

**NOTES ON NATIONAL
EDUCATION IN
CONTINENTAL EUROPE**

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Notes on National Education in Continental Europe by Jno. F. Moss

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BY JNO. F. MOSS,
CLERK TO THE SHEFFIELD SCHOOL BOARD.

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TO THE
CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SHEFFIELD
SCHOOL BOARD.

SIR JOHN BROWN AND GENTLEMEN,

Having, in accordance with your instructions, visited a *Introductory* large number of public schools in various States on the Continent, it is due from me that I should now give some account of the information I have gathered relating to the work in which you are so deeply interested.

My task was undertaken with much diffidence, and I am conscious of many short-comings. The difficulty of dealing with so large a field of enquiry in the limited space of time allotted to my journey was of itself great. The amount of travelling involved rendered it impossible for me to stay long at any one point, and it became absolutely necessary that further than gaining a general knowledge of the working of the school systems under review, I should chiefly confine my attention to those branches of the enquiry more immediately falling within my own province.

At the outset it is my duty to acknowledge my indebtedness to A. J. Mundella, Esq., M.P., for having, through Lord Enfield, obtained for me letters of introduction from Earl Granville, which were of very great service in each of the countries visited. My acknowledgments are also specially due to Dr. Gneist (Rector Magnificus of the University of Berlin, and Member of the Reichstag and of the Abgeordnetenhaus), to Dr. Wiese (Minister in Charge of

Affairs relating to the Higher Schools of Prussia), to Dr. Gerber (of the Ministerium des Cultus, Saxony), to the Minister of Education for Austria, to Monsieur Cerecol (President of the Swiss Confederation), and to Monsieur Schiëss (Vice-Chancellor of the Swiss Confederation). From Lord Odo Russell, Sir A. Buchanan, A. G. Bonar, Esq., and others of Her Majesty's representatives, I received the utmost courtesy; whilst to H. M. Felkin, Esq. (of Chemnitz), Dr. Bornemann (of Dresden), Herr Ernst Ihne (of Berlin), and Professor Wienzierl (of the St. Anna Stadt Normal School, Vienna), I am also indebted for much kind assistance.

Scope of enquiry.

Although my principal object was to ascertain as far as practicable what points of excellence in the Continental school system could be with advantage introduced in the Elementary Schools established and controlled under the English Elementary Education Act of 1870, I found it not only useful but absolutely essential to the success of my mission to see schools of all grades,—indeed it seemed clear that it was in the secondary and higher schools that the best hints as to school arrangement and educational appliances were to be gathered.

Countries visited.

In Prussia, Saxony, Bavaria, Austria, and Switzerland, excellent opportunities were afforded of visiting what may be termed typical schools of every class. In Holland and Belgium I have also seen schools of various grades. My time in France was too limited to admit of the visitation of schools.

It will not be necessary to give anything like a detailed account of all the schools visited, but it may be desirable to specify some, rather by way of illustration than with any view of setting them up as precisely the best examples of their class, though, as a rule, I was enabled to select for visitation the very best schools in each of the districts.

The Schools of Germany

I am not sufficiently versed in the science of "pedagogy" to enter at any length into that portion of the subject, nor did

time permit of my making more than very general and meagre enquiry in that direction; but it would be impossible to visit, however hurriedly, the schools of central Europe, without being impressed with the manifest thoroughness of the work done and with the evident aptitude of the teachers engaged.

It will be obvious that there are many matters of detail connected with the subjects touched upon which must necessarily be omitted in order to confine a report within reasonable limits; but I trust numerous valuable hints derived during the journey, though unrecorded in the following notes, may nevertheless be of use in the service of the Board.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

JNO. F. MOSS,

Clerk of the Board.

22nd May, 1878.

NOTES, &c.

GERMANY naturally claims first attention in any attempt to point out the excellencies characteristic of the various school systems of Continental Europe.

Compulsion. No one needs to be told that in Germany education is compulsory. The laws on the subject are varied in different States, and the power of compelling the attendance of children at school is not exercised uniformly.

Assimilation of parents. But something more has been achieved than the mere efficient working of compulsion. The duty of parents to attend to the education of their children has been thoroughly instilled into the minds of the people. In Prussia, people laugh at the idea of being *compelled* to send their children to school, because scarcely anyone thinks of disregarding what he knows to be a primary duty. Negligent parents are happily rare exceptions in at least the more important communities. Active intelligent citizens are to be met with in Saxony who would have difficulty in giving you the merest notion of the working of a compulsory system of education, because they have never seen compulsion applied.

Regularity of attendance. I have been astonished, on looking at registers of school attendance in some of the common schools, to note how few cases of absenteeism, without reasonable excuse, are recorded. One of the directors of a public elementary school in a populous manufacturing district, assured me that out of 2,500 scholars scarcely a score were away without proper reasons having been given, and he shewed me large folio pages of the class registers with less than a dozen absences marked for which sufficient excuses had not been furnished. One instance

was given in which a boy had only been absent ten times during the whole of the eight years of his school career.

In Berlin, however, I visited a large "Gemeinde schule," where out of 900 girls nearly 50 on the average absented themselves from the girls' department 3 days out of the 6 in the week, and out of this number 25 were often on the delinquent list. The explanation given by the teacher was that they were the older girls, who were much wanted to assist their mothers in household duties. In the boys' department the proportion of irregular scholars did not seem so great. In this case it should be mentioned the school has not been long established, and the steady enforcement of the law is leading to a gradual diminution of absenteeism. An average attendance of 95 per cent. seems almost incredible in England; yet it is not uncommon to find such results recorded in German schools.

Absenteeism amongst girls in Berlin.

The methods of dealing with delinquents are diversified, and the penalties inflicted upon negligent parents seem to be generally heavier than are provided for in England. The fine is usually doubled for a second offence, and a third conviction is in some States followed with imprisonment. Happily such extreme measures are seldom rendered necessary.

Methods of enforcing attendance.

The police in many of the communes are entrusted with the duty of enforcing the attendance of children at school during the prescribed periods; but usually complaints of neglect must in the first instance come from the school director or teacher, and only when his remonstrances or warnings prove unavailing are other measures resorted to.

Police officers.

An officer called a "School Messenger," who is required to be a man of tact and judgment, is attached to each of the large schools in Saxony. His duty is to look up absentees and report to the Director, who, if he deems it necessary, sends for the parent and administers a caution, which generally proves sufficient. But if a parent shows a disposition to evade