

WHY CHILDREN QUIT SCHOOL

(Continued From First Page)

50 per cent. of its raw material. He wants to know what is the matter, and particularly how to stop this 50 per cent. of loss.

This article is written in the belief that there are at least four great underlying sources of loss which belong in varying degrees to all the schools in all parts of the country, both urban and rural, North, South, East and West. It is true that the problem of the rural schools is different from the problem of the city schools, that the standards of the licensing of teachers varies greatly in the different States, that the general intelligence in different communities varies considerably, that the courses of study are widely variant, and that there are many other factors which render the problem complex.

Taking all this into account, however, there appear to be at least four great sources of loss:

(1) Losses from the ranks, due to the lack of adjustment between the length of the compulsory education and the length of the school course.

(2) Losses due to preventable ill-health or to removable physical defects.

(3) Losses due to irregular school attendance.

(4) Losses due to the fact that the courses of study are either too difficult or not adapted to the average pupil.

The school machinery is such that every facility is given children to go more slowly than the average, and but little opportunity to go faster than the average.

I take these up serially: **Six-Year Law With Eight-Year Courses.**

In most of the States the law requires six years or less of school attendance, and yet the elementary course in most American States involves eight grades with a year apiece. So we have a six-year law with an eight-year school. In several States the law appears to require eight years, but in reality demands only six. For example, in Massachusetts the law requires the child to attend school from the age of eight to sixteen, but excuses him at fourteen if he has regular employment elsewhere. The States demanding eight full years of schooling are Maine, Michigan, Minnesota and Washington.

There are two factors basal to the length of the elementary school course. Upon these factors the duration of the compulsory education period should be established. These are (1) at what age is it best that a child should enter school? and (2) at what age should pupils graduate from the elementary school?

Under existing conditions it appears that, on the average, children who enter school at six or seven do better for themselves and the school than those who enter at any other age. We have long been told that the child who enters school at eight would be advanced enough mentally soon to catch up with, if not to pass, those who enter at six. The study of 600 children's records by my classmate, Leonard P. Ayres, to whom I am indebted for all the data in these articles, does not support this claim. Children who enter at eight or nine do progress faster than those who enter at six or seven, but not enough faster to make up for their handicap. More children graduate who enter at six or seven than who enter at eight and nine. Under present conditions, then, children should begin school when they are six or seven years old. Children should graduate at fourteen or fifteen. A change ought to be made over children at that time which demands a less maternalistic environment than that of the elementary school. They are gripped by a new spirit of energy and independence which demands either the larger liberty of the high school or the obligations of business. Even the best of children are restless and unsatisfied in the elementary school after fourteen. With a wonderful uniformity the average age of leaving school ranges from fourteen to fifteen all over the country. This is true whether they have graduated or not, whether they are native-born or foreign-born, whether black, whether the course of study is easy or hard, or even whether the teachers and teaching equipment are good or bad.

It is a great biological fact which we are dealing with. When the wings of the nestling are grown, it leaves the nest. The same kind of force drives children out of the elementary school soon after they are fourteen. The elementary form of school is suited to children, but not to adolescents. This is the first reason why children drop out of school at fourteen, no matter

in what grade or part of the country they are.

The first thing that we need, then, is a compulsory attendance law, without "jokers" or exceptions, which shall require children to begin school at six or seven and stay in school for eight years.

Why Children Leave School.

Why do half of the children drop out of school before graduating? Sixteen per cent. of all who drop out do so because of ill-health; and those who have physical defects, such as poor hearing, poor seeing, hypertrophied tonsils, adenoids, or decayed teeth, progress through school 9 per cent. more slowly than children who are not so handicapped.

Suppose that a child is somewhat deaf and does not learn enough of what is going on to do well. He fails and has to repeat the first grade. After it is discovered that he is deaf, a seat in the front row is always given him. He makes no more failures. If he entered school at seven, at nine he entered the second grade, at ten the third, at eleven the fourth, at twelve the fifth, and at thirteen the sixth. There seems to be no question about the general truth of these figures. The chances are good that this boy will drop out of school. If he is followed by the school officer it will be shown that the boy is already in his fourteenth year, and that he will drop out on his fourteenth birthday anyway without completing the year. The result is that he is out either then or on his fourteenth birthday. He reasons that he cannot hope to graduate, for that will take him till he is sixteen, so he had better drop out at once.

Medical inspection as already carried on in many places will detect all these cases before they have failed, and an efficient "follow-up" system will see that the defects are removed. It is wasteful to the State and inhuman to the child to have his progress in school blocked because he has some removable defect that prevents his seeing, hearing, breathing or chewing. Children with bad teeth are, on an average, six months behind those in school with good teeth. Purely on the basis of economy, it is cheaper to have the teeth of these children fitted than it is to pay for the extra six months' instruction or to have the children drop out of school as a result of lack of education than they otherwise would have had.

Now about the 16 per cent. who drop out because of ill-health. Adequate attention to a few simple matters will remove most of this.

(1) Medical inspection can stop the school's being a means of spreading measles, scarlet fever and diphtheria.

(2) No matter what the system or lack of system of ventilation, every window in the building could be opened for three minutes every period, or at most every hour. During this time the pupils should march around, sing, dance, and do exercises. Change of temperature is as important as purity of air, and moving around every little while is essential to good work. The method of opening the windows and taking exercise all at once avoids disturbing the balance of circulation in a pressure system of ventilation, and avoids the evil of noise.

(3) The building and pupils must be clean. Send the children home if they smell, and clean the building by the vacuum system. In most schools a cloud of dust rises about three feet from the floor when the children run or dance on it. No wonder that they have colds. The school building could and should be as clean as a hospital, and for the same reasons. These three steps will largely prevent losses from illness.

Here are two largely preventable leaks in our school systems:

(1) About 16 per cent. of those who drop out do so because of ill health.

(2) Those having removable physical defects make 9 per cent. slower progress than they should.

To Stop the Leakage.

Another great leak in our school systems is due to intermittent attendance. The facts found by studying the records of all American cities which give in detail information about the regularity of attendance of their school children, are the following:

Three children out of four attend school regularly, that is, more than three-fourths of the time. One child out of four attends school irregularly, that is, less than three-fourths of the school year. It is not to be expected that a child can master the work of a grade well enough to be promoted in less than three-fourths of the time. London, Eng., and a good many American smaller cities have almost stopped this leak in the school system. It is accomplished by two steps efficiently taken:

(1) A school census which accurately locates every child of school age in the community.

(2) Adequately administered school laws, so that all who are not in school

are immediately followed up.

There are at present many children who do not go to school simply because the city has no knowledge of their existence. They have never been registered in school. A child moves to another part of the city, takes his transfer slip, and it may be a month before he appears at the school. Many children stay away from school for a month or so after school has begun; many drop out a week or two before the Christmas holidays and do not come back till a week or two after. Many, especially boys, drop out late in May or early in June.

Prompt following up of these cases in communities where it has been tried always results in establishing the habit of regular attendance the whole school year. Every child who is not keeping up because of intermittent attendance or any other cause tends to hold the entire class back and to absorb an undue proportion of the time of the teacher.

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(Continued on Sixth Page.)

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