

CAREERS FOR BOYS

THE choice of a career for his son is, in general, a problem of great perplexity for a man, and, often, one which he is ill equipped to manage. He probably makes large sacrifices to defray the cost of a 'good education,' and is liable finally to sacrifice his boy's chances of happiness and success by an injudicious decision about his future. His difficulties may be increased, curiously enough, by his failure to realise that conditions of entry into a career are radically different from what they were thirty or forty years ago. He perhaps is still sufficiently romantic to talk about, and even to believe in, the 'self-made man' ideal, although the impracticability of it in these days of combines and over-population is surely manifest. Or he is likely to adopt one of two favourite attitudes; either, that his personal experience of the exigencies of his own calling determines him not to allow his son to follow it, or that the only reasonable thing for a son to do is to step into his father's shoes and continue the work built up for him. If he is neither romantic nor obstinate, he will consult his son's inclinations and, in all probability, he will find them either fantastic or completely unformed.

A normal boy rarely shows a marked aptitude for one particular business or profession in his early or middle school-days, and if he forms an opinion about his future it is usually much influenced by a limited knowledge of his father's occupation. In general, a boy reaches school-leaving age without being able to discover what his best avocation may be; in consequence, he acquiesces in what appears to be the most attractive proposal put before him; or he accepts, with the philosophic resignation of extreme youth,

what seems to be the inevitable price of his parents' unsolicited sacrifice and follows the wrong course mapped out for him. Thus, for instance, is a good farmer lost in the Law, a writer in Commerce, or an actor in the Church.

And still, despite the irresistible growth of Democracy and the changes economic necessity has enforced, a father's pride may lead him to value success in terms of bank balances, and education as a preparation for work to which a high social standard is attached; so that a boy's real ability as well as his contentment may be immolated on the altar of convention.

All this means serious economic waste, which it is now increasingly important to check. The question of how boys, when they leave school, are to make the best use of their lives is not a personal question, but one of good citizenship and good sense. It is as much to the advantage of the State as of the individual boys that they should choose and follow those callings wherein they will most freely and enthusiastically use their best abilities. And it is the schools themselves that could assist boys to discover, as far as possible, the most suitable work for them to undertake.

Parents' co-operation would be, of course, essential, and perhaps the most difficult part for them would be to disabuse their minds of the idea that a 'standard of living' is more important than a standard of ability and endeavour. They could not expect the advantages and aims of general education to be set aside in favour of vocational training, but they could expect schools to provide their sons with information that would guide them in the wise choice of a career, and often they would be able materially to assist in supplying some part of it.

There are, indisputably, schools where considerable help is given in finding suitable employment for pupils

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who have completed their specified course, and individual masters have done invaluable work on their own initiative. But it is not at present within the compass of even a headmaster's duty to help boys collectively to choose a career, because he is not himself provided with the requisite information.

A superficial knowledge of the life a man leads in any one business or profession may be very misleading to a youthful aspirant; and few men are qualified to discourse fairly on another man's occupation. Boys require to know, not the personal views of their masters or parents, but, authoritatively, the scope for work in one calling or another and their own chances of success in it. Schools could provide such knowledge in two ways.

The first is simple and obvious. Lectures should be given by qualified speakers. It seems to be a conventional practice to invite boys to listen, two or three times a term, to addresses on subjects so informative as 'A Trip up the Ganges,' 'Procedure in the House of Commons,' or 'The Health of a Nation.' Lecturers are paid to inflict these extra burdens on the pupils, and only occasionally do they add a little comic relief by showing lantern slides upside-down. Boys would be far more interested and much better informed were they to listen to an engineer talking about the work of engineering, a manufacturer explaining what it means to run a factory, or a farmer discussing life on the soil.

Every school has, close at hand, a number of men who excel at their work and who would be delighted to speak about it for the enlightenment of the pupils. Such talks would be informal, and, possibly, not at all academic; and the speakers would be provided beforehand with suggestions about the form their talks should take, so that they would not concentrate on giving autobiographical sketches but would explain pre-

sent and potential opportunities in their several callings for new entrants.

The chief disadvantage of this form of supplying information about careers is that lectures must be limited in number and variety. But they should be amplificatory and not self-sufficient.

The more important work would have to be undertaken by a central body, and the results disseminated to schools throughout the country. Existing scholastic associations might well be able to provide the necessary machinery with little extra cost, and the annual subscription that schools might be called upon to pay would be so small as to be negligible. The small permanent commission thus established would revive part of the extremely valuable work done by the defunct Appointments Department of the Ministry of Labour. That Department recognised, at the end of the War, the urgency of this same problem among young soldiers returning to civilian life; and perhaps its most important, though least notable, achievement was to furnish men with such knowledge of conditions and prospects in every field of employment that they were helped to embark on the course most desirable for them.

Such an aim would entail a great deal of work at first, but once a record was compiled it would be simple and inexpensive to keep up-to-date. It would furnish concisely detailed information about every possible trade and profession, stating the conditions of entry, the cost, form and duration of the various apprenticeships, schemes of promotion, duties and responsibilities incurred, and the fluctuating prospects in different districts. An authoritative hand-book on careers: it would disclose undreamed vistas to young and eager eyes, and fire with enthusiasm boys otherwise fore-doomed to a routine that must be dull because of being unsuitable.

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There would be little difficulty in the compilation of such a record of opportunity if the initial hard work and endeavour were ungrudgingly bestowed, for, without doubt, the accredited institutions of the learned professions and of all sorts of trades would gladly contribute, and, periodically, revise and correct, the data required. From half a dozen volumes of such a record in each school boys could draw the information that would save them from the misery of misplaced ability and the State from the loss of valuable potential experts in a large variety of occupations.

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