

The SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE SECTION

A Magazine for your Reading Table

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS' PAGE



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MENDING MISFITS IN THE WORLD WORKSHOPS

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THE CONSCIENCE of the nation has been stirred by the alarming records of national waste, and a tremendous effort has been made to stop this inexcusable devastation of the treasures of the country in forests and mines and rivers. But the social consciousness is still too little impressed by the fact that after all the worst and the most criminal waste of national assets is the careless destruction of human material and personal energies. To be sure, the physicians do their best to keep the human machines in running order, and numberless schemes of hygiene are aimed toward the prevention of sickness and bodily harm. The friends of international arbitration insist that wars must be stopped in order to avoid that wanton squandering of human life on the battlefield. The friends of eugenics try to help by their careful selection of those who are to marry. And yet, whoever looks deeper into our social mechanism ought to recognize that human life is crippled and crushed not only on the sickbed and on the battleground, but everywhere that a human being is forced into a life work for which he is unfit and through which the development of his energies and the unfolding of his mind is made impossible.

Our social structure is one of the most subtle differentiation. Every place, from that which the laborer fills in the factory to that of the professional man, demands a specialized adjustment. Where boy or girl or man or woman has to plod through his daily work without such inner adjustment, the joy of life is sapped; the terrible feeling of an intolerable burden ruins the best intentions, makes every effort a failure, and ultimately wastes the powers which Nature had given to be unfolded.

Choosing One's Lifework Blindly

TODAY, those who rush into the market places of the world do not know anything about their minds. They use their minds; they use their emotions and their intelligence, their attention and their memory, their feelings and their will, just as they use their muscles when they walk or play ball, without having any idea which muscles are really involved. Moreover, even if they know how their mental equipment is made up by nature, they do not know which mental faculties are really needed for a special kind of work. They do not see any-

CONTENTS

COVER DESIGN—REX BEACH	E. P. UPJOHN	
MENDING MISFITS IN THE WORLD WORKSHOP— <i>Editorial</i>	HUGO MÜNSTERBERG	2
THE WEIGHT OF OBLIGATION	REX BEACH	3
<i>Illustrations by Charles Sarka</i>		
TEMPERING THE LAW IN DIXIE	HARRIS DICKSON	6
<i>Illustrations by J. N. Marchand</i>		
NOVEMBER JOE: WOODSMAN DETECTIVE	HESKETH PRICHARD	7
THE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLAR ROBBERY		
<i>Illustrations by Percy E. Cowen</i>		
NEW WRINKLES		18
LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT NUMBER		19

thing but the most external aspects of the vocations, and thus without any effort to adjust the mind and the needs of the work the overwhelming majority follows chance suggestions and hasty impressions in deciding on the activities of life. The result is that the misfits are overabundant, and that the failures do not know how to help themselves.

The movement toward vocational guidance has started a little effort to improve this wretched game with its human waste. The vocational counselors try to give advice to the boys and girls when they leave school. But they soon discover that the chief solution of the problem can come only from a careful study of the mind and of the mental demands of the various vocations. Their work, therefore, ultimately falls to the psychologists, who study professionally the human mind and the social demands on the mental mechanism.

There are already stories afloat that the psychologists have succeeded wonderfully in solving problems. People of bold imagination believe that we have in our psychological laboratories newly invented machines, of which a boy or girl has only to press the keys and levers and which then show in graphic record all subtle talents and inclinations, mental traits and dispositions. But this is idle fantasy. Such machines do not exist and never will exist, because a careful analysis of many single traits is needed. Moreover, it must be emphasized again that the study of the individual is not enough, and that the vocations themselves must be analyzed with all the means of psychological science, if the national waste of men is ultimately to be abolished.

A Bureau of Human Psychology

BUT such work far surpasses the possibilities of the few psychological laboratories which are parts of the universities, and as such are devoted to educational work. This is a task which can be fulfilled only with the resources of the whole nation. Not a chance laboratory director, but the government ought to undertake this superb work, which is the necessary counterpart to the triumphs of modern technique and the unfolding of modern specialization.

The government has its scores of experimental stations for the study of agricultural problems to serve the farmers all over the land; the government has its chemical bureau, which is to aid the chemical manufacturers by its scientific work and to insure healthful food for the nation. Only large institutes of this kind can cope with the overwhelming mass of problems which the adjustment of the man to his work presents.

There is room for every mind in this social fabric of ours. Every one can find the place where he can enjoy his work and grow into a truly useful personality. But the most careful scientific work is needed, work which can be carried out only with the means of the nation, to realize this ideal state, and we ought finally to awake to our responsibilities in this most important part of the conservation movement.

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