

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S IDEAS ABOUT COUNTRY AND NATIONALITY

PART II : NATIONAL SYMBOLS AND THEMES

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SUMMARY. The learning of conventional national symbols (national anthem, songs, flags) and the understanding of their significance at various stages were studied. A specially devised picture test was used to explore more subtle aspects of national consciousness. The broad developmental trends and the socio-economic group differences emerging from both parts of the investigation are outlined, and some educational implications suggested.

I.—INTRODUCTION.

IN the literature of the social sciences a good deal of lip-service is paid to the importance of national symbols in the building up of national sentiments. For instance, G. W. Allport (1950) wrote as follows: "As a rule, personal loyalty can adhere to an abstraction only when the abstraction is richly symbolized. Christianity rivets attention upon the cross, nations focus on their respective flags." Few attempts seem to have been made to trace the acquisition of such symbols in young children, apart from the work of Horowitz (1940) and recently Lawson (1963), who concentrated on national flags. The aim of the present study is to initiate the exploration of a somewhat wider range of symbols.

II.—THE NATIONAL ANTHEM.

Six different tunes were played to the children on a tape-recorder in a systematically rotated order. Two of them were Scottish, two Irish, one English, and the National Anthem. They were asked to say of each if they had heard it before; if recognition was claimed, the following questions were asked: Where did you hear it? Do you know what it is? Which country does this tune belong to? Here only results relating to the National Anthem will be given.

Table 1 shows the different kinds of responses. About one-quarter of the youngest children gave no sign of recognition. The second group said they had heard it before, but were either unable to specify the country, or gave absurd answers like "From the country where Herod is" (note the tense), or even "It's from Wagon Train."

TABLE 1
RESPONSES TO HEARING NATIONAL ANTHEM.

	<i>M</i> Schools			<i>W</i> Schools		
	6-7	8-9	10-11	6-7	8-9	10-11
Fails to recognize tune	6	—	—	7	1	—
Claims recognition but does not know country, or absurd response	13	4	2	11	6	4
Claims recognition and attributes to Scotland	1	4	2	4	9	9
Ditto and attributes to London or England	3	6	1	—	2	4
Ditto and attributes to Britain	1	10	19	2	6	7
	24	24	24	24	24	24
Per cent. unable to give title of tune	54%	4%	—	87%	12%	—

At this point attention may be drawn to the bottom row of the table, indicating the frequency of ignorance of the name. For this purpose only "God Save the Queen" or "National Anthem" were accepted; of those rejected, five implied awareness that the tune was linked with the monarchy, such as "The royal song" or "The Queen's music." Beyond the age of 7, inability to name the tune was rare, and in general it was found more often among *W* children (*P* less than .02).

Turning now to a consideration of errors of attribution, one finds two major trends. The first, most common with *W* children, was to claim the anthem for Scotland. The explanation which suggests itself is that these children are unlikely to have attained a conception of Britain as a whole, and a check of *G*-stages supports this: 76 per cent. of them were at or below *G*.III, as compared with only 30 per cent. of those answering correctly (*P* less than .001). The causes of the second error, namely mentioning England or London, are less evident. In some cases at least, judging from the replies, it seems to have arisen from an association in the children's minds between the Queen, her residence in London, and 'her music.'

The pattern of development that emerges from the comments (though owing to limitations of time it was not possible to pursue it systematically) may at least be broadly sketched. At earlier ages, the National Anthem tends to be just one particular piece of music among others. The name is largely unknown, but it is connected with such occasions as school ceremonials, Church and Sunday School (e.g., "We get it at concerts"; "In the service in the hall — the big ones know the words"; "It's a hymn"); other sources include the wireless and, especially among *W* children, television.* These trends continued at 8–9, but there were some additions. For *M* children, these consisted mainly of Cubs' or Brownies' displays, with *W* ones 'the pictures' or miscellaneous occasions like "Away up the town when the band was playing." Moreover, the name then being generally known, a definite link with the idea of the Queen had become established. In the case of most of the older (10–11) *M* children, the tune had already taken on the character of a national symbol (e.g., "Well, that can be sung by people all over the British Isles"); with the corresponding *W* group, such progress tended to be much slower, as illustrated by the examples below:

It was on the T.V., when they stand up and sing. (*Why do they stand up?*) Don't know. (*W*10).

They play it at the start of an international game or something. It could be English, Scottish—anything. (*W*11).

Thus, there is a slow and almost imperceptible transition in the meaning of this music for the children. At first it may be quite unfamiliar or, if recognized, quite wrongly labelled. Later, it comes to be connected first with the person of the Queen, and then with Britain as a whole; at that stage it was almost invariably correctly named. It was striking to observe how older children, who had already grasped this, responded to the questions with a contemptuous laugh, because they felt the answers were so obvious; one would hardly have guessed that their insight is likely to have been a fairly recent acquisition.

III.—NATIONAL SONGS

Whilst the National Anthem is confined to more formal or ritual occasions, there are many popular tunes tinged with patriotic sentiments. Furthermore,

* One-third of the 7-year-old *W* children were able to report that "It's on the T.V. when it's finished."

by contrast with the National Anthem, such tunes tend to be associated with the various units which together constitute the United Kingdom. The tracing of development in this sphere was the object of putting the following question: Many people from this country go to live in far-away places and are a long way from home. Now imagine they would like to hear three songs: which ones do you think they would choose?

Answers were divided into three categories. The first consisted of those unable to give the name of any song, together with those who produced irrelevant ones. For all these the question effectively meant "Tell me the names of three songs." The youngest children in this category came out mainly with religious songs ("Gentle Jesus," "Jesus loves me," "Away in a manger," etc.). At a later age, irrelevant songs tended to become increasingly secular, and some divergence between *M* and *W* emerged. "I saw Mum kissing Santa Claus" or "Jailhouse Rock" versus "Copelia" or "An adult might like opera"). Also included in this category, because their number was relatively small, were what might be called transitional answers. In these, the child seemed to have some inkling of what was required, but was as yet unable to bridge the gap imaginatively by putting himself into the position of someone far from home. Examples of this would be children who suggested such people would wish to hear Italian, Indian or other foreign songs; one boy said: "We might go to France next year, so I think they should be French ones"; in Piaget's terms, this would be a typically egocentric statement. All the responses so far are grouped under 'Nil or irrelevant' in Table 2.

TABLE 2
SONGS FROM HOME.

	<i>M</i> Schools			<i>W</i> Schools		
	6-7	8-9	10-11	6-7	8-9	10-11
Nil or irrelevant response	20	14	5	21	14	4
Understood and produced none or one . .	3	4	7	2	7	7
Understood and produced two or three . .	1	6	12	1	3	13

The second category was composed of children who clearly understood what was required ("They will want to hear a Scottish song," or words to that effect), but either could not think of any Scottish song at all, or were able to name only one. There was a small sprinkling of correct non-Scottish answers such as "Carry me home to blighty," which were, of course, credited. The third category was the same, except that the children knew two or three songs.*

One noteworthy feature of this question is the fact that it is one of the few which failed to yield any significant difference between *M* and *W*. From this, it may perhaps be inferred that the establishment of an effective association between native songs and the idea of the homeland is largely independent of differences in both intelligence and social background. It would seem that conceptually the presence of a global, diffuse and undifferentiated notion of, in this case, Scotland is sufficient for the formation of the link. Thus, none of the

* Those most frequently mentioned included: Auld Lang Syne, I belong to Glasgow, Scotland the Brave, Roamin' in the gloamin', Loch Lomond, A Gordon for me, Song of the Clyde, A hundred pipers, Ye banks and braes, My heart's in the Highlands.

G.I. children understood the problem ; however, the superiority of G.III over G.II was slight and not significant (P between $\cdot 30$ and $\cdot 20$). It is also likely that children in both kinds of environments are about equally exposed to patriotic songs, learning them at roughly the same rate.

IV.—THE UNION JACK.

Nine coloured cards picturing, among others, the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, were spread out in front of the children. At the outset they were told to point out those they had never seen before, and these were removed. Next, they were asked the names of the remainder, and the countries to which they belonged. Finally, children unable to comply were informed that some of the flags were Scottish, with the request that they should try and pick them out. The last move turned out to have been a mistake, hence, unfortunately, no useful material was obtained regarding the Lion Rampant and St. Andrew's Cross.* The report on the findings will, therefore, be centred on the Union Jack.

Results are set out in Table 3. First of all, there were two 6-year-old *W* children who placed the Union Jack among those they had never seen : they are included in the top row. It will be noted that the children were generally able to name the Union Jack correctly before attributing it to Britain as a whole rather than claiming it for Scotland only. The *M* children were significantly more successful on both counts (P less than $\cdot 01$).

TABLE 3

THE UNION JACK.

	<i>M</i> Schools			<i>W</i> Schools		
	6-7	8-9	10-11	6-7	8-9	10-11
Does not know country or mistakes other than Scotland.....	5	1	1	15	5	2
Calls it Scottish	14	8	4	4	11	9
Correct	5	15	19	5	8	13
Per cent. knowing the name of flag	24 42%	24 92%	24 96%	24 29%	24 54%	24 83%
Number of children able to identify U.S.A. flag	3	14	22	4	11	15

The youngest children were apt to link the flag with concrete situations in their spontaneous comments, as shown below :

It's the flag you always put up when the Queen comes. (*M6*).

That's the one you get at the circus—my daddy buys it for me. (*What country?*) It's the Glasgow flag. (*W6*).

The Union Jack was often called "the Queen's flag," indicating an association already seen in connection with the National Anthem. Beyond the age of 7, grosser mistakes were mainly confined to *W* children ; apart from calling a

* This was because of a pervasive tendency to call the whole of the remainder "Scottish," whereby they were bound to score by chance alone.

variety of different flags "Union Jack," they sometimes used the expression in a completely uncomprehending manner:

I think that's the Jack flag. (*What country?*) Don't know. (*W9*).

Yes, that's the Union Jack. (*What country?*) Is it France? (*W9*)

In contrast, to this, the bottom row of Table 3 shows that *W* children did not do significantly worse than *M* ones in attributing the Star and Stripes to the U.S.A. It might be added that a good many more recognized the flag without being able to specify the country. Here is a revealing instance:

That's General Custard's flag; I've seen him on T.V.; he fights the Indians. (*W7*).

Lastly, a few impressionistic comments will be offered regarding the Scottish emblems. They appeared familiar to many children, though few even among the older children were able to name them correctly. The pervasive influence of television again seems to have made itself felt, as several children mentioned it in connection with the Lion Rampant, this being the symbol of Scottish Television. Some of the *M* children who did best explained that they had learnt it with the Cubs or Brownies. On the whole, there was little evidence that, within the age-range studied, the Scottish emblems functioned as effective symbols of Scottish nationality.

V.—RECOGNITION OF SCOTTISH PICTURES.

This procedure was devised with the object of assessing some of the subtler aspects of children's knowledge of their country. They were presented with sets of three pictures, reproduced in Plates I–V, and required to indicate for each set which—if any—of the pictures is connected with Scotland.

PLATE I—COSTUMES

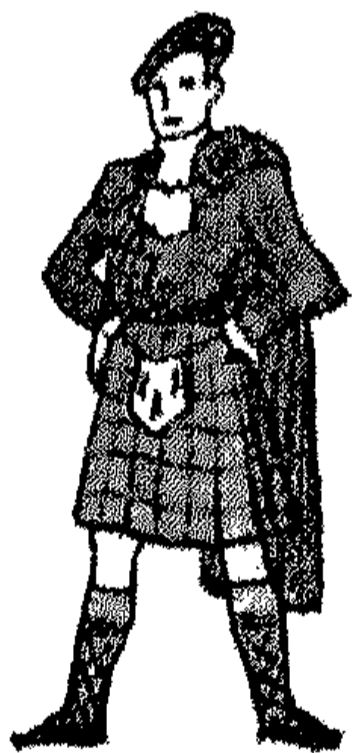


PLATE II—LANDSCAPES

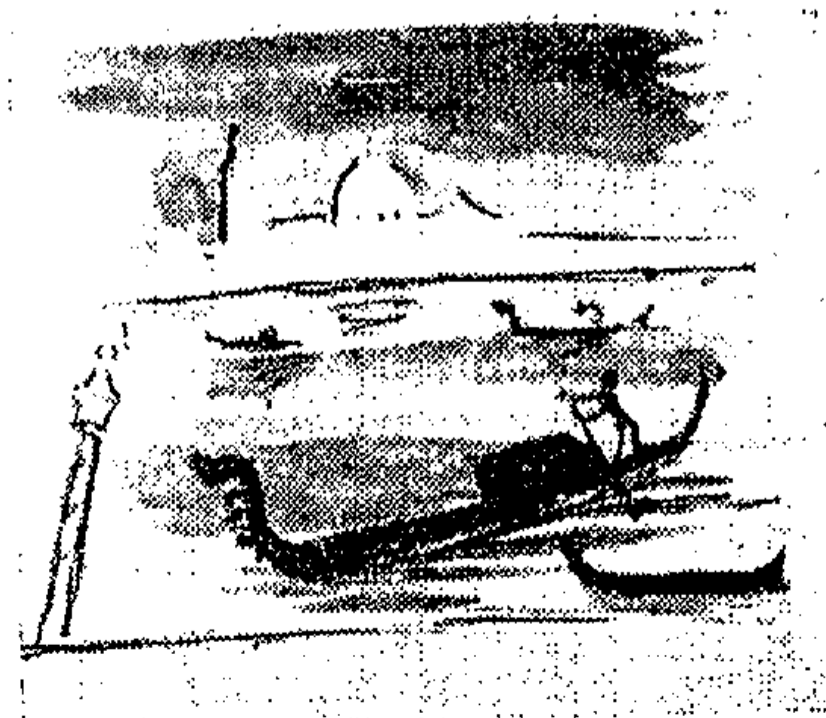


PLATE III—BUILDINGS

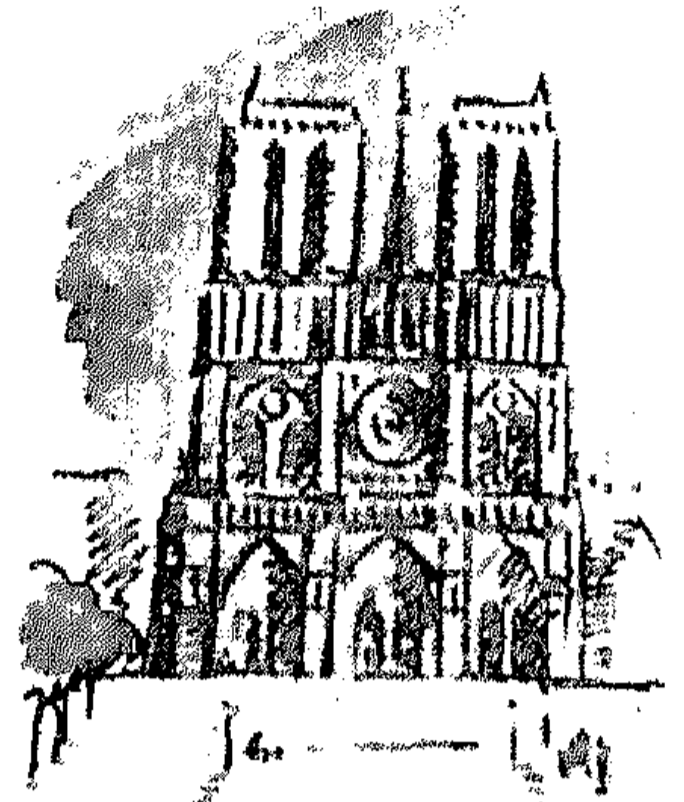
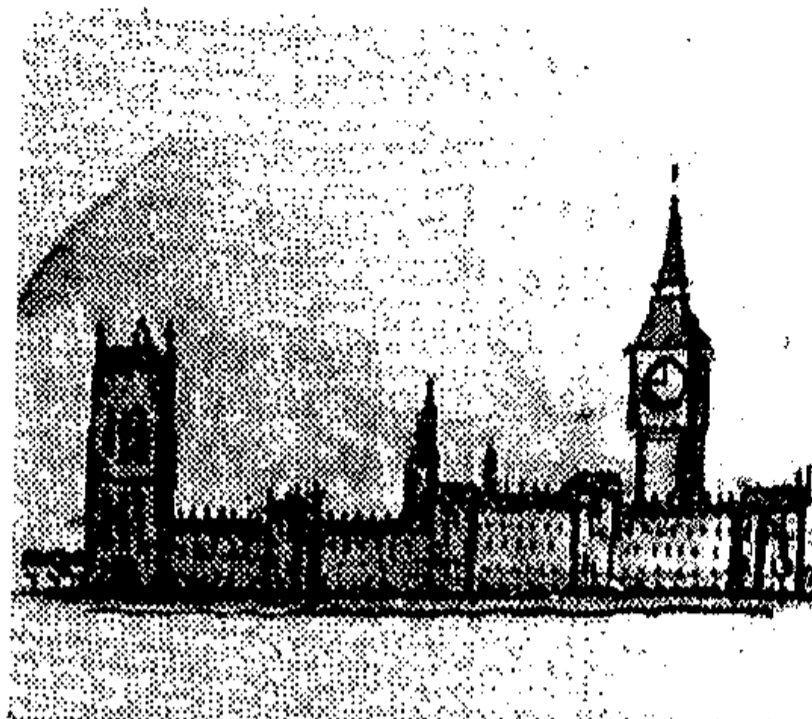
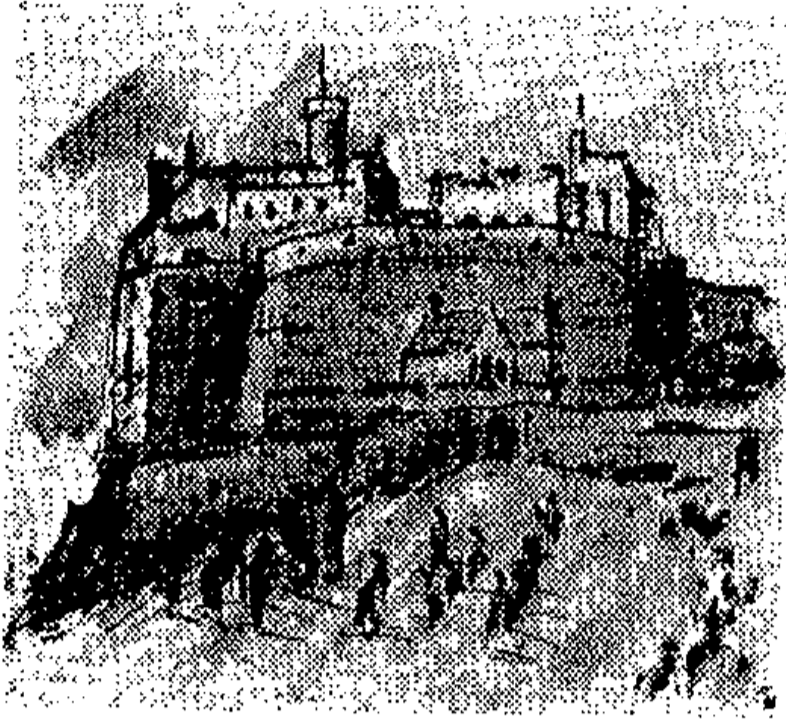


PLATE IV—EMBLEMS

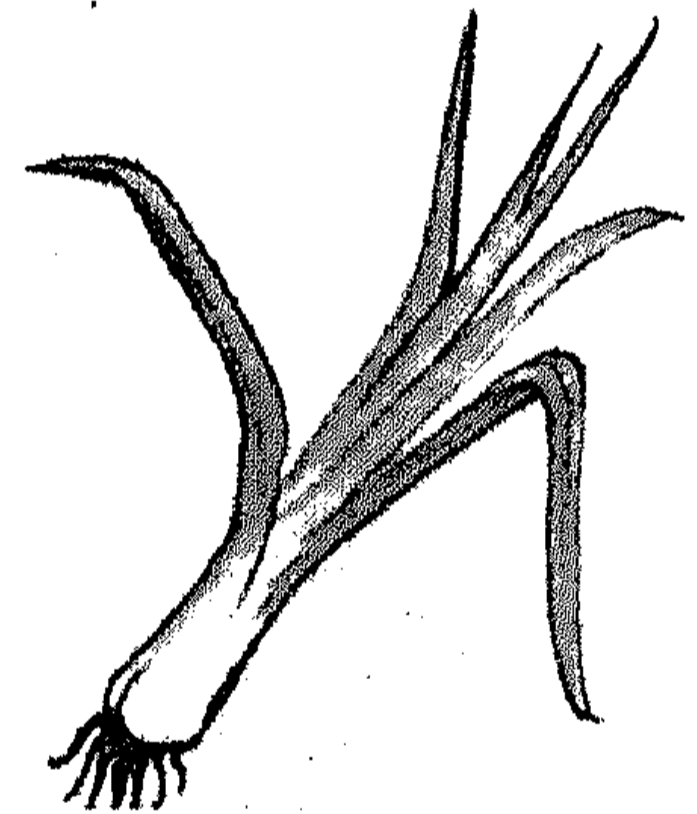
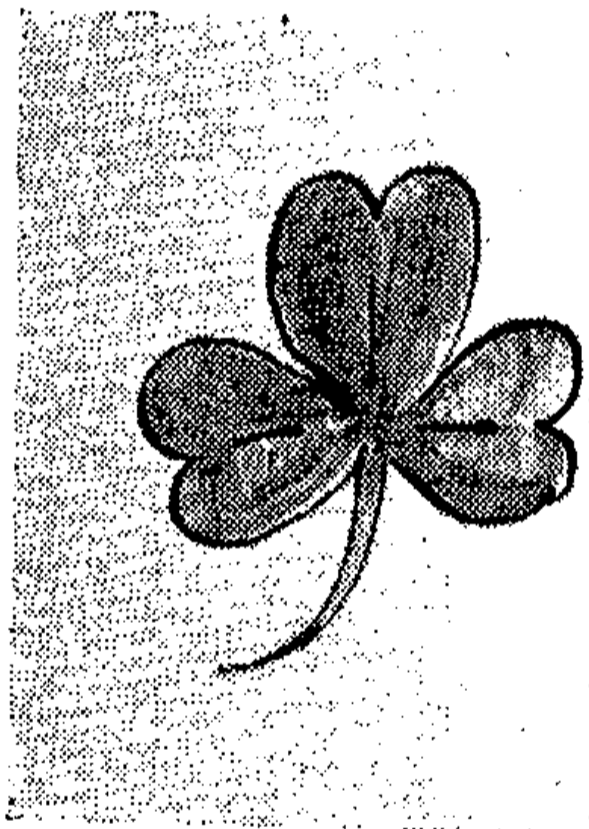


PLATE V—PORTRAITS

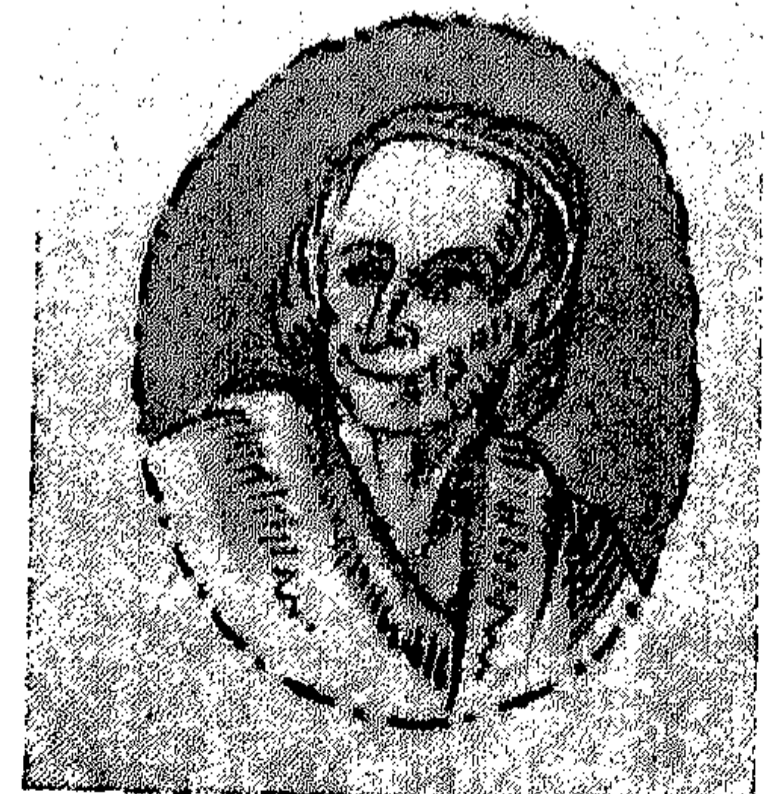
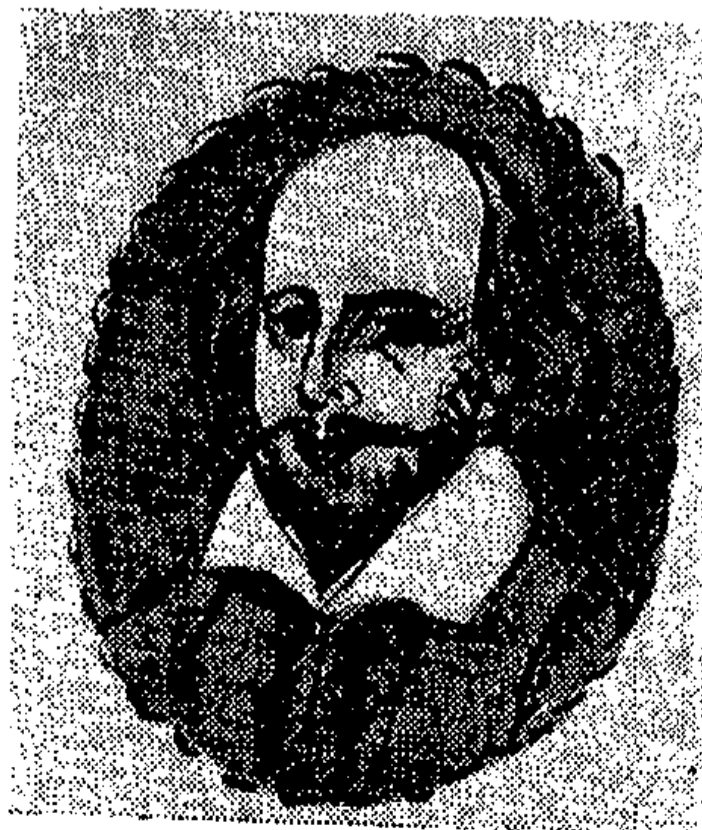


Table 4 gives the results in a somewhat different form, being confined to the number of successes for each sub-group of children. No correction was made for possible chance successes, as it was evident from the children's comments that their number was negligible. The first set, mainly intended as an encouragement, dealt with dress and costumes. The great majority of children had no trouble with this. With the landscape set, where a typical Scottish scene had to be picked out, *W* children were conspicuously less successful (*P* less than .001). The difference probably reflects differential opportunities for travelling around the countryside, and possibly also differences in the extent to which landscapes decorate their homes, though the latter is entirely speculative. Similar considerations would apply to the next set, three buildings including Edinburgh Castle (*P* less than .02). It is noteworthy that several *M* children were able to identify Notre Dame in Paris, one of the 'distractors.'

After this came a set of conventional emblems, and here the rates of success in singling out the ubiquitous Scottish thistle differed even less, though still significantly (*P* less than .05). The last set, featuring "Rabbie" Burns in company with Shakespeare and Voltaire, produced a surprise. There was no significant *M-W* difference, either in correctly choosing Burns as the Scottish one, or even in knowing his name. Evidently Burns constitutes one of the most potent Scottish national symbols, as early as childhood. Below are some revealing answers to the question "How do you know this is Burns?":

My grannie's got a picture of him. (*M8*).

Because we have a calendar with his face on it. (*M7*).

When your mummie's in hospital you go into a fish-and-chip shop for your dinner; and when I looked up I saw a picture of him looking at me. (*W6*). (N.B.—This boy recognized neither the National Anthem nor the Union Jack.)

On the T.V. news—we saw his cottage. (*W7*).

It would seem that Burns' presence in Scottish life cuts across the barriers of social class, and that is no doubt how he would have wished it to be.

TABLE 4

RECOGNITION OF SCOTTISH PICTURES.

(Numbers of children out of 24 who succeeded on each task.)

	<i>M</i> Schools			<i>W</i> Schools		
	6-7	8-9	10-11	6-7	8-9	10-11
Costumes	18	23	24	22	23	23
Landscapes	20	21	23	8	16	18
Buildings	15	21	21	9	15	19
Emblems	18	19	22	11	18	19
Portraits	14	16	22	10	20	22
Percentage of children able to name Burns	29%	46%	88%	21%	58%	88%

VI.—ATTITUDES TO OTHER COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES.

The findings relating to this are reported in detail elsewhere (Jahoda, 1962), and this section, therefore, offers merely a sketch of broad trends and some features of special interest in this country.

The children's growing awareness of more distant nations began with casual glimpses of unusual picturesque detail divorced from any general background. This was sometimes combined with concrete and homely, though equally fragmentary information gained through such personal channels as relatives abroad. The subsequent process of differentiation and organization, too complex for brief summary, was studied in some detail in relation to America and Russia.

Attitudes tended to follow a distinct pattern. Those of the youngest and/or least mature children were determined by some arbitrary and usually concrete detail that happened to have created an impression (e.g., "Don't like New Zealand because the butter is too salt"). Actually, these are probably too evanescent to deserve the term 'attitudes,' and are mentioned only because they are characteristic of an early mode of thought. Apart from the attraction of 'holiday countries,' the more stable sources of favourable attitudes seemed to be again the existence of personal ties, or a belief in the similarity of the people to oneself, resulting in a feeling of affinity; this last statement, it should be added, is somewhat speculative and could not be directly verified from the data. Unfavourable attitudes, from a surprisingly early age, have their roots in past wars, but among the oldest or most mature children these are overshadowed by present political conflicts.

On the salient, and somewhat disturbing findings, was the ethnocentricity exhibited by some *W* children. This took the form of colour prejudice, and a marked tendency to look down on people in other countries. It is interesting to note, however, that their attitude to the English appeared to be influenced by considerations of social class. Thus, a higher proportion of *W*'s compared with *M* children thought the English 'nicer' in behaviour (e.g., "In London the men are not so rowdy when they're drunk"); moreover, they tended to identify an English accent with middle class speech, and to regard the Scottish tongue as a working class one, as may be illustrated by two examples:

Well, the English say "Good jolly, this is a jolly fine day." The Scottish say "Aye, it's a grand day." The English are a lot of toffs. (W'9).

They talk different—kind of polite, kind of Cockney . . . (W'11).

Lastly, a few general remarks on attitudes towards the English. From the way the children talked about them (and it must be remembered that will largely reflect the expressed opinion of their elders) it would seem that the traditional antagonism is very much on the wane. There were hardly any disparaging remarks about the "Sassenachs"* and when questioned about dislikes, not a single one mentioned England or the English.

VII.—CONCLUSIONS.

The outstanding impression one gains from surveying the children's development, in line with the conclusions of investigators concerned with other areas of children's thinking, is that of the great intellectual distance traversed within the span of a few years. At the outset, their responses reveal an almost complete ignorance about the wider geographical and social world surrounding

* Asked to give another name for the English, only three *M* children were able to produce this ancient word.

them; some five years later the outlook of most of them is no longer fundamentally different from that of mature adults. During the intervening years, they have acquired a set of conceptual tools enabling them to organize their environment meaningfully and to make the main distinction conventional in our society.

The details of this process have been described in this present study. However, it was necessary to treat the various aspects more or less in isolation, leaving aside the question as to whether there may not be some common thread running through the advances in seemingly divergent spheres. An analysis carried out with the material as a whole indicates that the central element is probably to be found in the extent to which the child has succeeded in differentiating and ordering ever-widening sections of his geographical environment; and this can be at least roughly assessed in terms of the G-stages. It would appear that the particular G-stage reached is an index of the limit to the amount of progress possible elsewhere; children often lag behind, failing to realize their potential achievement, but there is no indication that they can exceed it in genuine understanding, as contrasted with mere parrot recital.

Among the youngest children investigated, nearly nine-tenths had not advanced beyond G.II. It is thus legitimate to generalize about the age-group 6-7, because their outlook was fairly uniform. After the age of 7, the increasing diversity of G-stages precludes any general statement, which would be misleading.

It may be recalled that G.I. denotes a perspective confined to the child's immediate surroundings—home, school and play streets in which they spend their everyday life. With G.II an extension has taken place, involving some apprehension of Glasgow as a unitary whole, to which the child refers himself and of which he feels himself to be a part. As yet, however, no conception has been formed about what lies outside. From this starting-point, an inventory of the ideas characterising a majority of the children aged 6-7 will be made.

First of all, the meaning of even the simplest geographical words tends to be extremely vague, or altogether mistaken. Thus 'town' is liable to be applied to any aggregate from streets upwards. This reflects not only inadequate command of this particular concept, but at the same time also inability to classify known geographical names in any coherent order; both are really two sides of the same coin. Asked "what is your country?" the dominant answer was "Glasgow"; one replied "I don't live in a country, I live in a close.*" Whilst they have heard the word "Scotland," and if G.II usually realize that it is a place of some kind, they cannot locate it properly in space; it is thought of as being "away" somewhere. Requests to say something about Britain elicited a collection of absurdities. The most they achieved, with three exceptions, was to put forward notions implying recognition that Britain is some kind of geographical entity, though invariably a remote one. Consequently, symbols relating to Britain as a whole, such as the National Anthem or the Union Jack, were at best attributed to Scotland; a majority of children in G.I failed to recognize them altogether.

When asked whether they were British, a majority of the children in G.I and G.II replied negatively; the same answer was given by nearly all children in G.I to the question as to whether they were Scottish; but two-thirds of those in G.II affirmed that they were Scottish. In view of the evident confusion prevalent even among the latter, this result may appear surprising: why should

* Close: strictly an entrance or passage, but extends to the common stairs of a tenement, or the building as a whole.

they be ready to acknowledge being Scottish, when they clearly fall short of understanding the relationship between Glasgow and Scotland? In order to explain this, one has to abandon the exclusive concern with purely cognitive aspects. These children are growing up in a symbolic environment (i.e., that part of their environment consisting of words, signs, etc.) where Scotland and things Scottish are bound to figure rather prominently. Hence, even before they are capable of building up a coherent conceptual framework serving to categorize their geographical surroundings, they will become familiar with such words as "Scotland" and "Scottish," as well as to a lesser extent "Britain" and "British." Moreover, some broad and loose associations, normally with a favourable emotional tinge, will tend to be established between these words and certain items of their experience. This was often apparent in earlier pages: children were reminded by the word "Scotland" of their family, of Highland Dancers, and so forth. An accumulation of such associations leads to a readiness to acknowledge themselves as "Scottish"; but until such time as an adequate concept of "Scotland" and "Scottish" has crystalized, such quasi-identifications remain unstable and apt to be withdrawn when challenged.

The purpose of labouring this point at some length is to show again how young children are sometimes able to use these words in a formally correct manner, when more careful probing would reveal that conceptual grasp still eludes them. In fact, during the first two or three years of their school career, most children have hardly begun to make sense of the wider geographical, social and political setting around them. It will not have escaped the readers' attention that it was necessary to qualify statements about the youngest children, because even they were far from uniform. Thus, one 6-year-old was already in G.IV, whilst at the other end of the scale, two 10-year-olds had not moved beyond G.II. This variability of individuals cannot be stressed too strongly, because it is in danger of being overlooked when one thinks in terms of age trends, and this applies most of all to the intermediate ages. A majority of the youngest children are likely to be in G.I or G.II, and most of the oldest in G.III or G.IV, but those aged 8-9 are distributed over the whole range. This holds true for children from *M* and *W* schools taken separately, as well as for the total sample.

In general, the children from *M* schools were found to be significantly in advance of those from *W* schools; however, when *M* and *W* children were matched for intelligence test score, the difference disappeared. It was, therefore, concluded that this factor accounts for a large part of both individual variations and group differences.

VIII.—SOME EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS.

"He that hath names without ideas, wants meaning in his words, and speaks only empty sounds." It would be entirely in the spirit of John Locke to add that the passage from names as more or less empty sounds to names backed by fully elaborated concepts is the outcome of a gradual learning process. However, it is not always easy to know whether or not a child who has a name speaks more than empty sounds. An adult may readily be led to assume that notions self-evident to him will also be within the reach of the child. One might again turn to Locke for an example: "The relation also that things have to one another in their *places* and distances is very obvious to observe; as above, below, a mile distant from Charing Cross, in England, in London." An analysis of the concepts underlying such statements, along the lines sketched in the present study, will indicate that to a child such relationships may be far from obvious.

What bearing does this have on the teaching situation? The simple answer would be that the teacher should not jump too far ahead of the children's capacity for adequate comprehension; but this is hardly a very helpful recommendation. In practice, the teacher could not hope to ascertain the stage of conceptual development reached by each child, and even if this could be done, some compromise would be unavoidable. More effective action would be a reconsideration of the manner of teaching such subjects as Geography and History. An examination of the Schemes of Work for teaching these in primary schools, keeping in mind the findings reported, will reveal the presence of numerous assumptions that are likely to be invalid; for instance, what kinds of 'simple geographical terms' are regarded as having to be taught, and which ones seem to be tacitly taken for granted?

Another possible suggestion is that some account be taken in planning the curriculum of what appears to be the dominant, if not universal sequence of concept development from the immediate vicinity outwards. This would rule out, say, a leap from plans of the school room and adjacent streets to the globe or map of the world. The main aim would be a consolidation of the series widening out from the home town to Britain as a whole.

Finally, it is important to guard against a possible misconception, arising from the general discussion of developmental stages. It has been stated that a child must attain a certain level of intellectual maturity before he is ready to move from one stage to the next; he must be capable of performing the appropriate logical operations as well as of handling spatial relationships. Thus, subject to the wide range of individual variation already emphasized, there is probably a ceiling to what a given child can understand at a particular time. However, it might be wrongly inferred from this that there is relatively little the teacher can do to help a child along. Such a view presupposes that most children more or less automatically advance to the limits of their potentialities, and this is, unfortunately, very far from the truth. Even in the course of the actual investigation, as an unintended consequence of merely trying to answer questions of a kind with which they were not normally faced, some children had a flash of insight; things suddenly fell into place, and they reached a new level of understanding. If this can be brought about so casually and incidentally, it is likely that teachers could achieve far more by a systematic effort. It is hoped that the present investigation may make some limited contribution by pointing the way.

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