

expect to judge ourselves approvingly if we do not struggle towards Him as close as intelligence will take us. The fundamental problem of our age is to discover a philosophical synthesis of those many opposites which characterize the life of man. Dostoievski rivets us to the problem, and to the problem at its most ultimate and difficult. But the inconclusiveness of his great work invites us to examine *his* premisses too, and to set out on other paths.

The Future of the Secondary Modern School

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The Secondary Modern School takes about 70 to 75 % of the children of England and Wales for their education from the age of eleven upwards. It is a type of school which is virtually the product of the 1944 Education Act: for what went before had a leaving age of fourteen instead of fifteen, and had a more limited objective: the addition of a year to the school life has brought with it both difficulties and opportunities.

Ubiquitous as the Secondary Modern school seems to be, a great many children do not have the choice of Secondary Modern or Grammar School. 141,000 children are educated in comprehensive schools; the number is growing: Anglesey is completely 'comprehensive': Coventry, London, Derbyshire, Birmingham are moving in that direction with varying degrees of conviction: Leicestershire has evolved a scheme different from any other, avoiding selection at eleven without embarking upon a scheme of comprehensive schools. The areas which have tried out some degree of 'comprehension' are not all controlled by the same political party. Southampton has avoided secondary modern schools altogether by giving every secondary school in the town some speciality of its own, leading up to some particular type of advanced course.

The Secondary Modern School is not the same thing in every area. Some areas have a very large grammar school entry; the secondary modern schools get on with a remnant, of which it could truly be said that there are not many gifted or talented among them; their more spectacular achievements are dependent upon the inefficiency of the selection process at eleven. Elsewhere the secondary modern schools are producing G.C.E. successes at ordinary and even advanced level which would put some grammar schools to shame. But all secondary modern schools have one thing in common; they go down practically to the bottom; all have to deal with the child who does not take to formal education; - the child who wants to leave as soon as possible, and be done with it.

Society is changing; and the direction in which our society is changing is fairly clear; - there are more clerks and production planners, and fewer engaged on the actual work of production. We still need people to do manual or menial jobs, but we are needing them less than at one time; meanwhile the demand for people with professional or semi-professional training becomes more pressing. In order to recruit the necessary personnel, we are forced to reach lower and lower down the social scale, and lower and lower down the scale of academic ability; or rather we are learning that ability is more widely spread than we previously believed: in fact we are beginning to doubt whether the now traditional intelligence test is in fact much good as a measurement of intelligence; there seems to be too much intelligence about, which the intelligence test set at the age of eleven has failed to detect, for our faith in its efficacy to remain unshaken. There are too many secondary modern pupils passing on to Further Education and getting Higher National Certificates for us to be quite confident in the infallibility of eleven-plus selection.

Our society has become more middle-class. Is this trend going to continue? If it does, is the distinction between the grammar-school child and the secondary-modern child going to continue to be significant? If it is going to become less significant in the future, can we justify a public system of education which makes such a separation at the age of eleven, and which inevitably separates sheep from goats, - some to the school which enjoys the confidence of the middle class, some to the despised secondary modern? For the two types of school do not enjoy the same advantages: the grammar school is run on more expensive lines, not only from the fifteen or sixteen year age level (which would be just), but from the age of eleven upwards, a thing which one might

well consider unjust. It might be hard to justify segregation on the basis of the intelligence tests given at the age of eleven without using arguments which would equally justify selection and segregation on the basis of colour in Louisiana. If segregation is declared by the Supreme Court of the United States to involve putting one set off with something inferior, the grounds for this opinion are not peculiar to U.S.A.; they apply everywhere. It is not to be supposed that our selection process at eleven selects nothing but innate ability: quite apart from the private coaching which is general in some areas, the middle class parent provides a background helpful to the child faced with what is essentially a test of verbal ability: moreover the middle-class parent knows how to use the publicly provided system of primary education to the best advantage.

There is no hard and fast division between the academic child at the grammar school, and the non-academic child at the secondary modern school. The more important division, if any such division exists, is between the child who responds to the education provided, and the child who does not. The 'dead-end kids' are the real challenge to our educational system; the educationists who write reports are not oblivious of the problem they present: even the Crowther Report in advocating the raising of the age of compulsory attendance had reluctantly to agree that there were some children with whom one could do nothing, and who might be better away. The difficulty is that nobody seriously believes that the young person of today is sufficiently mature to be in no further need of some guidance at fifteen and up to eighteen: in fact the more he (or she) needs it, the less likely he is to get it: the 'dead-end kids' are exactly those for whom the Youth Service might conceivably offer something: if it does, they are the very last to come and get it.

All the same the situation is not static. There are good schools and bad schools. At the good schools the number of boys or girls who fail to respond is less than at the bad schools. Nor need it be supposed that the 'bad' area is necessarily the one in which the children who fail to respond is greatest. Investigations in the West Riding (an area large enough for such investigations to be worth-while) suggest very strongly that this is not the case. Some Heads can and do produce an atmosphere in which discipline is maintained in such a way that the school is a force for good and for all its pupils; other Heads cannot and do not achieve this. There are some Heads who even make use of the school dinner to foster civilized contacts between children and staffs: others neither do this nor try to do it. There is no innate distinction between those who

respond to cultural influences and those who do not. The failures of the ordinary school find their way into Special Schools: the staff of a good Special School usually manage to demonstrate that the failure was the failure of the school, and that with skilled treatment, it ceases to be a failure. The possibilities of providing a form of education which will be accepted by the child who does not easily accept school have not yet been exhausted. It might well be that the secondary modern school has been so interested in showing what it can do with the cleverer children that it has not really got down to the needs of the others. Perhaps most of us need to make a beginning on this problem. It should be at least some encouragement that the problem child is not necessarily the least able or the least intelligent when his interest is roused.

If the problems of the secondary modern school are in fact less straightforward than those of the grammar school, it might be a good idea to get the most effective and the most imaginative teachers for this service, and to give them the most thorough training. We do not do this. The system of payment is such as to encourage the ambitious teacher to go elsewhere. The programme of graduate and other training which the Minister is in course of setting up for the immediate future, is calculated to let loose upon the secondary modern school the second-rate graduate, and that in only too many cases without training. The university training departments are not exactly the places in which a graduate can reasonably expect to be oriented to grapple with the secondary modern problems: as the training colleges are more and more inclined to fancy themselves as second editions of the universities, it might well be that they might end up by producing good subject teachers, but not the men and women who can talk to the 'dead-end kids' in their native vernacular. Of course it *may* happen that our present systems of payment and training will achieve what the secondary modern problems require: anything *can* happen.

If the justification for the segregation of the secondary modern and the grammar school child is going to get less and less as our society develops, what is the alternative? A forcing of the issue by a universal pattern of comprehensive schools may well not be the answer: it is fairly clear however that comprehensive schools can be run so as to overcome most of the objections to that form of school. They are large, but so are a good many other schools: once a school gets more than 450 children, most Heads find it difficult to maintain personal contacts with all of them, and once the school has grown to a size where such personal contacts can no longer be maintained, there is no reason

why it should stop at 700 or 800 rather than at 1,400 or 1,500. At least the comprehensive school is a reasonable speculation where a new school system is needed owing to new housing etc. It is an even bet that in twenty-five years time, school systems based on buildings which give no alternative to selection at eleven may be more of an embarrassment than a comprehensive school building which could be broken down into smaller components. Ultimately the division at eleven may well be based on class distinctions, real even if we try to pretend that they do not exist; these class distinctions will be different in twenty-five years time; of this we can be sure; what we do not know is in what way they will be different. The school system must correspond with society round about: it is fairly evident that the present arrangements for selection at eleven do not work as smoothly as one would wish. Parents believe that success at the 'eleven-plus' is essential for the sort of career every reasonable person ought to want. They may well be wrong; but the belief exists, and its side effects bring the whole principle into question.

At least in this day and age the comprehensive school is worth trying. The evidences are that the able pupils provide a stimulus to which the less able make a positive reaction: the well-run school can ensure that the academically less able do have a real share in the responsibility for running the school. The general trend of our society favours the school which stimulates ambition for more advanced education in the circles to which advanced education has hitherto been strange: the conception of a common secondary school for the area is one which ought not to need apology: it is segregation which ought to be on the defensive. The danger, however, of the comprehensive school is the same as that of the secondary modern school; in order to establish itself and its status it seeks to compete in the academic field of public examinations; in so doing it can, like the successful secondary modern school, lose sight of one of its real problems, the problem of the children who do not respond. This problem demands our best thought and our best efforts: its solution may well call for a major variation in our methods of teacher recruitment. At present the teaching profession is self-perpetuating; the successful pupil passes on to teaching in the atmosphere already familiar to him, and in which he has himself succeeded. We need to look further; the man who comes into the school after some years in industry should not be regarded as having entered the profession by a back-door: he may well be the man we want, and we may need to take more positive steps to find the right men and to encourage them.