

**A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE  
SYSTEM OF EDUCATION  
ADOPTED IN THE CELEBRATED  
COMMON SCHOOLS OF  
PRUSSIA**

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A Brief Description of the System of Education Adopted in the Celebrated Common Schools of Prussia by Various

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**VARIOUS**

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION  
OF THE  
SYSTEM OF EDUCATION

ADOPTED IN THE  
CELEBRATED COMMON SCHOOLS

OF  
PRUSSIA:

WITH  
SOME NOTICE OF SCHOOL BOOKS

Corresponding in Character

TO THOSE USED IN THE SCHOOLS OF THAT COUNTRY.

PHILADELPHIA:  
HOGAN AND THOMPSON,

No. 30 North Fourth Street.

1838.

Educ 1038.38.5

EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY  
EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY  
1917 23 246

C. SHERMAN AND CO., PRINTERS,  
19 St. James Street.

PUBLIC  
INSTRUCTION IN PRUSSIA.

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THE writer has been requested to furnish some particulars of the system of national education in present use in the kingdom of Prussia. The spirit, rather than the details, of this great institution is applicable in the United States, and its whole economy and general character are exhibited in Mrs. Austin's translation of Cousin's Report. In the preface to that work the author asserts that, "There is such a coherency, both in the fabric it describes, and in the description, that no one will fully understand the system, who cannot bear the toil of following the author step by step. Portions may be selected which show the beautiful spirit pervading the whole, and which must, I should think, touch any human heart; but its merit as a piece of legislation—as a system living and working—can only be appreciated when studied connectedly and in detail."—These remarks of Mrs. Austin suggest the character of this institution, and it is hoped, will commend it to persons interested in public education, and in its practical improvement in the United States.

PUBLIC INSTRUCTION, in relation to this system, signifies, "*instruction provided for the whole public by the state.*"\*

The territory of the kingdom of Prussia is divided into ten provinces, the provinces into departments, the departments into

\* Cousin.

circles, and the circles into parishes. The whole of the public establishments of education, throughout these subdivisions of territory, comprehend elementary or primary schools; burgher or middle schools; gymnasia or high schools; and Universities. All the institutions are under the regulation of the laws, and under the protection and ministration of an appointed magistracy. The present system came into operation in 1819; it has therefore been subjected to fifteen years of experiment, and has been constantly growing in popular favour, and in the estimation of the most public-spirited and philosophical minds over all Europe. The whole system is under the cognisance and control of the minister of Public Instruction, who is assisted in his function by a council, which, to use the words of Cousin, serves to prevent the probable errors of "a single and variable head; to make new rules or modify old ones; to aid the judgment of the minister as to what establishments it may be desirable to found, or what to suppress; above all, to guide him in the appreciation and the choice of men, and to serve as a rampart to ward off solicitation and intrigue." The council are sometimes severally employed to visit the institutions under cognisance of the minister. These visits are unexpected, always determined by a real necessity, and entrusted to men especially fitted for the occasion. In the general course of affairs, the correspondence and intervention of inferior authorities, immediately connected with the ministry, is sufficient to carry on the system in its ramifications most remote from the centre of authority.

Every department, circle, and parish, has its school board, which regulates its respective affairs, and every school its proper inspectors or committee, consisting of laity and clergy, who have particular and frequently recurring duties in regard to the schools. The minister, though thoroughly informed of results, does not interfere minutely with details. His information of the operation of the whole system is nearly perfect, being gathered from full and accurate reports of the dependent functionaries.

Two features in this system are very striking—one, is the respect felt by the nation for the dignity and uses of educa-



tion; and the other, the positive fitness required by the laws, for the exercise of the respective duties of those employed in the administration of it. "The high rank assigned to the head of public instruction, marks the respect in which every thing relating to that important subject is held by the government; hence science assumes her proper place in the state. Civilisation, the intellectual and moral interests of society, have their appointed ministry. This ministry embraces every thing relating to science, and consequently all schools, libraries, and kindred institutions."

"The spirit of the Prussian monarchy is decidedly adverse to unpaid functionaries of any kind," says M. Cousin, therefore the administrators of the public education have generally some small salary proper to their office. "In Prussia all public servants are paid; and as no post whatsoever can be obtained without passing through the most rigorous examinations, all are able and enlightened men. And as, moreover, they are taken from every class in society, they bring to the exercise of their duties, the general spirit of their nation, while in that exercise they contract habits of public business." By such an arrangement it must be seen that voluntary benefactors are excluded, except in the bestowment of donations and legacies to the schools, and also that the intrusive counsels, and arbitrary proceedings of well intentioned ignorance, cannot prevent the constant improvement and progress, which wise men, associated together for the public benefit, will certainly aim at, and may probably accomplish. No languor, negligence, and apathy are likely to enter into the applications of a system guarded in so many ways. Every parish must, by the law of the land, have a school; and the pastor, or minister of that parish, is in virtue of his office, the inspector of that school; associated with him is a committee of administration and superintendence, composed of some of the principal persons in the parish. If all the operations of this association were carried on without any check or authority, the methods and results of instruction might be correspondent entirely to the knowledge or ignorance, the vigilance or negligence, of the school committee, or trustees. But every department has

a board of education, called the Regency, which employs school-inspectors, who reside in the chief town of every circle, and who inspect all the schools in it; and another officer, the school councillor, also inspects the schools, quickens and keeps alive the interest of the school committees and the school-masters, and makes reports to the higher authority of the excellences and defects of the particular schools; and thus whatever is wrong is known, and is put in the way of redress.

The preceding statement is only a brief notice of the general economy of these schools. The translation of Mrs. Austin is limited to the details of primary instruction, and to this only the present abstract from Cousin is also restricted.—Cousin divides his report into the *rules* and the *facts*, thus:

I. The organization of primary instruction; the laws and rules by which it is governed.

II. What the laws and regulations have actually produced.—The rules are, concerning the duty of all parents and guardians to send their children to the primary schools; the duty of each parish to maintain a school, at its own cost; general objects and different gradations of primary instruction; how primary teachers are to be trained, placed, and rewarded or punished; authorities employed in superintendence; and private schools.

The duty of parents to educate their children, by means of schools, letters, and science, has long been recognised in northern Europe. Cousin believes that the system of the present education in Prussia originated in national tendencies—in a deep and general feeling that the moral and intellectual well-being of the state, and of the individual, must be promoted by letters, science, and religion; the last two being especially represented and inculcated by means of literature.

“This duty,” says Cousin, “is so natural, so rooted in all the moral and legal habits of the country, that it is expressed by a single word, [in English,] *school obligation*. In Prussia the state has for many years imposed on all parents the strict obligation of sending their children to school, unless they are able to prove that they give them a competent education at home. They are bound to send their children to school from

the age of five years. By the law of 1810 this obligation is rigidly enforced, and yet it is not esteemed tyrannical, but the school is generally regarded as a privilege. All masters and manufacturers who employ children as servants or apprentices, says the law, shall be required to give them a suitable education from their seventh to their fourteenth year inclusive. No child can be removed from school till the inspectors examine whether he has gone through the whole elementary course. A rigid census is taken of children, and in case of any negligence of parents or guardians, in regular attendance at school, the magistrate is called in, to enforce the law. But considerable facilities are afforded to the observance of this law—for the time employed upon lessons is so arranged as to leave children several hours daily for work at home. Care is every where taken to furnish necessitous parents with the means of sending their children to school by providing them with clothing, books, &c. To these facilities are added the benevolent and enlightened persuasions of the school committee, who represent to the parents the exceeding value of a good elementary education, and spread among the young a thirst for knowledge, which they can only obtain by means of the legal provision, which offers it to them.

Every parish is bound to have an elementary school. The schools are supported in part by endowments variously derived, by a tax upon property, and by contributions of parents who are able to pay for education. The financial provisions, are procured in these ways, according to local circumstances. It may happen that one village will be too poor to defray the expense of a school; in that case the combination of several, including insulated farm-houses, is allowed in order to form a school.

The number of children in one school must not be too great. One master cannot take more than a hundred. Difference of religion does not prevent children from attending school together, unless the populousness of the place conveniently separates them into schools of distinctive denominations.

In relation to the maintenance of the schools, the law thus defines the provision: