

**THE COMMON-SCHOOL
SYSTEM OF
GERMANY AND ITS
LESSONS TO AMERICA**

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The Common-School System of Germany and Its Lessons to America by Levi Seeley

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LEVI SEELEY

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PREFACE.

THE object of this book is twofold: first, to give an accurate picture of the German school system, especially that of Prussia, which was foremost in establishing a school system thorough in all respects; and second, to draw lessons from the same which can be applied in the American schools and for the improvement of her school systems. In order to obtain reliable information concerning the German schools it became necessary to examine a vast literature, as there is no single book in German giving a complete picture of the school system, and this would still leave many questions unsettled to the foreign student. Therefore it became necessary to study the subject on the ground where answers and explanations could be obtained from school officials and teachers. This study began twelve years ago, and four of these years have been spent in Germany. Access to the public libraries, and also to the private libraries of school men, together with the advice and assistance of many eminent teachers, have been of utmost value to me in securing correct data and in reaching absolute facts.

Not less important was the actual inspection of schools, and this has been made in all parts of Germany; institutions of all kinds have been visited, from the school in the lonely village, where perhaps a single teacher instructs a

hundred children, to the most complete school system of the largest city, and from the common school to the gymnasium and university. Uniform courtesy has ever been shown, and the school officials and teachers have never failed to give me an opportunity not only to see actual work, but also to obtain correct information concerning the schools.

In regard to the second motive, that of suggesting reforms in the American schools, I trust no one will think that I believe in bodily transporting the German school system to American soil. There are certain reforms needed, and the sooner we recognize the fact and set about their introduction, the better for our schools and for the cause of education. We should be ready to learn from any and every source; and if Germany has anything good that we can apply, prejudice should not prevent its application. That Germany has some good things entirely applicable to our conditions, I believe these pages will show. The object is not to improve the German schools, therefore their defects—and they have serious defects—will not be given prominence.

I do not expect that all American educators will agree with me in the manner of applying the lessons from Germany, nor in the manner of securing the reforms, though all will agree that such reforms are necessary. Experience in schools of all kinds in America leads me to believe that my plan is practicable. But if these suggestions shall awaken discussion and criticism, and thereby lead somebody else to propose a better plan which may be adopted, my end will be reached. The main end is the reforms sought, and if that end is reached I shall be satisfied.

I wish hereby to express my appreciation of most valuable assistance from the following gentlemen: Dr. Bosse, Minister of Education; Herr von Weyrauch, under-Secretary of State; Geheimrat Prof. Bertram, superintendent

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of the common schools of Berlin; Rektors Báblich, Lincke, Brunslow, Schmidt, and Bellardi, principals of Berlin schools; and especially from Herr Robert Siegert, instructor of drawing in the Royal Art School, Berlin. Believing that we have most to learn from the common schools of Germany, the discussion is limited to them.

LEVI SEELEY.

STATE NORMAL SCHOOL,
Trenton, N. J., Jan., 1896.

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SCHOOL SYSTEMS OF GERMANY.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

THE German common schools have long been celebrated for their efficiency and thoroughness. They have steadily improved from the time of their organization until the present, and although other nations have also improved their school systems, Germany, it is conceded, still continues in the lead. (The three most important lessons taught the world by Germany are: 1, that all teachers must be professionally trained and therefore have a professional standing; 2, that they must receive permanent appointments; and 3, that children of lawful school age must attend school every day of the year that it is in session, the parents being held accountable for such attendance.)

Three most important lessons from Germany.

All of these propositions are practically and successfully worked out in Germany, as later pages will show. Almost as successfully have the same ideas been copied by Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Austria, and other countries. Austria turned the crushing defeat of Sadowa in 1866 into better

In other lands.

than victory in that it opened her eyes to the necessity of better schools, and led to the adoption practically of the school system of Prussia. Even France, after her humiliation of 1870, learned the lesson from Germany that to have better soldiers she must have better schools, and began immediately to establish a school system in some respects better than that of her enemy, which is having wonderful effect upon the nation. America too has been benefited by a study of the German schools, and by the adoption of many ideas from them. The teachings of Pestalozzi, Froebel, Diesterweg, Francke, and Herbart, have exerted a wide influence, and are continuing to do so. But we fully believe that far more yet remains for us to learn which can be applied successfully to our conditions and will prove a great blessing to our land.

The two great things that America needs in her school system are: 1, professionally trained teachers given fixed places as soon as they have fulfilled rigid requirements as to fitness; and 2, compulsory education, for every day the school is in session, for not less than seven years.

Two great things America needs.

The question of professionally trained teachers is of far more importance than that of methods, as a properly trained teacher will settle the question of methods to suit his own individuality after having learned the principles which underlie all methods. The appointment for indefinite periods would largely remove the schools from politics, as the few appointments to be made from year to year would leave comparatively little patronage for the politician to distribute and would therefore destroy his baneful influence.

The second great need is compulsory education, not an abortive effort to secure attendance for a quarter or a half of the school year, but for all of the year. For a quarter of a century efforts have been made in different States of

the Union to secure regular school attendance, but not with anything like complete success. Failure has arisen from the incompleteness in the requirements of laws passed. France has adopted within ten years both of the above requirements, and her schools have attained a great degree of efficiency, her teachers are all trained and her children all attend school regularly, a result which after half a century of effort we have not yet reached.

Surely the conditions in the Republic of the United States are not less favorable nor the government less strong than in the Republic of France! Both of the above questions are discussed at length in later chapters and stress laid upon their importance.

In order to understand the German school system, it is necessary that its historical development should be studied. This history is fruitful of suggestions. They show not alone the difficulties that had to be overcome, the influences that were set at work, and the great value of the schools to the nation; they also disclose the way in which other nations may improve their school systems and through them assure their intellectual and material prosperity. Others may thus learn from the experience of Germany, avoiding the errors she has made and profiting by her successes. The study of her school government, of her course of study, of her teachers and the manner of training them, of the schools themselves and the end they seek to reach, will afford abundant material for thought, awaken discussion, and stimulate earnest effort for educational advancement. Activity in these directions can only result in good. We possess a great advantage over Germany in that we are not bound by unbending regulations, controlled by unprogressive conservatism, and loaded down with traditions which reach far back into the past. On the other hand new ideas are gladly

France.

Value of a study of the history of German education.

Our advantage over Germany.