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Todds
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The author, prominent and popular Limerick educator, here gives a concise and informative article on technical education in his native city . . .

Vocational and Technical Education in Limerick

BY JAMES O'DONNELL, C.E.O.

(Limerick Vocational Education Committee).

HISTORICAL NOTE.

TECHNICAL EDUCATION in Limerick had its beginning in 1855, with the erection of the Athenaeum Hall (now the Royal Cinema). The plot on which it was built was purchased from the Corporation for £300, subject to an annual rental of £21, payable to the Earl of Limerick. This initial venture emanated from the interest and enthusiasm of a group of citizens who subscribed a capital sum of £1,256 to promote Literature, Science, Art



Most Rev. Dr. O'Neill, Bishop of Limerick; Mr. P. J. Donnellan, Chairman, Limerick Vocational Education Committee, and the writer, Mr. James O'Donnell, B.Comm., C.E.O., viewing an Exhibition of Students' Work at Gairmscoil Aine.

and Music and "for the effectual encouragement of Agriculture in all its branches." The earliest development were a School of Art and a School of Music. The former continues to flourish. Unsuccessful recurring attempts were made to re-establish the latter. Recent developments show promise of the ultimate realisation of this aim.

With the passing of the Agriculture and Technical Instruction Act, 1899, Limerick became entitled to an annual endowment of £1,200 for the

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THE THEORY OF THE SAGE

People in every walk of life, representative of crafts, trades and professions, express themselves curious about our Natural Spring Well; frequently we find ourselves, not unwilling, having to answer questions about the source, depth, period of its existence, expectancy of its life, and about the curative properties peculiar to all Natural Spring Water, which make it health sustaining and so remarkably refreshing. A brief history of the Well may not now, therefore, be amiss.

The theory was that in bygone days the forebears of our good neighbours used to draw the most beautiful water from a Natural Spring Well which, according to the sage, was situated in the precincts of where our factory premises then stood. The place was called Sexton Street was, in those days, just a green field, the property of the Parish of St. Michael. Housing and industrial development suffered the inhabitants to lose their coveted water supply, but because Municipal Authority was apt to be totalitarian then, almost as it is now, they could do little more than deplore their loss. We, youngsters, at the time, were always fascinated by the little tale, and whenever the old gentleman commenced to theorise on his conviction with eloquence, which resulted from the comfort of good Irish Malt, willing and respectful ears were ever ready to pay attention. We soon shared his conviction and resolved that one day the Well would be reclaimed.

During the year 1935, when a programme of extensive structural alterations was being put in hand, we were given the opportunity we needed; we engaged the services of a water diviner and applied ourselves seriously to the task of finding the Well. Imagine our surprise when, eventually, the diviner's rod shook convulsively to evidence the existence of water. The floor was hurriedly cleared, and those who were present at the time beheld, in wonder, a bright Spring Well with a shaft of 40ft., and a water depth of 10ft. The theory of the sage had been proved.

It is conceivable, perhaps, that satisfactory Mineral Waters may be manufactured with water other than that which comes from a Natural Spring Well, but where Natural Spring Water is available for, and used exclusively in, the production of Mineral Waters, the result is inestimably more satisfactory. Natural Spring Water, the finest ingredients obtainable, and technique made excellent in the school of experience, give O'BYRNES MINERAL AND AERATED WATERS the quality which nothing can surpass.

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upkeep of its Technical Instruction Scheme. New premises were taken in Nos. 69 and 70 George's Street (O'Connell Street), and the scope of instruction was extended to cater for Mechanical Engineering, Physics, Chemistry, Building Trades subjects, Art, Commerce, Domestic Economy, etc.

With the further extension of the scheme it became necessary to build the present Municipal Technical Institute in O'Connell Avenue (former Military Road). The tender of John Kenny, Jnr., for £7,617 was accepted on December 13th, 1909, and the first sod was turned by Ald Donnellan, Mayor, on January 20th, 1910. The work was completed on July 12th, 1911, and the formal opening of the Institute by Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick, took place in December, 1911.

MODERN DEVELOPMENTS.

The Vocational Education Act of 1930, which controls vocational and technical education in the Republic of Ireland, brought into being the Vocational Education Committees. These are independent corporate bodies whose duty is to provide and maintain suitable systems of continuation and technical education.

The City of Limerick Vocational Education Committee comprises 14 members. Seven of these are Councillors and the remainder are representatives of employers, trade unions and other bodies, who because of their interest and experience in education have been appointed on the Committee by the Local Authority, i.e., the Corporation.

EXTENT OF SCHEME, FINANCES, ETC.

The present scheme of Vocational and Technical Education in Limerick comprises the following schools:—Municipal Technical Institute, St. Anne's Vocational School, Boys' Vocational School, Cecil Street; Girls' Vocational School, O'Connell Street; St. Gerard's Vocational School and the Marine Officers School in The Crescent.

Average annual enrolments for the scheme approximate to 3,600. These are catered for by a staff of 80, half of whom are permanent whole-time teachers and the remainder part-time teachers.

The estimated cost of the Scheme for the financial years, 1957-'58, will approximate to £48,000. It will be of interest to note that in 1911 the total enrolment amounted to 838, while the cost of the scheme was £2,745. Under the Vocational Education Act, 1930, the Committee derives approximately 80 per cent of its annual income from Department's Grants and 20 per cent from the Corporation.

PROPOSED EXTENSIONS.

New Technical Institute—The McCaffrey site on O'Connell Avenue has been purchased by the Committee and it is proposed to erect thereon a new Technical Institute, which will cater fully for the modern demands of technical education.

Schools of Music, Commerce and Art—With the erection of the above it is proposed to reconstruct the existing Institute to provide for a School of Music, a School of Commerce and a School of Art.

Regional Schools—Arrangements have been made for the purchase of a site on the Clancy Strand and the erection thereon of a Regional Vocational School for Boys. It is also proposed to erect a Regional School of a similar type in the Garryowen area.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN VOCATIONAL, TECHNICAL TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATION.

So much confusion exists in the public mind regarding the above that some attempt at clarification is essential.

The Vocational School programme provides for general and practical

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training in preparation for employment in trades, manufactures, agriculture, commerce and other industrial pursuits. The programme also provides for general and practical training in the early stages of employment.

Thus, the Vocational School programme caters for the pre-apprenticeship training and early apprenticeship training of the Craftsman.

Technical Courses cater for the further specialist training of the craftsman and are designed to provide theoretical and practical instruction leading to qualifications as a Technician. These Technical Courses are catered for in the evening classes in the Vocational School, or the Municipal Technical Institutes. In Limerick and in other centres a scheme of Day Release, which supplements the evening instruction, enables the craftsman to pursue his studies which will lead to technician hiatus.

Technological Courses are provided for in the University or the College of Technology. A Technologist must possess the qualifications and experience required for membership of a professional institution. He has a high degree of responsibility and in many cases he is expected to push forward the boundaries of knowledge in his own particular sphere.

SOME COMMENTS ON THE EXISTING SCHEME AND PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS.

While the Committee has made every effort to cater for the efficient administration of its Vocational and Technical schemes of education, the continued increasing enrolments have over-taxed the capacity and equipment of the schools. Recent reductions in Department's Grants have also had serious repercussions.

What is urgently needed is a well-equipped modern Technical Institute which will cater for theoretical and practical training leading to qualifications at technician level. A survey has been recently completed in Dublin and recommendations approved for the extensive development of technological courses. In the writer's opinion the existing facilities, which will shortly be extended in Dublin, should be sufficient to cater, in conjunction with the Universities, for the present and foreseeable future demand in the field of Technology.

A disturbing feature in the scope of Vocational and Technical Education is the attitude of many parents and some employers regarding the standard of general education requisite for the training of the Craftsman and Technician. The mistaken notion that entry to the trades and technical services requires little or no general education, has, and will continue to have, serious repercussions on our industrial life. While the majority of students entering our schools possess a sound basic structure of general education, the best pupils are earmarked for the white-collar job. Only a limited number of the latter achieve their objective, with a resulting serious loss to the efficiency and productivity of our industrial economy.

Ireland needs and demands that her craftsmen, technicians and technologists should rank with the best that other countries produce. If the Vocational Committees are to achieve their objective in their educational schemes, then the problem referred to above must receive the serious consideration of parents, employers and other interested parties.

APPRENTICESHIP.

The problems of apprenticeship are too complex to deal with in this general survey. The public will be interested to learn that an excellent local Apprenticeship Scheme controls and directs the pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship training of almost every branch of the building trades. Some 60 apprentices in the Motor and Mechanical Engineering Trades attend on a

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Day Release basis and also attend Evening Classes. Our schools provide specialised training also for apprentices in the Painting and Decorating Trades, Printing, Electrical Engineering, etc. Despite these achievements, however, we are far behind in a realistic and efficient approach to the problem. Vocational Education Committees are only too willing to advise and co-operate with interested groups of employers and trade unions.

ENTRIES TO EMPLOYMENT.

Only a limited number of parents show a direct interest in the conditions laid down for entry to the various trades—Motor Trades, E.S.B., etc., etc. The Committee would welcome a deeper parental interest in the students welfare and in the pre-apprenticeship and pre-entry conditions to the various avenues of employment.

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

The Committee is grateful to his Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. O'Neill, for providing excellent facilities for a scheme of Religious Instruction in all their schools.

CONCLUSION.

The efforts and enthusiasm of any Vocational Education Committee and of its officers and staff can only be measured in terms of the co-operation and interest of parents, employers and citizens generally. For the better technical training of its young people and for the efficient running of its crafts and industries, Limerick's co-operation and interest in the educational sphere is imperative.

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