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SHALL WE SEND OUR CHILDREN TO AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?

WE HAVE!—says H. E. Bates

THE question of a child's education, for some considerable part of the population of this country, is governed and decided by snobbery.

There is a small and favoured section of the community whose first action, after a baby has been born, weighed and washed and its relatives informed, is to put down its name on the register of one of the great private schools that are, for some reason, known as public.

This class is privileged and gladly pays for a continuance of its privileges to be conferred on its offspring, in the traditional manner, at stiff prices.

Not many of us belong to this class, in which parents—strangely like a blood-and-thunder school story though it sounds—find nothing unusual in sending pocket money to boys in units of ten pounds.

Not many of us can rush forward, at a child's birth, and solve the problem of its education with solemn ritual and a cheque book.

I think for most of us the problem of "Where shall we send them to school?" is deferred with increasing

guilt until at last it forces itself upon us. There is, of course, a huge section of the community for whom lack of means has kindly removed the problem altogether.

They know that, unless a miracle happens, their children must be State-educated. Both boys and girls will spend from six to ten years at an elementary school.

A fraction removed from this class is another. Its income may range from £250 to £400 per annum. It is modestly ambitious.

It wishes its children to have, in a phrase that has become much maligned, "a better chance than we did."

It believes rightly or wrongly, that education increases the chances of remunerative employment.

It wants its offspring to talk decent, intelligent and unembarrassing English.

It wants them to be kept, if possible, from the contaminating contact of "those awful hooligans, round the corner."

It wants them to be clean.

The problem of this part of the community is painfully simple. It has two choices.

Shall it send Ann and Bridget to Miss X's small private preparatory

school, *The Limes*, which is in reality a couple of large, draughty ill-planned Edwardian houses knocked into one, the fees being five guineas a term for half days; or shall it pocket its pride and the five guineas and send them to the local elementary school, which has been built for the sole purpose of being a school, is run by certificated teachers, and where the fees are quite properly paid by the State?

I am going to answer this question on the assumption that Ann and Bridget live in a town. The problem of children in the country, where thousands of elementary and church schools have been closed

for purposes of centralisation, is more difficult. And my

answer is, every time, the elementary school.

This answer is based, as it should be, on practical experience.

First I myself was educated for eight years at an elementary school and have yet to feel the ill effects of it; secondly my eldest daughter, now aged seven, received her first two years' education at a tiny village elementary school of twenty pupils, and I have yet to observe the ill effects of that either.

Thirdly, the more I see of human action and reaction, the more I observe that for a great many people education, like political creed, unfortunately means the same thing as respectability.

Finally the payment of five guineas (or more) a term does not insure that your child is going to receive that amount of education wrapped up like butter, or that it will receive immunity from the ugliness of other children's speech and demeanour,

or that it will not continue to behave like a hooligan when your back is turned.

In short, the idea of paying fees simply in order to immunise your child from the contagion of other people's children seems to me pure nonsense.

Miss X, in the Edwardian villa, will probably teach arithmetic, writing, reading, notes in music, dabbling in paint,



banging on percussion instruments.

Any elementary school will teach the same—and most probably more.

I know an elementary school in a midland manufacturing town, one of many others, which runs its own magazine, takes its own daily meteorological observations, has its own string orchestra, models and fires its own excellent pottery. Its headmaster does not recognise any confusion between the words education and respectability.

To straighten out this confusion is, I think, part of any self-respecting parent's job.

Many a child has been sent to a small, select, inefficient Edwardian-villa school not for the purpose of being educated at all but for the sole—and probably unconscious—purpose of inflating its parents' ego. Such mistakes are stupid and can be disastrous.

The issue to my mind is very simple. The State in this country provides a system of education, free of charge, to children up to the age of fourteen and in some cases older.

This system is not ideal; it is not comprehensive. It rarely teaches calculus, higher chemistry or foreign languages. It compares unfavourably with the more democratic systems common in Scandinavian countries. But as a machine for producing material which can be further refined and shaped by more specialised systems of education it is admirable.

The choice between this system and the small private school does not, for me, need a moment's thought.

But if another choice is dictated

Use mashed banana mixed with castor sugar and beaten white of egg as a substitute for cream in sandwich cakes. It's delicious!

—as it has been dictated to me by the closing of the nearest village school—I should at once choose to send a child to a large school with girls of all ages from five to eighteen, rather than to a small school of mixed sexes from five to ten.

Finally, it is a mistake to suppose that the higher the fee the higher the standard of a child's behaviour.

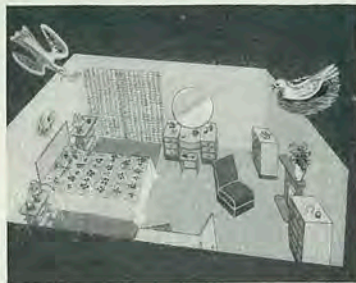
If the average parent could see its fond offspring, fee or no fee, engaged in horse-play with others of its kind, it might be extremely shocked at the uncouth animal it had created.

It is a further mistake to pay high fees on the assumption that they will ensure your child's behaving "like a little lady." Any child who behaves like a little lady probably needs some psychological screws adjusting.

No parent expects a child to attain adult intelligence in a ten-week term for five guineas; similarly no parent should expect a child to attain adult standards of behaviour in the same time and at the same price.

It is my view, therefore, that your child will, unless you live in an unlucky district, be perfectly well taken care of at an elementary school. And don't forget that the fees that might have been payable to Miss X may be put to excellent use in the form of an insurance policy that will guarantee your child's later education.

A few pounds a year will insure its education at a most important phase of its development—when school fees are high and when the State, unfortunately, has ceased in its obligations.



Housewife

HAS DESIGNED A BEDROOM

"CAN you suggest an attractive colour-scheme for a bedroom?" wrote an about-to-be-married HOUSEWIFE reader. "How much furniture should I get—and how much should I spend on it?"

We pondered the problem. We jotted down some ideas with pencil and paper. Then we sallied forth to the shops to spend a day choosing furniture, curtain fabrics, carpet, rugs and lampshades.

Finally, we planned and furnished a bedroom. You will see it illustrated on the following pages; you will perhaps also see it displayed in your nearest town. The actual furniture and fabrics we chose will be on view in a number of shop windows all over England, so that you will be able to see them as they are, and buy them for yourself if you want to.

We chose waxed oak for the furniture. Oak is an honest wood that will not look gimcrack as many highly-polished inexpensive walnuts or mahoganies will. Also furniture must be simple and unobtrusive or you'll get tired of it. Furniture lasts and fabrics don't. Therefore the fabrics can be as gay and daring as you like; they'll wear out before you've wearied of them.

We chose a double divan for the bed because it is cheaper than twin beds. We included two little chests of drawers because no one can have too much drawer space, though we have suggested a small man's wardrobe as an alternative to one of the chests if you would prefer to have more hanging space.

We included a big wardrobe, though if you're lucky enough to possess a built-in cupboard in your room, you will use that instead.

On the next pages you will see all the details of the bedroom we planned.