

IN comparing the educational systems of various countries it is necessary to take into consideration the aims or ideals that the leaders of national educational movements set before themselves, the machinery by which they attempt to reach those aims—that is, the system of administration, and the range and the methods of teaching—the cost of education, and by whom it is paid, and the national character of the people, which often, but not always, determines the aims and ideals of the national system of education.

In any particular country the ideals of public education may be vague, and, indeed, may not even find expression; or they may be in a process of gradual change, and, if the country is a large one, may at any given time differ widely in different localities. This is distinctly the case in Great Britain, which, accordingly, in spite of great advances during the last thirty or forty years, cannot yet be said to have a national system of education. Many obstacles, such as sectarian and class feeling, have retarded the progress of the nation towards this desirable result; and, indeed, the existence of a large body of people in the community who are not yet convinced of the national advantages to be reaped from a complete and efficient national system still prevents the provision of the money without which the best education must remain the privilege of only a part of the people. Even in Germany, where the standard reached in many departments of education is so high, and where many States and cities have made very complete provision for vocational and technical training in addition to a sound substratum of popular instruction, there is far from equal opportunity for all classes; still less is there equal opportunity for women to obtain the same advantages of education as men. The United States of America, again, have no national system, nor are the State systems sufficiently alike or all so efficient as to produce the same result as a national system would produce. In spite of the excellence of the common schools in most parts of the Union, and of the high schools and universities in many cities, in spite of the large sums of money spent in building and equipping many of the excellent institutions for technical and special education, and in spite of the democratic character of all their institutions there are notable gaps in the scheme—in particular, the provision for trade-training for the great mass of the workmen is woefully scant. The ideals of the men who control the public instruction in Italy are probably as high as those of the directors of education in any other country; but the large amount of ignorance among the mass of the people, and the meagreness of what has so far been accomplished in their vocational or professional training is not counterbalanced by the excellence of the work done in many of the primary and secondary schools, and in many universities and other higher institutions. The comparative backwardness of Italy, educationally, may probably be said to be an almost direct result of the burden of taxation imposed upon the country by the military system that it feels itself compelled to maintain. Even that burden, it may be, would be felt less by a nation whose individual members were better trained, and whose aggregate productiveness accordingly was greatly increased. It may be remarked that in Italy the public revenue per head of the population is less than one-third of that of New Zealand.

It does not follow that we have not much to learn from the thoroughness of the average German teacher, or from the excellence of the best schools in Great Britain, or from the high ideals and the intensely practical outlook of the leaders of education in America. But we may have more to learn from one of the smaller countries such as Switzerland, where many of the conditions are so like our own, where the teaching is as thorough, the ideals are as high, and the practical adaptation of education to the needs of life is as great as in any other country, and where, moreover, there is practically a complete national system, consistently and successfully carried out.

It is true that in countries like England, Germany, and the United States the conditions are so complex, and in the first two countries, at all events, the vested interests and the mass of prejudices due to causes bound up with their previous history are so vast, that it would be vain to expect a simple logical system to be evolved. The difficulties in the way of progress are, however, being gradually overcome even in the case of England, where they appear in their intensest form.

So far as it is possible to formulate the ideas of the men who are responsible for the direction of educational matters in Germany, it would not perhaps be unfair to sum them up in the phrase "national efficiency," and this description might not be very different from the ideal, if it is a conscious one at all, of the official leaders in the educational world of Great Britain; but the aim of national efficiency, although in a broad view not