TEACHING BOYS AND GIRLS HOW TO WORK:
WHAT WE NEED IS NOT MORE SCHOOLS,
BUT COMMON SENSE: BY THE EDITOR

fter two years of study and investigation, the Commi-

tee of Ten, appointed by the National Society
for the Promotion of Industrial Education, has sub-
mitted its final report. The investigation has evi-
dently been conscientious and painstaking, for the
conclusion at which the Committee has arrived is
that the problem requires a great deal more study
before even the outline of a solution can be formulated. Therefore
it recommends that the United States Department of Education
should be equipped by Congress with sufficient means and an adequate
organization for carrying on a close study of the progress of industrial
education here and abroad and, upon the basis of this extended
knowledge, finally formulating a definite plan of action that will
relate industrial education in this country to the present public
system of instruction.

All this sounds imposing and unquestionably will result in the
collection of a lot of statistics very interesting from an academic
point of view. But will it go even one step toward solving the real
problem? As we understand the situation, our great need is for
some kind of training that will enable our boys and girls to become
efficient workers in some trade whereby they can earn their own
living by producing things needed by society. Our schools, to do
them justice, seem to be doing their best according to their light to
supply this need, and the Committee of Ten has evidently worked
straight along the same lines, treating the whole question as one of
education instead of simple necessity. We have seen how this point
of view has worked out with regard to the manual training and
so-called industrial departments of the public schools. The children
are given a more or less interesting form of play, which varies attract-
ively as their school life progresses, but when they leave school are
they any better able to do real work than they would have been if
they had confined their school studies to the three Rs and learned
at home how to take care of a garden, look after farm animals and do
odd bits of carpenter work, just as their fathers and grandfathers did?

If a system of industrial schools could be established on the same
principles as the present industrial improvement schools for adults,
it seems to us that the problem would be much nearer solution than
it is now. These schools teach theories and principles to the work-
man who is actually engaged in doing the work, and who wants to
know more about it that he may gain greater efficiency and so com-
mand higher wages and a more secure position. For example, men who are working on an electric railroad as motormen, electricians or linemen, may in such a school learn the fundamental theory of electricity, the methods of insulation, of electrical measurement and of the transformation of energy, thus acquiring a foundation of knowledge which, if they have the required industry and ability, will enable them to become foremen, managers or even inventors. These men know enough about their work in the beginning to have a genuine interest in learning more, and all their ambition and energy is turned in that direction. Such theoretical knowledge as they may get from the school is clear gain, because it rests upon a solid foundation of practical experience.

THE trade school, which undertakes to teach the technique of a trade as well as its fundamental processes, does so by reproducing as nearly as possible the conditions of actual work. This is not so good as the industrial improvement school, because when the work is done at all it should be because there is need for it and not because it is to serve as an educational example to someone who is trying to learn to work. But for the manual training and other industrial departments of the public schools there is hardly a word to say. The tasks set to the pupils are all such futile sort of play work. They study elementary agriculture in little plots in the school yard or an adjacent vacant lot, under the direction of a teacher who has no more practical knowledge of horticulture or farming than they have, and their fathers hire gardeners to plant the flower beds, trim the trees and keep the lawn in good shape at home. The children play around a miniature forge or bench a certain number of hours each week, because their teachers and parents are under the impression that by so doing they are acquiring a skill of hand and brain that will fit them to do good work, while carpenters, plumbers and glaziers are called in every time some little thing needs doing around the house. Of course, we are generalizing very broadly here, because it is only the children of the well-to-do who would have home gardens to work in under the instruction of a practical gardener, or would be given the opportunity to learn how to do odd jobs under the guidance of a competent workman hired by their father for that purpose. The great mass of children have to learn as best they can, but surely it is within the power of all to do the real work that is necessary instead of wasting time and getting false ideas of life by learning to do play work under artificial conditions.

After all, it is not so much the fault of our educational system as it is of our standards of living as a whole. All the educational system
can do is to represent these as best it may, and if they are artificial we are bound to have artificial methods of training. Right down at the root of the matter lies our reluctance to have our children do anything that looks like real manual labor. The play work that is done at school is all right because under no possible circumstance could it have any commercial value, but when it comes to real work it hurts our pride to think that our children should have to do it and that our neighbors might possibly think they even earn money by it. When we decide that the boy shall become a lawyer we do not send him to school to argue theoretical cases before a mimic judge; we put him into a lawyer's office to learn the routine of the business by drawing up actual papers, serving writs, copying and doing all the rest of the drudgery that must be done, expecting him to get his theoretical knowledge by reading law, attending trials in court or taking up a certain term of study in the law school. If he is to be a doctor he goes right to work in the dissecting room, at the clinic, in the hospital, putting into effect every bit of theoretical knowledge he gains by applying it to actual experience, and making his experience lead steadily to the acquisition of a wider knowledge of principles. Of late it has become the fashion to study agriculture, so the curse is somewhat taken off the actual farm work in connection with the theoretical demonstrations of the agricultural college or experiment station, but even at that we have not got quite down to the practical stage of doing the work first because it has to be done, and learning about it because we want to know how to do it better.

The carpenter or bricklayer or blacksmith who sends his son to the public school to get a good education, and who approves of manual training because it is part of the system, would scoff at the idea of letting the boy work beside him and learn his own trade. He would tell you that such a thing was not possible under the regulations of the unions regarding apprentices, but the real reason would be that he does not want his boy to grow up to be a workman like himself. He wants him to be "something better," a clerk or a bookkeeper, or perhaps a lawyer or a physician,—anything but the skilled workman he is himself. There is no need to comment on the usual result of this ambition. We see it on every hand in the dearth of competent workmen and the plethora of worthless so-called professional men, or young idlers whose sole ambition in life is to secure a "soft snap" and make money somehow without using their muscles.

The Committee of Ten recommends strongly that local needs and conditions be studied carefully as an aid in the formation of curricula
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for the types of industrial schools best suited to different localities, and finds much encouragement in the fact that a number of communities are now asking what is being done toward the development of industrial schools, and what the community itself may do for its own industrial needs. The answer to these questions seems so simple,—so unavoidable by anyone who thinks directly and along practical lines,—that it is difficult to see how it is going to need a permanent committee and an appropriation by Congress to get together the necessary data to give it. If each community, instead of bothering its brains about establishing industrial schools, will resolve itself into units of families willing to take the necessary measures to give the boys and girls a chance to do useful work at home or in the shop, or anywhere else where work needs to be done, the investigating committees would speedily find themselves out of a job, and Congress would be saved the appropriation. When we come to think of it, there is really no need for an expensive school system to teach our daughters domestic science, when they can so easily learn housework at home and learn the principles of dietetics, household hygiene, sanitation and the like at school, applying them to actual work just as the trained nurse applies the knowledge she receives in the classroom to the work of taking care of her patients. If a majority of the workmen belonging to any union voted in meeting to set aside or extend their regulations regarding apprentices sufficiently to allow the admission of their own boys to learn their trade by actually working at it, the obstacles set up by union regulations would crumble into dust. If the farmer, or any householder who has sufficient land to cultivate, would set both boys and girls to actual work in planting the fields and the garden, hoeing the vegetables, cutting the grass, looking after the corn and potatoes and taking care of the cows, horses, pigs and chickens, the chances are that those children would be interested in everything that could be taught them about farming, and would gain a good working knowledge of physics, chemistry of the soil, plant physiology, biology and kindred topics, so that, instead of an artificially limited course of training, education would be a lifelong pursuit of absorbing interest, and efficient work become a matter of course because it would be a matter of common self-respect.

Apply these principles to all branches of education, and we would never need to bother our heads over evolving a system of industrial training that will apply to all classes and furnish the country with a supply of workers in the skilled trades. The trouble is that they are so simple and straightforward that it needs nothing but ordinary common sense to carry them into effect.