

THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF ENGLAND.

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[NOTE.—No apology, it is thought, will be deemed necessary for giving place in these pages to the instructive papers on "The Public Schools of England," now being contributed to an American review by so high an authority as Mr. Thomas Hughes, M.P. The interest of the subject for our readers, and the rich detail of information concerning the schools given by Mr. Hughes, will make ample amends for the length of the articles.—ED.]

PART I.

"Well, but will you tell me, after all, what is a public school?" The propounder of this was an American gentleman, of high culture himself and deeply interested in the subject of education. He was not satisfied with the state of things in his own country, and was persuaded that the time had come when an effort must be made to meet the demand for some other stepping-stone for their boys than the common school or the private boarding-school, between the home of the American gentry and the universities. He had read such documents as he could lay hands on as to the English public-schools system, and had convinced himself that there might be something in it which would be of use to him in his search. At any rate he would run over and study it for himself. Accordingly, having obtained such letters as he thought might be of use to him, he sailed for England, and, after consultation with and under the advice of some of those to whom they were addressed, made a tour of inspection which comprised most of the English public schools. He had been much pleased with his adventures; had seen a number of fine buildings, some of them of rare historical interest; had got much information as the methods of study and discipline; had looked on at any number of cricket matches and other games, and been much impressed by the skill and activity of the boys, and the beauty of their raiment; had talked with masters, and prefects, and other boys, big and little, and had come back full of all manner of facts and figures. But in one thing he had failed, and in a matter, too, which he not unreasonably held to lie at the very root of his inquiry; and so, after his six weeks' wanderings, he returned to his original mentor in London, before starting on his return voyage, with the

above question, "What *is* a public school?" Many replies, indeed, he had heard, but none which had at all satisfied him. Thus he had been told by a sixth-form boy in the Eton eleven, that the only public schools in England were those which played against each other in a yearly match at Lord's cricket-ground; according to the captain of Westminster, a royal foundation was the true test; other authorities of equal weight had limited public schools to those entitled to contend for the Elcho shield and Spencer cup at the Wimbledon gatherings of the National Rifle Association. A Liberal under-master at Rugby had defined public schools as those which possessed a foundation controlled by persons in no way interested in the profits of the institution; while at Shrewsbury he had been assured that a charter of some Plantagenet or Tudor sovereign was of the essence of a true public school. From his own observations and inquiries, however, he remained quite dissatisfied with all and each of these definitions, and came back with steady persistence to the starting-point, "What is a public school—in your country?"

The question is one of considerable difficulty. To some extent, however, the answer has been furnished by the Royal Commission appointed in 1861 to inquire into the nature and application of the endowments and revenues, and into the administration and management of certain specified colleges and schools commonly known as the Public Schools Commission. Nine are named in the Queen's letter of appointment, viz., Eton, Winchester, Westminster, the Charterhouse, St. Paul's, Merchant Taylors', Harrow, Rugby, and Shrewsbury. The reasons probably which suggested this selection were, that the nine named foundations had in the course of centuries emerged from the mass of endowed