

TRADES AND PROFESSIONS

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Trades and professions by George Herbert Palmer

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**TRADES AND
PROFESSIONS**

Riverside Educational Monographs

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AND PROFESSIONS**

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE teachers of the public schools perform their work with high-minded intention. It matters little what motives led them, as youths of nineteen or twenty, to enter the teaching service of the State; once enrolled, they go about their business with devotion. The need to earn a living, the pride of economic independence, or the desire to follow a socially respectable occupation, may have brought them to the door of the schoolhouse, but once inside they are firmly gripped by the ideals of the teaching service. There is something in the contact with childhood, something in the miracle of human growth, something in the transformation of the children of all the world into American citizens, which soon interests the newest recruit at teaching, and enlists him for the full and willing sacrifice that the public school service demands. It is for this reason that one can say that the half-million teachers of the United States are its most devoted public

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servants. No other large group of public employees can match the average of fine conscience with which they do their work.

Yet, in spite of our ungrudging praise of the idealism of teachers, the public is not completely pleased with the schools and their products. Indeed, it must be said that the teachers themselves are far from being satisfied with their own service. Everywhere there are evidences of new protests and aspirations in the teaching professions. The teachers in the grades unite to gain a higher wage, to establish annuities for old age, or to add stability to tenure; they plead for the right to exercise initiative and discretion in the management of their own classrooms, and ask to be heard in the general councils of the school department. The supervisory officials, too, ask for an expert status that will allow them to meet with a freer will the difficulties of school organization and administration; they survey the community in order to register accurately its needs and demands, and measure with scientifically derived standards the worth of teaching. Somehow, in the face of all these disturbances,

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agitations, and gropings, professional high-mindedness and the eagerness to serve seem not of themselves adequate. Professional discussion reveals a thousand attempts to meet the difficulties of which the teachers and superintendents are now for the first time aware.

In such a situation, the need is for a body of guiding principles. We ought to know what society requires of the school. That is initial. We ought, too, to have a sympathetic appreciation of boys and girls. Without personal consideration, no high work is done with humans. But we require finally a clear sense of the nature of our own workmanship, not merely as to its technique, but also as to its spirit. To comprehend the spirit with which the work of teaching must be done is to pave the way for growing sanely. The clear analysis and definition of professional life which this volume presents will be of unending worth to those who would carry fundamental values and a far-reaching perspective into their professional thought.

There are some particular things that are of special pertinence to our present educational

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situation. At the very outset, we need, once and for all, to perceive the true relation between social service and monetary remuneration in professional work. In spite of an impression to the contrary, it is really quite difficult to unify the teachers in a propaganda expressed in money terms. The profession has many austere idealists who hold that a profession of teaching ought not of itself to lay any stress on money pay. Being ascetics they are quiet about their views, and are discoverable only through the fact that they will not cooperate in the fiscal program of reformers. These need to see their own half-truth beside the other; to see that, while money can be no major end of teaching, it is a necessity ennobled by its proper use as means. There is among us another group, those who have felt with overkeenness the pinch of cultural poverty caused by slender financial means, or who have felt their neighbors' low esteem for the teaching wage. These make paramount the professional policies that look to improvement in the fiscal status of teachers, omitting or underemphasizing issues that touch superior teaching service.