

CHOOSING COURSES.

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WHEN first the modern elective system was introduced into the colleges of this country many shook their heads in grave doubt as to the wisdom of the step. Chief among the objections raised against the plan was the dual fear that on the one hand many students would be called upon to adapt themselves to the system who were not qualified to choose for themselves, and that on the other hand there would tend to spring up among some of the less studiously inclined a habit of selecting work not on a basis of value, but on one of ease. For both of these fears experience has shown a cause, and also, in part, appropriate remedies. This paper is addressed not to the student who is hunting "snap" courses, careful supervision of the student body on the part of the collegiate officials will attend to him, but it is addressed to the student who is honestly in doubt as to the work which he ought to select for his life preparation.

The writer is aware that to give advice is easy, to be tangible is another matter. The principles here outlined are based on the best practice in successful schools and are offered solely on their merits.

In actual life, education is defined as a process fitting for mastery. This may not be education ideally defined, but as the world uses the term it is sufficiently accurate. If we look more carefully at this practical aim of education, we find that while in theory men are educated to be masters of their total environment, in practice, influenced by personal motives of the most diverse kinds, they divide their total environment more or less accurately into two parts, of which the one includes men and the other things, giving rise thus to the all but universal practice of choosing between "the humanities" and the "natural sciences." This division is the more rational because life is short and time

fleeting, making necessary in the average case, brief, intense preparation for one definite end.

The first thing, then, to decide, is the question: "What am I after? Mastery over men, control in the market at the bar, in the pulpit, at the ballot-box, or in the school room; or is it my work to unravel the mysteries of matter and force, to master the secrets of Alladin, and "command the genii of the deep." You must answer these questions if your preparation is to bear any definite fruit; you must answer them squarely, honestly, independently, following neither the voice of fashion nor the trend of impulse, but only that inner reason that reveals to you your own want and purpose in life. Both pathways are alike honorable and worthy, and both lead, if consistently followed, to the Soul that breathes through the men and things. With this question settled we are prepared for a rational choice of courses.

In all curricula studies group themselves more or less clearly about three central facts in the student's personality. Born as an isolated unit he needs to open avenues of communication between himself and the world about him. He needs to learn to comprehend the meaning of sounds and sights, of smells, tastes and touches. He needs to establish gateways, as many and as wide ones as possible, through which the world shall be able to get at him and he in turn at it. For this purpose he masters languages, grammars, systems and forms, until he has built up each new thing or symbol or sound into a compact vocabulary that shall enable him to comprehend when addressed, and in turn to be comprehended when addressing.

Having in some such manner made the individual accessible, the curriculum next grapples with the problem of self-comprehension. The student must know himself as an intelligent, thinking being. His attention must be directed to the rational processes within; he must be led, step by step, from the simplest to the most complex mental operation, until he has perceived the modes of thought, and by frequent repetition and experiment has gained certainty of knowledge, and accurate speed in manipulation. To

achieve this result the schools call for introspective and abstract effort, secured in the mastery of pure mathematics, introspective psychology, logic and philosophy in its varied forms. No one of these appeals to all types of mind, the personal element in each case determining whether synthetic or analytic effort is to be preferred.

To this point the curriculum, assuming that the student is equipped with normal mentality, may be considered substantially as identical for all types of personality. Variations may occur, some minds take more kindly to the spoken or written language of men than to the language of nature, and for such suitable provision is demanded, though every student needs as much as he can secure of both, since accessibility from all points of the environment is the ideal goal of all formal study. In like manner a pronounced analytic or synthetic tendency of mind will determine apathy or interest in special phases of subjective study. The sacred duty of the school is to consider the individual personality, and to develop it as completely as possible, with special emphasis on personal adaptability, which will always be in the time of least resistance. It is better that the school shall produce a brilliant scientist, even though he be a stupid linguist or vice versa, than that it shall waste natural talents, in a blind effort to make stereo-types. The business of the school is not to make facsimiles, but men.

It is in the third group of courses that the greatest complexity of problems is presented, for an attempt is here made to cater directly to the natural preferences of the student. These courses are largely if not entirely elective. If carefully examined, they are readily divided into two sub-groups, of which the one deals entirely with natural phenomena, and the other with humanity. In the one group are found the physical and biological sciences, in the other the concerns of humanity, histories, arts, literatures, political and social studies, religions. The one aims to introduce the student directly into the realm of nature's activities, to enable him independently to observe her moods and actions and to avail himself of her favors. The goal

of this group is mastery over nature. The end of the other series of courses is to unveil to the student the inner heart of humanity, to unravel the tangled skein of human activities, past and present, to show him how men act, to paint for him the idols and ideals to which men best respond, in short, to teach him to know and master men. In practice the two lines of study overlap. for since man must live among men, he cannot afford to ignore them, and since his feet are rooted to the soil, he must needs know at least some of its simplest secrets.

“What to elect,” is a question that can be settled rationally only in the light of the facts here presented. The first problem is always to decide the ultimate end in view and neither fond parent, nor good friend, nor chance may decide that. It must be settled on the basis of a personal consciousness of ability and tendency. A serious half hour of self examination will go further in securing the desired certainty than a book full of advice. And once the eye has caught a glimpse of that definite final purpose, the problem will largely solve itself in the general direction here suggested.
