

REFORM IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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WITH A PREFACE

BY

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PREFACE

My friend Professor Hagmann has expressed a wish that I should introduce him to the English public; and I now do so with very great pleasure, regretting only that the introducer is not a person of more importance, better able to secure for his interesting book the attention it deserves.

Dr. Hagmann is a Swiss and a Professor in the Canton School at St. Gall. For many years he has devoted his energies to teaching, and he possesses, what is to my mind the best qualification a teacher can possess, that of looking upon the pupils entrusted to him as so many intelligent beings, endowed with feelings, and not, as is often the case, as mere units of humanity requiring the cane or birch at short intervals.

The keynote to Prof. Hagmann's system is "kindness." He is a firm believer in its beneficial effects, and thinks the best teacher to be the man who is in entire sympathy with his pupils. This view I heartily endorse, for I have always endeavoured to practise it myself, convinced as I am that therein lies the great *secret* of successful teaching. I wish those who take a different view, and who are staunch believers in the so-called "robust system," would only try what kindness can do when combined with firmness and intelligence. Prof. Hagmann's long experience in teaching has naturally suggested to him most of the reforms he here advocates, for which a certain amount of credit is due to this country.

Prof. Hagmann was a young man when he visited England in 1884. This visit was a revelation to him, and what he then saw of English schools and English methods, made a strong and lasting impression on his mind. He soon discovered

that English methods are essentially different from those adopted on the Continent, and if he did not invariably approve of them, he nevertheless realised that they contain a very great deal that is worthy of imitation.

He was especially struck with the happy mixture of work and play which is so great a feature of English schools. Later on he discovered that many of the English he came in contact with, were just as well educated as the bulk of people on the Continent, and that practically the same results had been obtained with much less hardship to the individual. This early formed opinion has been confirmed by later experience. No wonder, then, that Prof. Hagemann lays so much stress on the desirability of curtailing the hours of work in foreign schools. It must be admitted that Prof. Hagemann's condemnation of long hours of school-work is more than justified, for the time spent in the school-room abroad is certainly somewhat in excess.

To expect boys and girls to devote eleven,

twelve, and occasionally fourteen hours a day to actual work is hardly reasonable, and that such a system is still in existence does not speak highly for the intelligence of those responsible for its maintenance.

Personally, I am not prepared to say that English boys and girls have much to complain of in the way of long hours, but I do not hesitate to say that their fellow scholars in Continental schools do certainly spend too many hours over school exercises. In this, as in other points, I am speaking from personal experience, and I have not yet forgotten that at our school, in Paris, we began work at 5.30 A.M., and that we went on steadily until 8.30 P.M., with but two hours and a half for meals and play.

After returning to Switzerland Prof. Hagmann thought over what he had seen, and in 1887 he embodied the result of his reflections in the following book, which first appeared at the annual meeting of Swiss teachers at St. Gall.

The time was not yet ripe for the reforms

which he advocated, yet the book was much discussed and very favourably received, and the author had the gratification of discovering, soon after, that his efforts had not been wholly in vain. His ideas gradually made their way, and it soon became evident that the number of those who realised how necessary were the reforms advocated was steadily increasing.

The book gave rise to much controversy; but if there was divergence of opinion on special points, there was also a general agreement as to the actual need of reform. Most teachers were agreed as to the needlessly long hours during which children were kept at work, others wished to introduce new subjects in the curriculum, or to modify those actually taught, but very few indeed were those who objected to every kind of reform.

It was very gratifying to the author to find that the majority of teachers were convinced that reforms were necessary, and the interest evinced by the general public about the various educational questions was also a