Book Reviews

What's Happened to Our High Schools? John F. Latimer. Public Affairs Press, Washington, D.C., 1958. vii + 196 pp. $3.75.

This question is not only asked but answered by John F. Latimer in a factual, even-tempered, and scholarly analysis. It is a question that has been asked many times by many people in the course of the present decade. From the critics of our schools and their product has come the deep-throated chorus, "They're worse!" And from the educators has come the high-pitched cry, "They're better!" The argument has virtually reached the 'tis-'tain't intellectual level, as each side eloquently quotes Scripture—and statistics—to prove its points.

Latimer's searching, historical analysis of our changing school system represents the results of four years of painstaking research. His facts and figures will end many a statistical argument, and they certainly demonstrate the fact that our schools are different and that their curriculum has changed drastically—whether for better or for worse may still be open to argument, but on some of the author's thoughtful conclusions it is hoped there will be increasing agreement.

Critics of the high-school curriculum have claimed that only 45 percent of our high-school pupils take work in mathematics. This claim is countered by Harold C. Hand, professor of education at the University of Illinois, with the contention that "only about 5 percent of our high school youngsters are not taking any work in mathematics these days." Using the same source of information as Hand, Latimer finds that the total percentage of students taking mathematics is 55.0. Again, there has been the argument about how many of our high schools offer courses in physics and chemistry. This question, as a matter of fact, is unimportant. What matters is how many students are taking physics and chemistry. Latimer finds that in 1949 only 5.4 percent of the high-school students in grades nine to twelve were enrolled in physics, and only 7.6 percent in chemistry. Even if these figures for a single year are multiplied by four—a dubious procedure, at best—the totals are not impressive, and they represent substantial drops from the percentages of students enrolled in these subjects from 1890 to 1910. Meanwhile, physical geography and geology have virtually dropped out of the high-school curriculum, whereas biology has shown a spectacular rise, and general science an even more phenomenal increase—from 0 in 1910 to 20.8 percent in 1949.

In general, Latimer's story is one of rise and fall for the "hard-core" subjects—mathematics, science, and foreign languages (English appears to have held its own fairly well)—and a sharp increase in social studies, business education, vocational and related subjects, home economics, and physical education.

Thoughtfully, Latimer concludes: "It is no accident that the main core of those subjects without which life in the modern world is inconceivable is the same in all civilized countries: Mathematics, science, foreign languages, history, and one's own native tongue. The logic and principles of mathematics, the laws of science, the lessons of history are the same, no matter in what language they are studied and learned. Native tongues differ, but each is the gateway to its own procreation of culture, thought, and communication. Foreign languages differ, but they constitute the media for the transmission of ideas and for the cross-fertilization of cultures. These are the subjects around which coordinated courses of study for all students, regardless of ability, should be built, from the grades through high school. . . ."

Latimer demolishes what he calls "split-level" education—easy subjects for the slow and hard subjects for the bright. Again, to use his own words:

"That some students are not capable of strenuous mental effort is unfortunately true. The proper solution for the slow-learner is not the notion of 'easier' subject-matter. Tremendous as the task will be, it lies rather in the development and use of special texts and teaching methods and in grouping according to ability, that will give the less gifted an education that will differ in *quantity, not in kind,* from that of his more gifted fellows. This is the essence of democratic education, the opportunity to learn, at one's own pace and ability, the basic principles of those subjects without which life in the modern world is inconceivable.

"But split-level education often results, not from lack of ability, but from *underestimation* of a student's capacity, by himself, his parents, or his advisor, or from the very human tendency to which even students are prone, to follow the path of least resistance. Those who make their own choice in high school, whatever the reason, often realize it too late to make the necessary substitutions or to change their objectives. The effect on the student can be disastrous, in lowered morale and self-confidence, in loss of interest, and in lack of adequate preparation for college or for the larger world outside. Here is the educational wasteland we can and must reclaim."

While the Congress and the public are so keenly concerned about our educational goals, the study of John F. Latimer's book is a "must." As he says: "We must face these facts realistically . . . these data make it possible for the reader to draw his own conclusions, in agreement or disagreement with those suggested by the writer. . . . The use of facts and figures is not meant to imply that the *quality* of education is measured by statistics. But by means of these facts and figures, cold and lifeless as they may seem, we may be able to take the educational pulse of America and prescribe with confidence for her educational health in the years to come."

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Antiseptics, Disinfectants, Fungicides, and Chemical and Physical Sterilization. G. F. Reddish, Ed. Lea and Febiger, Philadelphia, ed. 2, 1957. 975 pp. Illus. $15.

With its appearance in 1954, this volume became a standard reference work on the subject of applied disinfection and sterilization. The publication of a second edition within a relatively short time is indicative of the active interest of the editor and his 27 collaborators in maintaining this book as an up-to-date reference standard in this area.

Like the first, this second edition is concerned for the most part with the practical aspects of chemical antisepsis, disinfection and sterilization, and heat sterilization of canned foods and similar products. Antimicrobial compounds, other than the chemotherapeutic drugs, are considered in detail, this edition including new material on the extensively studied phenolic compounds and on the use of antibiotics in food preservation and for other purposes and completely new chapters on sterility testing, by Brewer, and on the applications of ultraviolet radiation, by Schechmeister. The outstanding chapter, by Spaulding, on chemical disinfection of surgical instru-