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New frontiers and new frontiersmen in education

BY ELLSWORTH COLLINGS

Our world is a changing world, it is a moving present. Change is the very foundation of all things and is manifest on all sides of us. We plant an acorn today, tomorrow it is a growing tree. The home illustrates the fact that change is even more true in our social world. The home of our grandparents was a different home from that of today. In that day the home and immediate community made up almost the whole of life. Food, clothing, shelter—almost everything that went to the making of life—came mostly from the home or from the vicinity. The home supplied the corn and wheat, the neighboring mill ground it. The crossroads blacksmith did practically all the necessary iron work. Clothes came from wool or cotton which was grown, spun, dyed, woven, and made into garments at home. Shoes were made at home or near by. The sorghum mill, the grist mill, the scythe, and the flail were necessities of that day which now exist only in poetry and art.

The home of today is a different institution. It is no longer a social institution as it once was. The hearth with its sparkling fire no longer is the center of the family and neighborhood. Social contacts come through other means outside the home and nothing is known of occupations in homes today. The only sign of these former occupations in modern homes is an occasional spinning wheel or loom. The fact that we are moving is very obvious when we study the frontiers of yesterday. Our forefathers were engaged in totally different affairs as compared to what we do today. They lived in a new world of forest, field, and stream. They were compelled to clear the woodland, build homes, and provide their own protection. Clothing, foods, machinery, and means of transportation were manufactured in every home and community. Conquering the wilderness challenged the intelligence and courage of our forefathers. Today we have moved forward a long way. There is no wilderness to conquer, and we have subdued nature until she meekly obeys our wishes. We no longer fell trees and build our homes by hand; we live, for the most part, in apartments or rented homes. The spacious home with its hearth and lovely furniture is history. Our mothers no longer work at the spinning wheel and loom. We get our garments ready made, in many instances from distant places. They come to us prepared for use much cheaper than they could be manufactured in our homes. We get our foods from centers of manufactures ready for consumption. In short, the frontiers of our forefathers are not the frontiers of today. What concerned our grandfather and grandmother no longer concern us.

Instead of conquering the wilderness, we are concerned in conserving the wilderness. One of our problems is to cope with the fast-disappearing natural resources. Men are engaged in growing thousands of acres of trees so that lumber for our homes may be provided in the future. Instead of exploiting our fast-disappearing wild life, our problem is to conserve it. We spend thousands of dollars annually in preserving remnants of the vast buffalo herds that once roved our plains. Conservation of wild life is our main challenge. How well we meet this problem will condition to a very great extent how well we will live tomorrow. As life in the past depended upon the exploitation of nature, so life in the future depends on the conservation of nature.

The neighborhood

The circle of understanding in early America included the neighborhood. People at that time lived in small neighborhoods and because of common interests, people of each neighborhood understood each other well. They assisted each other in the building of log homes; they attended the same grist mill; they worshipped together at the same altar; they understood each other's problems and shared in their solution. The common ties of understanding were strong. They knew each other's strengths and weaknesses and adjusted their differences accordingly.

Today there is no such neighborhood. I once lived two years in an apartment house in New York City and never learned during all that time the names of the people in adjoining rooms. At present the people living in the house adjoining mine have little in common with me. We attend different churches, we buy our groceries from different stores, we belong to different clubs. Each has his own circle of friends and no associations to speak of exists. The "neighborhood common" no longer exists. During early times people depended very much upon their neighbors for the necessities of life and protection while we get our shoes from Boston,
of the crime could be traced to their lack of leisure time resources. No wholesome activities were provided and, for that reason, they engaged in unwholesome activities that eventually led to the courts. A big problem confronting the American people today is to know how to spend this leisure time profitably. It is an unsolved problem and is an important frontier of our present world. It must be solved satisfactorily or people will drift into unwholesome activities which lead to crime of various kinds.

We have changed in another respect. In the past, people pursued many kinds of work. The farmer farmed, did carpentry work, made his shoes, and many other things. He was, in common parlance, a Jack-of-all-trades. The conditions at that time demanded this and, as a result, people were not highly skilled along any particular line. They did not, for example, spend all their time producing small vegetables, producing wheat, or raising hogs. They were general farmers. Successful farmers today are not general farmers, they are not Jacks-of-all-trades; they are highly skilled in doing one thing. This era of specialization has been brought about by modern inventions, machinery, and transportation. The farmer in Colorado, for example, can produce better potatoes than the farmer in Delaware, and so on for the multitudinous lines of farming.

The same is equally true in all other lines of occupations. We are living in an age of specialization. There is so much to learn now about one line of farming that it is impossible for one man to pursue successfully more than one line. This presents us with another challenge. The problem of specialization for the one hand and our people must follow the line of specialization for which they are best fitted, and, on the other hand, they must be able to appreciate the contributions of specialized workers in other fields. The problem stated in other words demands that people today must prepare themselves along the line of some particular vocation in such manner as to see it in its broadest relation to the world's good. It is chiefly a problem of education. Our education must be of such a nature that it prepares young people to do something well but at the same time enables them to see its bearing on the world in which they live. Boys and girls preparing to engage in some line of farming must have an opportunity to study the beautiful in art, in music, in nature, and in literature, as well as its bearing on the world's goods. Agricultural education in this sense is the best type of liberal education, for it liberates young people along lines for which they are best fitted. The same applies to all other lines of education. The providing of an education that liberates people along the line for which they are best fitted is still another frontier of modern times.

The new frontiersman

The conservation of our natural resources, the proper understanding of our neighbors, spending our leisure time profitably, and pursuing a liberating vocation, challenge the intelligence of all thinking people. The sad thing about the whole thing is that some of our people do not realize that the frontiers have changed. They always remind us of the good old days and the weaknesses of our present time. We must face forward and not backward. We are only interested in the past for what it tells us of the present because, whether we like it or not, change is inevitable. We must recognize this fact and attempt to guide change, for if we fail, change will move forward without us.

Our changing times bring up the question of the type of individual that can best cope with the new frontiers. How does this individual differ from the frontiersmen of yesterday? In the first place, the people of early America were very independent. They did not lean to a very great extent on their fellows for a livelihood. Today we are inter-dependent, we depend on a great number of people scattered over the world for our necessities. This inter-dependency demands that people of today have a wider point of view which demands that we understand our inter-dependency and appreciate how people of the world contribute to our livelihood. This is an important characteristic of the new frontiersman.

In the second place, the frontiersman of yesterday was a man of many trades. He could produce not only his foods, but could transform them into table use. He could, in addition, produce his clothing and shelter. He was a farmer, a manufacturer, a miller, and a home entertainer, but today men perform the work which one man once did. Even the general farmer is history. Now there are wheat farmers, cotton farmers, and fruit farmers. They study and produce only one line of products and depend on other people for their shoes, for their shelter, and for their entertainment. The man of today is a specialist, he is an individual who can do something well. This is a second fundamental characteristic of the new frontiersman.

In the third place, the freedom of the early frontiersman was circumscribed. His freedom was limited largely to his home and local community and, because of lack of transportation and varied industries, his only chance
that this plan is an improvement over the system that is now being practiced here. But whether it will be the final plan adopted by Panhellenic is a question that no one can answer at the present time. However, it is a step forward in the right direction when the sorority women on the campus agree that the present plan must be changed this year and changed so that the rushing and pledging system will be as modern and progressive as the other projects of the university.

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was to follow the footsteps of his father. Then, too, his choice of things was exceedingly limited. In the matter of books, for example, his choice was largely limited to the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress. Because of this condition, the people of yesterday did not have as much occasion to think, evaluate, and judge as do the people of today. Our freedom extends to the boundaries of the world. A farmer's son may take up banking in New York if he so desires. He, by no means, is required to follow the footsteps of his father. And the multiplicity of things we must consider in making our choice is astounding. When we attempt to select a book, we must consider many—some good and some bad. We must choose our recreational activities from a great variety. We can go to the movies, to the dance, or to a club, or read, and the same thing can be said of every choice we make. This condition demands that people be able to think, to evaluate, and judge effectively before making choices. If we fail to think, our choices often lead us along undesirable lines. One of the difficulties of young people today is that this extended freedom of choice is not paralleled by an extended ability to think, evaluate, and judge. We have extended our freedom but we have not extended correspondingly our ability to make wise choices from the great variety of new things about us. This is the third outstanding characteristic of the new frontiersman. He, above all, must be a thinker, he must evaluate things carefully, he must judge and foresee the outcome of his action before his actions take place.

Educatine the frontiersmen

This raises another important question. What kind of an education does the new frontiersman demand? How may youth of today secure the wider understanding of their world, develop along the line for which they are best fitted, and learn how to think, evaluate, and judge intelligently before embarking upon lines of action? The kind of education that prevails today will not, for the most part, equip boys and girls for the challenge of tomorrow. Education of today belongs to the age of the old frontiersman. True, we have made many changes in the vehicles of education but we have not changed our point of view in education. We are still teaching boys and girls about the past. The remarks of a high school girl in history indicates this fact. During the history class discussion, she very aptly remarked that she was tired of studying dead people and that she would like to study about some live ones. Then again, education of today gives very little attention to pupil thinking, evaluation, and judging. Teachers do this for the pupils. The most outstanding defect perhaps is the utter disregard to individual differences in the aptitudes of young people. Schools are doing very little in helping young people find their aptitudes and secure an education along that line. They still require all students to go through the same mould. We must change our whole point of view in education if we are to equip young people to grapple with the problems of tomorrow.

At the very outset, we must recognize the fact that no two boys are alike any more than any two blades of grass. They differ widely in physical and mental traits. Individual differences is a fact. Some boys are born with aptitude to engage in farming or some are born with aptitudes to engage in scientific investigations. Young people are born with different aptitudes and every boy and girl is born with an aptitude to do something. They simply do not come into this world as useless beings.

The first objective of the school should be to help boys and girls to discover their aptitudes—the things they can do with joy. This demands that opportunities must be provided for young people to try themselves out in a great variety of occupations, for the purpose of discovering what they can do with joy. This work must begin in the elementary school and extend at least through the high school for it takes time to discover the real aptitudes of youth.

The second objective of the school should be to provide an opportunity for young people to develop along the lines of their aptitudes, and also, at the same time, provide an opportunity for them to undertake some line of work in its bearing on the world at large. Opportunity must be provided for youth to study the beautiful in art, in music, in nature and in literature, as a means of spending their leisure time fruitfully. This is vocational education, plus...