

## REPLY TO MASON

X

Editor News-Record:

What a pity it is that among humanity's great throngs there must be, every now and then, a "Mental Misfit," one who has straggled so far behind the procession of intellectual progress, whose thought is so completely out of step with the times, that he should rise up among his fellow men and cry out for a five month's school and the reduction of teacher's salaries. Ye Gods, how else are we to account for such mental brush heaps from whose tangled thought such odious ravings are emitted, other than to class them as "Nature's Mistakes"?

If R. J. Mason, of Bridgewater, with his contracted mind and contorted ideas, is a product of such schools as he advocates in last Tuesday's News-Record, then let us do away with schools altogether rather than return to his kind. Some one has truly said that "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing," and as this case would indicate, the less it is the more dangerous it seems to be.

Imagine, if you can, a nation made up of such miscellaneous misfits as he who advocates the closing of our high schools and universities, the limiting of our public school term to five months and the reduction of teachers' pay. Imagine our legislative halls filled with such "giants of intellect," and you would have a government chaos that would, by comparison, make Russia look like a highly organized world power in the advanced stages of civilization and efficiency.

Perhaps the Almighty intended that some portion of this world, such as Russia, should be set apart as an International "Mad House" within whose boundaries we should confine the ravings of "Unbalanced Radicalism"; and a shame it is that we do not protect intelligent civilization by some such method. It is indeed fortunate that the rural sections of America, such as the "Valley of Virginia," have advanced in general intelligence and have such a fortitude of purpose that the mental eruptions of "One Mason" are looked upon by the people generally about as they would look upon the antics of a sun-worshiper, which because of its ridiculousness causes a faint smile of pity and is soon forgotten.

A SCHOOL PATRON

## THE BOOK OF THE MONTH

THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

The inevitable has happened. A textbook on the junior high school has appeared. Superintendent Bennett of the public schools of Pomona, California, is the author. When one recalls that ten years ago there was but a single textbook on the whole high school movement and that there are now a score or more of excellent volumes in this field, one welcomes the appearance of this pioneer book on the junior high school.

THE BOOK AND ITS CONTENTS

Mechanically, the writer has not seen a less satisfactory book in some time. It is bound in cheap brown boards like the early books on "pedagogy," with the title on the back very much askew, so that one's first impressions are not at all good.

One finds the paging unattractive and notices that frequently lines are very unequally spaced even to the point of interfering with the reading. The table of contents and the thirteen-page bibliography bear every evidence of being the work of a novice in the printer's art. Moreover, poor proof-reading seems to have allowed a rather unusual number of misspellings to creep in, together with such unfortunate mistakes as the use of two different plurals for curriculum. There is no definition of the much-used term "course of study," although several related terms are carefully defined. A second edition will give the opportunity to make these errors of effect a less prominent feature.

Superintendent Bennett as a practical school man urges upon his fellows (p. 129) that they compete more definitely with the "college professor" in placing their contributions before the educational public, a very desirable thing indeed. This book, however, one finds a rather curious admixture of the theory and practise of education; some co-operative plan of writing whereby those parts dealing with the principles of education might be treated by students and the practical ex-

*The Junior High School*, by G. Vernon Bennett, 224 pages. Warwick and York, Baltimore, 1920. \$1.25.

periments by administrators, seems at once much more desirable. This plan has been followed by Johnston and Monroe in their texts upon high school education. A related problem arises in evaluating the contribution of this book in that the author admits that his firsthand knowledge of junior high schools is limited to a half dozen cities of which three are in California. Even at that, the contribution would have been more general in its application were not the Pomona plan, which is most frequently referred to, quite atypical in that one of the high school years is eliminated and absorbed in the junior high school period and the school is made a 6-3-4 plan in which the last four years comprise a senior-high-school-junior-college type. This arrangement is unique to California.

The text falls into two major parts. The first four chapters deal with the causes giving rise to the junior high school, its history, real and possible objections, and the probable effect upon the elementary school. The second part (seven chapters) deals with the course of study, the teaching staff, the administration, relation to higher schools, and characteristics of the ideal junior high school. An appendix is added with a limited number of sample junior high school courses.

The author in the preface states that his purpose is to offer the book as a guide for the study of the junior high school movement. It seems to the writer that this study will be made, just as was the case with the early treatises on the high school. In a few years we shall probably be able to make our choice of guides, and it is to be hoped we shall have at hand many special treatises upon topics which are but minor parts of a general book.

Naturally the importance of adjusting educational practises to the needs of adolescent boys and girls is an important theme in this book. Lacking scientific data on the subject the author has presumably drawn upon the contributions of the Hallian school of pedagogy. (There are no foot-notes on the two hundred pages of the text). The result is a very decided emphasis upon physical education, upon the appreciation elements in education, upon vocational subjects, and upon "manual and sense training."

This is clearly in accord with the best practise. Attention must be called, however,

to certain extreme points of view suggested in the book. Under the last head, discussion is had of the "education of the senses of touch, feeling, sight and measurement," somewhat along the lines of the old object-lesson methods of a hundred years ago. Training of touch is urged through rubbing, wrestling and swimming; and reading with raised type is recommended for normal children. Color matching and measuring and weighing, and even manual training itself are largely justified by the author on the basis of a training of the senses.

On the other hand, diversification of the curriculum to allow for wider use of reasoning, the utilization of the clubs and societies for educative purposes, attention to the probable tendency to temperamental changes, and to the feelings of adulthood, can hardly be objected to.

The reader must carefully check the considerations raised and make sure that common sense, the recall of experiences of one's self and others and the observation of adolescent boys and girls are given fully as much weight as these and the other theories of adolescent traits set forth by Superintendent Bennett. There is probably no investigation which will do more to clear up the field and function of the junior high school than that of the psychology and education of the adolescent.

The history of the junior high school movement is briefly traced in Chapter II. The report of Bunker (Reorganization of the Public School System, U. S. Bureau of Education, Bulletin No. 8, 1916) is taken as the basis of this study. Those who care to look into the original source of information will find much concrete data necessarily omitted in this treatment. Other lists of schools quite unlike this list and very probably more accurate because of the method of obtaining the data are to be found in the Report of the Committee on the Junior High School presented to the High School Masters' Club of Massachusetts, (D. C. Heath & Co.) and the Fifteenth Yearbook of the National Society for the study of Education, Part III, 1916. This latter study by Douglass on the Junior High School includes many of the reports of states and cities on the movement. It can scarcely be hoped that fully adequate historical treatment of the junior high school movement will be forthcoming until we have

such a study, still lacking, in the general high school field.

For the classroom teacher, the most suggestive part of the book is the forty pages dealing with the courses of study. In general the point of departure in the discussion is that of the personal experience and conviction of the author. However, the subjects of general science, social science, physical education, and others held by modern educators to be essentials of the program of studies at this period are adequately emphasized, if briefly treated. Valuable analysis of the content of courses in personal and community hygiene and of the possible range of topics in manual training, English, history, the cultural studies and the vocational studies is given. The reviewer finds himself in disagreement with certain theses, such as the allocation of algebra to the first year of the junior high school, at least for the majority of the pupils, the taking of single terms of foreign languages for their value to the study of English, and the stress on sense training noted above, but is heartily sympathetic with the breadth of program offered and with many of the specific recommendations.

The aims offered by the author for the junior high school under the caption "qualities to be developed in pupils" are as follows: acquisition of habits of industry; development of sense perception; acquisition of motor skill; health and physical development; acquisition of valuable information; development of the faculties of reasoning, retentiveness, alertness and quickness; development of a liking for clean and wholesome pleasures; acquisition of skill in expression; the instilling of the sense of purposefulness in life. One notes at once that these aims are more personally or individually conceived than socially and in this respect may be contrasted to other statements of aim which are common in recent educational literature. The author is inclined to the position that the theory of formal discipline and development of faculties have not been seriously undermined by scientific study.

The administration of the high school is treated in Chapter IX, but numerous practical suggestions are made throughout the text. On the whole, these are applications of recognized principles of general school admin-

istration, having to do with the choice of a faculty, supervision of teaching, organization of the schedule, choice of textbooks, utilization of student clubs and organizations, etc. The author on the whole considers the junior high school of the city, offering a population of not less than five thousand so that the school may have a minimum of 300 pupils and 14 teachers. While this has the advantage of giving consistency to the point of view, it makes difficult the practical applications to conditions in rural Virginia, where the junior high school is getting so splendidly under way.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Much credit must be given Superintendent Bennett for blazing the way. This pioneer effort will undoubtedly be followed up in the near future with numerous specialized treatises and co-operative texts. Many have been awaiting this book and teachers and administrators alike will place it on their desks and make constant reference to it.

Teachers' clubs, parent-teacher associations and faculty meetings can appropriately concern themselves with its discussion. The wealth of concrete suggestions rather than abstract principles make the book readable and vital. The reader must indeed be unusually careful to weigh critically these suggestions, if for no other reason than that the field is new.

It is imperative here in Virginia that the teaching and administrative corps, not only in junior high schools already established, but also in communities where the junior high school is being seriously considered, shall avail themselves of the opportunity of being fully informed.

The bibliography of this text will suggest the possibilities in that direction. Extensive reading and careful study of the movement and of the problems arising is possible in a way that was never true of the high and elementary schools in the days of their establishment, and this is largely true because the junior high school is a definite product of a scientific effort on the part of thoughtful teachers and administrators to revise a traditional school organization.

W. J. GIFFORD