Diltz, Bert Case, *Sense or Nonsense: Contemporary Education at the Crossroads* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1972, $7.95, 190 pp.)

Gilbert, V.K., *Let Each Become: An Account of the Implementation of the Credit Diploma in the Secondary Schools of Ontario* (Toronto: Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Toronto, 1972, $4.50, 88 pp.)

Canadian high schools underwent fundamental changes during the 1960's that could only be compared with the original democratization of secondary education at the turn of the century. Among English-speaking provinces, nowhere were the changes so dramatic as in Ontario. Ontario high schools of the 1950's were still largely under the grip of a nineteenth century classical curriculum and traditional teaching methods. By the 1970's these same schools had welcomed a host of new subjects, teaching methods and graduation requirements into their repertoire. But what had happened to the calibre of education received by the schools' adolescent populations? Bert Case Diltz offers a pessimistic view of declining standards in *Sense or Nonsense,* while V.K. Gilbert presents the other side of the coin in *Let Each Become.* While the two works apply specifically to the Ontario scene, the arguments and conclusions of the authors will have implications throughout Canadian education.

Diltz's *Sense or Nonsense* is the more satisfactory of the two books under review. Here, one of Ontario's foremost "teacher-scholars" of the old school presents a powerfully written and persuasive argument in support of the fundamentals of education. It is probably the most important conservative statement of educational philosophy to appear in English-speaking Canada since Hilda Neatby's *So Little for the Mind* in 1953. But unlike Neatby, Diltz is acquainted with the school scene from first hand experience and knows his subject well. Whereas Neatby set out to slay the twin dragons of Deweyism and progressive education, Diltz takes full aim at the "sociological approach to education." This, he fears, "has led to a quagmire of adjustment to standardized mediocrity and of conformity to a homogenized society." The school "has been asked to bear so many extraneous social burdens that it has had little energy left to perform its real duties." (p. 14)

While demonstrating support for several innovations of the 1960's — the abolition of provincial departmental examinations, more lively and humane teaching — Diltz deplores the inauguration of educational hardware and individually prescribed instruction, the psychologist and the sociologist getting their feet in the classroom door, the ivory-towered educational research industry, the absence of "first principles," and the importation of American educational theories. For the author, the pupil is at school "to develop his mental faculties, not his physical prowess, vocal powers or technical skill, but his mental faculties, his ability to think, feel, imagine and wonder." (p. 164) But there is hope for the future. "The basic instrument of education is still the book. The central, indispensable figure in the school is still the classroom teacher." (p. 134)

It is not surprising that this former English teacher advocates literature as the continuing core subject of the high school. "Among the chief attributes of literary experience are the validity and indispensability of the imagination and the quality of the insights it so lavishly provides." (p. 135) Literature in general, but poetry in particular. "It has everything to do with the quickening of the imagination and the expansion of its capacity to surmise." (p. 8) Not the contemporary Canadian poetry of Al Purdy, Alden Nowlan and Irving Layton, but the "masters" of yesterday — Keats, Arnold, de la Mare, and especially Shakespeare. "No other writer developed the full richness of the English language as did Shakespeare." (p. 116) Reading the selections of poetry included in *Sense or Nonsense* will plunge the Ontario high school graduate of the 1950's back into his own school days when Diltz's poetry anthologies dominated the English curriculum.

In one sense Diltz is absolutely right. Senior high school English classes guided by a superior "teacher-scholar" of the Diltz type were a valuable intellectual experience for the small core of academically gifted students who had survived on the academic ladder. But the trouble is that all teachers are not Bert Case Diltz; nor are all the pupils reaching the higher grades today capable of being motivated by Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach." Diltz naively hopes that if only the psychologists, the sociologists, and the educational researchers would go away, then the classroom teacher with book in hand will redress the wrongs of the 1960's. The book suffers through its failure to take into account societal changes external to the schools — changing life-styles and vocational patterns, the impact of television, and the resulting pluralism of values now found among Canadian senior high school students.

In *Let Each Become,* V.K. Gilbert traces the changing Ontario high school curriculum from the classical and mathematical orientation of the 1950's, through the Reorganized Program (or Robarts Plan) of the early 1960's, to the implementation of the credit diploma at the end of the decade. Twenty-seven "credits" from a wide-ranging catalogue of offerings now lead to secondary school graduation in Ontario. As principal of Newtonbrook Secondary School in North York, Gilbert was instrumental in pioneering the new approach. This involvement allows him to employ valuable inside knowledge but makes him a less than objective observer. That the credit diploma system enables each student to achieve his or her maximum potential is the main argument of the book. But, as he points out, little evaluation of its effects has been carried out. Therefore the book provides no real answers to Diltz and other critics, be they those who claim that the credit system is developing a generation of illiterates or those who argue that it has affected no substantial changes and is merely a more subtle form of streaming.

The major weakness of *Let Each Become,* as with *Sense or Nonsense,* is the failure to relate educational change to broader societal change. Gilbert, for example, largely overlooks such significant factors as student unrest

and militancy and society's concern over high school drop-out rates. What is the relationship between societal change and educational change? Which is the cause and which is the effect? Why? Although these two books provide a valuable service in documenting what is happening inside the contemporary Canadian high school, they are merely preliminary works in the labour to explain and analyse the reasons why these changes occured.

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