**Significant Books in Review**


This report by the Educational Policies Commission has obviously been prepared with great care. Behind it must lie many discussions and meetings, much writing and rewriting of the report itself. That the language of the final report is at most points firm and clear is evidence that the work has been carried through all its stages with close attention and vigor.

In American educational thinking it is characteristically the student who is taken as the prime given fact and not the educational discipline or the existing educational institution. The practical question for the future then becomes not who should go to college but who will, and the question is so phrased as a chapter heading in this report: “Who Will Go to College?” Questions of curriculum, methods of instruction, problems of private, state and federal financing (all of which are carefully considered) depend upon the ultimate answer to the initial question.

The specific recommendations of the Commission regarding admission, however, seem wisely conceived, both for the prospective student and for the institution. The individual institution should “limit and clarify its own role in the total enterprise and admit students in terms of that role.” While higher education should be made available to all young persons who can profit by it, no one institution should attempt to be an all-purpose organization. Admission should be active rather than passive on the part of both the institution and the prospective student. The institution should seek the particularly gifted. The college and high school should share the responsibility of adequately informing the prospective student of the nature of higher education so that the young person himself may decide whether college training is appropriate for him. As we all know, the student who is “self-selected” has a far greater chance of success in college. The Commission warns against the creation of numerous poorly equipped and poorly staffed local colleges to accommodate the pressure of students seeking additional education and urges that the problem of ensuring adequate opportunities be approached on a regional basis.

The report states with skill the various issues involved in faculty recruitment, the maintenance and development of basic research in the universities, the need for greater articulation of high school and college, the many problems of building and financing. In a brief review one can comment only on selected topics. Because the report makes liberal and general education the distinguishing characteristic of higher education, it seems appropriate to take special note of its findings in this area.

The Commission favors the diversity of general education programs which have been developed from the many dif-
different experiments in American colleges, yet seems to feel that these programs are frequently not rigorously evaluated "in terms of qualities and competences within an individual." The report insists that the first step in setting up programs of higher education is to identify the characteristics of the liberally educated person. While this procedure seems the obvious one to the person trained in the behavioral sciences, it goes against the grain of the person who has lived for years with the humanities. True, the courtesy books of the Renaissance attempted to define the ideal gentleman, and Walt Whitman set himself the task of delineating the ideal democratic personality, though he proceeded by "hints and indirections" rather than by a scientifically compiled check list of traits. The humanist, however, has sat through the committee meetings devoted to the compiling of the desirable traits and has more confidence in the vitality of the liberal tradition, when exemplified by the able teacher, than in the list of virtues abstracted from the living subject matter.

The final recommendation concerning general education is misleading when taken out of the context of the whole discussion of general education. It asserts that "the programs of general and liberal education . . . should be focused more directly on the personal qualities and competences required of men and women in the contemporary world." It would now seem that we are not working to develop the liberally educated person but rather to train individuals to meet requirements imposed by a social and political environment. From the emphasis upon the word contemporary one assumes that this world represents a real discontinuity in human experience. A particular objective of liberal education, however, has been to make the individual less a prisoner of his immediate "contemporary" environment. Again the humanist has more confidence in the ability of the tradition to adapt itself organically and is skeptical of the new chemical synthesis suggested by the language of the final recommendation.

The general tenor of the report, however, supports the full human development of the individual who is capable of profiting by liberal education. It suggests that the abler student be allowed to proceed more rapidly and be encouraged to give himself more of his education through independent study. At every point the report calls for re-examination of all procedures which have become lockstep in effect.

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