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Prussian Fire-Discipline

On approaching the enemy, the marching columns of Prussians wheeled in succession to the right or left, passed along the front of the enemy until the rear company had wheeled. Then the whole together wheeled into line facing the enemy. These movements brought the infantry into two long well-closed lines, parade-ground precision obtained thanks to remorseless drilling. With this movement was bound up a fire-discipline more extraordinary than any perfection of maneuver. "Pelotonfeuer" was opened at 200 paces from the enemy and continued up to 30 paces when the line fell on with the bayonet. The possibility of this combination of fire and movement was the work of Leopold, who by sheer drill made the soldier a machine capable of delivering (with flintlock muzzle-loading muskets) five volleys a minute. The special Prussian fire-discipline gave an advantage of five shots to two against all opponents. The bayonet attack, if the rolling volleys had done their work, was merely "presenting the cheque for payment," as a German writer put it.

– Encyclopedia Britannica, 11th edition, "Prussia"

The Land of Frankenstein

The particular utopia American believers chose to bring to the schoolhouse was Prussian. The seed that became American schooling, twentieth-century style, was planted in 1806 when Napoleon's amateur soldiers bested the professional soldiers of Prussia at the battle of Jena. When your business is renting soldiers and employing diplomatic extortion under threat of your soldiery, losing a battle like that is pretty serious. Something had to be done.

The most important immediate reaction to Jena was an immortal speech, the "Address to the German Nation" by the philosopher Fichte—one of the influential documents of modern history leading directly to the first workable compulsion schools in the West. Other times, other lands talked about schooling, but all failed to deliver. Simple

forced training for brief intervals and for narrow purposes was the best that had ever been managed. This time would be different.

In no uncertain terms Fichte told Prussia the party was over. Children would have to be disciplined through a new form of universal conditioning. They could no longer be trusted to their parents. Look what Napoleon had done by banishing sentiment in the interests of nationalism. Through forced schooling, everyone would learn that "work makes free," and working for the State, even laying down one's life to its commands, was the greatest *freedom* of all. Here in the genius of semantic redefinition¹ lay the power to cloud men's minds, a power later packaged and sold by public relations pioneers Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee in the seedtime of American forced schooling.

Prior to Fichte's challenge any number of compulsion-school proclamations had rolled off printing presses here and there, including Martin Luther's plan to tie church and state together this way and, of course, the "Old Deluder Satan" law of 1642 in Massachusetts and its 1645 extension. The problem was these earlier ventures were virtually unenforceable, roundly ignored by those who smelled mischief lurking behind fancy promises of free education. People who wanted their kids schooled had them schooled even then; people who didn't didn't. That was more or less true for most of us right into the twentieth century: as late as 1920, only 32 percent of American kids went past elementary school. If that sounds impossible, consider the practice in Switzerland today where only 23 percent of the student population goes to high school, though Switzerland has the world's highest per capita income in the world.

Prussia was prepared to use bayonets on its own people as readily as it wielded them against others, so it's not all that surprising the human race got its first effective secular compulsion schooling out of Prussia in 1819, the same year Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, set in the darkness of far-off Germany, was published in England. *Schule* came after more than a decade of deliberations, commissions, testimony, and debate. For a brief, hopeful moment, Humboldt's brilliant arguments for a high-level no-holds-barred, free-swinging, universal, intellectual course of study for all, full of variety, free debate, rich experience, and personalized curricula almost won the day. What a different world we would have today if Humboldt had won the Prussian debate, but the forces backing Baron vom Stein won instead. And that has made all the difference.

The Prussian mind, which carried the day, held a clear idea of what centralized schooling should deliver: 1) Obedient soldiers to the army; 2) Obedient workers for mines, factories, and farms; 3) Well-subordinated civil servants, trained in their function; 4) Well-subordinated clerks for industry; 5) Citizens who thought alike on most issues; 6) National uniformity in thought, word, and deed.

The area of individual volition for commoners was severely foreclosed by Prussian psychological training procedures drawn from the experience of animal husbandry and equestrian training, and also taken from past military experience. Much later, in our own time, the techniques of these assorted crafts and sullen arts became "discoveries" in the pedagogical pseudoscience of psychological behaviorism.

Prussian schools delivered everything they promised. Every important matter could now be confidently worked out in advance by leading families and institutional heads because well-schooled masses would concur with a minimum of opposition. This tightly schooled consensus in Prussia eventually combined the kaleidoscopic German principalities into a united Germany, after a thousand years as a nation in fragments. What a surprise the world would soon get from this successful experiment in national centralization! Under Prussian state socialism private industry surged, vaulting resource-poor Prussia up among world leaders. Military success remained Prussia's touchstone. Even before the school law went into full effect as an enhancer of state priorities, the army corps under Blücher was the principal reason for Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, its superb discipline allowing for a surprisingly successful return to combat after what seemed to be a crushing defeat at the Little Corporal's hands just days before.³ Unschooled, the Prussians were awesome; conditioned in the classroom promised to make them even more formidable.

The immense prestige earned from this triumph reverberated through an America not so lucky in its own recent fortunes of war, a country humiliated by a shabby showing against the British in the War of 1812. Even thirty years

after Waterloo, so highly was Prussia regarded in America and Britain, the English-speaking adversaries selected the Prussian king to arbitrate our northwest border with Canada. Hence the Pennsylvania town "King of Prussia." Thirty-three years after Prussia made state schooling work, we borrowed the structure, style, and intention of those Germans for our own first compulsion schools.

Traditional American school purpose—piety, good manners, basic intellectual tools, self-reliance, etc.—was scrapped to make way for something different. Our historical destination of personal independence gave way slowly to Prussian-purpose schooling, not because the American way lost in any competition of ideas, but because for the new commercial and manufacturing hierarchs, such a course made better economic sense.

This private advance toward nationalized schooling in America was partially organized, although little has ever been written about it; Orestes Brownson's journal identifies a covert national apparatus (to which Brownson briefly belonged) already in place in the decade after the War of 1812, one whose stated purpose was to "Germanize" America, beginning in those troubled neighborhoods where the urban poor huddled, and where disorganized new immigrants made easy targets, according to Brownson. Enmity on the part of old-stock middle-class and working-class populations toward newer immigrants gave these unfortunates no appeal against the school sentence to which Massachusetts assigned them. They were in for a complete makeover, like it or not.

Much of the story, as it was being written by 1844, lies just under the surface of Mann's florid prose in his *Seventh Annual Report* to the Boston School Committee. On a visit to Prussia the year before, he had been much impressed (so he said) with the ease by which Prussian calculations could determine precisely how many thinkers, problem-solvers, and working stiff the State would require over the coming decade, then how it offered the precise categories of training required to develop the percentages of human resource needed. All this was much fairer to Mann than England's repulsive episcopal system—schooling based on social class; Prussia, he thought, was republican in the desirable, manly, Roman sense. Massachusetts must take the same direction.

¶Machiavelli had clearly identified this as a necessary strategy of state in 1532, and even explored its choreography.

¶For an ironic reflection on the success of Prussian educational ideals, take a look at Martin Van Creveld's *Fighting Power* (Greenwood Press, 1982). Creveld, the world's finest military historian, undertakes to explain why German armies in 1914–1918 and 1939–1945, although heavily outnumbered in the major battles of both wars, consistently inflicted 30 percent more casualties than they suffered, whether they were winning or losing, on defense or on offense, no matter who they fought. They were better led, we might suspect, but the actual training of those field commanders comes as a shock. While American officer selection was right out of Frederick Taylor, complete with psychological dossiers and standardized tests, German officer training emphasized individual apprenticeships, week-long field evaluations, extended discursive written evaluations by senior officers who personally knew the candidates. The surprise is, while German state management was rigid and regulated with its common citizens, it was liberal and adventuresome with its elites. After WWII, and particularly after Vietnam, American elite military practice began to follow this German model. Ironically enough, America's elite private boarding schools like Groton had followed the Prussian lead from their inception as well as the British models of Eton and Harrow.

German elite war doctrine cut straight to the heart of the difference between the truly educated and the merely schooled. For the German High Command war was seen as an art, a creative activity, grounded in science. War made the highest demands on an officer's entire personality and the role of the individual in Germany was decisive. American emphasis, on the other hand, was doctrinal, fixated on cookbook rules. The U.S. officer's manual said: "Doctrines of combat operation are neither numerous nor complex. Knowledge of these doctrines provides a firm basis for action in a particular situation." This reliance on automatic procedure rather than on creative individual decisions got a lot of Americans killed by the book. The irony, of course, was that American, British, and French officers got the same lockstep conditioning in dependence that German foot soldiers did. There are some obvious lessons here which can be applied directly to public schooling.

¶Napoleon assumed the Prussians were retreating in the direction of the Rhine after a defeat, but in truth they were only executing a feint. The French were about to overrun Wellington when Blücher's "Death's Head Hussars," driven beyond human endurance by their officers, reached the battlefield at a decisive moment. Not pausing to rest, the Prussians immediately went into battle, taking the French in the rear and right wing. Napoleon toppled, and Prussian discipline became the focus of world attention.

The Long Reach Of The Teutonic Knights

In 1876, before setting off from America to Germany to study, William H. Welch, an ambitious young Bostonian, told his sister: "If by absorbing German lore I can get a little start of a few thousand rivals and thereby reduce my competition to a few hundred more or less it is a good point to tally." Welch did go off to Germany for the coveted Ph.D., a degree which at the time had its actual existence in any practical sense only there, and in due course his ambition was satisfied. Welch became first dean of Johns Hopkins Medical School and, later, chief advisor to the Rockefeller Foundation on medical projects. Welch was one of thousands who found the German Ph.D. a blessing without parallel in late-nineteenth-century America. German Ph.D.'s ruled the academic scene by then.

Prussia itself was a curious place, not an ordinary country unless you consider ordinary a land which by 1776 required women to register each onset of their monthly menses with the police. North America had been interested in Prussian developments since long before the American Revolution, its social controls being a favorite subject of discussion among Ben Franklin's¹ exclusive private discussion group, the *Junta*. When the phony Prussian baron Von Steuben directed bayonet drills for the colonial army, interest rose even higher. Prussia was a place to watch, an experimental state totally synthetic like our own, having been assembled out of lands conquered in the last crusade. For a full century Prussia acted as our mirror, showing elite America what we might become with discipline.

In 1839, thirteen years before the first successful school compulsion law was passed in the United States, a perpetual critic of Boston Whig (Mann's own party) leadership charged that pro-proposals to erect German-style teacher seminaries in this country were a thinly disguised attack on local and popular autonomy. The critic Brownson² allowed that state regulation of teaching licenses was a necessary preliminary only if school were intended to serve as a psychological control mechanism for the state and as a screen for a controlled economy. If that was the game truly afoot, said Brownson, it should be reckoned an act of treason.

"Where the whole tendency of education is to create obedience," Brownson said, "all teachers must be pliant tools of government. Such a system of education is not inconsistent with the theory of Prussian society but the thing is wholly inadmissible here." He further argued that "according to our theory the people are wiser than the government. Here the people do not look to the government for light, for instruction, but the government looks to the people. The people give law to the government." He concluded that "to entrust government with the power of determining education which our children shall receive is entrusting our servant with the power of the master. The fundamental difference between the United States and Prussia has been overlooked by the board of education and its supporters."³

This same notion of German influence on American institutions occurred recently to a historian from Georgetown, Dr. Carroll Quigley. Quigley's analysis of elements in German character which were exported to us occurs in his book *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time*. Quigley traced what he called "the German thirst for the coziness of a totalitarian way of life" to the breakup of German tribes in the great migrations fifteen hundred years ago. When pagan Germany finally transferred its loyalty to the even better totalitarian system of Diocletian in post-Constantine Rome, that system was soon shattered, too, a second tragic loss of security for the Germans. According to Quigley, they refused to accept this loss. For the next one thousand years, Germans made every effort to reconstruct the universal system, from Charlemagne's Holy Roman Empire right up to the aftermath of Jena in 1806. During that thousand-year interval, other nations of the West developed individual liberty as the ultimate center of society and its principal philosophical reality. But while Germany was dragged along in the same process, it was never convinced that individual sovereignty was the right way to organize society.

Germans, said Quigley, wanted freedom from the need to make decisions, the negative freedom that comes from a universal totalitarian structure which gives security and meaning to life. The German is most at home in military, ecclesiastical, or educational organizations, ill at ease with equality, democracy, individualism, or freedom. This was the spirit that gave the West forced schooling in the early nineteenth century, so spare a little patience while I tell you about Prussia and Prussianized Germany whose original mission was expressly religious but in time became something else.

During the thirteenth century, the Order of Teutonic Knights set about creating a new state of their own. After fifty

turbulent years of combat, the Order successfully Christianized Prussia by the efficient method of exterminating the entire native population and replacing it with Germans. By 1281, the Order's hold on lands once owned by the heathen Slavs was secure. Then something of vital importance to the future occurred—the system of administration selected to be set up over these territories was not one patterned on the customary European model of dispersed authority, but instead was built on the logic of Saracen *centralized* administration, an Asiatic form first described by crusaders returned from the Holy Land. For an example of these modes of administration in conflict, we have Herodotus' account of the Persian attempt to force the pass at Thermopylae—Persia with its huge bureaucratically subordinated army arrayed against self-directed Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans. This romantic image of personal initiative, however misleading, in conflict with a highly trained and specialized military bureaucracy, was passed down to sixty generations of citizens in Western lands as an inspiration and model. Now Prussia had established an Asiatic beachhead on the northern fringe of Europe, one guided by a different inspiration.

Between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Order of Teutonic Knights evolved by gradual stages into a highly efficient, secular civil service. In 1525, Albert of Brandenburg declared Prussia a secular kingdom. By the eighteenth century, under Frederick the Great, Prussia had become a major European power in spite of its striking material disadvantages. From 1740 onwards, it was feared throughout Europe for its large, well-equipped, and deadly standing army, comprising a formulaic 1 percent of the population. After centuries of debate, the 1 percent formula became the lot of the United States military, too, a gift of Prussian strategist von Clausewitz to America. By 1740, the mature Prussian state-structure was almost complete. During the reigns of Frederick I and his son Frederick II, Frederick the Great, the modern absolute state was fashioned there by means of immense sacrifices imposed on the citizenry to sustain permanent mobilization.

The historian Thomas Macauley wrote of Prussia during these years: "The King carried on warfare as no European power ever had, he governed his own kingdom as he would govern a besieged town, not caring to what extent private property was destroyed or civil life suspended. The coin was debased, civil functionaries unpaid, but as long as means for destroying life remained, Frederick was determined to fight to the last." Goethe said Frederick "saw Prussia as a concept, the root cause of a process of abstraction consisting of norms, attitudes and characteristics which acquired a life of their own. It was a unique process, supra-individual, an attitude depersonalized, motivated only by the individual's duty to the State." Today it's easy for us to recognize Frederick as a systems theorist of genius, one with a real country to practice upon.

Under Frederick William II, Frederick the Great's nephew and successor, from the end of the eighteenth century on into the nineteenth, Prussian citizens were deprived of all rights and privileges. Every existence was comprehensively subordinated to the purposes of the State, and in exchange the State agreed to act as a good father, giving food, work, and wages suited to the people's capacity, welfare for the poor and elderly, and universal schooling for children. The early nineteenth century saw Prussian state socialism arrive full-blown as the most dynamic force in world affairs, a *powerful rival to industrial capitalism*, with antagonisms sensed but not yet clearly identified. It was the moment of schooling, never to surrender its grip on the throat of society once achieved.

Franklin's great-grandson, Alexander Dallas Bache became the leading American proponent of Prussianism in 1839. After a European school inspection tour lasting several years, his Report on Education in Europe, promoted heavily by Quakers, devoted hundreds of pages to glowing description of Pestalozzian method and to the German *gymnasium*.

Brownson is the main figure in Christopher Lasch's bravura study of Progressivism, *The True and Only Heaven*, being offered there as the best fruit of American democratic orchards, a man who, having seemingly tried every major scheme of meaning the new nation had to offer, settled on trusting ordinary people as the best course into the future.

In Opposition to Centralization (1839).

Quigley holds the distinction of being the only college professor ever to be publicly honored by a major party presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, in his formal acceptance speech for the presidential nomination

The Prussian Reform Movement

The devastating defeat by Napoleon at Jena triggered the so-called Prussian Reform Movement, a transformation which replaced cabinet rule (by appointees of the national leader) with rule by permanent civil servants and permanent government bureaus. Ask yourself which form of governance responds better to public opinion and you will realize what a radical chapter in European affairs was opened. The familiar three-tier system of education emerged in the Napoleonic era, one private tier, two government ones. At the top, one-half of 1 percent of the students attended *Akadamiensschulen*,¹ where, as future policy makers, they learned to think strategically, contextually, in wholes; they learned complex processes, and useful knowledge, studied history, wrote copiously, argued often, read deeply, and mastered tasks of command.

The next level, *Realsschulen*, was intended mostly as a manufactory for the professional proletariat of engineers, architects, doctors, lawyers, career civil servants, and such other assistants as policy thinkers at times would require. From 5 to 7.5 percent of all students attended these "real schools," learning in a superficial fashion how to think in context, but mostly learning how to manage materials, men, and situations—to be problem solvers. This group would also staff the various policing functions of the state, bringing order to the domain. Finally, at the bottom of the pile, a group between 92 and 94 percent of the population attended "people's schools" where they learned obedience, cooperation and correct attitudes, along with rudiments of literacy and official state myths of history.

This universal system of compulsion schooling was up and running by 1819, and soon became the eighth wonder of the world, promising for a brief time—in spite of its exclusionary layered structure—liberal education for all. But this early dream was soon abandoned. This particular utopia had a different target than human equality; it aimed instead for frictionless efficiency. From its inception *Volksschulen*, the people's place, heavily discounted reading; reading produced dissatisfaction, it was thought. The Bell-school remedy was called for: a standard of virtual illiteracy formally taught under state church auspices. Reading offered too many windows onto better lives, too much familiarity with better ways of thinking. It was a gift unwise to share with those permanently consigned to low station.

Heinrich Pestalozzi, an odd² Swiss-German school reformer, was producing at this time a nonliterary, experience-based pedagogy, strong in music and industrial arts, which was attracting much favorable attention in Prussia. Here seemed a way to keep the poor happy without arousing in them hopes of dramatically changing the social order. Pestalozzi claimed ability to mold the poor "to accept all the efforts peculiar to their class." He offered them love in place of ambition. By employing psychological means in the training of the young, class warfare might be avoided.

A curiously prophetic note for the future development of scientific school teaching was that Pestalozzi himself could barely read. Not that he was a dummy; those talents simply weren't important in his work. He reckoned his own semiliteracy an advantage in dealing with children destined *not* to find employment requiring much verbal fluency. Seventeen agents of the Prussian government acted as Pestalozzi's assistants in Switzerland, bringing insights about the Swiss style of schooling home to northern Germany.

While Pestalozzi's raggedy schools lurched clumsily from year to year, a nobleman, von Fellenberg, refined and systematized the Swiss reformer's disorderly notes, hammering the funky ensemble into clarified plans for a worldwide system of industrial education for the masses. As early as 1808, this nonacademic formulation was introduced into the United States under Joseph Neef, formerly a teacher at Pestalozzi's school. Neef, with important Quaker patronage, became the principal schoolmaster for Robert Owen's pioneering work-utopia at New Harmony, Indiana. Neef's efforts there provided high-powered conversational fodder to the fashionable Unitarian drawing rooms of Boston in the decades before compulsory legislation was passed. And when it did pass, all credit for the political victory belonged to those Unitarians.

Neef's influence resonated across the United States after the collapse of New Harmony, through lectures given by Robert Owen's son (later a congressman, then referee of J.P. Morgan's legal contretemps with the U.S. Army³),

and through speeches and intrigues by that magnificent nineteenth-century female dynamo Scottish émigré Fanny Wright, who demanded the end of family life and its replacement by communitarian schooling. The tapestry of school origins is one of paths crossing and recrossing, and more apparent coincidences than seem likely.

Together, Owen and Wright created the successful Workingman's Party of Philadelphia, which seized political control of that city in 1829. The party incorporated strong compulsion schooling proposals as part of its political platform. Its idea to place working-class children under the philosophical discipline of highly skilled craftsmen—men comparable socially to the yeomanry of pre-enclosure England—would have attracted favorable commentary in Philadelphia where banker Nicholas Biddle was locked in struggle for control of the nation's currency with working-class hero Andrew Jackson. Biddle's defeat by Jackson quickly moved abstract discussions of a possible social technology to control working class children from the airy realms of social hypothesis to policy discussions about immediate reality. In that instant of maximum tension between an embryonic financial capitalism and a populist republic struggling to emerge, the Prussian system of pedagogy came to seem perfectly sensible to men of means and ambition.

I've exaggerated the *neatness* of this tripartite division in order to make clear its functional logic. The system as it actually grew in those days without an electronic technology of centralization was more whimsical than I've indicated, dependent partially on local tradition and resistance, partially on the ebb and flow of fortunes among different participants in the transformation. In some places, the "academy" portion didn't occur in a separate institution, but as a division inside the Realschulen, something like today's "gifted and talented *honors*" programs as compared to the common garden variety "gifted and talented" pony shows.

⌘Pestalozzi's strangeness comes through in almost all the standard biographical sketches of him, despite universal efforts to emphasize his saintliness. In a recent study, Anthony Sutton claims Pestalozzi was also director of a secret lodge of "illuminated" Freemasonry—with the code name "Alfred." If true, the Swiss "educator" was even stranger than I sensed initially.

⌘During the Civil War, Morgan sold back to the army its own defective rifles (which had been auctioned as scrap) at a 1,300 percent profit. After a number of soldiers were killed and maimed, young Morgan found himself temporarily in hot water. Thanks to Owen his penalty was the return of about *half* his profit!

Travelers' Reports

Information about Prussian schooling was brought to America by a series of travelers' reports published in the early nineteenth century. First was the report of John Griscom, whose book *A Year in Europe* (1819) highly praised the new Prussian schools. Griscom was read and admired by Thomas Jefferson and leading Americans whose intellectual patronage drew admirers into the net. Pestalozzi came into the center of focus at about the same time through the letters of William Woodbridge to *The American Journal of Education*, letters which examined this strange man and his "humane" methods through friendly eyes. Another important chapter in this school buildup came from Henry Dwight,¹ whose *Travels in North Germany* (1825) praised the new quasi-religious teacher seminaries in Prussia where prospective teachers were screened for correct attitudes toward the State.

The most influential report, however, was French philosopher Victor Cousin's to the French government in 1831. This account by Cousin, France's Minister of Education, explained the administrative organization of Prussian education in depth, dwelling at length on the system of people's schools and its far-reaching implications for the economy and social order. Cousin's essay applauded Prussia for discovering ways to contain the danger of a frightening new social phenomenon, the industrial proletariat. So convincing was his presentation that within two years of its publication, French national schooling was drastically reorganized to meet Prussian *Volksschulen* standards. French children could be stupefied as easily as German ones.

Across the Atlantic, a similar revolution took place in the brand new state of Michigan. Mimicking Prussian organization, heavily Germanic Michigan established the very first State Superintendency of Education.² With a state minister and state control entering all aspects of schooling, the only missing ingredient was compulsion

legislation.

On Cousin's heels came yet another influential report praising Prussian discipline and Prussian results, this time by the bearer of a prominent American name, the famous Calvin Stowe whose wife Harriet Beecher Stowe, conscience of the abolition movement, was author of its sacred text, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Stowe's report to the Ohio legislature attesting to Prussian superiority was widely distributed across the country, the Ohio group mailing out ten thousand copies and the legislatures of Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Virginia each reprinting and distributing the document.

The third major testimonial to Prussian schooling came in the form of Horace Mann's *Seventh Report to the Boston School Committee* in 1843. Mann's *Sixth Report*, as noted earlier, had been a paean to phrenology, the science of reading head bumps, which Mann argued was the only proper basis for curriculum design. The *Seventh Report* ranked Prussia first of all nations in schooling, England last. Pestalozzi's psychologically grounded form of pedagogy was specifically singled out for praise in each of the three influential reports I've recited, as was the resolutely nonintellectual subject matter of Prussian *Volksschulen*. Also praised were mild Pestalozzian discipline, grouping by age, multiple layers of supervision, and selective training for teachers. Wrote Mann, "There are many things there which we should do well to imitate."³

Mann's *Report* strongly recommended radical changes in reading instruction from the traditional alphabet system, which had made America literate, to Prussia's hieroglyphic-style technique. In a surprising way, this brought Mann's *Report* to general public attention because a group of Boston schoolmasters attacked his conclusions about the efficacy of the new reading method and a lively newspaper debate followed. Throughout nineteenth-century Prussia, its new form of education seemed to make that warlike nation prosper materially and militarily. While German science, philosophy, and military success seduced the whole world, thousands of prominent young Americans made the pilgrimage to Germany to study in its network of research universities, places where teaching and learning were always subordinate to investigations done on behalf of business and the state. Returning home with the coveted German Ph.D., those so degreed became university presidents and department heads, took over private industrial research bureaus, government offices, and the administrative professions. The men they subsequently hired for responsibility were those who found it morally agreeable to offer obeisance to the Prussian outlook, too; in this leveraged fashion the gradual takeover of American mental life managed itself.

For a century here, Germany seemed at the center of everything civilized; nothing was so esoteric or commonplace it couldn't benefit from the application of German scientific procedure. Hegel, of Berlin University, even proposed historicism—that history was a scientific subject, displaying a progressive linear movement toward some mysterious end. Elsewhere, Herbart and Fechner were applying mathematical principles to learning, Müller and Helmholtz were grafting physiology to behavior in anticipation of the psychologized classroom, Fritsch and Hitzig were applying electrical stimulation to the brain to determine the relationship of brain functions to behavior, and Germany itself was approaching its epiphany of unification under Bismarck.

When the spirit of Prussian *pelotonfeuer* crushed France in the lightning war of 1871, the world's attention focused intently on this hypnotic, utopian place. What could be seen to happen there was an impressive demonstration that endless production flowed from a Baconian liaison between government, the academic mind, and industry. Credit for Prussian success was widely attributed to its form of schooling. What lay far from casual view was the religious vision of a completely systematic universe which animated this Frankensteinian nation.

¹Of the legendary Dwight family which bankrolled Horace Mann's forced schooling operation. Dwight was a distant ancestor of Dwight D. Eisenhower.

²This happened under the direction of William Pierce, a man as strange in his own way as Pestalozzi. Pierce had been a Unitarian minister around Rochester, New York, until he was forced to flee across the Great Lakes to escape personal harm during the anti-Masonic furor just before the first Jackson election. Pierce was accused of concealing a lodge of Illuminati behind the facade of his church. When his critics arrived with the tar and feathers, the great educator-to-be had already flown the coop to Michigan, his tools of illumination safely in his kit and a sneer of superior virtue on his noble lip. Some say a local lady of easy virtue betrayed the vigilante party to Pierce in exchange for a few pieces of

Socinian silver, but I cannot confirm this reliably. How he came to be welcomed so warmly in Michigan and honored with such a high position might be worth investigating.

The fact is Mann arrived in Prussia *after the schools had closed for the summer*, so that he never actually saw one in operation. This did nothing to dampen his enthusiasm, nor did he find it necessary to enlighten his readers to this interesting fact. I'll mention this again up ahead.

Finding Work For Intellectuals

The little North German state of Prussia had been described as "an army with a country," "a perpetual armed camp," "a gigantic penal institution." Even the built environment in Prussia was closely regimented: streets were made to run straight, town buildings and traffic were state-approved and regulated. Attempts were made to cleanse society of irregular elements like beggars, vagrants, and Gypsies, all this intended to turn Prussian society into "a huge human automaton" in the words of Hans Rosenberg. It was a state where scientific farming alternated with military drilling and with state-ordered meaningless tasks intended for no purpose but to subject the entire community to the experience of collective discipline—like fire drills in a modern junior high school or enforced silence during the interval between class periods. Prussia had become a comprehensive administrative utopia. It was Sparta reborn.

Administrative utopias spring out of the psychological emptiness which happens where firmly established communities are nonexistent and what social cohesion there is is weak and undependable. Utopias lurch into being when utopia happens best where there is no other social and political life around which seems attractive or even safe. The dream of state power refashioning countryside and people is powerful, especially compelling in times of insecurity where local leadership is inadequate to create a satisfying social order, as must have seemed the case in the waning decades of the nineteenth century. In particular, the growing intellectual classes began to resent their bondage to wealthy patrons, their lack of any truly meaningful function, their seeming overeducation for what responsibilities were available, their feelings of superfluosity. The larger national production grew on wheels and belts of steam power. The more it produced unprecedented surpluses, the greater became the number of intellectuals condemned to a parasitic role, and the more certain it became that some utopian experiment must come along to make work for these idle hands.

In such a climate it could not have seemed out of line to the new army of homeless men whose work was only endless thinking, to reorganize the entire world and to believe such a thing not impossible to attain. It was only a short step before associations of intellectuals began to consider it their *duty* to reorganize the world. It was then the clamor for universal forced schooling became strong. Such a need coincided with a corresponding need on the part of business to train the population as consumers rather than independent producers.

In the last third of the nineteenth century, a loud call for popular education arose from princes of industry, from comfortable clergy, professional humanists and academic scientists, those who saw schooling as an instrument to achieve state and corporate purposes. Prior to 1870, the only countries where everybody was literate were Prussia, its tiny adjacent neighbor states in Nordic Scandinavia, and the United States. Despite all projects of the Enlightenment, of Napoleon, of the parliaments of England and Belgium and of revolutionaries like Cavour, the vast majority of Europeans could neither read nor write. It was not, of course, because they were stupid but because circumstances of their lives and cultures made literacy a luxury, sometimes even impossible.

Steam and coal provided the necessary funds for establishing and maintaining great national systems of elementary schooling. Another influence was the *progressivism* of the liberal impulse, never more evident than in the presence of truly unprecedented abundance. Yes, it was true that to create that abundance it became necessary to uproot millions from their traditional habitats and habits, but one's conscience could be salved by saying that popular schooling would offer, *in time*, compensations for the proletariat. In any case, no one doubted Francois Guizot's epigram: "The opening of every schoolhouse closes a jail."

For the enlightened classes, popular education after Prussia became a sacred cause, one meriting crusading zeal. In 1868, Hungary announced compulsion schooling; in 1869, Austria; in 1872, the famous Prussian system was nationalized to all the Germanies; 1874, Switzerland; 1877, Italy; 1878, Holland; 1879, Belgium. Between 1878 and 1882, it became France's turn. School was made compulsory for British children in 1880. No serious voice except Tolstoy's questioned what was happening, and that Russian nobleman-novelist-mystic was easily ignored. Best known to the modern reader for *War and Peace*, Tolstoy is equally penetrating in *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, in which he viewed such problems through the lens of Christianity.

The school movement was strongest in Western and Northern Europe, the ancient lands of the Protestant Reformation, much weaker in Catholic Central and Southern Europe, virtually nonexistent at first in the Orthodox East. Enthusiasm for schooling is closely correlated with a nation's intensity in mechanical industry, and that closely correlated with its natural heritage of coal. One result passed over too quickly in historical accounts of school beginnings is the provision for a quasi-military noncommissioned officer corps of teachers, and a staff-grade corps of administrators to oversee the mobilized children. One consequence unexpected by middle classes (though perhaps not so unexpected to intellectual elites) was a striking increase in gullibility among well-schooled masses. Jacques Ellul is the most compelling analyst of this awful phenomenon, in his canonical essay *Propaganda*. He fingers schooling as an unparalleled propaganda instrument; if a schoolbook prints it and a teacher affirms it, who is so bold as to demur?

The Technology Of Subjection

Administrative utopias are a peculiar kind of dreaming by those in power, driven by an urge to arrange the lives of others, organizing them for production, combat, or detention. The operating principles of administrative utopia are hierarchy, discipline, regimentation, strict order, rational planning, a geometrical environment, a production line, a cellblock, and a form of welfarism. Government schools and some private schools pass such parameters with flying colors. In one sense, administrative utopias are laboratories for exploring the technology of subjection and as such belong to a precise subdivision of pornographic art: total surveillance and total control of the helpless. The aim and mode of administrative utopia is to bestow order and assistance on an unwilling population: to provide its clothing and food. *To schedule it*. In a masterpiece of cosmic misjudgment, the phrenologist George Combe wrote Horace Mann on November 14, 1843:

The Prussian and Saxon governments by means of their schools and their just laws and rational public administration are doing a good deal to bring their people into a rational and moral condition. It is pretty obvious to thinking men that a few years more of this cultivation will lead to the development of free institutions in Germany.

Earlier that year, on May 21, 1843, Mann had written to Combe: "I want to find out what are the results, as well as the workings of the famous Prussian system." Just three years earlier, with the election of Marcus Morton as governor of Massachusetts, a serious challenge had been presented to Mann and to his Board of Education and the air of Prussianism surrounding it and its manufacturer/politician friends. A House committee was directed to look into the new Board of Education and its plan to undertake a teachers college with \$10,000 put up by industrialist Edmund Dwight. Four days after its assignment, the majority reported out a bill to kill the board! Discontinue the Normal School experiment, it said, and give Dwight his money back:

If then the Board has any actual power, it is a dangerous power, touching directly upon the rights and duties of the Legislature; if it has no power, why continue its existence at an annual expense to the commonwealth?

But the House committee did more; it warned explicitly that this board, dominated by a Unitarian majority of 7-5 (although Unitarians comprised less than 1 percent of the state), really wanted to install a Prussian system of

education in Massachusetts, to put "a monopoly of power in a few hands, contrary in every respect to the true spirit of our democratical institutions." The vote of the House on this was the single greatest victory of Mann's political career, one for which he and his wealthy friends called in every favor they were owed. The result was 245 votes to continue, 182 votes to discontinue, and so the House voted to overturn the recommendations of its own committee. A 32-vote swing might have given us a much different twentieth century than the one we saw.

Although Mann's own letters and diaries are replete with attacks on orthodox religionists as enemies of government schooling, an examination of the positive vote reveals that from the outset the orthodox churches were among Mann's staunchest allies. Mann had general support from Congregational, Presbyterian, and Baptist clergymen. At this early stage they were completely unaware of the doom secular schooling would spell out for their denominations. They had been seduced into believing school was a necessary insurance policy to deal with incoming waves of Catholic immigration from Ireland and Germany, the cheap labor army which as early as 1830 had been talked about in business circles and eagerly anticipated as an answer to America's production problems.

The reason Germany, and not England, provided the original model for America's essay into compulsion schooling may be that Mann, while in Britain, had had a shocking experience in English class snobbery which left him reeling. Boston Common, he wrote, with its rows of mottled sycamore trees, gravel walks, and frog ponds was downright *embarrassing* compared with any number of stately English private grounds furnished with stag and deer, fine arboretums of botanical specimens from faraway lands, marble *floors* better than the *table tops* at home, portraits, tapestries, giant gold-frame mirrors. The ballroom in the Bulfinch house in Boston would be a butler's pantry in England, he wrote. When Mann visited Stafford House of the Duke of Cumberland, he went into culture shock:

Convicts on treadmills provide the energy to pump water for fountains. I have seen equipages, palaces, and the regalia of royalty side by side with beggary, squalidness, and degradation in which the very features of humanity were almost lost in those of the brute.

For this great distinction between the stratified orders of society, Mann held the Anglican church to blame. "Give me America with all its rawness and want. We have aristocracy enough at home and here I trace its foundations." Shocked from his English experience, Mann virtually willed that Prussian schools would provide him with answers, says his biographer Jonathan Messerli.

Mann arrived in Prussia when its schools were closed for vacation. He toured empty classrooms, spoke with authorities, interviewed vacationing schoolmasters, and read piles of dusty official reports. Yet from this nonexperience he claimed to come away with a strong sense of the professional competence of Prussian teachers! All "admirably qualified and full of animation!" His wife Mary, of the famous Peabodys, wrote home: "We have not seen a teacher *with a book in his hand* in all Prussia; no, not one!" (emphasis added) This wasn't surprising, for they hardly saw teachers at all.

Equally impressive, he wrote, was the wonderful *obedience* of children; these German kinder had "innate respect for superior years." The German teacher corps? "The finest collection of men I have ever seen—full of intelligence, dignity, benevolence, kindness and bearing..." Never, says Mann, did he witness "an instance of harshness and severity. All is kind, encouraging, animating, sympathizing." On the basis of imagining this miraculous vision of exactly the Prussia he wanted to see, Mann made a special plea for changes in the teaching of reading. He criticized the standard American practice of beginning with the alphabet and moving to syllables, urging his readers to consider the superior merit of teaching entire words from the beginning. "I am satisfied," he said, "our greatest error in teaching lies in beginning with the alphabet."

The heart of Mann's most famous *Report to the Boston School Committee*, the legendary *Seventh*, rings a familiar theme in American affairs. It seems *even then we were falling behind!* This time, behind the Prussians in education. In order to catch up, it was mandatory to create a professional corps of teachers and a systematic curriculum, just as the Prussians had. Mann fervently implored the board to accept his prescription...*while there was still time!* The note of hysteria is a drum roll sounding throughout Mann's entire career; together with the vilification of his opponents, it constitutes much of Mann's spiritual signature.

That fall, the Association of Masters of the Boston Public Schools published its 150-page rebuttal of Mann's *Report*. It attacked the normal schools proposal as a vehicle for propaganda for Mann's "hot bed theories, in which the projectors have disregarded experience and observation." It belittled his advocacy of phrenology and charged Mann with attempting to excite the prejudices of the ignorant. Its second attack was against the teacher-centered nonbook presentations of Prussian classrooms, insisting the psychological result of these was to break student potential "for forming the habit of independent and individual effort." The third attack was against the "word method" in teaching reading, and in defense of the traditional alphabet method. Lastly, it attacked Mann's belief that interest was a better motivator to learning than discipline: "Duty should come first and pleasure should grow out of the discharge of it." Thus was framed a profound conflict between the old world of the Puritans and the new psychological strategy of the Germans.

The German/American Reichsbank

Sixty years later, amid a well-coordinated attempt on the part of industrialists and financiers to transfer power over money and interest rates from elected representatives of the American people to a "Federal Reserve" of centralized private banking interests, George Reynolds, president of the American Bankers Association, rose before an audience on September 13, 1909, to declare himself flatly in favor of a central bank modeled after the German Reichsbank. As he spoke, the schools of the United States were being forcibly rebuilt on Prussian lines.

On September 14, 1909, in Boston, the president of the United States, William Howard Taft, instructed the country that it should "take up seriously" the problem of establishing a centralized bank on the German model. As *The Wall Street Journal* put it, an important step in the education of Americans would soon be taken to translate the "realm of theory" into "practical politics," in pedagogy as well as finance.

Dramatic, symbolic evidence of what was working deep in the bowels of the school institution surfaced in 1935. At the University of Chicago's experimental high school, the head of the Social Science department, Howard C. Hill, published an inspirational textbook, *The Life and Work of the Citizen*. It is decorated throughout with the *fasces*, symbol of the Fascist movement, an emblem binding government and corporation together as one entity. Mussolini had landed in America.

The *fasces* are strange hybridized images, one might almost say Americanized. The bundle of sticks wrapped around a two-headed axe, the classic Italian Fascist image, has been decisively altered. Now the sticks are wrapped around a *sword*. They appear on the spine of this high school text, on the decorative page introducing Part One, again on a similar page for Part Two, and are repeated on Part Three and Part Four as well. There are also fierce, military eagles hovering above those pages.

The strangest decoration of all faces the title page, a weird interlock of hands and wrists which, with only a few slight alterations of its structural members, would be a living swastika.¹ The legend announces it as representing the "united strength" of Law, Order, Science, and the Trades. Where the strength of America had been traditionally located in our First Amendment guarantee of *argument*, now the Prussian connection was shifting the locus of attention in school to *cooperation*, with both working and professional classes sandwiched between the watchful eye of Law and Order. Prussia had entrenched itself deep into the bowels of American institutional schooling.

¹Interestingly enough, several versions of this book exist—although no indication that this is so appears on the copyright page. In one of these versions the familiar totalitarian symbols are much more pronounced than in the others.