

The Higher Schools are naturally those from which the most important results are to be expected, and which, from the English point of view, are best worth careful study. It is simply the truth to say that I have been amazed at what I have seen. It is a very remarkable thing that although no commune is obliged to establish a higher school—only the State is obliged to maintain five—yet at the present time there is no town having a population of above 15,000 which has not its higher school in full work. A still more remarkable thing is that nowhere do the school fees exceed £5 a year. As an Englishman, I was very curious to learn how they were able to give at the rate of £5 a year an education which, in our happier England, can scarcely be obtained at all. This is what I learn. The expense of a Higher School (not including the maintenance of the building) amount to about £1,750 per annum. Supposing the school to be attended by 100 pupils (a medium estimate), the receipts under the head of School fees do not exceed £500. There thus remains a deficit of £1,250; but the State generally provides a subsidy of 7,000 florins (about £583), and the town has therefore only to make up the difference by contributing £667. We have supposed the school to be attended by 100 pupils. It is evident that when this number is exceeded the receipts rise in proportion. This, however, is not always to the advantage of the communal budget, for it should be known that in Holland a class is not allowed to contain more than thirty pupils, the result being that a greater number necessitates the creation of a double class, and this may require an increase in the number of teachers. Let us note, also, in passing, that the communes which are not able to bear the expense of a complete Higher School are authorized to establish schools of three classes corresponding to the three lower classes of a complete school.

The Communal Councils (Town Councils) may appoint such teachers as appear to them efficient. It is only necessary that these present certificates of competency and character, and that they have consequently passed the examinations required by the law. There are exempted from these examinations the bearers of certain academic degrees; thus, for the mathematical and physical sciences the greater part of the candidates are former students of the Universities. These are generally young doctors of science who have taken a high place. Holland is not slow in showing her gratitude to them.

I have said that in the Higher Schools the school fees, although the law has not fixed a *maximum*, do not exceed £5. For the Lower Schools the *maximum* is £1 per annum, but this figure is rarely reached. It is evident from the above that when a boy of twelve years of age leaves the Primary School and is not immediately obliged to earn money, his father, called in to decide whether or not he shall be sent to a Middle School, has no obstacle to face in the matter of school fees. A foreman or superior workman in a position to keep his son till he is 14 years of age can easily pay a shilling a month for school fees; £5 would be an almost insuperable obstacle, though it is none to a father who is able to provide for the other wants of his son until the latter reaches the age of 17 or 18 years.

A Dutchman who boasted greatly of the system which his country has adopted, and to whom I remarked that it might be objected that in virtue of the system it was not himself, but the taxpayers, who paid for the education of his children replied eagerly, "But am I not myself a taxpayer? Does not the system which we have adopted come simply to this—that instead of my being compelled to pay for the education of my children in a few years under the form of very heavy school fees, the law allows me 30 or 40 years in which to pay it under the form of a tax? As for myself personally, it matters very little; but look at my neighbour, whose three sons are being educated at the Higher School. Change the system, his taxes would perhaps be lessened by 20 florins; but, on the other hand, the school fees would reach so high a figure that he could not meet them. The case of my neighbour is not an exceptional one; it is the case of at least one-half of the parents who send their children to the Higher Schools. Of 100 pupils who are now attending these establishments there would remain scarcely one-half, and it would consequently be necessary to raise to £35 the fees to be paid by each of them; this figure speaks more than all the arguments put together."

If in defence of a new order of things it is only necessary to urge the argument of success, it must be confessed that the advantages of the Higher Middle Schools of Holland do not require to be urged any others. By universal consent the success has surpassed all expectation; it has been complete. Yet whoever knows human nature will not be astonished to find that these schools, simply because of their success, are still the object of much criticism, particularly among the clergymen and scholars of the country. I should have wished to learn from M. Thorbecke, himself a very distinguished scholar, what he thought of these criticisms. That

statesman, however, being dead, I applied to one of his former colleagues in Leyden University, whose advice M. Thorbecke to a large extent followed at the time when he was occupied in drawing up his scheme of superior education. I will give you a summary of our conversation. Having asked if it was not a mistake to found a system of education which had not Greek or Latin as its basis, he replied as follows:—

"Allow me to observe to you that our Middle Schools are not intended to produce scholars, orators, statesmen. For these there are the Gymnasium and the University. Has it, moreover, been thoroughly proved that the profound study of a modern foreign language cannot, as mental gymnastics, take the place of the study of a dead language? I could name to you members of Parliament who have never given any attention to Greek and Latin, and yet who, as orators, are on a par with the most eloquent of their colleagues. The Greeks are represented as having left to us in literature and in philosophy monuments of a perfection such as modern writers can never equal. Yet the Greeks studied no dead language that I know of. Besides, what would it serve, in the matter of education, to make a theoretically perfect law, when the mass of the public would condemn it? If there is one idea strongly rooted in the mind of our middle classes, it is the conviction that Greek and Latin are perfectly useless to any one who has not to pass through the University. It was daring enough to give so large a place in our new schools to the mathematical and physical sciences, to which our *bourgeoisie* had hitherto given so little attention. To go further and compel this class of people to study, in addition, Greek and Latin would have been wantonly to court an inevitable defeat."

I next ventured to point out that the programme is overloaded. "Overloaded," replied he. "From whom have you got this accusation? From men who pass their time in their study? Speak a little with our manufacturers and our merchants, and they will give you quite another version of the matter." "It is not said that useless subjects are taught," I went on to add; "it is urged only that too many things are taught at once, that the mind of the pupil cannot take them in, and that in the end his intellect will be enervated." "I understand how this objection could have been urged in 1862 and 1863, during the discussion of the law, when experience had not yet pronounced; but now!—at the present time our merchants, who formerly maintained that a man of business had nothing to do with science, that it was rather an embarrassment than otherwise, now receive with open arms any young man having no other recommendation than that of having studied in one of our schools; they will tell you, moreover, that at the end of five or six weeks the new comer is more useful to them than the majority of their old *employés*, grown grey in harness. There is more to come; it happens that some pupils of the middle schools, having acquired a taste for the mathematical and physical sciences, wish to complete their education at the University. Well, they almost always surpass those of their companions who come from the Gymnasias. Confess that all this is very difficult to explain if it be true that in the new schools the mind of the pupil is enervated and atrophied."

Our conversation then went on as follows:—

"You maintain, then, that in your new schools everything is for the best?" "Pardon! I believe, on the contrary, that there is room for reform. It cannot be denied that the mediocre pupils have great difficulty in learning all that is taught them in the first three forms. Instead of three years, they would require four. The entire course ought to be six years." "But, why at the first did you not fix the course at six years?" "Because we old-fashioned Dutch, like all the rest of the world, have our characteristic faults. We are a people essentially economical, but, unfortunately, we are too anxious that our children should begin early to earn money. It was a great point gained, even, to fix the course at five years. What an outcry would there have been had we taken a year more! Besides, we had not then the experience that we have now." "It will then be necessary to modify the law?" "Yes, but gradually. There are some members of our Chambers who think it will suffice to cut out from the programme the subjects which are called superfluous. I believe it will be well not to oppose this opinion. Let us commence by setting these members to work. That which will be superfluous in the eyes of some will be quite indispensable in the estimation of others. Moreover, they cannot touch either the mathematical and physical sciences or language, and if they end by cutting out anything, a thing which appears to me very problematical, it will be of so little importance as to make scarcely any difference. It will only be when the insufficiency of all these palliatives has been well established that I have indicated to you." "You believe, then, that if we should decide in England to establish schools similar to your Higher Middle Schools, it would be necessary to have a course of six years?" "I do not venture to assert this. You