

Where Youth May Look for Employment

BY H. A. WEIR

SOONER or later almost everyone is faced with the necessity of choosing a vocation. And of all the decisions which a young person is called upon to make, probably none is of greater importance, probably none may have more far-reaching consequences, than this. Nor was the difficulty of choosing a career ever greater than it is today. Specialization, division of labour, the decline of the crafts, scientific discovery and invention—all these and many other influences have combined to present to the young man and the young woman a situation so complicated and so diversified that the choice of a vocation is no longer the comparatively simple matter that it once was. Add to this the rapidity with which established industrial and economic institutions are constantly changing, and the difficulty of mapping out a career which promises a reasonable measure of success becomes more and more apparent.

Today more than ever before, is it imperative that parents and teachers acquaint themselves with the conditions and requirements of modern business and industry, in order that they may be able to offer to our young people increasing assistance in making this all-important decision. The need for this is particularly apparent in the Maritime provinces, where for some time to come, conditions will probably not permit the establishment of organized departments of vocational guidance, except perhaps in the larger centres. For the present at least,

the responsibility for the dissemination of such information among our young people must rest largely with parents and more particularly with teachers and principals of our secondary and technical schools.

But before either parents or teachers can be expected to assist in this work, the necessary information must be made available. We must have accurate and detailed knowledge concerning the requirements, both immediate and anticipated, of Maritime business and industry. It is true that numerous surveys have been made elsewhere in order to acquire data of this nature, but these findings are generally quite inapplicable to conditions in Nova Scotia, and the problem at hand is to find satisfactory employment for our young people here and now. Time was when many of these boys and girls might seek employment elsewhere, as evidenced by the large numbers of Maritime people who have reached responsible positions in Central and Western Canada, and in the United States. But not so today. The time has come when the majority of Maritime youth must avail themselves of Maritime opportunities. That these young people are in real need of intelligent advice and guidance was amply illustrated by the youth unemployment survey conducted in Halifax a few months ago.¹ Consequently, it was deemed advisable to conduct an additional survey in order to determine not only to what extent local industry might be in a position to absorb the employable youth of this province, but also to provide accurate information as to the skills, abilities, and the physical and intellectual qualifications required by the various branches of industry. With a view to ascertaining the best

EDITOR'S NOTE: H. A. Weir, M. A., has for the past few years given special attention to the problems of vocational guidance in Nova Scotia. He took part in the survey of juvenile relief recipients in Halifax conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs in the spring of 1937, and in the fall and winter has, on behalf of the Institute, made an inquiry among the main industries in Halifax to determine what chances there are for the employment of juveniles. Mr. Weir, who has meanwhile been appointed Inspector of Schools for Colchester County, will continue his inquiries in that district giving special attention to rural industries. The results of the survey will probably be published later on by the Institute.

(1) See "Youth on Relief" by L. Richter, "Public Affairs", Vol. 1, No. 1.

methods of collecting such data, the Research Committee of the Institute of Public Affairs, Dalhousie University, decided to carry out a limited survey in Halifax and vicinity and it was the writer's privilege to conduct this initial investigation. Although the work has not yet been brought to completion, some very interesting facts have been divulged which might very well be recorded at this time. It should be noted that the firms were chosen almost entirely at random, the only consideration being that they represent, as widely as possible, a cross-section of Halifax business and industry. Although in a few cases the questionnaire method was resorted to, the major proportion of the information was obtained by direct personal interview.

Almost without exception, the executives of these firms spoke as one in their insistence upon the necessity for an early academic training. In the case of most of the larger institutions, junior matriculation was an essential requirement for all prospective employees, while one of the largest corporations was loath to consider any candidate who did not possess a certificate of Grade XII. When one considers the startling lack of such training revealed by the findings of the unemployment survey mentioned above, one is impressed by the difficulty of finding any sort of employment for these young people in the skilled trades and vocations.

Generally speaking, the more highly skilled branches of industry demanded technical training or experience, or both, while the less skilled trades preferred to train their own employees while they worked. This demand for experience and training in the skilled vocations introduces a real problem to young people seeking employment. Time was when they might apprentice themselves to their chosen trade on leaving school and thereby obtain the necessary skill and ability, but such opportunities are very rare at the present time. Today, employers seem not to be particularly interested in young men and women who are not in a position to take over the work and begin production at a reasonably high level of efficiency.

One phase of the investigation which contributed much of interest was the record of miscellaneous remarks made by the various business heads and executives. Two general comments were repeated so frequently that they seem to merit mention in this report. In the first place, many employers deplored an attitude of *laissez faire* and a general indifference to responsibility which seems to prevail today among young people seeking employment. Not that these young men and women can be said to lack ambition, for most of them are very desirous of attaining promotion and success, but they seem to be unwilling to observe the necessary formality of "earning" the positions which they seek. Secondly, a surprising number of employers expressed a preference for the country, to the city-bred lad. The general consensus of opinion was that the country boy, accustomed as he is to the rigours and difficulties of rural life, is more capable of withstanding the hard knocks and discouragements of an early apprenticeship—is sooner able to assume a position of definite responsibility—than is his city-born contemporary.

But what of the opportunities of employment offered by local business and industry? In general, it may be said that openings occur quite frequently in the skilled and the semi-skilled trades, while in the unskilled branches of labour the problem seems to be one of finding openings for those who seek employment. In short, there is in the Maritimes immediate evidence of an actual shortage of skilled labour, while the keenest competition and the major proportion of unemployment exists among the unskilled workers.

There is, in Halifax at the present time, a shortage of skilled mechanics and trained sheet metal workers for the automobile trade. Of five garages, chosen at random as being representative of the industry, all but one reported an immediate or anticipated need of skilled repair men as well as competent body men and finishers. Two of these firms offered positions at once to seven or eight experienced mechanics. Only one of these shops, how-

ever, offered facilities for the training of prospective employees. Without exception, the other firms stated that skill and experience were most essential. Positions were available also in service stock-rooms and, here again, mechanical training was a decided asset. The major proportion of these positions pay from \$25.00 to \$40.00 per week, with no lay-off during the winter season.

Capable automobile salesmen are apparently at a premium, employers reporting that it is not an easy matter to obtain candidates for these positions who combine the necessary qualifications of efficiency and experience. Contrary to general opinion, the opportunities offered in the sales department of a large, modern garage can hardly be termed undesirable. Many of these men experience no seasonal lay-off and, although wages are usually paid on a straight commission basis (or commission with drawing account), earnings range from \$25 to \$50 or more per week. Employers were generally of the opinion that it is not in the interests of the business to retain the services of a salesman who is incapable of earning a monthly income of at least one hundred dollars.

One service which has become increasingly essential to the automobile trade during the past few years is that supplied by the modern chain of automobile service stations. While the operators of these stations can hardly be classed as skilled workers, it should not be supposed that capable attendants can be developed without any form of special training. One large chain of such stations reported that they had increased their staff by seventy persons during the past three years and that the business was steadily continuing to expand. There seemed to be no reason why an equal number of new employees should not be engaged during the ensuing three years. At present, prospective operators are being trained at one of their own branches under the direction of a capable manager, but the director went on to point out that, with more than fourteen hundred gas outlets now operating in this province

employing well over two thousand five hundred men, there is need for some sort of organized training for young men about to enter automobile service. Whether or not the establishment of such a course of training is advisable, the incident does go to show that, even in the less-skilled branches of industry, the demand for specialized preparation is ever increasing. Wages with this particular organization ranged from \$10 to \$20 per week. And it is interesting to learn that the larger chains of stations are making concerted efforts to reduce the weekly hours of labour which have been generally so exacting in the past.

In the field of radio repair service a different sort of picture presents itself. It is of course quite impossible for any young man to experience even moderate success in this work without a thorough study of the subject. Here is a vocation, too, which seems to offer little, at least locally, in the way of financial returns. It should be noted that this criticism refers only to the hired repair man and takes no account of the individual service operator. This trade seems to be seriously lacking in regulation and organization, with the result that competition between the various repair shops is extremely keen and the workers are poorly paid. Earnings are not by any means in keeping with the degree of preparation required, and the technical skill demanded, by employers. Radio service men would do well to establish some sort of organization devoted to standardizing qualifications, regulating fees for service jobs, and setting up a scale of minimum wages.

While retail salesmanship can hardly be classed as a skilled vocation, nevertheless when one considers the number of young people entering this field each year, the necessity for detailed information as to wages, requirements, openings, possibility of advancement, etc. becomes very apparent. Two exactly opposite expressions of opinion were elicited from the managers of two of the larger department stores. The first, who employs about twenty new salesmen and salesladies each year, was convinced that there was a real need in this city for an organized course of training in the niceties and skills of modern retail selling. Not so the manager of another large department store. He remained unconvinced that

such a course of instruction would serve any very useful purpose, not only in Halifax but anywhere else in fact. Yet his organization draws from twenty-five to fifty young people annually from Halifax and vicinity. He much preferred to train his own staff while they worked. It is interesting to note that the weekly wage scales of these organizations were \$11 to \$40 and \$10 to \$25 respectively. Some idea of the possibility of employment may be gathered from the above figures of yearly absorption, and in neither case were opportunities for advancement lacking. In fact, clerks with the qualifications necessary to take their places as supervisors and department managers were very much in demand.

In the case of all firms interviewed, information was elicited concerning the office staffs. Needless to say, those seeking employment of this nature must have successfully completed a recognized course in commercial training. Not a few employers, however, pointed to the difficulty of obtaining really efficient stenographers, and they cited many instances where they had employed young graduates possessing excellent qualifications only to find that they were lacking in speed, in accuracy, and not infrequently in the fundamental requirements of spelling and composition. Openings for capable stenographers were not by any means wanting and wages were reasonably uniform throughout, averaging from \$12 to \$25, or even as high as \$35, per week. Several businesses anticipated expansion of their office departments during the next three years, which would provide not a few openings for capable commercial graduates.

A matter that occasioned no little surprise was the disclosure that there seems to be, in Halifax at the present time, an actual shortage of registered drug clerks. While it is not possible to draw general conclusions owing to the restricted nature of the survey, nevertheless one local drug chain reported an immediate need for two such clerks and anticipated openings for six more during the next three years: fifteen or more certified clerks would probably be required over the same period. The former positions pay from \$25 to \$40, the latter

from \$15 to \$30 weekly, and real efforts are being made by the more progressive stores to effect a reduction in the hours of work of their employees which have been so long and exacting in the past. Facilities are provided whereby junior clerks may avail themselves of correspondence courses in pharmacy which, followed by a six weeks finishing course, provides a certified clerk's diploma. Then, too, for the ambitious registered clerk, there is always the possibility of promotion to a position as branch manager.

While newspaper journalism, with all its related vocations, does not correctly fall within the scope of the present survey, it was thought that information concerning the possibilities of employment in this type of work would be of real interest to young people whose aptitudes and abilities seem to fit them for such a career. For such young men, in the opinion of the editor of a large local newspaper, this field offers excellent opportunities. But he went on to state that it was very difficult to locate anyone who was particularly trained along these lines. And while the writer felt that the possibilities were entirely too limited to justify the establishment of such a course of training, this editor was disinclined to think so. Be that as it may, the important fact divulged by this phase of the investigation was that, for those who anticipate a career in newspaper journalism, opportunities are not entirely wanting.

Again, for the young man in good physical condition who is obliged to leave school without matriculation requirements and who possesses average mechanical tendencies, the possibilities offered by the composing, press, and stereotype departments of the modern newspaper should not be overlooked. Here is one of the few remaining opportunities for a boy to enter a working apprenticeship which, after five years of training, may conceivably lead to a position yielding \$30, or more, per week.

Unfortunately, space does not permit anything like a complete report on the findings of the vocational survey now being brought to completion. It is earnestly hoped, however, that the necessarily brief discussion presented here will convey some idea of the direction in which our young people may turn in their search for employment. A comparison of the results of the present investigation with the findings of the survey of youth on relief reveals, at one and the same time, widespread unemployment on the one hand and, on the other, available employment in the skilled and the semi-skilled trades. Certainly, the existence

of such a discrepancy points to three very definite conclusions:

1. There is a real need for additional facilities in technical and vocational training in order that the non-academically inclined may be able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the skilled and the semi-skilled trades.
2. That our young people may be able best to

avail themselves of this training, vocational advice and guidance should be made increasingly available,—guidance which has particular reference to Maritime business and industry.

3. In view of the increasing demands made by employers for a minimum scholastic attainment, it is essential that vocational education be paralleled by at least a rudimentary course of academic instruction.

Prince Edward Island's Library

By NORA BATESON

FROM 1933 to 1936 the Carnegie Corporation of New York granted funds for a library demonstration in Prince Edward Island to show what can be done today to provide a rural population with a good library service. Since July 1936 the library has been financed by the Prince Edward Island government.

Within the last generation there has been a great development in the conception of what constitutes good library service for a rural community. The status of the public library today may be judged from a recent statement by an English authority: "The public library is no longer regarded as a means of providing casual recreation of an innocent but somewhat unimportant character: it is recognized as an engine of great potentialities for national welfare and as the essential foundation of that progress in education and culture without which no people can hold its own in the struggle for existence." It is the logical continuation of the public school: public schools for the awakening and training of the faculties and public libraries for the further use of them. This implies that the library will have, besides a

wide range of literature of a 'recreational' character, books and printed information on every subject likely to be of interest to its users. It is the aim of the modern public library to put at the disposal of its readers all the resources of the printed word which they need for information, amusement and that enrichment of mind and spirit which art, literature and philosophy can bring.

The last twenty years has witnessed a great change not only in the conception of the public library but also in the extension of its service to rural communities. The day of the small independent village or small town library is over. A revolution started in English library history about twenty years ago when a committee, investigating the reasons for the stagnation of small libraries, made the pronouncement that, "For a public composed of general readers with a variety of wants, no small library can provide an adequate service. A community of 5,000 may include readers with as great a variety of tastes as a community of 500,000 and will therefore require to have access to as wide a range of books." It was recognized that the only way to give country dwellers access to this wider range of books was through the establishment of a larger unit of library administration and support. Within ten years county

EDITOR'S NOTE: Miss Nora Bateson, a distinguished librarian from Baltimore, has helped to organize Prince Edward Island's library system which she describes in this article. A few months ago she made a survey of conditions in Nova Scotia that may lead to the establishment of a similar system in this Province.