

THE GERMAN SCHOOLS.

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IT is not seldom that one hears in Ontario the patriotic boast that its common school system is one of the best in the world, and the statement can scarcely be disputed. Yet excellent as the common school system of the Dominion may be, no one can be blind to the serious defects in intermediate and higher education. It is for this reason alone, I think, that our reputation as an educated people is yet to be recognized. To a distinguished and widely read foreign scholar with whom I had lately the honour of conversing, the Canadians were an unlearned, uneducated people ("*unwissenschafliche Leute*," were the exact words of the speaker).

It is well for us to see ourselves sometimes even through the distorted vision of others. And I am not certain that we do not display as much ignorance when we talk of foreigners. Surely but little definite information of the progress of public instruction in those countries which have the best right to our recognition is found among those who oftentimes in their inexperience would seek to foist upon us their experimental systems.

No schools are better worthy of a careful study than those of Germany. No doubt much of their excellence is due to the Minister of Public Instruction who is the centre of responsibility; and this state administration, we are told, has been found in practice to be just and right. But, on the other hand, it is asserted that the whole system of public instruction in France, where a like policy is in vogue, is influenced too much by political considerations. What may be said of Prussia in this respect, I doubt

if the same can be affirmed of any other country in the world. In Prussia all officials are armed with an authority which Americans or Englishmen would not easily brook. A statesman is free to act according as his own experience directs, he is not hampered by the will of his constituency or the likes and dislikes of the populace. Yet the popular will is strong enough to prevent his being swayed by political motives. However much other departments may be governed by political considerations, it is certain that the Germans are so thoroughly imbued with belief in culture that they will not suffer it to be sacrificed to any other interest. We must not forget, moreover, that the representatives in their legislative halls generally represent the best culture of the country. For in Germany the professions are only accessible through the University course, and the necessity of combining responsibility with thorough mastery and experience in educational matters in the Minister of Public Instruction is easily met in a German council. There the statesman may be the man of letters, or the warrior—imagine such men as William von Humboldt and Wolf, the great Homeric critic, directing educational reforms. To these two men do the Germans owe, more than any others, that complete system which challenges the admiration of the world. Both to us probably are known only as the greatest scholars of their age, marking new eras in philological research.

It is my present purpose to make special reference to the classical schools or gymnasiums. These dif-