Why Teachers Do Not Teach—By Frances Duncan Manning

Since Teaching Is Not Lucrative, Only Opportunity for Service Can Keep the Ranks Filled

It is a joyful reflection that perhaps Americanization may strike not only the schools—already it has done that—but the school system itself.

There has been considerable discussion as to why the teacher no longer chases his job. It is rather significant also that in this case, as in that other depleted profession, the ministry, the sole reason given is lack of proper remuneration.

Teaching Hardly a "Get Rich Quick Scheme"

Yet I do not believe this is the only reason why teaching has ceased to "draw," any more than it is the sole reason for a decreased interest in the ministry. The greatest religious leaders in the past were not engaged in that work because it was lucrative. Often it proved quite the opposite, involving loss of money, position, and even brought persecution. Never have men or women of the highest ability gone into teaching as a "get rich quick scheme." If they wanted money they pocketed their teaching enthusiasm and did something else.

I have known cases where women of high teaching ability have cheerfully and deliberately turned their backs upon a job in the city schools and taught mountain whites at a trifling salary for sheer love of teaching.

The profession of teaching, like the job of domestic housework, has felt the effect of the tremendous increase in variety of occupations for women. Not so many years ago teaching was the only profession for women, as their only gainful industry was sewing or domestic labor. If a woman had any education at all, she taught; if she hadn't, there was housework. As to the ease of entering the teaching profession, the way was so well worn it seemed almost a chute. A girl child would be fed into the educational hopper and a teacher with a public school appointment would come out at the other end.

Now, a woman does not have to teach for a livelihood if she doesn't want to, any more than she has to marry for a home or enter domestic service. She can drive a motor truck, or run a dairy, or edit a newspaper; she can be a solicitor, or a conductorette, a movie actress or a farmer. All this female versatility which formerly was penned into the respectable fold of teaching now finds its individual place, which is far more interesting for the individual woman, but not so interesting for boards of education and school committees, for it decreases the former ample supply of "cheap labor" which, in earlier years, could be drawn upon to an unlimited extent.

Machine-Made Teachers Fit the System

The teaching profession will be none the worse for this shortage; a raise of pay, like the raise of pay in domestic service, will be the first result; the more important change will be that only men and women with a love for teaching and real teaching ability will enter the profession.

But there is this fact to reckon with—the better the teacher the less she will care to take a job under the system, for the system was built to fit the former bountiful supply of machine-made teachers. Under it the better teachers suffer abominally, original thinking is penalized, the rewards go to the more mechanical teacher—to her with iron nerves and leathern sensibilities, whose ideal of service is the unthinking obedience of the Light Brigade.

This sort of thing may be good militarism, good and effective Prussianism, but it isn't democracy and it isn't Americanism—not as Washington or Thomas Jefferson understood it. And this is the sort of thing which is expected of our public school teachers. What our boards of education really want seems to be an army of intellectual mercenaries.

Why should a woman of brains, ability, force, enthusiasm and the gift of leadership, of which stuff the best teachers are made, enter an intellectual treadmill, put her individuality into cold storage and accept the job of doing as she is told, even having ready-to-talk opinions handed out to her?

The Psychologist and The Board of Education

It is always easier to observe defects at a little distance, rather than in our own city, the mote in the brother's eye always being more noticeable. Therefore, the attention of the reader is invited to the way the system works in a nearby large town. Here, it is asserted, a teacher must not attend too closely, nor with too much interest, the meetings of the Parents' and Teachers' Association, or she "gets in bad," as the expressive slang phrase is, with the Board of Education, for at such meetings she is quite likely to hear that venerable body criticised. Indeed, the whole attitude of the board to constructive criticism is interesting and illuminating.

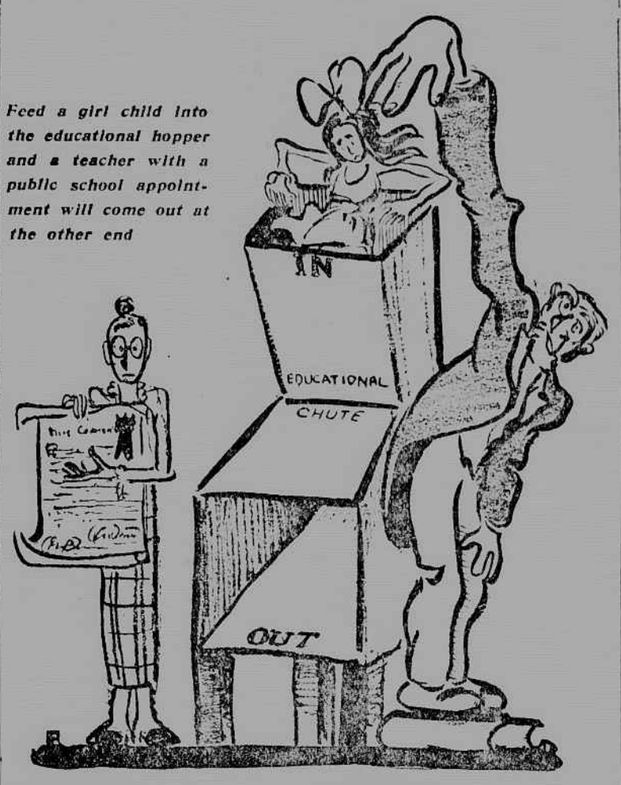
The head of the psychology department of the State University challenged the board to a public debate of questions of school policy in regard to subnormal children, and the only answer of that august body was the fretful insistence that the university "make their professor shut up." Whereupon the professor lightheartedly suggested that the tests applied to pupils be applied also to the members of the Board of Education and offered the services of his psychologic clinic so that the tests for initiative, for concentration, and for other useful mental qualities be applied, that the citizens might know what they were getting. But I believe the only result was that he again was told to "shut up."

Yet the revolting professor has had remarkable success in the training of backward and subnormal children and the city might reasonably have profited by his coöperation. The whole problem of backward children is closely related to juvenile delinquency, and that one child who might be trained for a life of usefulness is permitted to grow up a probable delinquent, with a possible prison existence, is a matter of more legitimate concern to the community than that the board of education preserve their dignity.

Let the Music Master Teach Music

Another instance shows plainly the sad workings of the system. One of the schools had as its director of music a young organist of exceptional ability. One would suppose the selection of music would devolve upon him rather than on the school principal, who had no musical training. Evidently the music master thought so, for when the principal gave to the children for learning a popular song, on the ethical and musical plane of "Love Me While the Loving Is Good," the musician objected, saying that the children should be taught better music.

Then followed a sort of educational court-martial, a star-chamber proceeding, and the music master was dismissed! Hereafter any musician, if he have any regard for his art and his conscience, will think twice before taking a position under that city's school system. No real musician will want the job, and the loss to the school children and the community is a grave one. And why should we allow reactionary boards of education to practise Prussianism on the teachers, while the teacher, having that experience, is expected to teach democracy?



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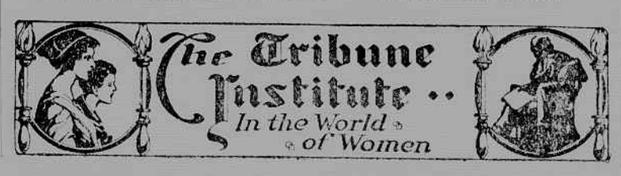

Representation on The Board of Education

The teachers should have larger salaries—certainly. But they should demand them. They should introduce democracy into the system and have the backing of the community in the demand. They should demand adequate representation of the teachers on the Board of Education. Associations of parents also should be represented on the governing body. Suppose, in a certain district, a committee of parents (or aunts and uncles) of teachers and an advisory committee of experts got together—the schools could be adapted to fit the needs of the district and every near-at-hand agency for social, religious and recreational betterment be utilized. If ever there were a city where a wide variation in schools is necessary it is New York. If ever there were an opportunity for wonderful educational achievement it is here in New York.

The marvellous opportunities, the poignantly appealing engerness of the children and young people of every nationality, must fairly clamor at the men and women who are gifted as teachers with their insistent demand. But between the man and woman and the work they are fitted to do there often rises the disheartening and impassable barrier of a cast-iron system, and to get to the work they have to renounce their most precious gifts and most valuable endowment. What man or woman wishes to make the sacrifice? It is as if we set a violinist or a pianist to teach music, took away from each his instrument and gave him instead a phonograph and a few popular records selected by some one who, perhaps, knew little of music. What wonder that the best musicians are not observed rushing for the job!

Freedom in Organization

This experiment might be interesting: to let the teachers themselves organize the education in a given district, for adults as well as children, aided by a school committee which should include a representative from every social agency in the district, besides a representative of the fathers and mothers or interested parents themselves. Instead of the usual appointed principal, the teachers would elect one of their own number, to serve without additional pay, as organizer and director; they would employ an accountant to do much of the clerical record work, which impedes the real work of the teacher and turns many a principal into a filing expert.

Suppose, then, teachers preferred three, or even two, hour sessions, with groups of ten or twelve, to five-hour sessions with twenty-four. Suppose the teachers, starting with a group of ungraded children, could decide at weekly conferences that Ikey or Aloysius would fare better in another class—the children could be shifted and exchanged until each teacher had a well working unit.

Suppose the teachers could do as they liked with their group, let ten-year-old Olga or Herman off an hour earlier for a music lesson. Suppose day after day of the lovely autumn weather a teacher could, if she chose, take her young charges to the park and give them their lesson there, charging the carfare to Father Knickerbocker. Suppose she could take beauty-loving Italian children to museums and music-loving Polish youngsters to free concerts; suppose she could arrange without let or hindrance for such outside neighborhood assistance as might be had—as freely as a country school teacher could do? Certainly she would have a chance to find out the aptitudes of the different scholars to a degree which is impossible under the present system. And the sole test of her work would be the results.

I am not commending the above

A Cast-Iron System That Calls for Sacrifice of Initiative Always Weeds Out the Best

Women Doctors, East and West, on Shoes, Feet and Health

TO THINK that the day should ever come when the women of the Orient should tell the women of the West what to wear on their feet! Although foot binding was never a Japanese custom, the grotesque practice is so associated with the East in the minds of Westerners that to have a Japanese woman berate our "sensible" American shoes calls forth many a smile. That is, it does at first.

But when she goes on to say that

Dr. Tomo Inouye

the introduction of American shoes into Japan caused the women of that country to have many physical ailments they had never known before, even shoe manufacturers and export men may pause to listen and consider.

Dr. Tomo Inouye is the Japanese delegate to the International Conference of Women Physicians, which is winding up a six weeks' session here under the auspices of the Y. W. C. A. Dr. Inouye has little kindly feeling toward American shoes. She has treated the ailments of Japanese women who wore them.

And when she attacks American shoes in her gentle, courteous Oriental way, she does not refer to the high-heel contraptions that every one concedes are silly, especially the women who wear them. No, she means our sensible, low-heeled walking shoes. Of course, the high-heeled ones are included.

"I think your American shoes are bad," she said last week, and thrust forward her miniature foot, clad in a round-toed, flat-heeled oxford; "They are always too tight. They are too stiff. I have worn them since September 9, and my feet hurt for the first time in my life.

The Wabble Walk Is Not Graceful

"Many of the young women in America look ridiculous, because when they walk, they wabble. Even when they take off their shoes they do not know how to walk, and they still wabble. They wear the very high heels. Even the low-heeled shoes you have are bad for your feet. Too much support is given to the arch, and to the ankle. They do not have a chance to become strong themselves. The ligaments are weak. In Japan we often turn our feet over, turn our ankles, I believe you say. But it does not hurt us because our ligaments are strong. Many persons in this country sprain their ankles and suffer badly just from turning their feet. That is because their feet and ankles are not strong.

"Most of your shoes pinch your toes together like this," she went on, squeezing the fingers of one hand together toward the first finger. "Toes should be spread out and each one strong in itself."

In Behalf of Japanese Footgear

Dr. Inouye has been one of the notables at the conference of women physicians. She is small, even for a Japanese woman. Her responsiveness and eagerness to learn from the doctors of other countries have made her one of the most popular persons in the conference. She goes to all the extra-official meetings and has taken in all the sightseeing trips arranged for the visitors.

She insists that every one interested in the welfare of the feet see her exhibit of Japanese shoes and stockings and learn from it. There are several kinds of shoes—the flat grass sandals, with rubber soles; lightweight wooden sandals, shaped something like short rockers, of a thickness that lifts the whole foot from the ground, and wooden sandals on high pegs for muddy weather. The stockings would hardly be called stockings in this land of artistic hosiery advertisements. They are of heavy cotton cloth, shaped to the foot and fastened in the back. They come just to the ankle. Each stocking is made something like a mitten, having a separate stall for the great toe. They have little insoles, so that the wearer can go stocking-footed in the house.

Beautiful Are The Sandalled Feet

The merits of this footwear are shown in Dr. Inouye's own feet. She is fifty years old and has almost perfect feet. She smiles over our feet in a way not unkindly, but decidedly pitying. Rational shoes and correct posture are two of her hobbies. In recommending the shoes of her own country she did not offer them as substitutes for the American all-leather footgear. It may have occurred to her that sandals wouldn't last long on cobblestones. The one thing she insisted on was that American women pinched their feet; that American shoes are too tight.

Dr. Inouye posed for some correct posture moving pictures, made by Carlyle Ellis, of the Autographed Films. Mr. Ellis is making these educational pictures of Dr. Inouye's feet and their clothing for the Y. W. C. A. They will be shown before working girls and school girls. The beauty of Dr. Inouye's bare feet may take the edge off the taste of many young women for high heels and pointed-toed shoes.

The American Woman Doctor Speaks

Among our American physicians who are strong advocates of sanity in footwear, is Dr. Florence Meredith, director of the New York Health Centre for Women, which is conducted under the auspices of the Y. W. C. A. She "prescribes" sensible shoes for all of her patients. She herself wears them. And she agrees with the Japanese doctor's opinions on American shoes in general.

"Unquestionably Dr. Inouye is right in attributing part of the increase in women's ills to the American shoe," said Dr. Meredith. "The main objection to any shoe that takes the heel very far off the floor is that it upsets the equilibrium of the whole body. In doing this the pelvis is invariably thrown forward. This gives a hollow back at the waist line and a bulging, sagging abdomen. The relation of the abdominal organs is thus disturbed and their circulation interfered with. Poor posture of this type is responsible for much digestive and pelvic trouble.

"I have in mind one girl who came to the Centre, determined to make every effort to correct her physical defects. She balked on the shoes, however, not because she was not willing to comply with suggestions, but because she hated to spend the money for shoes at their present prices as a matter of principle. When she found, however, that the deep curve in her back persisted, and that she could not get proper control of her abdominal muscles, she compromised and bought shoes with low heels, although lacking some other good qualities. This helped some, but every feature she adds to her shoes to make them more like real feet, the easier she will find good posture and graceful, easy gait, and the less she will be troubled with aches and pains directly or indirectly due to her feet.

Low Heels, Straight Lines, Flexible Soles

"Low heels are probably the first thing to see to; but a close second is the straight inner line of the shoe. The foot is meant to be a straight line from heel to toe, and the big toe is supposed to do a great deal of the balancing of the body, which it cannot do when cramped out of position. Moreover, bunions result from a shoe that shoves the big toe toward the middle of the foot. Make this toe what it ought to be, the key to balancing. If the shoes you are wearing are not doing this, discard them. It is a difficult thing to say just how, but it is necessary.

"The next point, of almost equal value with the other two, is the flexibility of the sole. It should bend not only the way the shoemaker always bend it to show how easy it is going to be on the foot, but should bend in the opposite direction, too. If it is stiff, then all those five layers of muscles on the sole of the feet have their work taken away from them and become thin and useless. In order to support the body as a foot should, all the muscles are necessary, to keep the body right and the foot itself free from pain and ugliness and inefficiency. If shoes have the above three qualities and also have plenty of room for the toes, either by having a rounded toe or by getting a shoe long enough so that the narrow part comes beyond the toes, it will prove one of the greatest blessings to the girl who wants to be active and successful in life. Personally, I think a shoe with a moderately thick sole, provided it is flexible, permits greater comfort in tramping and walking on rough surfaces, while developing the foot muscles. Moccasins, after the customary footwear, would certainly cause discouragement, and are not suited for anything but house purposes, anyway.

"In our country, of course, Japanese shoes would be quite impracticable. Imagine a running, jumping, romping, playing, tramping American girl with a board under her feet attached at only one place

Ruined feet and the shoes that did it

Real feet—nature's own, in almost perfect shape

Feet are free in Japan