

EDUCATION AROUND THE WORLD



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EDITORIAL 47

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR 48

A COLLEGE IN THE ISLANDS
By David C. Stewart 50

EDUCATION IN THE DEVELOPING
NATIONS

1. PLANNING FOR EDUCATION IN
LATIN AMERICA
By René Maheu 52

2. PRIORITIES IN AFRICAN EDUCATION
By James Avery Joyce 55

OPERATION CROSSROADS AFRICA 58

FRENCH HIGHER EDUCATION
By Hoyt H. Purvis 60

DO NOT BRING FOREIGN STUDENTS,
UNLESS . . .
By Chong M. Pak 62

WHILE SCHOOL KEEPS
By James Cass 64

BOOK REVIEWS

The Reasonable Adventurer, by Roy
Heath, reviewed by David
Yount 65

Continuing Your Education, by Cyril
O. Houle, reviewed by Ethel
Strainchamps 66

The Stone Soldier: Prize College Stories,
edited by Whit and Hallie
Burnett, reviewed by Bonnie Bar-
rett Stretch 67

NEW BOOKS 67

Joining the Family

Saturday Review's Education Supplement has moved, along with other departments of the magazine, to *SR's* new home. Effective immediately, all correspondence intended for the Education Supplement should be addressed to: Education Editor, *Saturday Review*, 380 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

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SR/August 15, 1964

Vocational Education: In the High School?

HIGH SCHOOL administrators face growing demands for more vocational courses. They are urged to relate these courses to immediate job openings and to make them available to more students in order that each may graduate with a "marketable skill." Those who exert the pressures point out that most of the jobs now available require technical training—that unskilled jobs are being eliminated by automation. They contend that greater vocational emphasis in high school will go a long way toward solving the problems of unemployment and delinquency. They assume that it will reduce the number of dropouts and provide better education for the culturally deprived.

These assumptions require examination. No one denies the need for vocational training. But there are some hard facts to be faced, and numerous alternatives to be considered, before we decide that the high school is the best place for it. Educators and school board members who must make the decisions should keep these facts in mind:

► Automation reduces the demand not only for unskilled laborers but also for semi-skilled laborers of the kind usually produced by high school vocational courses. It increases only the demand for workers with college or technical school education who make the machines.

► The jobs that require high-level technical training also require a knowledge of mathematics and science as well as a good grasp of English. If this basic knowledge is not acquired in high school it is not likely to be acquired anywhere. It is much easier for an adult to learn, on the job, to operate a machine than it is for him to repair his deficiencies in mathematics, science, and English after he has left high school.

► Many boys and girls of superior academic talent choose vocational courses because their family traditions—and their personal aspirations at the time they enter high school—are not such as to cause them to anticipate going to college. When they later discover that college is an appropriate goal they find the better colleges closed to them because they have not had the right kind of high school preparation.

► For students who are not going to college, high school offers the last chance to study literature, history, science, mathematics, and the arts, with the aid of teachers. If they devote most of their high school time to vocational training, their liberal education is neglected. Its lack may later restrict both their vocational opportunities and their capacity to take full advantage of life in a civilized community.

► Although a brief exploratory course may be desirable, extended vocational training is not appropriate until the student has made a firm vocational choice. And in a period of rapid technological change, early vocational choice is neither possible nor desirable—many students now in school will spend their adult lives in types of work that do not yet exist, cannot

be predicted, and consequently cannot yet be specifically prepared for.

► Technical vocational courses do not solve the problem of educating the slow learner because the trades for which they prepare require both good general intelligence and a knowledge of the basic academic subjects. Vocational teachers do not want their courses to become dumping grounds for slow learners.

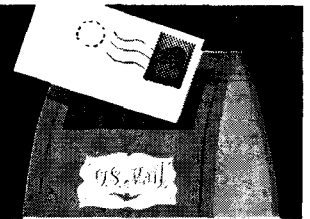
► The culturally deprived child needs an education that will bring him into the culture; only a basically liberal education that provides the cultural background not available at home will enable him to overcome his handicaps. He needs a better knowledge of English and an introduction to art, music, literature, history, science, and the principles of government at least as much as he needs vocational training. Allowance must be made for his limitations; in many cases the traditional academic program must be altered to meet his special needs. But the basic disciplines can be taught in different ways and at different levels to students who differ widely in both academic aptitude and cultural background. When properly taught, they can later be applied to many different vocations.

These considerations lead us to the conclusion that the needed expansion of technical training should take place, not in high school, but in junior colleges, adult evening schools, post-high school technical schools, and programs conducted by industry. Because vocational programs are firmly established in most high schools—where, for half a century, they have received massive federal aid that is denied the humanities—there is little likelihood that they will be de-emphasized. But they can be made broad rather than narrowly preparatory for specific jobs and they can be closely related to the academic program, as they already are in some schools. And they should take up only a minor portion of any student's time in order that each may have ample opportunity to gain the liberating knowledge and understanding essential to free men who, whatever their vocation, must make a wide variety of decisions.

We Americans pride ourselves on being "practical" men. To such men—unless they have thought deeply about it—it seems obvious that vocational training is more useful than a study of principles, theories, and ideas. But it was John Dewey—not an educational conservative—who once observed: "Theory is, in the end, the most practical of all things." It is the most practical because it has the broadest applications. In preparation for an uncertain future, the studies dealing with the basic principles will prove to be most practical in the long run.

—P.W.

Letters to the Editor



Campus Mores

THE GENEROUS SPACE you allotted to a discussion of "Campus Mores" [SR, June 20] makes this letter a necessity.

Having been raised in a class of about 1,000 (University of Vienna, Class of 1937), I experienced complete sexual liberty without bad taste, licentious compulsions, and obnoxious side effects. How? Simple: Vienna University has no dormitories. Hence, students live in the town, mostly in rented rooms. What goes on in these apartments is anybody's guess, but nobody's business. Public gatherings can thus be held with proper decorum, no complexes or obsessions either way. Dormitories, whether military, prison, or academic, breed sexual aberrations by sheer lack of privacy.

GEORGE VASH, M.D.

Baltimore, Md.

IN ANY KIND OF social order the idea of human freedom in any given field carries the implication of responsibility for acts and the results of acts performed in pursuance of that freedom. To all those college students, high school students, teen agers, and others who want to indulge in sexual intercourse without marriage I would propound this question and demand an answer: "Are you personally prepared to assume full responsibility for pregnancies, illegitimate births, or physical or psychological damage that may result to you or your sexual partner because of these acts and to relieve your parents and others of the burden of such results?" To those who can truthfully answer "Yes" to this question and prove the truth of their answer, I would say go ahead. To those who cannot truthfully answer "Yes" I would give an unqualified prohibition.

As the father of a daughter who made a "mistake" in college, gave the child for adoption, underwent psychiatric treatment for two years, and then had to go back to school to try to make some kind of new life, and who necessarily threw much of the burden on her family, I would say that sexual "freedom" is first of all a matter of responsibility and the ability and willingness to assume it. To those who have not the willingness and ability to assume responsibility, the freedom should be denied. In general, I would say that sexual intercourse is for responsible men and women and not for irresponsible boys and girls.

As for college women establishing any new sexual order, if it is established by women it will not be a moral one, or at best it is most unlikely. It seems clear enough that such chastity as has existed at times in the past was established and enforced by men because, among other things, they wanted to know who their sons were and who actually produced the burdens they bore. As for me, I think I would not want to marry one of the current college girls just because if there happened to be children I

could never be sure who the father was.

This letter is a testimony of a deep and harsh experience that has not ended after eight years and may never be ended, for there is little hope that my beautiful daughter will ever be anything like what she might have been. If this harsh aspect of "sexual freedom" has ever been discussed by anyone I have never heard of it.

W. J.

Vista, Calif.

Academic Freedom

MAY I CONGRATULATE Henry Steele Commager for his article on "Academic Freedom" [SR, June 20]. Dr. Commager so lucidly laid out the very foundations of higher education in a free society. I was much concerned to find my own alma mater involved in this very issue. It has become apparent that more Americans are attempting to accept a philosophy committed to specific lines of thought rather than keeping to a philosophy that is open to questions and examination. Academic scrutinization of our political and social structure has always been a mainstay of democracy. Without dissenters there is apathy. Choice becomes unimportant. Blind acceptance of rigid maxims becomes more prevalent. Apathy therefore leads to a total eclipse of independent thought.

The university's luminescent effect hopefully rubs off on us. There are not many places in our society where we can question, dispute, and alter thinking as much as we can in a university. Here we are encouraged to do so with little fear of reprisal from standing institutions. Once into the structured atmosphere of everyday living we are more discreet in maintaining our position. Yet we have learned to question, we have seen the grey between the black and white. And hopefully this ability to discriminate will lead to meaningful appraisals of our pursuits and the pursuits others would have us follow. We must also have the right to know how others think in order to develop and justify our own thinking. Universities must not be compelled to deny this exposure to its future citizens.

RONALD COUN.

Buffalo, N.Y.

Two Points

CHARLES H. WILSON says in "Critics of the Schools Never Die" [SR, June 20] that "the only valid measure of a nation's schools is the economic, scientific, intellectual, and cultural well-being of the nation itself."

On the surface this contention is difficult to combat. But it may be that the upper third of our population is actually sustaining our highly complex civilization in the United States, another third is engaged in repetitive jobs that carry out the directives of the upper third, and the lower third is being supported by the other two groups. There is certainly a large body of evidence to support this view. If true, our educa-