Why Vocational Guidance?*

Misdirection of Abilities Avoided and Future Success Made More Certain

By Benjamin C. Gruenberg†

THE folks will tell you that when they went to school they had none of the new-fangled frills and vocational guidance, and they got along just as well—and some think even better. Which only means that they don't know what they missed. The individual's perspective does not allow him to be a judge of whether the changes that have come about in his generation are on the whole advantageous or otherwise to the community. But adequate records enable us to compare conditions at various periods and judge whether the community has gained or lost, without regard to what happened to this or that particular individual.

Our economic relations have undergone such rapid changes since the Civil War that most adults have not had time to re-adjust their mental attitudes to the new conditions. And the younger people are dominated by the phrases and traditions of the past. This is illustrated by the complacency with which we assume that all one needs for getting started in life is a "job." Or by the fact that so many of us acquiesce in the doctrine that the trouble with the unemployed is that they have not found their jobs. Or by the currency of the notion that young men can go to some vague "West" and grow up with the country, and make a fortune as fortunes were made in the past. It is these fundamental economic changes that have brought us suddenly the problem of vocational guidance, as well as the need for a complete reorganization of our whole school system.

The former drift into vocations, chiefly along the lines of family usage or neighborhood custom, is for the mass of our younger people no longer possible. The occupations themselves have disappeared in the transfer of production to the factory. The neighborhood artisans have disappeared in the shifting of populations. The variety of experiences has disappeared in the simplification of processes.

There are no longer industries carried on in the home where the children can learn the rudiments and acquire skill through incidental participation. With the concentration of the specialized work in the factories, the apprenticeship system has died out. And with the simplification of individual processes trades have lost their identity and have thus been lost from the attention of the young men and women destined to occupy them.

Especially noteworthy is the situation in the larger city and in the manufacturing town. A combination of economic forces has brought about a condition in which there is a demand for "jobs" on the part of an army of young boys and girls and in which there are hundreds of jobs that can be as well filled by these untrained children as by older men and women. The family's needs compel the sacrifice of many considerations, including the vague "future" of the children, to the opportunity for immediate earnings.

Accordingly, boys and girls leave schools woefully lacking in even the rudiments of an "education" and enter these occupations that lead to nothing. They run elevators or errands, they wrap chocolates or parcels, they open oysters or stem cherries, they tend stands or sweep offices, they paste labels or pull basting threads, they do a thousand other things while they are rapidly outgrowing their native plasticity and the capacity to acquire greater skill and new ideas, while they are rapidly forgetting what they learned of the

"three R's," and while the sources of youth's idealism are drying up.

With our schools standardized under the age-long influence of the university, the children attending high-schools for a longer or shorter period have, in most cases, merely a larger amount of certain kinds of learning. But they have not any more knowledge or experience of the kinds necessary to prepare them either for particular occupations or for intelligent choice of an occupation. Indeed, whatever influence the high schools have had has been in the direction of prejudicing pupils in favor of professional work, with clerical work as a close second.

We do not need to enter into the internal causes that have hitherto produced these results. The net result is that the young people leave school under conditions that permit only a small fraction of them to enter upon occupations for which they are naturally fitted, or for which they have the opportunity to prepare themselves.

In the meanwhile our professions have become overcrowded, so that the average income of a lawyer or a doctor in this country is less than the average income of a good mechanic. In the meanwhile our industries have actually felt the lack of skilled workers to a very serious degree. In the meanwhile the mass of workers go forth to their labors with the certainty of failure before them.

It is in these complex circumstances that the vocational guidance movement has its source and its justification. There is need for training up young men and women for work that has to be done; but there is also need for selecting the young men and women for their occupations upon a basis more adequate than their random distribution in space and time. It is impossible through resolution or legislation to abolish the "blind alley" occupations. We can warn young people against entering such occupations; we can warn parents against letting their children enter such occupations, and we can legislate against the employment of girls and boys at too early an age.

Our warning to the young people will be counteracted in part by the specious plea that "going to work will make a man of Johnny." Our warning to the parents will have to meet the pressure of economic necessity in from one-fourth to one-third of the cases. Our attempt to legislate for the protection of the youth will meet the organized opposition of all who profit from the exploitation of children and low-grade labor generally.

On the side of the pupils in the schools, there is need for recognition of the fact that admiration for a hero is no indication of qualification to follow in his footsteps. It takes more than ambition and imagination to make an artist. Arthur has both, but is unfortunately color-blind and will have to forego color work. The fact is that we have made but a bare beginning in the direction of analyzing the nature of the child with a view to finding out what kinds of work he may qualify to do. But there is a great need for a development of technique and an organization of simple methods that can be applied by every teacher to the children under her immediate charge. An indication of the widespread appreciation of some such need may be seen in the fact that so many charlatans succeed in separating people from their money by promising to read their characters and special abilities, etc., in the stars, in the palm of the hand, in the bumps on the head, in the

twists of the hand-writing and in the latest photograph. The world is eager for the blessing of knowing what each can best do—a blessing that is denied to most of us. It is the aim of vocational guidance to assist in the wider extension of this great blessing.

Many steps have been taken toward the establishment of vocational guidance on a comprehensive plan. But the various steps have not all been taken by any one community or school system.

The gathering of information or the making of "surveys" seems to be the first step. Many of the surveys already made in various centers of industry will yield information as to the conditions of work in certain occupations. Such information needs to be constantly brought up to date by means of direct contact with the industries and by means of permanent census work carried on by departments of labor and commerce, investigations of public commissions and of social workers. The best surveys so far made have been conducted under the auspices of the Russell Sage Foundation. The results of these investigations are unfortunately unavailable for the children in school or even for most teachers. There is needed a series of simple summaries of these surveys that can be placed in the hands of pupils and teachers.

The training of teachers in the use of statistical and other reports on economic and social conditions is another step forward. Psychologists are conducting experiments with a view to devising formal tests that are on the one hand simple enough to be used by ordinary teachers working with children in large numbers, and on the other hand searching enough to indicate, at least in a general way, the main types of capacity possessed by children in such varying degrees.

Many cities and towns have established differentiated courses of study in the upper elementary grades, calculated to give girls and boys a chance to "try out" their varying powers in actual work. This movement is likely before long to become a commonplace in all progressive school systems. Indeed, the great educational revolution in the near future is most likely to modify the school course in such a manner, that from term to term the individual child will be showing the teacher just what he can do best, and just what he needs most to be taught.

A consideration of all that is implied by vocational guidance must be of interest to every social and economic reformer, as well as to the progressive teacher. If we can imagine the schools so organized and conducted that each child's abilities are early recognized and then fully developed, that each child stays in school and does useful, educative work to the age of eighteen years or later, we can see some of these implications. We should in the supposed case be confronted with the fact that the public school trains each child for useful service, while the public has not the means to assure to each of its graduates an opportunity to exercise his talents and skill. In the second place, we should be confronted with the alternative of refusing to ruin children by sending them into occupations that are obviously destructive of the best in human life, or of refusing to ruin the industries by withholding from them the children. At present neither the public at large nor the teachers in school recognize that this choice of courses lies before us. When the study of vocational guidance becomes the serious concern of the public schools, society will become conscious of some of its basic troubles.

Whetstones in the United States National Museum

NOT many people realize that there is a special sort of whetstone for nearly every purpose. The proper sharpening stones or abrasives for use in various professions and trades and in household work are exhibited in the division of mineral technology of the United States National Museum at Washington, D. C.

Probably the first stone used for abrasive purposes was sandstone, and it is still used to-day. Its coarse grit and even grain first attracted attention, while the rough edge that it gave was all that was then required.

The hard, white, compact sandstones found near Hot Springs, Arkansas, are among the best whetstones known, equaling, if not surpassing, the Turkey stone which for years has been considered one of the best. This Arkansas stone is known as Novaculite, and occurs in two or three grades, suitable for use with certain tools.

The hard, flint-like stone should be used only to sharpen instruments made of the very best steel, requiring very keen edges and points, such as those used by surgeons, dentists, and jewelers. Other grades, although composed of the same ingredients, are more porous, the sand grains are not as close together, and a rougher edge is given to the sharpened tool. Because of their more porous nature, these stones cut faster, proving suitable for the finer edged tools of carpenters, machinists, and engravers, and for honing razors.

Indiana and Ohio supply a whetstone made from a sandstone of a coarser grain than the Novaculite of Arkansas, but nevertheless quite uniform. It may be used with either oil or water, and is useful for sharpening household cutlery, penknives or ordinary carpenters' tools. But since it is easily cut and grooved by hard steel, the fine instruments of dentists and surgeons should not be edged or pointed on this stone.

Scythstones and mowing machine stones are practically all made from mica schist rocks found in New Hampshire and Vermont. These rocks are generally of a dark gray color, and composed of very thin sheets of mica and quartz crystals interlaminated. The grit of the schist is not as sharp as that of the sandstone, because it contains foreign material other than silica which prevents the quartz grains from abrading freely. Mica schist stones wear down quickly from constant use—an advantage rather than a disadvantage, for as they wear down, more of the hard silica grains are exposed to do the sharpening. Neither oil nor water is needed to keep the pores of the stone open as with other whetstone rocks. Scythes require stones with these qualities. Some of the fine grained schists which produce well finished edges are made into carpenters' bench stones.—*Bulletin of the Smithsonian Institution.*

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