

**THE YOUNG INDUSTRIAL
WORKER: A STUDY OF
HIS EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

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The Young Industrial Worker: A Study of His Educational Needs by M. Phillips

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INTRODUCTION

THE present delay in the setting up of Continuation Schools is a reason, not for putting on one side for a time the problems of adolescent education, but for spreading abroad, among a wider public, information and ideas of every kind that will help to bring home the urgent necessity for the continued education of the young wage-earner. The special significance of adolescence as a time of mental and moral upheaval, as a plastic period when influences for good or evil may mould the whole future of the youth, all this is a commonplace to students of educational psychology; but it is far from being recognized by the general public. No doubt financial reasons are the strongest influence at work against the extension of education. They are backed, however, by a widespread feeling that education beyond the elementary stage is, for the masses, unnecessary and often, as I have heard a City Councillor assert, useless. This attitude seems to be taken even by many persons who are really keen about the advance of education upon established lines, for example, the improvement of primary education and of secondary education for the selected few. It will be found, I think, that such persons are usually ignorant as to the special characteristics of adolescence.

The average parent, indeed, seems to forget the significance of his or her adolescence. This appears strange if, as stated above, adolescence is a period of such intensified feeling and often of storm and stress. In the course, however, of some investigations made to test whether the findings of Stanley Hall in reference to the psychology

of adolescence were true for the average student in a provincial University, two explanations appeared of this apparent lack of appreciation of the importance of adolescence. One was that an aversion is set up from the recall of and thought about adolescent experiences. I had evidence that in many instances the unpleasantness of some experiences of adolescence leads to a repression almost amounting at times to an entire forgetting of these experiences.

The other explanation suggested was the tendency, in a number of cases, for a man or woman to regard his or her own adolescent experiences as unique. Few know that those traits, which to each have appeared as the eccentricities of his own youth, have been shown by wide investigation to be almost universal.

Now there is already a large number of the working classes who are making noble sacrifices to send their children to secondary schools and even to a provincial University. It seems to me certain that a still larger number would be willing to make the far slighter self-sacrifice involved, even if some wages were lost, by the sending of their children to a Continuation School, if they could be brought to realize the significance of adolescence. And the same enlightenment would, I believe, bring over an appreciable number of the middle class at present hostile or indifferent to the institution of Continuation Schools. They would be prepared to make their contribution in rates and taxes to a scheme they really felt to be good.

For these reasons a welcome is due I think to such a work as the present volume, and particularly because enlightenment is needed, not only as to the special characteristics of adolescence in the young wage-earner, but as to the ways in which the Continuation School may deal with them—or better still in which it actually has dealt with them. In

reading Miss Phillips's book one feels in touch with such reality. The characters of some of her own pupils appear vividly before us. She has been fortunate in winning their confidence to an unusual degree ; and their letters to her, quoted in this book, form valuable material for the study of the young girl wage-earner. To the teacher Miss Phillips's discussions are of special value because she reveals so frankly the great difficulties by which the Continuation School teacher is faced, and deals with them with such remarkable insight.

I would call special attention to the evidence of the way in which some of the poorer parents come to appreciate the Continuation School when they realize its value as a social centre for their girls and lads. Perhaps it would be well if we could find some term better than 'school' which would signify the wider services which will be performed by the Continuation Schools and which would lessen the suggestion to the young wage-earner of a continuance of the bondage from which he often rejoices to be free. The use of the term 'school' would surely be most misleading if the social activities, self-government, group work, and individual methods, which are included among the ideals of the writer of this book, were realized.

Enlightenment is also needed as to the curriculum which is likely to be adopted in the Continuation Schools. Many a parent who left the Elementary School twenty or thirty years ago may have some justification in feeling that a continuance for a few years more of the same education he received at school would not have been of much service to him, and had no obvious relation to the great and permanent interests of adult life. Some of us are looking to the Continuation Schools to show that work of genuine educational value may at the same time appeal

strongly to the widening interests of the young wage-earner and be a help towards his preparation for the duties of citizenship.

As to the attitude of the middle class—at a time when the franchise is being extended practically to every adult, it is really amazing that one should have opposition to continued education on the part of those who at other times complain that the working-man does not understand complex social and political questions, and is too ignorant to use his vote wisely. One would have thought that even if they had no generous impulse to improve the life and widen the interests of the masses of the people they would at least, for reasons of self-interest, desire the steadying influence of education, even as a form of political insurance. One hesitates to think that there are still many who think that social stability is best secured by keeping the masses uneducated, beyond a necessary minimum. Such as do are blind to the fact that we are living in a new world.

In the sphere of physical health, the value of preventive medicine is now thoroughly established. So in the work of moral regeneration the signs of the times suggest that the best progress is possible along the lines of prevention; that it is better to increase the number of schools rather than that of prisons.

In the study of mental diseases and of juvenile delinquents it is being found that evils are best cured, not by mere repression, but by the substitution of new good activities for bad. So in the study of social advance it is seen that the best means of getting rid of the great evils is to guide the impulses and instincts of youth along higher lines, not merely to punish them when they have wandered, unguided, far along the wrong paths.

C. W. VALENTINE.

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