

Growth and Influence of Industrial Schools

The industrial school system is one of those promising and already influential institutions that have sprung up in this nineteenth century. Before the beginning of this century there were trades-schools, schools of special sciences, etc. but what none of these were what we now call industrial schools or colleges. These we may say are mostly American, for, though all other civilized countries have schools for all the trades, sciences, and arts, each school has its special class of students and all are more or less special or technical in their nature. Their object is more to train skilled specialists than to give a good general education that will serve as a good foundation for any kind of pursuit. They are not based on the broad fundamental principles of our American schools which train the mind as well as the hand and make citizens as well as skilled workmen.

The broad foundation of liberty and equal suffrage to all on which our

government was founded and it necessary for the security of the government that our industrial classes should be educated. Just how this should be accomplished has puzzled many an able mind. But hard study and careful experiment have revealed at least the direction in which we may look for the solution of the problem.

It was soon found that the simple training of the hands for a special work; the production of skilled mechanics and artisans was not all that was necessary. To be sure these were necessary but men with trained minds were also necessary among the working people. The trade schools or purely scientific schools did not give this much needed mental training. It is absolutely necessary that a majority of our people should be laboring people or at least engaged in industrial pursuits. And as the majority rules it becomes necessary that these people, some of them at least have a better education than they will usually get at our common schools. The government could hardly exist and exercise the functions of a true republic

unless the industrial classes were fairly well educated.

Many and various were the efforts to establish schools that would do this work. The fact seemed to be clearly recognized that education on the old plans by studies mostly theoretical or classical was not suitable for the working people. It indeed trained the mind but not in such a way as to greatly benefit one who was preparing for an industrial occupation. Neither did it teach him enough of the relation of theory to practice or give him the training for direct application he so much needed. Besides the expense was far too great. Some scheme was needed that would make our education useful in industrial pursuits and at the same time be as inexpensive as possible.

Philanthropists and charitable organizations have done a great deal to establish schools in our large cities that would do this work. Their success we may say has been marked and is attested by the number and size of these schools that are now so potent a factor in the education of our

city masses.

But quite early in our history there were men who believed that the government should provide special means for the education of the industrial classes but it was not until within the last half century that anything of really practical benefit was done. Michigan, Illinois, and some other states led the way by establishing, one an agricultural college, another an industrial university, etc. Many people then in all parts of the country began to agitate the subject and soon the National Congress took it up and passed an act especially to aid the establishment of such schools in all the states of the union. This of course gave great impetus to the movement and gave more prominence to this new kind of education.

Most of the states and territories soon availed themselves of the opportunity and either established new colleges or added new departments to old ones to give this special kind of instruction. Some of these were to teach simply the

sciences that underly industrial pursuits without any special application to labor by the student. But within the last few years especially there is a strong tendency toward a more practical application of the sciences and arts to real work, making manual labor a part of the course of instruction. The object of this is to enable the student to see the practical working of the things he learns from his books; to teach him to observe things for himself; to give him an acuteness in perception and application that he could not otherwise get; and give him the best general development possible. The increasing number and size of these schools and the increasing number of students that attend them show what a rapid growth they are making and how fast their influence is now increasing.

Let us now look at some of the benefits being derived from this kind of education. In the first place it is bringing the industrial pursuits into greater prominence and giving them a place they have always deserved in

relation to the professions. In times past they have been looked upon as low and unworthy pursuits, fit more for slaves and the lower grades of society. Even now they are often looked upon as more suitable for those who are not fit for a professional calling, or as not worthy to engage the attention and abilities of educated and cultured people. But industrial schools are giving a higher education to the working people, even though they are poor, so that they are beginning to think and act for themselves in their respective callings. Many people of a good degree of intelligence are taking up industrial pursuits and finding in them good opportunity for the exercise of all their abilities. This is bringing both them and their pursuits into greater prominence for an educated man will be recognized wherever found and the estimation in which a vocation in life is held depends largely on the kind and quality of the one engaged in it. It is also developing a greater amount of that native ability often

so exceptional, that is found in the working people especially of our own country. It is very noticeable that so many of our great men in all pursuits have come from this class of people. If so many of our national heroes, statesmen, and professional men come from these classes and rise, as many of them have, by their own great efforts surely an industrial education, carrying as it does with its great benefits within the reach of all, would greatly increase the number who could thus rise and develop their abilities. It is a fact that our industrial schools are giving a good general education to many who expect to follow professional pursuits as a kind of broad and solid foundation for future study and work. Many students and graduates of these schools join the professions. But the work of the schools in giving them the education it does is quite as important as if they had taken to some industrial vocation instead. In this way these schools are giving to the professions a constant

supply of men whose early experience and education make them more able to understand and work with the facts of human life as they really are.

Industrial education we believe is also doing a great deal to break down the prejudices that and antagonistic spirits that have so long existed between professions, and between these and the humbler vocations. From its very nature it is general. It teaches somewhat, at least, of most of the common sciences and gives the student a fair idea of the principles that underly all the pursuits of life. One who has such an education is thereby enabled to grasp somewhat of the relations of the different pursuits to each other. He sees that his is not the only one that is necessary for the maintenance and well-being of the human race; that his is more or less dependent upon others; and that to make the most of his own he must work more or less in harmony with the rest.

But this education is not simply reducing the friction between different vocations.

and thereby greatly increasing the productive capability and general efficiency of all. It is also training the working men to see what is really for their best interests and what their duties are to other men such as employers, capitalists, etc. If a working population is very ignorant they cannot comprehend or grasp the laws that necessarily govern the production and distribution of wealth or the true relations that men in different positions should bear to each other. They are also governed in their actions largely by passions and prejudices and comparatively little by an enlightened sense of self-interest. This education then will tend to greatly reduce the number of conflicts between labor and capital or rather between the laborer and his employer. The educated laborer, in his actions toward his employer, will not be governed so much by the baser motives. Neither will the employer try so much to oppress a class of people that think for themselves and are always alive to real self-interests.

In close relation to this is the fact that it makes laborers more thrifty and worthy.

We can hardly think of a mentally trained and educated people as a body or class having such low ideals and ambitions, such habits of recklessness and vice that work so strongly against the efficiency and welfare of the laborer as now characterizes such large numbers of our laboring people. There can hardly be a doubt but that a large part of the disquietude and dissatisfaction now so common is the result of evil and vicious habits that make real thrift and satisfaction impossible. An educated laborer, while he may go as low as any, is more likely to look to the future and be controlled by higher motives and ambitions than is the ignorant one.

The effect of this kind of education on the government is to make it stronger than it could possibly be otherwise. The stability of our government we may say depends on the education of the people. If the majority are ignorant so that they can be controlled in the exercise of their rights as citizens by unscrupulous

politicians and selfish organizations
we cannot expect the government to
exercise the functions of a true
republic. Our working people must be
educated enough to understand at least
the fundamental principles of our
political institutions. A large part of
this work we believe is to be done by our
industrial schools for they alone of our
higher educational institutions come
within ready practical reach of the
industrial classes

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