

Masters and Boys of English Public Schools.

The interest which these ten years, I mean since the publication of Dr. Wiese's German Letters on English Education, has been bestowed upon English school-affairs by German educationists, is, in my opinion, chiefly founded on the fact stated by Dr. Wiese, that the English school-system, as far as it concerns education and preparation for life, is in many respects superior to our own.

The author of the following pages is not among those who succeeded in piercing the privateness and seclusion which screens the English public schools both from inquisitive and professional inquiry. Though, therefore, he has been obliged to derive his information particularly from books, he hopes his statements will not be the less interesting. He has especially one object in view viz. to examine the relations between the two classes constituting the school-community, masters and pupils, senior and junior boys, out of lessons.

„Boys,“ says Dr. Wiese, ¹⁾ „who are sent to English public schools, bring from their paternal roof two things, a natural clinging to fixed family customs and a consciousness shared by all, that they belong to a great and free people.“ The schools to which they are sent are old, noble, renowned places, where generations after generations of boys grew into men, commonwealths which hundreds of years ago were managed and governed on almost the same principles and regulations as they are now. Every school boasts to have been the fostermother of a series of men who are the pride of their countrymen, and hands down with due reverence even every outward mark and sign remembering them. „To have been at such a school of itself confers a certain prestige.“ ²⁾

The English public schools, Eton, Rugby, Westminster, Harrow, and Winchester are neither government establishments nor under the control of Mayors and Corporations, their head-masters are, in most cases, appointed by a body of trustees, the assistant-masters by the head-master. „With the office of the head-master, everything is made over to him and left to his discretion, the fixing rules of discipline, the course of study, even the appointment and removal of under-masters.“ ³⁾

The boys of Eton (at the other schools it is nearly the same) are partly „Foundationers, Collegers, or King's Scholars,“ partly „Oppidans.“ ⁴⁾ The seventy boys on the foundation were

¹⁾ German letters on English education translated by Arnold p. 19. — ²⁾ German letters p. 41. —

³⁾ German letters p. 14. — ⁴⁾ The following intelligence is an extract from Crease's, Some account of Eton College, London 1848. p. 22. sqq.

formerly lodged in one room „The Long Chamber.“ From eight o' clock in the evening till seven the next morning, the whole seventy scholars were shut up together without any control except the discipline maintained among the rest by the sixth-form boys. The discipline was very systematic and strict. But that old system was destructive to the habits of steady industry among the younger boys and fraught with great perils to the character of the more advanced.

In 1844 the College authorities were enabled to undertake and complete the erection of new buildings, and the alteration of the old ones on a scale ample enough to provide for every scholar on the foundation those decencies and comforts, which in modern usages and manners are absolutely necessary, and also to provide the means of ensuring that proper and prompt supervision which is essential for the due maintenance of discipline and decorum.

By means of the recent improvements, each of the forty nine senior students on the foundation has his separate apartment. The younger boys of the seventy are provided with studies, and there are also breakfast-rooms, lavatories, and dormitories. Apartments for one of the assistant-masters have been built in communication with those occupied by the boys.

And although the upper boys still are the vicegerents of authority and are responsible for the preservation of order, the prompt superintendence of a higher power is ensured at all hours, and a very desirable guarantee of discipline and quiet provided.

Boys are eligible for admission into College from the age of eight years to that of fifteen. The ages of the boys in the Lower School (first, second, third form) are from about six to about eleven or twelve. The fourth form is the proper part of the school for a boy of eleven or twelve, the age at which most lads are sent.

The „Oppidans“ form the bulk of the school, their number has of late years averaged from five to six hundred in number. The Oppidans are lodged and boarded partly in the houses of the lower and the assistant masters, and partly in boarding houses which are conducted under the sanction and supervision of the authorities of the school by their proprietors, the „Dames.“ Wherever he boards, each boy is placed under the care of the lower master or one of the assistant-masters as his „Tutor.“ Lower school-boys, with very few exceptions, during the last years have been placed in the house of the Junior Lower-School Assistant, who takes no upper-school pupils. At the age of twelve they leave him, and pass into the house of another Tutor or Dame, as may be chosen by the parent. The boy has to prepare his lessons under the superintendence of his tutor, in whose pupil-room every lesson is rehearsed and revised, before it is construed or shown up.

The interest which recently has been created by the school of Rugby, particularly refers to Dr. Arnold and the period of his headmastership. I am sorry to say that I have not been able to obtain either his own works or those of Stanley and Heintz, his biographers. I have, therefore, been obliged to derive information from other sources. My account is fragmentary, however I suppose that some important matters connected with the object I have in view, will be elucidated by it.

„Dr. Arnold's principles, says an English writer,⁵⁾ were few: the fear of God was the

⁵⁾ Quarterly review Nro. 204, John Timbs School-days of Eminent Men p. 298.

beginning of his wisdom, and his object was not so much to teach knowledge as the means of acquiring it. He desired to awaken the intellect of each individual boy, and contended that the main movement must come from within, and not from without the pupil; and that all that could be, should be done by him and not for him. In a word, his scheme was to call forth in the little world of school those capabilities which best befitted the boy for his career in the great one.“

„Dr. Arnold, says another author,⁶⁾ had found time to watch over the career of the boys at the same time, and all that without taking the least credit to himself, or seeming to know or let any else know, that he ever thought particularly of any boy at all.“ And in another place,⁷⁾ „It was not the cold, clear voice of one giving advice and warning from serene heights to those who were struggling and sinning below, but the warm living voice of one who was fighting for his pupils and by their sides and calling on them to help him and themselves and one another.“

In Dr. Arnold's opinion the first essential requisite of a teacher was, „that the man should be an undoubted Christian, next to this, that he should possess that earnestness and dignity which constitute the true gentleman; then a man of deep scientific culture, learning and scholarship, an active man; one who has common sense and understands boys.“⁸⁾

„The key-stone of Dr. Arnold's government, says an English writer,⁹⁾ was the Sixth-form, which he held to be an intermediate power between the master and the masses of the school. But he carefully watched over this delegated authority and put down any abuse of its power. The praeceptors themselves were no less benefitted. By appealing to their honour, by fostering their self-respect and calling out their powers of governing their inferiors, he ripened their manhood and they early learnt habits of command, and this system, found to work so well is continued and with many of its excellent principles is now acted on in most of the chief public schools in England.“

„The system of carrying on the government of the school through the upper boys, says Mr. Crease,¹⁰⁾ is general among our public schools. To accustom lads early to the exercise of responsible power, under due superintendence and safeguards against its abuse, and to diffuse through a community of young minds a respect for authority that forms part and parcel of that community itself, such respect being based on other feelings than mere dread and superior brute force, is surely to provide them with one of the very highest branches of education.“

The praeceptors or sixth-form boys who are chosen or nominated¹¹⁾ from the mass of the boys only after a most careful and close examination of their moral and intellectual qualities, may, therefore, be termed the real „rulers“ of the school out of lessons. „Strength of body and character, and prowess in games are the requisites of good praeceptors.¹²⁾ The praeceptor is supposed to be the „guide, philosopher and friend of his fags.“¹³⁾ In some gross cases the praeceptors are even entitled by law to inflict corporal punishment.¹⁴⁾ They have a

⁶⁾ Tom Brown's school-days by an Old Boy. Tauchnitz edit. p. 311. — ⁷⁾ Tom Brown p. 121. —

⁸⁾ German letters p. 203. — ⁹⁾ John Timbs School-days of Eminent Men p. 93. — ¹⁰⁾ Some account of the foundation of Eton College p. 20. — ¹¹⁾ Crease, some account of Eton p. 57. — ¹²⁾ Tom Brown p. 123. — ¹³⁾ Tom Brown p. 124. — ¹⁴⁾ See p. 9, of this treatise.

kind of constitutional authority. It is school-tradition that, who appeals to the master without having first gone to some praepostor and laid the case before him, is to be thrashed publicly.¹⁵⁾ The praepostors, that is the notion of the boys, have to look sharply after vested school-rights and see that nothing is done to the injury of the republic without due protest.¹⁶⁾ „They give the tone to all the rest and make the school either a noble institution for the training of Christian Englishmen, or a place where a young boy will get more evil than he would, if he were turned out to make his ways in London streets.“¹⁷⁾ A school under „no-government“ is described thus by the author of Tom Brown,¹⁸⁾ „The praepostors were either small boys, whose cleverness had carried them up to the top of the school, while in strength of body and character they were not yet fit for a share in the government; or else big fellows of the wrong sort, boys whose friendships and tastes had a downward tendency, who had not caught the meaning of their position and work and felt none of its responsibilities. The big fifth-form boys, who were a sporting and drinking set, soon began to usurp power and to bully and oppress the little boys. So the fags were without their lawful masters and protectors, and ridden over rough-shod by a set of boys whom they were not bound to obey and whose only right over them stood in the bodily powers. The house broke up into small sets and parties and lost the strong feeling of fellowship and much of the prowess in games and the lead in all school-matters.“

In a school which is led well and strongly the lead of school-matters is, then, in the hand of the praepostors. „Masters, says the author of Tom Brown¹⁹⁾ could do very little out of school-hours“ even at Rugby under Dr. Arnold's headmastership. If Dr. Wiese observes²⁰⁾ that he has never known an English teacher in whose exercise of authority or system of education he could detect anything likely to stifle the free development of character in a boy, it seems that he means head-masters as well as assistant-masters. The liberty, he says in another place,²¹⁾ which they think they may allow the boys within certain limits is, judged by our notions, extraordinarily great. They have no idea of a strict perpetual inspection, there is no master to overlook the boys at mealtimes nor near at hand to watch them in play-hours. The young people would regard this as an intolerable encroachment on their rights. And Dr. Arnold says, „If I can feel confidence in my sixth-form, I am content.“²²⁾ The same Dr. Arnold, who wants a teacher to understand boys, is well aware that his object is not „to form Christian boys, but only to prepare them to act and live as Christian men.“ „From the natural, imperfect state of boyhood, he says, they are not susceptible of Christian principles in their full development upon their practise, and I suspect that a low standard of morals in many respects must be tolerated amongst them.“²³⁾

I trust to be right when supposing, that the system of superintending the boys lately introduced at Eton and intended to submit them to a stricter discipline, is not at all in discrepancy with the general rules and principles I endeavoured to sketch above. I observe that, at Rugby

¹⁵⁾ Tom Brown p. 147. — ¹⁶⁾ Tom Brown p. 311. and p. 106. — ¹⁷⁾ Tom Brown p. 142. —
¹⁸⁾ Tom Brown p. 141. — ¹⁹⁾ Tom Brown p. 310. — ²⁰⁾ German letters p. 21. — ²¹⁾ German
letters p. 23. — ²²⁾ German letters p. 29. — ²³⁾ German letters p. 206.

as well as at Eton, no boy is allowed to live anywhere except with a master.²⁴⁾ But it appears that, when doing their school-work, the boys of Rugby are not under his special supervision.²⁵⁾ At Eton as well as at the other public schools the influence of the praepostors in former times certainly was more extensive than now, and the supervision on the part of the masters less systematical, but I am sure, what the boys lost on one hand, they have gained on the other.²⁶⁾ For the „tutor-system“ of Eton seems to be a mere adoption of that of Oxford and Cambridge. The tutor is chosen and paid by the parents, and which master does not know that the parent's choice in many cases depends on his boy's?

The English are a conservative nation in politics as well as in matters concerning universities and schools. The educational principles established by Locke about one hundred and fifty years ago, are, upon the whole, attended to to-day. „Children, says Locke,²⁷⁾ have as much a mind to show that they are free, that their own good actions come from themselves, that they are absolute and independent as any of your grown men. „Children, he says in another place,²⁸⁾ love to be treated as rational creatures sooner than is imagined.“ And „Let your rules to your son be as few as possible, and rather fewer than more than seem absolutely necessary. For if you burden him with many rules, one of these two things must follow, that either he must be very often punished or else you must let the transgressions of some of your rules go unpunished.²⁹⁾

The deficiencies and shortcomings of the system of education in England are not less obvious than its advantages and benefits. The English school-boys, in general, may be a „hearty, good-natured set, well satisfied with themselves and their position, chock-full of life and spirits,“ boys commanding the interest of foreigners by their „fresh, firm complexions, open, honest glance, light step, and manly carriage,“ and high credit may be given to their „openness, sincerity of manner, and resoluteness of character,“³⁰⁾ but, on the other hand, it is an undeniable fact, that „frivolity, pride, and occasionally grossness, exist in English schools as extensively and in as great a degree as they generally do among the young, especially in large societies; and that their greater wealth is likely to give rather more encouragement to these dispositions among them.“³¹⁾ That custom and tradition, at school as well as anywhere in England, are stronger than law, is an undoubted truth. It is no less evident that a power exercised by senior school-boys over their juniors is liable to the grossest abuse, so as to serve unrighteous and even sinful purposes.

In English schools all boys below the fifth-form are called lower boys, and the upper ones have a right to command their services. Each lower boy has his particular master among the

²⁴⁾ German letters p. 15. — ²⁵⁾ I conclude that from several passages in Tom Brown, e. g. p. 196. and p. 219, where the author gives a most ludicrous account of the different methods of verse-making among the boys. — ²⁶⁾ The praepostors will, in some respects, not be sorry for it. Formerly it was one praepostor's special duty at Eton to examine, after morning-prayer, the students' faces and hands and to report any boys that came unwashed. One's particular function it was to keep a sharp look-out after dirty and slovenly lads. Crease p. 16. — ²⁷⁾ On Education (Tauchnitz ed. vol. 500.) p. 331. — ²⁸⁾ On Education p. 343. — ²⁹⁾ On Ed. p. 320. — ³⁰⁾ German letters p. 16. — ³¹⁾ German letters p. 17.

sixth-form, or upper fifth-form boys, for whom he performs certain stated services; and who, by the general custom and feeling of the school, becomes his patron and protector („fagging system.“)

„The opponents of fagging, says Crease,³²⁾ make several grounds of complaint against it, e. g. that the menial services exacted of the fags are degrading to gentlemen's sons. Rather ought we to admire the system which makes the young aristocrat at once, on his entrance at a public school, drop all silly notions about his being a superior being to his poorer school-fellows. The son of the proudest peer is at a level with the boy of humblest birth in the school. The young nobleman, if he is a brilliant scholar, or if he is a good cricketer, a crack-oar, or a tough foot-ball-player, will be looked up to by his school-fellows; if he is a frank and kindly nature, he will be liked. But no exemptions or pretensions on the score of purse or pedigree are admitted in this admirable youthful democracy.“ Other objections are „that fagging injures the character of the upper boys by placing undue power in their hands, and that it is attended with oppression and cruelties to the lower boys.“ Mr. Crease speaking from personal knowledge and experience asserts, that „fagging is attacked by persons only who were never at a public school, and who consequently know little or nothing of what they talk about, whilst it is almost invariably defended by public-school-men who really understand the subject. „The upper boy, he says, is not only under the constant superintendence of the masters, but also under the control of the public opinion of his school-fellows, which never fails to manifest itself strongly and decisively, if any attempt is made to abuse the privileges of the upper forms.³³⁾ Fagging causes no oppression and prevents a great deal. A fag has a natural protector in his master (the upper boy), who is expected and bound by general usage and feeling, to defend his young client from oppression. The system of fagging puts a stop to the exercise of „bullying“ and substitutes the dominion of station for the tyranny of brute force.“

Bullying, in the school cant, signifies ill-treatment and misuse of all kinds which young and weak boys have to suffer from the strong and wicked. There is no German word, for all I know, of the same meaning, but it is beyond doubt, that bullies i. e. „snivelling, sneaking fellows, who leave no slander unspoken and no deed undone which may in any way hurt their victims,“³⁴⁾ are a species of boys to be met with likewise in German schools, though perhaps and fortunately not to such an extent as in England. Boys of that kind are the more dangerous, because „their associates seldom interfere with their bullying or live a bit the less intimately with them.“³⁵⁾ To rule by the mere right of superior bodily strength is too natural with boys, and this right will particularly be claimed by those who are not allowed to exercise a legal power over their fellow-pupils. It is told³⁶⁾ that Cowper the poet retained „even in late years a painful recollection of the terror with which one boy among his school-fellows inspired him.“ „His savage treatment of me, he says, impressed such a dread of his figure on my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than his knees, and that I knew him

³²⁾ Some account of Eton p. 64. sqq. — ³³⁾ Other educationists are, however, of different opinion on account of public opinion at school, see next page. — ³⁴⁾ Tom Brown p. 148. — ³⁵⁾ Tom Brown p. 151. — ³⁶⁾ School-days of Eminent Men p. 228.

better by his shoe-buckles than by any other part of his dress.“ Another gentleman says,³⁷⁾ „It fills me with grief and misery to think what weak and nervous children go through at school, how their health and character for life are destroyed by rough and brutal treatment. Small school-boys are entirely at the mercy of proverbially the roughest thing in the universe, great schoolboys, and deprived of the protection which the weak have in civilized society, for he may not complain; if he does, he is an outlaw; he has no protector but public opinion of the very lowest grade, the opinion of rude and ignorant boys.“

Several methods have been proposed to fight bullying which seems to be the very plague of English schools. „A constant supervision of the masters, says that same gentleman³⁸⁾, is not desirable nor possible. Telling tales and constantly referring to the master for protection would only produce ill-will and worse treatment.“ He proposes³⁹⁾ „the separation of boys of different ages into different schools,“ and „supervision by the master at those times, where there are special occasions for bullying, e. g. in the long winter evenings and when the boys are congregated together in the bedrooms.“ But the author of Tom Brown is of opinion⁴⁰⁾, that „sorting the boys by ages will be of no use to put the evil down, and sorting the boys by strength is impossible. The Sixth-form boys must be got to eradicate it and the lower fellows to scorn it.“ „Masters, he adds, who really care for their fellows are pretty sure to know who are likely to be bullied, and able, if not entirely to stop ill-usage, at least to make the shafts of the wicked pointless.“ Dr. Arnold seems to have thought severe physical pain to be a way to deal with cases of gross bullying and „a good sound thrashing before the whole schoolhouse administered by some trustworthy praepostor“⁴¹⁾ the best cure of it.

I am sure that there are some more gross deficiencies originating in the English system of education. But I believe at the same time that there is a means to restrain boys from indulging in pursuits which are the curse and ill-report of our public boarding schools. I mean the English national games and sports. To them the English boys owe that health, activity, strength, and suppleness of body, that presence, coolness, and intrepidity of mind, that self-command and self-reliance which so favourably distinguish them from the boys of other nations. The attachment to a place where a man spent his boyhood is natural. In some cases that fondness may rise from a kind remembrance of eminent masters, but more frequently it has other sources. Gray's ode on Eton and a passage in one of Cowper's poems commemorate the school-sports and games as the chief cause of the joyfulness and happiness of their boyhood. The latter writes:

That pleasant spectacle (the boys at game) at once excites
Such recollection of our own delights,
That, viewing it, we seem almost to attain
Our innocent, sweet simple years again.

There is a system in the amusements and attractions of the leisure-hours of English boys, and the sports may at the same time be considered as a series of struggles foreshadowing the

where most of the schools are private institutions and considered by most of their

³⁷⁾ Tom Brown, preface p. VII. — ³⁸⁾ Tom Brown, preface p. IX. — ³⁹⁾ Tom Brown, pref. X. —
⁴⁰⁾ Tom Brown, pref. XI. — ⁴¹⁾ Tom Brown p. 179.

earnestness of those which attend the career in after-life. „The boy, says Dr. Wiese ⁴²⁾, must learn by his own experience, that is the notion in England, to know danger and to forget it; so that sports and contests which we consider dangerous, are highly approved of, not only as a means of acquiring bodily skill, but also as fostering in the boys that fearless spirit so peculiarly characteristic of a nation, calling herself mistress of the seas.“ „The discipline and reliance on one another, says the author of Tom Brown,⁴³⁾ which cricket teaches are so valuable. It is such an unselfish game. It merges the individual into a larger body, he does not play that he may win, but that his side may.“

It would be impossible to give a distinct idea of any of the games by describing its rules and practise. Suffice it to say that the boys at game are under leaders and captains, who dispose of them as generals do of their forces in a battle. „It is no joke, says one school-boy to another in Tom Brown's schooldays,⁴⁴⁾ playing up a match, I can tell you. Quite another thing from your private school-games. Why, there's been two collar-bones broken this half and a dozen fellows lamed. And last year a fellow had his leg broken.“ Boys who by continual practise become familiar with danger, may not be supposed to shrink from single-fights, though they are forbidden, and will always consider fighting with fists the natural way for them to settle their quarrels. Boxing is, therefore, learnt and practised like cricket and foot-ball, and even such gentlemen as the author of Tom Brown highly recommend it. „There is, he says, no exercise in the world so good for the temper and for the muscles of the back and leg.“⁴⁵⁾

Have we anything to make up for the benefit of the English active sports and national games? Our school-boys confined within school-room walls almost twice as many hours as the English ones, are bound to give a considerable part of their time out of school to studying and doing their school-work. Gymnastic exercises have been introduced as a branch of school-routine. But will the few hours destined to the recreation and strengthening of the body compensate a comparatively long time spent in schoolrooms and studies? And is our system of exercises such as to impart bodily vigour and health to the mass of our boys? Strong and vigorous are likely to be rendered stronger and more vigorous by them, but the weak, the frail, the awkward — and they constitute the majority of our boys — will always shrink from tricks, which, being executed, require such an amount of nimbleness and even temerity as kind nature has granted only to the elected few.

I, therefore, do not blame our boys for being, upon the whole, less daring and active than English boys, nor their parents for being more cautious and apprehensive than English parents. We are not only in want of national games and spacious and shadowy play-grounds, but also of time for plays and sports. I often witnessed myself that boys who were to enjoy a half-holiday in the open air, were always waiting for their masters to join and lead them in their very plays. How seldom do we find big boys entrusted with a delegated authority over little ones capable and even willing to exercise that authority?

One should think that in a country, where the trading spirit pervades almost every class, where most of the schools are private institutions and considered by most of their owners and

⁴²⁾ German letters p. 48. — ⁴³⁾ Tom Brown p. 300. — ⁴⁴⁾ Tom Brown p. 83. — ⁴⁵⁾ Tom Brown p. 255.

managers as a business-branch, that in such a country a liberal education preparing those who are submitted to it to live and to act in after-life as men, citizens, Christians, must be still more out of the way than with us. If the amount of knowledge imparted to the boys of Eton, Rugby, and the rest of the few great public schools is below that which our schools bestow upon their pupils, the general standing of the private grammar schools must, of course, be much lower still. Parents sending their children to such establishments may be supposed to want for them little more than a substantial food, healthy air, and bodily exercise. There is no doubt that some of the head-masters of such schools stand high both as teachers and educationists, but I believe that most of them leave their boys to provide for themselves, their only care being to prevent them from tresspassing upon some traditional regulations, which, being common to all schools, are, upon the whole, readily obeyed.

To accustom boys to provide for themselves as early as possible is, in my opinion, the foundation of the system of education in England. Nobody will be able to do so, unless he has learnt „the right use and management of self-respect.“ Self-respect must restrain the boy from evil, and the more he is trusted, the more he is likely to endeavour to deserve trust.⁴⁶⁾

Many a father sending his boy to school will bid him farewell with the same words as Tom Brown's father, when sending him to Rugby. „Remember, he says⁴⁷⁾ you are going to be chucked into a great school like a young bear, with all your troubles before you. If schools are what they were in my time, you will see a great many cruel, blackguard things done, and hear a deal of foul bad talk. But never fear. You tell the truth, keep a brave and kind heart and never listen to or say anything you wouldn't have your mother and sister hear, and you will never feel ashamed to come home or we to see you.“

⁴⁶⁾ German letters p. 21. — ⁴⁷⁾ Tom Brown p. 61.

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