, was that wider current of late nineteenth-century British Idealism which had been most influentially set out in the thought of T.H. Green. For Green, the development of systematically organized national structures of education and training, through the moral and practical agency of the state, derived its legitimacy 'not solely on the grounds of equality of opportunity ... but on the metaphysical grounds of the organic unity of Society'.¹⁶ Green's powerful message touched a whole generation of educational and social reformers, which included luminaries such as Acland, Haldane, Sadler and Morant—and, much less famously, Edmund Beale Sargant. Green's inseparably related injunction that theory should find issue in practice was perhaps the decisive stimulus which drew Sargant to Toynbee Hall, as a place where he saw that it might be possible for him to do some good.¹⁷ It was precisely this desire that ultimately came to direct his efforts towards the foundation of 'School Field', and later on, with the focus of his organic philosophy shifting from social to imperial concerns, to more ambitious educational endeavours overseas.

Like others of Toynbee Hall's crusading settlers, Sargant's residency, driven by a common concern to pursue educational and social endeavours on behalf of Whitechapel's demoralized poor, was paralleled by the pursuit of a respectable professional career.¹⁸ In his own case, this led to the law—he was admitted to the Inner Temple in 1878—and thence to an appointment as Examiner in the Civil Service Commission in 1884.¹⁹ He maintained this post until July 1899, when he resigned it in order to travel the colonies to pursue a gathering personal interest in comparative school organization and teaching

14 London Metropolitan Archives. LMA/4063/006. Dame Henrietta Barnett: her autobiographical memoirs, ch. VIII, 40.

15 'A Whitechapel Man' (Frederick Rogers), *The New Movement at the Universities, and What May Come Of It* (c. 1887), 2. These are sentiments clearly deriving from Arnold Toynbee's own passionate idealism: 'No longer members of a single class, but fellow citizens of one great people'. Quoted in Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant, *Philosophy, Politics and Citizenship: The Life and Thought of the British Idealists* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 18.

16 W.S. Fowler 'The influence of Idealism upon State provision of education', *Victorian Studies*, IV/4 (1961), 337–44, 342. Also see Vincent and Plant (1984), 2–3; Peter Gordon and John White, *Philosophers as Educational Reformers: The Influence of Idealism on British Educational Thought and Practice* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 101–7; David Boucher and Andrew Vincent, *British Idealism and Political Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 27–54.

17 John Morrow 'Ancestors, Legacies and Traditions: British Idealism in the History of Political Thought', *History of Political Thought*, 6/3 (1985), 491–515, 512–13.

18 At Toynbee Hall, 'You were encouraged to go on with your profession, if you had one, and to give what time you could to the work of the Settlement'. 'Barnett of Toynbee Hall', *Westminster Gazette*, 19 June 1913, 1–2. The author of this piece was signed 'S.' and though the style is generally more demonstrative than E.B. Sargant's normal prose style, it is not impossible that this generous tribute to Barnett is his. Sargant remained characteristically highly loyal and deeply respectful to his principal mentors throughout his life. Also see London Metropolitan Archives. LMA/4063/006. Dame Henrietta Barnett, ch. VIII, 39: '(A)ll the "brethren" should have a profession—not philanthropy'.

19 D.J.N. Denoon (1968) 'Edmund Beale Sargant', *Dictionary of South African Biography* (Nasionale Boekhandel Bpk., 1968), I, 685–6; Transvaal and Orange River Colony, *Public Education: Report of the Director of Education* (Aberdeen, University of Aberdeen Press, 1905), 3.

methods across the Empire. This was a concern that had been fuelled by his experiences at 'School Field', but which had been kindled initially by the particular interest in the education and professional preparation of pupil teachers that he showed from his earliest days as a Toynbee resident. He spent a great deal of time with the pupil teachers, including the organizing of debates, talks and sporting activities, in his capacity as the founder of the London Pupil Teachers' Association which, like many other associated educational groupings, utilized the rooms and facilities of Toynbee Hall.²⁰ Beyond this direct personal and professional contact with young teachers from the public elementary schools, Sargant also played a significant political role in the promotion of public education in London, as the secretary of the Education Reform League. Conceived and inaugurated by Toynbee residents in the winter of 1885–86, '(t)he object of this League is to enlist the co-operation of the working classes in the effort to infuse more life into the dry bones of State-aided Elementary Education'.²¹ By late 1887, fortified by his success in the administration of both the League and the London Pupil Teachers' Association, Sargant was beginning to look out for a practical arena in which his developing ideas might be more extensively explored and tested. His confidence in his own educational skills and sensibilities was also buoyed as a result of a brief period of voluntary service as a classroom teacher at Collingwood Street Board School, 'reckoned by the London School Board as a school of special difficulty'.²² His burgeoning interest in elementary teaching marked Sargant out among the Toynbee residents, amidst whom he had become a recognized specialist on the subject. In the summer of 1887, he was called before the Cross Commission, probably on

20 One of the earliest pupil-teacher centres was based at Toynbee Hall. However, '(t)he centre ... did not remain long in Toynbee, though long enough to enable Mr. E.B. Sargant to found the Pupil Teachers' Association for the boys'. Henrietta Barnett ('His Wife'), *Canon Barnett: His Life, Work, and Friends* (London: John Murray, 1921), 342. Also see 'Annual Report of the Council of the London Pupil Teachers' Association', *The Toynbee Record*, VIII/5 (February 1896), 59: 'The Excursion to Cambridge was a great success this year. Fifty went.... Our thanks are due to our esteemed founder, Mr Sargant, for the admirable arrangements made for our enjoyment at the University.' Also see Universities' Settlement in East London, *Second Annual Report* (1886), 18: 'Under the direction of Mr. Sargent [*sic*], an effort has been made to unite the boy pupil-teachers of all the London Schools into one community, and by the agencies of Cricket, Rowing, and Debating Clubs, to kindle amongst them that *esprit de corps* which so strengthens the *morale* of our higher Public Schools. The numerous classes for Pupil-Teachers ... quicken their intellectual interest and widen their sympathies, constitutes an attempt, the value of which it seems impossible to over-estimate, to sow the seeds of a broader and more humane quality of instruction in the all-important Elementary Schools.' The later but ultimately more successful London Girls' Pupil Teachers' Association was the child of Henrietta Barnett herself, the product of 'a band of ladies' meeting in November 1886 'to consider what could be done to raise the thought and elevate the tone of mind, of Pupil Teachers'. London Metropolitan Archives. LMA/4063/006. Dame Henrietta Barnett, ch. VII, 34.

21 Universities' Settlement in East London, *Second Annual Report* (1886), 18–19. The League took a radical stance: 'The programme of the League enumerates the following points, to which its efforts will be mainly directed:— 1. University Education for Teachers in Primary Schools. 2. Equal opportunities for all children to attain their highest capability by continuity of training,—technical, physical, and intellectual. 3. Improvements in the system of inspection. 4. The more general employment of school buildings and playgrounds for the people's benefit.' Also see H. Barnett (1921), 352. Though his name does not appear in the report of its inception, it is worth noting that at exactly the moment when Sargant was establishing 'School Field', a Hackney branch of the League was formed. The Hackney branch set out a list of objectives that went some way beyond those of the initial foundation. 'The object of the league is to better national education. Amongst other things it seeks to abolish the present system of "payment by results" in elementary schools, to secure a more liberal training for teachers, manual training, commercial and technical instruction in continuation schools, and the fullest opportunities for the development of the talents of the children of working men and women. It endeavours to enlarge and purify our educational system in the broad and enlightened spirit of the late Mr Matthew Arnold.' *The Hackney and Kingsland Gazette*, 30 April 1888, 3. See also PP 1887 XXX, *Third Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Working of the Elementary Education Acts (England and Wales) (Cross)*, 468, qu. 54,703; Briggs and Macartney (1984), 33.

22 PP 1887 XXX, *Cross Commission, Third Report*, 466, qu. 54,637; also 462, qu. 54,550.

the recommendation of Barnett, Toynbee's supremely well-connected Warden, as an expert witness 'on the training of pupil teachers and teachers'.²³

With this accumulating experience came the first signs that Sargant's faith in some of the axioms of the university settlement movement was starting to flag in favour of a solution to social problems focused squarely upon the institution of the elementary school and the agency of its teachers—'the true leaders of the people'.²⁴ This was a decisive shift—indicative, perhaps, of a movement across two divergent strains of thought in Toynbee's intellectual culture—from 'an Octavia Hill view of society' to 'a Beatrice Webb view of society'.²⁵ For Sargant, popular education was now elevated from being merely one among a number of routes towards social reform and regeneration. Henceforth, it was the school alone and, by extension, its teachers, which presented the paramount strategy for the future. The school as an institution offered potential, to a degree that Sargant believed had scarcely been imagined, both for unlocking individual creativity and for building a new social harmony. Energized by the implications of this insight, he began to slip from the centre of life at Toynbee Hall as well as from its core ideology. 'When after three years' residence at Toynbee, and with the full approval and goodwill of the Barnetts, I went to another part of East London to start my experimental school, it was already clear to me that the methods I wished to employ were different from those of the Hall.'²⁶ It was at this point that Sargant sought out, acquired and began to prepare a suitable building in South Hackney for 'my experimental school', which he dubbed 'School Field' and which, for the next six years, would become the major preoccupation of his life. The new enterprise was inaugurated on Monday, 7 May 1888 and seems to have thrived until its closure in July 1894.²⁷ How Sargant divided his time between his avocation in Whitehall and his passion in the East End during these years is not clear, but it is evident that whilst he was often physically present and active in the school, the bulk of the day-to-day teaching was in the hands of others.

The school was housed in a large eighteenth-century building, Grove House, neighbouring St John's Church, South Hackney. 'Facing on a common, and with no public road to it, School Field [Grove House as it was then] appeared to be little known, even to dwellers in the neighbourhood. Often, indeed, it seemed half-hidden in mist; partly the result of damp air from the Lea marshes, partly the result of the smoke which pours out, at low altitude, from the chimneys of the thousands of two-storied dwellings of Hackney.'²⁸ The school opened with 35 scholars, settling after a few years to a working complement of just over 80, with a staff of two full-time teachers and a number of pupil teachers, in addition to Sargant himself.²⁹ Sargant's presence seems to have been very frequent, his regard for the pupils genuine, and his pleasure in their company sincere, if highly sentimental. He offers pen pictures of his particular favourites: 'Dear Emmeline!'; 'What will become of Ida?'; 'Edith of the happy face is the real product of the school: her wares are the best we have to offer'.³⁰ The tone is similar in the composite personal memorial he offers:

23 PP 1887 XXX, *Cross Commission, Third Report*, 462, qu. 54,524.

24 'Pupil Teachers', *The Toynbee Record*, V/12 (September 1889), 132. The phrase was also a favoured one of Barnett's; see Briggs and Macartney (1984), 31.

25 Briggs and Macartney (1984), 36.

26 London Metropolitan Archives. A/Toy/6/3. Letter from Sargant to Lord Milner, 25 July 1913.

27 School Field Magazine 1890–94, xxx.

28 *Ibid.*, xviii. There is an engraving of the building from earlier in the nineteenth century, when it was used as a private school for boys, in David Mander, *Hackney, Homerton and Dalston* (Stroud: London Borough of Hackney/Sutton Publishing, 1996), 84. On the demise of 'School Field', the building became a home for deaconesses.

29 School Field Magazine 1890–94, xxii, xxiv–xxv.

30 *Ibid.*, xii, xiv.

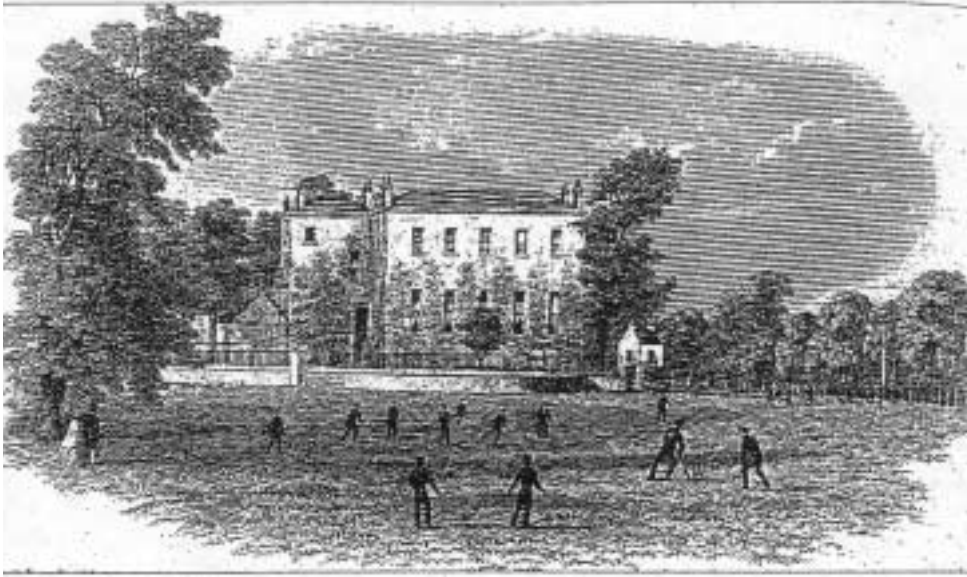


Figure 2. 'School Field'.

Whatever of good, and whatever of bad, flourish within the walls of School Field are mirrored upon the pages of this little book. As I glance, for the last time, at the stories and drawings of my school children, before handing the 'transfers' to the printer, I seem to see each individual boy and girl before me, visible not only in bodily shape, but in character. Their tears and laughter, their dullness and vivacity, their conceit, their humility, their love of justice and self-government, their quick obedience, their impatience of restraint:- all are to be found here.³¹

The object of the school was to stand as an example of what might be achieved within a novel learning regime based on 'ordered liberty', the recognition that 'in youth the artistic faculties so predominate over all others' and the desire 'to educate each child, so that his best powers may be developed for service in after life'.³² Sargant was no educational theorist. He did not dilate much further on the educational principles that defined patterns of activity in the classroom and the playground. These, he believed, would be manifest in the material products of the children's daily work, and that was why the bulk of the book's available space was devoted to displaying them. The demonstration of such material was intended as a signal of what could be achieved by ordinary children and good teachers when they were afforded a degree of freedom in setting their own goals. In this respect, the 'School Field' regime was designed to stand as the dramatic antithesis of 'the misery of grant-earning children' who found themselves 'absorbed into the vast machinery of a Board School'.³³ In 1892, just such a new school opened nearby, and though it turned out to have no negative impact on the numbers on the books of 'School Field', Sargant confessed 'to an anxiety, on the day that the Leviathan opened its mouth, whether or no it would swallow up all my little ones'.³⁴ 'School Field' went on to prosper for another two years, during which time the long process of devising, drafting, editing and producing the

31 *Ibid.*, i.

32 *Ibid.*, xxix, i, xxii.

33 *Ibid.*, xviii, xvi.

34 *Ibid.*, xxviii; also see PRO, ED 25/11679. Letter from Clerk of London School Board to Secretary, Education Department, 8 November 1890.

Design in Chalk upon the Blackboard from the Snowdrop.



Emmeline Letch. Aged 19 years. 1894.

Figure 3. 'School Field': pupil's work.

'School Field Magazine' was completed. 'Scarcely anything has done so much, as this magazine, to weld together home- and school-life. Not one of the numerous visitors who flit through the class-rooms, has seen this secret spring in action, or guessed its true importance.'³⁵

A MORNING IN SCHOOL.

The school has just begun. It is very quiet for composition is going on. The south west wind, is swaying the sweet smelling mignonette and corn flowers, to and fro, while the dull cumulus clouds, are looking into the school upon the bright scholars, who are busily at work. The kitten too is very bright, jumping here and there, playing with every thing which is near him, and we feel as happy at work, as the kitten at play.

Henry Wheeler.
Aged 12 years. 1893

Figure 4. 'School Field': pupil's work.

Sargant left his experimental school in the summer of 1894 confirmed in a new belief. The best answer for resolving the moral concerns and social problems that had drawn him to Toynbee Hall in the first place would not come from the settlement of university men among the poor in order to touch and transform their lives, bringing out their 'best selves', in the Toynbee way, 'one by one'.³⁶ He had proved, at least to himself, that there was an existing institution which could engage the task more directly, consistently and successfully, and that that institution was the elementary school.

³⁶ Meacham (1987), ch. 2. Also David Reeder (ed.), *Educating Our Masters* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1980), 31.

With compulsory national attendance having been enacted in 1880, less than a decade before the setting up of 'School Field', Sargant believed he now possessed a model through which the true capacity of the elementary school for achieving moral, social and educational transformation might be generalized. But there were obstacles in the way of this entrancing prospect. The first concerned the narrow and unimaginative scope of the elementary curriculum as it had emerged from the Revised Code of 1862, which had inaugurated 'the method of awarding grants of money to elementary schools on the results of the individual examination of children'.³⁷ 'Payment by results' represented, for Sargant, the opposite of the characteristics of true teaching, which he saw as being 'unconstrained and natural'. Instead, 'one witnessed the flog, flog, flog, necessary to bring up the scholars to the standard of that annual examination, upon which the golden food of the school depended'.³⁸ In seeking an end to such a system—'(p)rimarily it was the elementary teachers who called for some change'³⁹—Sargant was entirely representative of broad swathes of contemporary public and political opinion.⁴⁰ As its title suggests, the central purpose of *Specimens of work in an elementary school* had been to demonstrate how the capacities of quite ordinary elementary scholars, 'free from the misery of grant earning',⁴¹ could be engaged to produce work of a standard far in excess of the conventional expectations allowed by a pinched and predictable curriculum. 'School Field' was, in effect, a practical experiment to show a wholly different prospect for elementary education than the baleful model offered by 'payment by results'.

Tied to the problem of a restricted and mechanical curriculum, and in part generated by it, was the second and far greater obstacle which Sargant saw as blocking the path of educational advance. This difficulty turned on the character and agency of the classroom teachers themselves. In some respects, the latter—the agency of the teacher—could be seen as a direct function of the system they were obliged to operate; 'no wonder that ... teachers applied the lash—the mental lash—to lagging children to bring them into line, and that, once in line, they cared about them no more'.⁴² If the system could be changed, then the teaching would change. And, with the publication of the Code of 1890, the cumulative campaigns of teachers and others against payment by results, reinforced by the conclusions of the 1888 Cross Commission report, saw the system finally breached.⁴³ 'How all is altered', Sargant wrote, 'the barrier to progress is removed'.⁴⁴ The new Code held out, then, the prospect of a turn to 'unconstrained and natural' classroom teaching. But not all had, in fact, altered. The second element of the problem of the teacher, that which might be broadly described as the question of character, presented a far more complex set of difficulties, amenable to no simple amendment of administrative regulation.

The issue of the character of the teacher, and particularly of the gulf between that which the teacher was in practice and that which he or she might ideally become, was the very foundation both of Sargant's educational analysis and of his consequent prescriptions. It was a problem that particularly perplexed him because he sincerely liked

37 School Field Magazine 1890–94, xvi. Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History 1750–1997* (London: Arnold, 1997, 2nd edn), 360; Paul Sharp and John Dunford, *The Education System in England and Wales* (London: Longman, 1990), 6.

38 School Field Magazine 1890–94, xvii. Also Gillian Sutherland, *Policy-making in Elementary Education 1870–1895* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 80.

39 School Field Magazine 1890–94, xvii.

40 Sutherland (1973), 260.

41 School Field Magazine 1890–94, xviii.

42 Ibid., xvii.

43 Sutherland (1973), 279–82.

44 School Field Magazine 1890–94, xvii.

elementary teachers and enjoyed being in their company.⁴⁵ More than this, and quite unusually in an age when such figures, with all their clumsy pretensions, were the common object of ridicule among cultural and intellectual elites, Sargant held them in genuine admiration and respect. At Toynbee Hall, he had had more sustained contact with teachers, and particularly with pupil teachers, than any other resident.⁴⁶ He came to feel, with justification, that he possessed a special insight into their strengths as well as their weaknesses. This, in turn, helped him to value what the minority report of the Cross Commission identified as 'the moral securities we should look for in our future teachers', securities which seemed increasingly to depend on the acquisition by prospective teachers of a more elevated personal education to match their professional dedication.⁴⁷ This was an insight and a policy objective that Sargant shared, as would his celebrated contemporary and one-time Toynbee resident, Robert Morant, shortly to emerge as the driving force behind the systemic reconstruction of national education at the turn of the century. The sentiments which the future Permanent Secretary of the Board of Education would later announce as guiding official policy had long been those held and practised by E.B. Sargant: 'the teachers as a body of well-educated men and women may render services, out of all proportion to their number in the population, in the performance of the common duties of citizenship'.⁴⁸

Until the reforms which might make such a prospect a reality were put in place, Sargant would remain familiar with, and doubtless irked by, the kind of critical comments about school teachers that marked the private conversations of his Toynbee colleagues, who were, in public discourse, ostensibly among the best supporters of the teachers' interests.⁴⁹ Henrietta Barnett's memorial of her husband relates that Canon Barnett believed '(c)haracter is the chief element in good teaching, and character is the only product worth considering'.⁵⁰ But if character was the ideal for which a teacher should strive, the struggle to achieve it could also lead to that which Barnett saw as the greatest of teachers' failings, conceit. 'To this fault', he warned, 'the teachers have special temptations'.⁵¹ Barnett's letters on the subject of teachers reveal the extent of a distaste that was founded on the cultural gap between what the teachers who came to Toynbee Hall might have been, and what they actually were. 'On Thursday we had a party of elementary teachers. They are a set who need culture. We had thirty conceitedly ignorant, comfortably ugly men and women, to whom is intrusted the power once held by students and priests. We brought them face to face with Holman Hunt and other real creatures, people who know and unconsciously teach humility.' 'The truth is that life to most [teachers] is not serious.' 'They are so cocky and so ignorant.'⁵² Teachers were also a topic of conversation on one of the last occasions Sargant attended Toynbee Hall before he went overseas in 1899:

45 PP 1887 XXX, *Cross Commission, Third Report*, 474, qu. 54,829; also 462.

46 *Ibid.*, 474, qu. 54,827. Sargant felt his special knowledge extended to pupils as well, wondering on one occasion of the House of Lords 'whether some of its members quite realized the ways of boys and girls who attended our elementary schools'. 'Federal Tendencies in Education', *The Times*, 17 January 1907, 13.

47 Also see PP 1888 XXXV *Final Report (Cross)*, (minority report), 242.

48 Morant, quoted in Bernard M. Allen, *Sir Robert Morant: A Great Public Servant* (London: Macmillan, 1934), 220.

49 See, for example, G.A. Christian, *English Education from Within* (London: Wallace Gandy, 1922), 34–5.

50 Barnett (1921), 350. Also see PP 1888 XXXV *Final Report (Cross)*, (minority report), 267; 'that which lies at the root of all educational progress, is the quality of the teaching and the character of the teacher'.

51 Barnett (1921), 349.

52 *Ibid.*

On Wednesday we had an interesting dinner—Gorst, Bond, Sargant and Macdonald with others. There was talk about education, and as Bond is chairman of the Technical Education Board, the talk was with knowledge. Opinion went against School Boards—‘Why should they not control education?’ said the School Board man. ‘Because of the elementary teacher’, said Bond and Gorst. The answer was convincing.⁵³

Sargant himself experienced the dual frustration of precisely recognizing the misgivings which Barnett and others observed, at the same time as being able to perceive, more acutely than any of his Toynbee brethren, the structural—and therefore potentially resolvable—factors which lay behind them. He stood, in other words, on a rather special ground from which he could survey the cleverest of the new as well as the cleverest of the old, as they circled around each other in a moment when the educational consequences of democracy and meritocracy were immanent but not yet evident. Teachers needed to exhibit all the graces of the established intellectual elite, but they could not be considered for admission to it. They might visit Toynbee Hall to be inspired and instructed, but they could never properly be all that the Barnetts understood in their leaden phrase, ‘Toynbee men’. Organic ideals did not yet fully embrace the notion of a common culture as it came to be understood by Raymond Williams.⁵⁴ The elevation of teachers would be of a moral kind primarily, with an admixture of social refinement certainly, but the justification for their limited access to a finer life was defensive as well as permissive. Elevation by merit meant that a limited number of talented individuals from the ranks of those attending elementary schools might be admitted to the benefits of superior cultural values and norms; it did not mean that such values and norms were open to modification from below.⁵⁵ Nurtured by, and enclosed within, a privileged, elite world, the best that can be said for reformers of Robert Morant’s stamp was that, at least to some degree, they were prepared to widen entry to it.

Sargant was just as weighed down by cultural elitism as Barnett or Morant, but he was more open than either of these to the awareness of paradox. Such awareness was not the product of any great intellectual subtlety on Sargant’s part; subtlety was not one of his qualities. Rather, it originated simply from his sustained contact with teachers themselves. Whilst Barnett could understand elementary teachers principally in a spirit of benevolent contempt, Sargant’s benevolence was instead forced upon him by a combination of experience which intimated that social and cultural differences were the product of material circumstances as well as idealist concerns. In regarding pupil teachers when they came for classes at the Hall, he could be appalled, in the way of any other Toynbee resident, by ‘their want of interest in reading generally, and the way in which all knowledge was valued according to its bearing on examination’.⁵⁶ Such would have been a commonplace observation of that which Marx knew as the ordinary bourgeois intelligence, of privilege surveying aspiration. But more poignantly, and wholly in keeping with Sargant’s naturally generous nature and sensibilities, his observations of pupil teachers went on to note that, when efforts were made to entertain or amuse them, ‘how unenthusiastic they were, and how difficult it was to make them laugh’.⁵⁷ In a comment recalling his own advantaged

53 *Ibid.*, 519.

54 Raymond Williams *Culture and Society* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987), 332–8. Also *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), 162.

55 Emblematic of this sensibility is Sargant’s compilation, during his time at ‘School Field’, of a volume consciously dedicated to the interests of the self-improver. See E.B. Sargant and Bernhard Whishaw, *A Guide to Books* (London: Henry Frowde, 1891).

56 PP 1887 XXX, *Cross Commission, Third Report*, 464, qu. 54,593.

57 *Ibid.*

education at Rugby, and prefiguring the model that he would later put forward as an Imperial ideal, Sargant told the Cross Commissioners that the public school experience was one which he sought to share rather than to reserve. 'I got to like the boys [pupil teachers] so much that I wanted to see them have some of the opportunities that boys at public schools have.' Sargant believed implicitly in the value and the rectitude of his own education. He wanted others to share in that from which he knew that he had benefited and in which he honestly believed throughout his life. Like his colleagues at Toynbee Hall, Sargant was not much assailed by fundamental doubt. Had he been so, he might perhaps have understood his own commitment to cultural absolutes as a variation on just that same quality of intellectual narrowness that he sometimes perceived in elementary teachers.

Sargant's clearest and most perceptive commentary on the problem of character as a cardinal quality for elementary teachers came in a brief article on pupil teachers which he produced for the *Toynbee Record* in 1889, not long after the 'School Field' experiment had got under way. What is so noteworthy about this piece is its refusal, once again, to project upon the teachers themselves primary responsibility for their shortcomings. It is also important for its very early prefiguration of many of the key themes that would come to dominate official thinking in relation to the reform of the pupil-teacher system, as undertaken by Morant in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Sargant was first of all 'struck by the isolation from other classes of the community in which [teachers] live'.⁵⁸ In this respect he understood better than any other contemporary commentator that underlying any detailed technical debate about the age of apprenticeship of pupil teachers or the balance between the academic and the practical elements of their training stood the fundamental fact of a hierarchical and segregated system of national education. In a single, unified system, operating on principles of perfect equality of opportunity, the problems—with which the Cross Commissioners had wrestled—of the supply and training of teachers 'as the true leaders of the people' might be resolved. The pupil-teacher system would be rendered unnecessary because mature and highly educated recruits for elementary teaching would simply flow in from the sixth forms of the secondary schools. Sargant was an idealist, but he was not a socialist. He sought an organic society, not an equal one. For as far as he could see, there would be—should be—distinctive social classes with different associated educational regimes. But the dangers, in a more democratic age, of mutual misunderstandings between these regimes he recognized as being very great. '(A)s long as the richer classes draw their teachers from their own ranks, and the poorer classes from theirs, and as long as the distinction between the two classes of teachers is preserved, so long will the ignorance of one part of the nation about the other continue.'

Whilst other educational planners saw the reform of pupil teaching as essentially an exercise in systemic development, Sargant, with his close and sympathetic contacts with individual pupil teachers, saw the question also in personal terms. He recognized very early that fact upon which the much later writing of Hoggart and Jackson and Marsden would continue to reflect: that educational mobility within a class-based society holds out opportunities for its beneficiaries, but that it involves pain and dislocation too. The isolation of the pupil teacher was in large part of just this kind. 'They have taken the first mental step forward which may separate them from the intellectual life of their homes.'

58 'E.B.S.', 'Pupil Teachers', *The Toynbee Record*, I/12 (September 1889), 132. For the subsequent working out of this problem, see PP 1907 LXIV, *General Report on the Instruction and Training of Pupil-Teachers, 1903-07, With Historical Introduction*, 15; also see Philip Gardner, 'Teachers', in Richard Aldrich, *A Century of Education* (London: Routledge/Falmer, 2002), 117-39.

But, unlike the twentieth-century scholarship boy or girl, this first step could never offer the chance of mobility at its fullest expression, out, up and away. For the elementary teacher, the escape was partial and temporary; it was out, up and back. Having glimpsed the higher and finer things of a wider world, the teacher's job was to hold on to them and to carry them back, in an accessible form, to the little world of the elementary classroom. In undertaking this noble and self-effacing work, the nation's children, and the nation itself, would benefit and would owe a debt of gratitude to the teachers.

Sargant believed that this would not be enough. In the isolation of their schools and classrooms, under conditions which 'draw them away from general society', in which 'they feel the narrowing effect of th(eir) early training', service could come to feel like self-sacrifice, and early commitment could turn into subsequent resentment. So much, in Sargant's view, was, without some unprecedented and unwanted upheaval in the organization of society, unavoidable. The inherently anomalous social and status position occupied by the elementary teacher was a function, a regrettable function, of the necessary operation of a complex and intricate education system, answering the needs of a complex and intricate social structure. From this paradox, the teachers could hardly be expected to save themselves; 'as the fault does not lie at their door, so the remedy is not in their hands.'⁵⁹ Sargant offered a solution. It was, as might be expected, cast in that spirit of service, duty and responsibility which had brought him to Toynbee Hall in the first place. To a conventional and essentially domestic expression of Idealism, Sargant would later add a strain of that burgeoning Liberal Imperialism which was so much to influence him in the years to come.⁶⁰ Under this subsequent aspect, it would appear to him that the best values and traditions of the great colleges and public schools could be captured in the form of 'colonizing settlements', designed to found and nurture British educational and cultural values throughout the Empire in a 'policy of college extension beyond the seas'.⁶¹ This was work 'to which it seems to me that [the public schools] are entitled, both on historical grounds and in consequence of their organic structure'.⁶² The roots of this grand Imperial scheme for the public schools, however, originated with Sargant's earlier concern for colonizing the character of the elementary teaching force at home. From the late 1880s, his attention was increasingly caught by an educational variation of the Toynbee principle of settlement in which the settlers would be ex-public school men, as he himself was, and the settled would be individual pupil teachers in need of 'social training'.⁶³ If Robert Morant's policy for securing the character and liberal credentials of the nation's teachers would be to enrol them in the new post-1902 local secondary schools, Sargant's was to drip feed them a distillate of public school values through direct personal contact with public school people.

The cure rests with that part of the community—so difficult to describe in a single phrase—which has had the best opportunities in life. It is for the men and women belonging to that class to recognise the immense responsibility undertaken (perhaps unconsciously) by any child who elects to be a teacher, and to resolve that they will honour the choice and the chooser by some effort of friendship on their own part. If each of them became the adviser and friend of two or three pupil teachers, sympathising with their

59 Note the similar recognition of the 1898 Departmental Committee: 'The traditions of primary teaching are still, through no fault of the teachers, narrower than is consistent with sound education.' PP 1898 XXVI, *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Pupil-Teacher System*, vol. 1, 7–8.

60 Matthew (1973).

61 'Public School and College Extension Throughout the Empire', *The Times*, 23 April 1903, 4; see also *ibid.*, 9.

62 'Public School and College Extension Throughout the Empire', *The Times*, 23 April 1903, 4.

63 PP 1887 XXX, *Cross Commission, Third Report*, 463–4, qu. 54, 573–81. Also see W.E. Marsden, 'Recycling religious instruction? Historical perspectives on contemporary cross-curricular issues' *History of Education*, 22/4, 321–33, 324.

difficulties in their school work and in their lives, reading with them works of imagination of a high order, assisting them in the practice of healthy out-door amusements, it is not too much to say that the conditions of life of these boys and girls would be radically changed, and that they would make far more valuable teachers in the future.⁶⁴

The social conservatism informing the organic ambitions of Sargant's plans for teacher training is explicit here. With the teachers themselves shaped at one remove by the ethos of the public school, the message would find its way, in one further indirect step, to those whom they taught:

(I)t is they who impress upon the working masses their conception of the aristocracy of birth and intellect at the time when such conceptions produce life-long images. If by personal association they learn to form a high ideal of the courtesy and unselfishness of those aristocracies, they will transmit a high ideal to their young disciples.

In the name of the maintenance of high ideals and social harmony, Sargant also advocated that the later stages of the teacher training process should be located not in the teacher training college, but in the more liberal and academic environment of the university or the university college. Again, such an advanced proposal for general progress towards a 'university connection' for teacher training was not driven primarily by meritocratic impulses, but once more by a desire to associate teachers with principles and aspirations of a sort which a college populated by teachers alone could never generate for itself.⁶⁵

The paradox of Sargant's approach—deriving from Toynbee social reformism with a later infusion of Liberal Imperialism—was that it sought to achieve essentially conservative goals of social unity through the exercise of radical reform agendas which always risked unintended consequences or outcomes running beyond the objectives of reformers themselves. Sargant's approach to education policy and practice, whether in South Hackney or in the Transvaal, was essentially that of an 'intellectual Whig'.⁶⁶ He never doubted his role and his duty as a part of a naturally ruling elite which 'assumed that their "effortless superiority" would carry them and their views effortlessly to the top'.⁶⁷

If he believed, however, that his public school training could help teachers with the development of character, liberal sensibilities and moral leadership, Sargant recognised that these needed to be paralleled by improvements in practical teaching method too. Here, the public school could not serve as the appropriate model. What was required instead were systematic comparative data from other elementary school settings, in order that the principles governing best practice might be identified. In advance of the establishment of 'School Field', Sargant had sought to gather such data within a national context. Some years previously, in a spirit of benevolent enquiry drawing strongly on Toynbee's social paternalism, but also from an older tradition of Victorian social investigation, he had fallen into the routine of combining walking holidays in the English countryside with series of informal visits to local elementary schools, chiefly in the West Country and in Kent.⁶⁸ By the time that the 'School Field' experiment had come to an end, Sargant's educational scheming had become far more ambitious, and his plans for compiling comparative data correspondingly more demanding. Now the scope of his perspective was expanded to comprehend the entire Empire or 'Greater Britain' as, following the words of

64 'E.B.S.', 'Pupil Teachers', *The Toynbee Record*, I/12 (September 1889), 132.

65 PP 1887 XXX, *Cross Commission, Third Report*, qu. 54,660. Also see W. Roy Niblett, Darlow W. Humphreys and John R. Fairhurst, *The University Connection* (Windsor: NFER, 1975).

66 Matthew (1973), 290.

67 *Ibid.*

68 PP 1887 XXX, *Cross Commission, Third Report*, 462, qu. 54,546–49.

Dilke and the spirit of Chamberlain, he often described it.⁶⁹ From being the best hope for social unity and harmony at home, education had now become for Sargant also the resource from which could be fashioned the organic bonds of Empire itself.

Sargant carried out an exploratory visit to Rhodesia in the winter of 1897–98, taking an extended leave from the Civil Service. ‘After my return from Rhodesia, I made up my mind to devote my energies, as far as might prove practicable, to those Colonial school problems of which the complexity, as well as the importance, were already beginning to be apparent to me.’⁷⁰ The Rhodesian visit therefore became the precursor for the much more ambitious educational tour which got under way in the autumn of 1899.⁷¹ As in the case of teacher training, the thrust of Sargant’s thinking in relation to the importance of comparative education—as he explained it to the Cross Commission in 1887⁷²—prefigured many of the later concerns of the formal policy process. Sargant’s Imperial educational tour was designed to answer many of the same purposes, if at the modest level of the lone researcher, as was the Education Department’s Office for Special Educational Enquiries, set up in 1895 under Michael Sadler.⁷³

By the middle of 1900, having completed an extensive sequence of investigations in Australia and South Africa, Sargant had arrived in Canada. It was here that he received a dramatic message which took him half-way back around the world, opened a wholly unexpected new phase in his career, and established a link between the achievements of an obscure and short-lived experimental school in London’s East End, and the foundation of a postwar national system of education in South Africa. The summons came from Lord Milner, then High Commissioner for South Africa at the height of the Boer War.⁷⁴ The connection between Sargant and Milner went back to the early days of Toynbee Hall, where Milner, a close friend of Arnold Toynbee himself, had also been an energetic and influential founding member.⁷⁵ Now, nearly two decades later, the subsequently elevated Milner was a powerful—for many, an iconic—Imperial figure, struggling to bring a difficult and unexpectedly protracted colonial conflict to a close. Harried both by hostile world opinion and by intense criticism from domestic liberal opposition, Milner was seeking some amelioration in the grisly public image presented by the concentration camps into which Boer women and children had been herded and confined.⁷⁶ Aware of Sargant’s educational interests and experience, at Toynbee Hall and doubtless at ‘School Field’, it was to him that Milner now turned; ‘my visit has been cut short by a cable-gram from Sir Alfred Milner asking me to help in the “organization of education in the colonies”. He says “Come at once”.’⁷⁷

69 Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain made the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 247.

70 *The Times*, 23 April 1903, 4; Transvaal and Orange River Colony (1905), 2.

71 Transvaal and Orange River Colony (1905), 3.

72 PP 1887 XXX, *Cross Commission, Third Report*, 468, qu. 54,700: ‘I think that extra time, more attention should be paid to the methods of teaching formerly practised in our own country, which are now forgotten.’

73 Michael Sadler, *Michael Ernest Sadler, 1861–1943* (London: Constable, 1949), 125; Allen, (1934), 95.

74 L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times History of the War in South Africa 1899–1902* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1909), 12; David P. Henige, *Colonial Governors from the Fifteenth Century to the Present* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970).

75 Both Sargant and Milner were members of the London branch of Toynbee Hall’s General Committee at its inception. *First Annual Report of the Universities’ Settlement in East London* (1885), 2. Also see London Metropolitan Archives. LMA/4063/006. Dame Henrietta Barnett, ch. VIII, 40: ‘Alfred Milner never lost his touch with Toynbee...’.

76 Ferguson (2003), 278–80.

77 Cambridge University Archives. MS Add. 9281/24. Letter dated 9 October 1900, from Sargant to Aves, Subwarden of Toynbee Hall. Sargant had a deep admiration for Milner, as he had for that other extravagant imperialist, Rhodes; he does not seem to have figured, however, among Milner’s closest imperial acolytes in South Africa.

The War had virtually obliterated educational provision in the Transvaal and the renamed Orange River Colony. On surveying the prospects on his arrival, Sargant was 'very uncertain as to whether it would be possible to make any satisfactory beginning of my work for months to come'.⁷⁸ It was the agency of Boer prisoners themselves that indicated where a start might be made. 'Learning ... that the prisoners at the Green Point Camp had themselves started a school for the boys and young men who were confined there, I determined to see whether something could not be done by Government to help them. On visiting the camp I found that the prisoners were in want of school material, especially books written in English.'⁷⁹

'By this time', Sargant recorded, 'the families of many of the burghers who had taken up arms were being concentrated in camps along the lines of railway in the two Colonies. The nearest camp to Cape Town was Norval's Pont ... close to the banks of the Orange River. It was here that I determined to make the first experiment of a school for refugee children....'⁸⁰ In effect, this was to be Sargant's second 'experimental' school. Nearly seven years had passed since the winding up of 'School Field' but the memories of his experiences in Hackney could not have been far from his mind as he surveyed the scene at Norval's Pont. The most immediately pressing matter was accommodation. This was answered by the supply, from a nearby supply depot, of a number of large military field tents. 'In two of these I opened the first camp school, remaining for a fortnight as its headmaster. The rest of the teachers were found in the camp itself. It was apparent from the first that the school would be a success. The children flocked to it, and the mothers who brought them were well content with the arrangement that the religious instruction should be given in Dutch and other lessons in English.'⁸¹

The success of the school at Norval's Pont encouraged Sargant to press ahead with similar arrangements for other camps and by May 1901, more than 2000 children were receiving an education of sorts in this way, a figure which a year later had risen fifteen-fold.⁸² The most acute obstacle to further progress was not, however, any shortage in tents, equipment or books. What was lacking above all was a cohort of trained and experienced elementary teachers. These Sargant sought to recruit by initiating a recruitment campaign endeavouring to attract teachers from Britain and from other parts of the Empire. By the middle of 1902, some 300 teachers had made the trek to South Africa. 'These ladies were fully certificated, many of them trained as infant mistresses and specially qualified in singing. A small number of excellent headmasters were also imported.'⁸³ The importance of these teachers lay not only in what they were able to achieve in the camps over the short term but, because many of them stayed on and made their lives in the new country, they collectively made up a substantial professional foundation upon which more sustained educational reconstruction could be built.⁸⁴ Sargant considered that this flow of pedagogical talent also had an

78 Transvaal and Orange River Colony (1905), 4.

79 Ibid., 4–5.

80 Ibid., 5. Also Ernst Gideon Malherbe, *Education in South Africa* (Cape Town: Juta, 1925), 297–304.

81 Transvaal and Orange River Colony (1905), 5–6; Amery, (1909), 36. See also Dr Brill, *The Teaching of the Dutch Language in South Africa ... Together with a Letter Addressed to the Rector by Mr. E.B. Sargant* (London: Longmans, Green, 1904), 18–29. Also Clive Whitehead, 'The medium of instruction in British Colonial education: a case of cultural imperialism or enlightened paternalism?' *History of Education*, 24/1 (1995), 1–15, 2.

82 Transvaal and Orange River Colony (1905), 15.

83 Ibid., 12.

84 Amery, (1909), 35, 143–4; Malherbe, (1925), 305–34; W. Basil Worsfold, *Lord Milner's Work in South Africa* (London: John Murray, 1906), 519–26. A.K. Bot, *A Century of Education in the Transvaal 1836–1936* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1937), 77–81.

impact on domestic sentiment at home. 'It is my belief the English nation looked upon these teachers as the forerunners of peace.'⁸⁵

By any judgement, Sargant's achievement was a substantial, important and impressive one. On this one point, both Milner and Emily Hobhouse, seldom on the same side in any question relating to British policy in South Africa, were in agreement. For Milner, '(t)he education, under Sargant, is going like a house on fire everywhere. Sargant has no idea of red tape—too little—but he is a genius as an educationalist, and worth his weight in gold'.⁸⁶ And Hobhouse observed that, 'To Mr. E.B. Sargant the country owes its gratitude for creating what has been the redeeming feature of camp life—the schools—where already many children have learnt a higher side of English character and thought than that which the war seemed to have taught them. Much, very much, may develop from the beginning made in these camp schools.'⁸⁷

Sargant's period in South Africa was clearly important in accelerating and consolidating that complex shift in his unifying Idealist beliefs which carried him, without much apparent difficulty, from classical Toynbee social reformer to a position much closer to Liberal Imperialism.⁸⁸ In a sense, of course, such a movement did not represent a very great ideological detour, and the paternalist and organicist elements common to both positions are as evident in the successive phases of Sargant's thinking as they are, if more stridently, in his erstwhile Toynbee colleague, Milner.⁸⁹ Both exemplified the ways in which '(i)n those days Imperialism and social reform went together. They represented a collectivism, a voluntary subordination of the individual to the community, a reaction against the harsh and unimaginative individualism of *laissez faire*.'⁹⁰

85 Transvaal and Orange River Colony (1905), 13. See also Barnett (1921), 577: 'E.B. Sargant writes from the camp saying the whole world must be impressed by the care England is taking of her enemies. Of course he sees the kindness and not the brutality which made them need the kindness....'

86 Cecil Headlam (ed.), *The Milner Papers: South Africa 1899–1905*, vol. II (London: Cassell, 1933), 316. Also 217: '[Sargant] is at once enthusiastic and businesslike, quite free from pedantic ideas—educational or bureaucratic—and gets on capitally with the people.'

87 Emily Hobhouse quoted in Rykie van Reenen (ed.), *Emily Hobhouse: Boer War Letters* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1984), 493. Also Emily Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War and Where It Fell* (London: Methuen, 1902), 121: 'The only bright spot in the camp life at this period was the little schools; these the wisdom and energy of Mr. Sargant were gradually creating out of chaos.' Also Amery (1909), 34–6.

88 Though most sections of contemporary educational opinion in South Africa found much to admire in Sargant's work, it was also noted that 'at the same time he sacrificed none of his own imperial aspirations'. Bot (1937), 79.

89 A.M. Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics: A Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and Power* (London: Anthony Blond, 1964), 12–18.

90 John Marlowe, *Milner: Apostle of Empire* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976), 8. Reflecting on his later cooperation with Milner on Lloyd George's War Council, Jan Smuts, a former military opponent of the then High Commissioner during the Boer War, '(h)aving been asked how he got along with Milner ... answered promptly as though revealing something unknown to others and only recently discovered by himself, "Do you know what that man is—he is a socialist autocrat"'. See Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, *South African Memories: Scraps of History* (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1979), 88. Also Eric Stokes 'Milnerism', *Historical Journal*, V/1 (1962), 47–60, 52. In Milner's case, the simultaneous commitment to social reform at home and imperial consolidation overseas is nowhere better illustrated than in two speeches, delivered within a week of one another in December 1912. The first, at the Authors' Club, was devoted to 'Empire Citizenship': 'Let me define what I mean by Imperial Union ... I mean a real Empire State with its necessary concomitant, an Empire citizenship ... I think that the tendency is ... towards closer organic union ... the Empire should be a real State'. The second was delivered on the familiar territory of Toynbee Hall, and took Disraeli's signal phrase, 'The Two Nations' for its title. 'If the wage-earners could recognise what they have owed to the finer spirits among the powerful, the wealthy and the highly educated; if the majority of the well-to-do, instead of seeing only the worse side of the upward struggle of the working classes, could learn to appreciate the nucleus of civic virtue which is to be found in their increased self-respect and self-reliance, in their capacity for sticking together, and in their longing for a less narrow and monotonous life, it would go a long way to make us a more unified people.' Lord Milner, G.C.B., *The Nation and the Empire: Being a Collection of Speeches and Addresses* (London: Constable, 1913), 487–500. Sargant would have found nothing to dispute in any of these comments.

Following the return of peace in South Africa, Sargant continued in the formal post of Director of Education for the Transvaal until August 1903, when he became Educational Adviser to Milner as High Commissioner and Governor, with a brief to harmonize educational arrangements across South Africa as a whole.⁹¹ In both capacities, the concern that Sargant had always shown for the figure of the teacher remained the key to his thinking. To the principles he had long held in relation to the initial training of teachers, Sargant's South African experience prompted two further innovations which, between them, indicate his peculiar combination of practical awareness and grandiose scheming. The first was a plan for improving close contact with teachers as an organized body through the introduction of teachers' conferences and the provision of rudimentary forms of what would today be called in-service training.⁹² The second, building upon the idea of educational leadership spreading around the Empire through dynamic teams of public-school settlers, was the cultural equivalent of Tariff Reform. It called for the funding of ambitious exchange schemes whereby teachers from Britain and the Empire would progressively circulate and cooperate to form a genuinely federal teaching force dedicated to promoting the interests of the Empire on a truly global scale.⁹³

In the event, Sargant's brief period as a peacetime educational administrator in South Africa was not a success.⁹⁴ Temperamentally, his tendency was towards observation, experiment, practical involvement and grand scheming for utopian educational futures rather than routine administration. The notable achievements of the camp schools and the

91 Bot (1937), 81.

92 *Conference of Teachers of the Transvaal and Orange River Colony: Johannesburg, July 1902. Address Delivered by the Director of Education* (Johannesburg, 1902); Cyril Jackson, *Outlines of Education in England* (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1913), 161; 'Mr E.B. Sargant, late Educational Adviser in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, put forward a very interesting scheme by which short courses in the training college were to be taken by teachers from time to time during their teaching career.'

93 *The Times*, 23 April 1903, 4. Also see *The Toynbee Record*, XV/9 (June 1903), 112. 'Mr. Sargant, before leaving for South Africa, on May 16th, met a party of old Residents and other friends, at the invitation of Canon and Mrs. Barnett ... he gave a short account of his scheme for leading public schools to establish daughter schools in the Colonies. The scheme has been set forth in *The Times*. Mr. Sargant, in answer to questions, commended it by his faith. His old friends felt his power, and agreed together that his inspiration would get over many difficulties and fill out from various instruments for the best sort of empire making. It is gratifying to know that many lessons he learnt in Whitechapel, 18 years ago, are now found applicable in South Africa.' Also, *The University and the Civil Service: Address by Mr. E.B. Sargant. Delivered on Degree Day at the University of the Cape of Good Hope, February 25, 1905* (London: Longmans, Green, 1905).

94 Writing in 1937, A.K. Bot described the camp schools as 'the first common ground for co-operation between Boers and British'. A.K. Bot (1937), 61. The conclusions of a later generation, exemplified by D.J.N. Denoon in 1968, continued to acknowledge Sargant's tactical skills but were far cooler in relation to his strategic vision. 'A brilliant innovator and an original thinker, S(argant) in peacetime was not a good routine administrator. He left South Africa a legacy of many young teachers who proved themselves able and adaptable, and a number of ideas which were almost immediately forgotten.' D.J.N. Denoon, 'Edmund Beale Sargant', *Dictionary of South African Biography*, vol. 1 (Nasionale Boekhandel Bpk., 1968), 686. Also see the jaundiced but telling judgement of Russell, Sargant's erstwhile lieutenant from the days of the camp schools: 'He [Sargant] wished to make the Grey College a school of the English Public School type for the training of the future Governing Classes. He wished to establish a system of schools resembling Grammar Schools for the Middle Class and a system of Free Elementary Schools for the People, the differences between these various types of school being primarily social rather than educational. However well this organisation might suit English society with its strong feeling of social inequality, I was soon convinced that it could not be successfully transplanted....' W.A. Russell (Late Assistant Director of Education for the Orange River Colony), *An Answer to the Report of the Director of Education for the Transvaal and Orange River Colony* (Cape Town, 15 April 1905), 2. As able and talented individuals, other members of the Sargant family shared Sargant's tendency towards a kind of diffidence that has helped to obscure the extent of their achievements in their own lifetimes. Sargant is considerably less prominent in the annals of Toynbee Hall than contemporaries of similar ability and achievements. He is not, for example, included in Standish Meacham's list 'of residents from the early years [who] later achieved reputations as social reformers'; see Meacham (1987), 45. Also Andrew Vincent and Raymond Plant (1984), 147.

influx of trained teachers from around the Empire were not matched by his subsequent work, and at the end of 1904 he resigned and returned to England, following a bitter difference of opinion with one of his assistant directors.⁹⁵ But one moment in this more prosaic phase of his time in office is worthy of particular attention, illustrating the strong currents of continuity in his educational thinking. Early in 1904, as he reflected on the principles informing the drafting of the code of regulations which he was then preparing for the elementary schools of the Orange River Colony, it is evident that the memory and example of 'School Field' remained much on his mind. In considering the most productive relation between head teacher and school inspector, Sargant devised regulations that protected the former from undue intrusion by the latter. 'An inefficient Principal of a school must have his inefficiency exposed without mercy. But the Inspector will do incalculable harm if he seek to revise the plans and results of a good Principal in detail, and without sufficient knowledge of the special conditions of the school under examination.'⁹⁶ Clearly referring to 'School Field', though scarcely any of his readers in South Africa, and few in England, could have had any idea of the existence of the school and therefore of the exact nature of the reference, Sargant continued:

I have dwelt thus strongly upon the articles in question because for six years the effect of regulations of a contrary nature in England was my constant study. It became clear to me that the mechanical character of the teaching in most elementary schools in the 'eighties' was directly traceable to undue interference of the Inspectorate in the details of school work, and particularly to the system which removed out of the hands of the head teachers the individual examination of scholars.⁹⁷

In seeking to build an educational system from first principles, the vision of an ideal school remained, in Sargant's mind, the one that he had established, years before, in London's East End.

Sargant was 50 years of age on his return to England in 1905. Now with the time as well as the financial resources to be described as 'a gentleman of independent means', he was able to pursue his old interest in education, and his newer one in empire, in a variety of ways.⁹⁸ Through the newspapers, he sought, without much apparent public response, to promote his schemes for public-school educational settlements and teacher exchange schemes across the Empire. He served as a member, along with Milner and Morant, on the

95 A.K. Bot (1937), 81. For details of what was clearly a bitter dispute, see W.A. Russell (Late Assistant Director of Education for the Orange River Colony), *An Answer to the Report of the Director of Education for the Transvaal and Orange River Colony* (Cape Town, 15 April 1905), 1. Russell was appointed to his post in June 1901, '(b)ut before long I found that Mr. Sargant and myself differed very seriously'. After standing down, Sargant continued, however, to work, at Milner's request, on the provision of native education and to publish some official reports under the title of 'Education Adviser to the High Commissioner for South Africa'; see, most notably, *Report on Native Education in South Africa; Part III.—Education in the Protectorates* (London, HMSO, 1908). In the preparation of this report, Sargant sought and was afforded—through a mutual acquaintance with Grace Luling, a New York socialite—the specific advice of Booker T. Washington. See Louis R. Harlan (ed.), *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol. 8: 1904–1906 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 184–5. Luling wrote again to Washington in February 1909 to say that Sargant 'has successfully accomplished this work' and 'has asked me to forward to you the enclosed report, which he thinks may be of interest to you'. Louis R. Harlan (ed.), *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, vol. 10: 1909–11 (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 32–3.

96 Transvaal and Orange River Colony (1905), 38.

97 Transvaal and Orange River Colony (1905), 39. Sargant went on to observe that: 'Among the younger generation of school administrators, who have not witnessed the evils from which we have escaped, there are those who turn their eyes longingly towards the older and more bureaucratic methods of examination. Let them take warning.'

98 PRO, HO144/1035/178724. Mary Sargant-Florence. Memorial for Certificate of Readmission. Metropolitan Police memo, 14 January 1910. At the time of this memorial on behalf of his sister's readmission to British nationality, Sargant's declaration (August 1909) indicated that he was then living at Headley in Surrey.

Royal Commission on University Education in London, set up in 1910. He inaugurated a discussion on the nature of British citizenship in a specifically imperial context, through the columns of the journal *United Empire*, and subsequently reproduced the major contributions to the debate as a small volume, prefaced by one of his own poems on the subject.⁹⁹ In 1913, in a renewed contact with Alfred Milner, then the Chairman of Council at Toynbee Hall, he was offered, but declined—‘I do think it a great honour that you should have thought of me in this connection’—the Wardenship of the institution which had first stimulated and shaped the concerns that absorbed the remainder of his life.¹⁰⁰ Had he accepted the offer, Sargant—along with all his earlier educational achievements—would doubtless have become much better known to history than he has turned out to be.

As E.H. Carr once pointed out, any historical justification for the resurrection of an obscure or minor figure from the past must rest ultimately upon the ground of historical significance and not upon mere antiquarian or sentimental interest.¹⁰¹ So what significance may be claimed for renewing our contact with E.B. Sargant?

Among his practical educational achievements, ‘School Field’ was certainly Sargant’s most important, because it represented his best and most sustained attempt both to absorb and to transcend the constellation of educational and intellectual influences that he encountered in his formative period at Toynbee Hall. Moreover, it was his experience of the school that helped to shape, in one way or another, each of the subsequent educational endeavours of his later life, including his brief stint as a policy-maker in South Africa. In this respect, ‘South Field’ always had for Sargant an experimental character of an essentially personal sort, designed to extend as well as to test his own educational thinking. This explains why, beyond the publication of *Specimens of work*, he did not seem to be greatly concerned with publicizing the school’s successes—doubtless one of the reasons why it remains largely unknown today. Though the school attracted a succession of notable visitors, including Elizabeth Hughes of the Cambridge Training College for Women, it was not widely noticed in contemporary educational discourse. Charlotte Mason was an important exception in this respect, citing in her discussion of ‘personal initiative in work’ that ‘(a) very interesting and instructive educational experiment on these lines has been tried at the School Field, Hackney, where Mr. Sargent [*sic*] got together some eighty boys and girls under the conditions of an ordinary elementary school...’.¹⁰² The school was also

99 *British Citizenship: A Discussion Initiated by E.B. Sargant* (London: Longmans, Green, 1912). Also see ‘British Citizenship’ in E.B. Sargant, *The Casket Songs and Other Poems* (London: Longmans, Green, 1911), 62: ‘England! This is not she, the glowing maid/Who breathes into thine ear her word of power./Citizenship! In other tones and hour/To Greek and Roman state that word was said;/For still the goddess grows, and still must he/Grow with her, who would mate with Liberty.’ Also E.B. Sargant, Esq., ‘Naturalisation in the British Dominions’, *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation*, New Series, XIV/2 (1914), 327–36.

100 London Metropolitan Archives. A/Toy/6/3. Letter from Sargant to Lord Milner, 25 July 1913. Also Briggs and Macartney (1984), 22, 27.

101 E.H. Carr *What Is History?* (London: Penguin Books, 1987, 2nd edn), 12.

102 Charlotte M. Mason, *The ‘Home Education’ Series*, vol. III, *Home and School Education* (Oxford: Scrivener Press, 1953), 38: ‘The results seem to have been purely delightful; the children developed an amazing capacity for drawing, perhaps because so soon as they were familiar with the outlines of the flower and foliage of a given plant, for example, they were encouraged to form designs with these elements. The really beautiful floral designs produced by these girls and boys, after quite a short art training, would surprise parents whose children have been taught drawing for years with no evident result. These School Field children developed themselves a great deal on their school magazine also, for which they wrote tales and poems, and essays, not prescribed work, but self-chosen. The children’s thought was stimulated, and they felt they had it in them to say much about a doll’s ball, Peter, the school cat, or whatever other subject struck their fancy. “They felt their feet” as the nurses say of children when they begin to walk; and our non-success in education is a good deal due to the fact that we carry children through their school work and do not let them feel their feet.’

referred to in talks on teaching method given at Toynbee Hall in 1896—apparently in Sargant’s absence—given by Sir Joshua Fitch (‘Mr. Sargant’s book on the experiments at School House [*sic*], Hackney, was referred to as usefully illustrating some of the lecturer’s points’); and by Mr Storr, the editor of the *Journal of Education* (‘Mr. Sargant’s book with its charming child composition was again referred to...’).¹⁰³

From a methodological perspective, one of the benefits of looking at a life such as Sargant’s is that it helps to disturb the analytical division of policy and practice, obliging us to see that the concerns of each are always, to some degree, written into the other. That these two arenas are often distanced from each other is a commonplace observation, bearing, as do most such claims, a degree of truth. Precisely because of this, the task of probing for the nature of the complex articulations between policy and practice calls for substantive investigation rather than theoretical assertion. Only in this way can we begin to see in detail the ways in which policy is ultimately made across a much broader landscape than policy historians sometimes allow. In this respect, the case of E.B. Sargant is an instructive one. Sargant was unquestionably a bearer—and often a highly representative one—of some of the most significant discursive currents of his age, most notably idealist organicism and liberal imperialism. But though by nature a true and loyal follower he was never simply a cipher of such beliefs. They cannot be read into his life in any straightforward way. His intellectual trajectory holds out a particularly clear example of the way in which the journey from late nineteenth-century social reform to early twentieth-century liberal imperialism could represent a practical, rather than a purely theoretical, expression, of British Hegelianism. Sargant did not radiate a pristine Idealism; he interpreted it, finding ways of expressing its central tenets in a succession of his own, often idiosyncratic, policy objectives.

His ideas, drawn from his extensive practical experiences of teachers and teaching, worked both within, and sometimes against, his overarching philosophical concerns. And so, although he did not intellectually rebel against the fundamental tenets of his core philosophy, he was quite capable of modifying them or bending them to new needs in new circumstances. His movement away from the idea of university settlement did not, for example, at all diminish his faith in the principle of settlement itself, which he learned to apply in other contexts, as in the notion of public-school outgrowths ‘across the seas’, or, in a more complex form, in relation to the cultural nurturing of pupil teachers. In this sense it is possible to claim a good deal of originality in the educational thinking of E.B. Sargant, particularly in relation to forms of teacher training, and, to a lesser degree, principles of school organization and classroom teaching. Though Sargant was clearly not a great educational thinker in any fundamental sense, it is easy to overlook the extent of the novel combinations of elements in his thinking. This is because many of his ideas, formulated in the 1880s, became widely accepted in subsequent policy thinking, and are therefore identified predominantly with the work of policy-makers who drew upon Sargant to a greater degree than they might have admitted to others and, indeed, to themselves.

A good example of this is the link between Sargant and Robert Morant in relation to the reform of the pupil-teacher system undertaken by the latter from 1903 onwards. At the time that Morant was planning such changes, Sargant was engaged in educational reconstruction in South Africa. At the time that Sargant was running ‘School Field’ and pondering the problems of pupil teaching, Morant was still working in Siam. And yet strong links remain; and if the tracing of unequivocal lines of influence in such matters

103 *The Toynbee Record*, VIII/9 (June 1896), 106–8.

raises substantial methodological difficulties of the kind indicated most powerfully by Quentin Skinner, they are worth noting, nonetheless.¹⁰⁴

The essential policy goals set out by Morant in relation to the reform of pupil teaching, if not the detailed administrative machinery through which they were to be secured, show striking similarities to those advocated by Sargant in his *Toynbee Record* article of 1889, nearly 15 years before. The former sought to ‘break down the existing and undesirable barrier between Elementary and Secondary School Teachers’, whilst the latter observed that ‘as long as the distinction between the two classes of teachers is preserved, so long will the ignorance of one part of the nation about the other continue’.¹⁰⁵ Morant’s solution to the problem was ‘to bring the Pupil Teachers under the influence of a wider outlook and a more humane ideal of Education’ and Sargant’s was to afford pupil teachers the necessary time so that they might ‘seek out congenial friends beyond their school walls ... [in order that] they learn to form a high ideal’.¹⁰⁶

The teacher training parallels go yet further. Morant’s ‘revolutionary’ new regulations for the education of pupil teachers were published in mid-1903.¹⁰⁷ Sargant had been back in England since December 1902 ‘on a five months’ furlough’, which seems to have been connected, in part, with a breakdown in his health.¹⁰⁸ W.A. Russell, Sargant’s one-time co-worker in the South African camp schools, but later estranged from him, relates that from his appointment by Milner at the beginning of 1901, ‘(t)he training of teachers had always been a leading feature of Mr. Sargant’s policy’.¹⁰⁹ The main features of Sargant’s policy seemed shockingly advanced to Russell. They certainly went beyond anything that the minority report of the Cross Commission or the 1898 Departmental Committee had envisaged and set out a position to which Morant aspired in every respect, but which would be practically and politically unattainable in the British context for some years to come.¹¹⁰ Informed both by his own practical experience and by his comparative investigation of teaching methods across the Empire, Sargant had formed the view that in South Africa:

... the Pupil Teacher system should be completely abandoned. Mr. Sargant wished even to introduce a provision to this effect in the Educational Ordinance. He decided that candidates for the teaching profession should first receive a good secondary education, and thereafter should receive a professional training,—purely professional and highly elaborate.¹¹¹

In later years, Sargant and Morant certainly knew each other personally. They served together on Haldane’s Commission on University Education in London,¹¹² and Morant was a guest of honour at a dinner given by Sargant at the 1911 Imperial Education

104 Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol.1, *Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 74–6.

105 PP 1904 LXXV *Regulations for the Instruction and Training of Pupil-Teachers*, Appendix F, ‘Hints on the Organisation of the Instruction of Pupil Teachers’, 30; *The Toynbee Record*, 1/12 (September 1889), 132.

106 *The Toynbee Record*, 1/12 (September 1889), 132.

107 H.C. Dent, *The Training of Teachers in England and Wales, 1800–1975* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), 50. Also see Neil Dalglish, *Education Policy-making in England and Wales: the crucible years, 1895–1911* (London: Woburn Press, 1996, 207–13; also Allen (1934), 208.

108 Russell (1905), 6. Also see Sargant in *The Times* of 23 April 1903, 4: ‘the opportunity afforded me by a period of rest which medical opinion has enforced...’.

109 Russell (1905), 3.

110 Peter Cunningham and Philip Gardner. *Becoming Teachers: texts and testimonies 1907–1950* (London: Woburn Press, 2004).

111 Russell (1905), 3.

112 PP 1913 XL *Royal Commission on University Education in London. Final Report. (Haldane)*. Also see *The Times*, 11 August 1913, 10.

Conference.¹¹³ Their most salient point of common interest was, however, Toynbee Hall. Sargant was a resident from 1884 until at least 1888 when he seems to have moved out of the Hall, though remaining a more or less regular visitor thereafter. Morant took up residency at Toynbee in April 1895, nearly a year after the end of the 'School Field' experiment, and at a time when Sargant's visits to the Hall were episodic.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, given their mutual interests in education, and regardless of whether or not their paths—and their thoughts on pupil-teacher reform—crossed in the critical early months of 1903, it would have been extremely surprising had they not come across each other at this earlier time: 1895. Sargant was at that point unrivalled as the Toynbee specialist on all matters connected with elementary education and teaching whilst Morant was beginning to angle for an entrée to an educational appointment and was apparently intending, as Sargant himself had done, 'to undertake some actual teaching work in elementary schools'.¹¹⁵ Sargant was therefore an obvious contact for Morant. Moreover, as a habitually voracious scourer of documentary records in seeking to achieve command of a brief—Morant was appointed 'Censor of Studies' at Toynbee—Sargant's educational contributions to the *Record* would have been among his earliest reading on settling at the Hall.

If the two men shared many of the same ideas in relation to the reform of pupil teaching—though Sargant's interpretation of them was always of a more liberal, generous and socially adventurous stamp than Morant's more measured and calculating prescription—then the personalities through which such ideas were filtered and expressed were exceedingly different. Morant was thorough, determined and ruthless in pursuit of educational objectives. He was also self-absorbed, disloyal and, in the admittedly interested judgement of Michael Sadleir, given to a 'passion for despotic regimentation ... and with it the ruthless personal ambition which later possessed him'.¹¹⁶ Beside such a man, Sargant, though holding sincere opinions strongly, was of a far more liberal and self-effacing temperament. Duty and service were defining qualities for him, but playing supporting roles rather than leading ones always seemed more congenial in practice. As he grew older, his dominating interest became the writing of introspective, sentimental, often maudlin, poetry, examples of which still find their way into one or two more obscure modern anthologies.¹¹⁷ He does not seem to have cared to try to shape his reputation for posterity. Had he—with an equally plausible track record—and not Morant pestered the Education Department for a job in the spring of 1895; or, had Barnett commended not Morant but Sargant—then just about to set sail on his independent education tour of the Empire—to Sir John Gorst in the summer of 1899, then the course of educational history in the early twentieth century would have been different. That these things did not happen is not only a consequence of the specific historical pattern of general trends or discrete events. It reminds us too of the place of personality and personal agency in giving shape to

113 *The Times*, 28 April 1911.

114 Allen (1934), 95. Sadler describes Morant's demeanour on his arrival back in Britain as 'out at elbows, subdued and humble'. Sadleir (1949), 194.

115 Allen (1934), 96.

116 Sadleir, 148. For Sadler's own recollections, see *ibid.*, 194–5.

117 For an example, see Sargant's 'A Hymn to the Nameless', *The Times*, 14 December 1914, 9. For a more extensive collection, see E.B. Sargant, *The Casket Songs and Other Poems* (London: Longmans, Green, 1911). These well illustrate Sargant's Romanticism as well as his Idealism; see particularly, 'In Quiet Mood', p. 34: 'This world is fair as any dream./And why? because it is My Mind.' The judgement of Sir Charles Sargant's obituary writer—'great learning' but '(a)lways of an unambitious and retiring disposition'—seems also to sit well upon his brother. See *The Times*, 28 July 1942, 6. In a similar way, posterity's assessment of the achievements of his sister, Ethel, conveys something of the work of Sargant himself: 'Ethel Sargant's achievements are now forgotten but woven into our knowledge...'. See William T. Stearn, 'Biographical Notes', *Journal of the Society for Bibliography in Natural History*, 4/7 (1968), 371.

the past. The will to power and the desire for recognition is always what has separated men—otherwise with so much in common—such as Morant from men such as Sargant. The one craved to be at the centre. The other, no less committed, was more comfortable looking on from the periphery.

Sargant possessed insight and sympathy in some abundance, but he lacked rigour, authority and pleasure in power. He shared, perhaps, something of the qualities of his illustrious contemporary, H.H. Asquith, as a man who moved at the margins of social and intellectual alliances, always engaged, but sometimes more in the way of a spectator than a player. At Toynbee Hall, Henrietta Barnett found these qualities charming. ‘Whatever the medium, the boys could not help being uplifted by Mr. E.B. Sargant—a nature so poetic as to be unpractical, so public-spirited as to conquer unpracticality, and all the time tenderly watchful for the spiritual potentialities of every neglected child. He gathered leading educationalists to listen to his ideals and set a new standard for some of them.’¹¹⁸ Though he also always appreciated Sargant’s undisguised enthusiasm, Samuel Barnett’s judgement was more worldly:

It has been most interesting to hear [Sargant] on S. Africa. He is guileless as a child—an educated child. He sees human nature as good and being in power often makes it good. He likes Milner, he likes the Boers, he respects the magnates. He believes in an Empire which will be inspired by moral fervour, and he is now busy trying to induce the old public schools to start ‘settlements’ of themselves in the colonies. You may imagine our talks. Wherever he goes and whatever he does must be for good. He like an angel will be there and not be seen. He is such a simple soul that he carries conviction against fear, against even reason. He shows the power of faith. The more I think, the more I listen, the more my mind goes back to the conception of free nations held together by memories and not by imperial bonds.¹¹⁹

Barnett was an astute judge. Though far from being without either originality or influence, ‘an educated child’ is a fitting description of E.B. Sargant, both in his understanding of social relations, whether in domestic or international terms, and in the ways through which he believed that these might be facilitated by education.¹²⁰ Perhaps it is also an apposite term for a wider generation of educational and social reformers with optimistic ambitions for the resolution of an inequalitarian and hierarchical social fabric through the creation of organic bonds of mutual goodwill and responsibility. Naive optimism of this sort would not long have been able to survive the domestic consequences of those very educational prescriptions that it advanced in defence of its goals. In the event, it was about to end more suddenly and brutally in a catastrophe of global conflict from which would emerge a world largely unintelligible to the organic assumptions, social and educational, that had energized the endeavours, now mostly forgotten, of Edmund Beale Sargant.

118 Barnett (1921), 343.

119 Barnett (1921), 580.

120 Sargant’s poetry itself signals his own essential childlikeness, here referring to his close relationship with his wife, whom he met and married in middle age, in South Africa: ‘A child with playthings, dreamfully reclined/On pillows, and those pillows clouds of fleece;/Her nursery the vault of heaven; the wind/For nurse, and stars to give her slumbers peace!/. . . The playmates you and I, the child my wife.’ From E.B. Sargant, *The Casket Songs and Other Poems* (London: Longmans, Green, 1911), 23. Also see Sargant’s (apparently unfulfilled and guileless) plan further to encourage and develop the creative talents of two of his favourite pupils, Emmeline Letch and Edith Jones, when ‘School Field’ finally closed in August 1894. ‘I have a plan . . . to take Emmeline and Edith, for the late summer and autumn months, away into the country, upon the edge of some breezy heath: to give them pencils and brushes, and let them write a story for children, ornamenting every page with the leaves and flowers and fruit that they find in their rambles. If their work does not reach a high level of art, it will at least be fresh and simple and be interesting to me; while if it does not rise somewhat higher, it may be worth printing as a children’s book written by children. And with the proceeds of this sale—but is not this fellow cousin to the dreamer in the Arabian Nights with his basket of hardware?’ *School Field Magazine* 1890–94, xxv–xxvi.